Leonard Lawlor
Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy.
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Over the past ten years, Leonard Lawlor has published numerous works in twentieth-century continental philosophy, primarily focusing on the French side of things. This current book is intended to serve as a "general introduction" (vii) to continental philosophy. It stems from a course on recent continental philosophy that Lawlor has taught several times. This is a good thing, because the reader benefits from Lawlor's long familiarity with the texts that he treats here. Clearly, this is material he has covered with students many times. This is not a book for beginners only, however, for the overall argument Lawlor pursues—that there is a unified philosophic project at the heart of continental philosophy and what this, consequently, implies—is essential for anyone in the field to consider and take seriously.

In addition to an introduction and conclusion, the book is divided into seven chapters, each about 25–30 pages long. Also included are two helpful appendices, further explicating complex but key concepts ('immanence' and 'trait') that function throughout the text. Each of the seven chapters treats a relatively brief original text (20–40 pages) by Husserl, Heidegger, or Foucault, for example. First, Lawlor gives a summary of the original text that aims to be more or less straightforward explication. This is then followed by a shorter section of explicit textual interpretation that extends the explication in what can be described as a creative appropriation. It is in these interpretations that Lawlor develops and advances the overall argument of the book. We can see in the selection of shorter texts and the method of proceeding by explication and then interpretation how this book emerges from course material, and judging from the contents of this book, one can be envious of the students enrolled in those classes. Lawlor's approach means, of course, that the texts chosen for explication are not the big, heavy tomes for which Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and others are best known. Here we find lesser-known texts that serve to exemplify the thought of the thinkers, and, relying on his deep understanding of the thinkers in question, Lawlor does an excellent job of teasing big thoughts out of these short texts. This is one of the main strengths of the book; it shows how patient, detailed textual analysis serves to reveal a deeper understanding of a thinker. Even seasoned scholars will profit from reading the summaries; they are full of insights.

Lawlor's approach (first summary, then interpretation) is also an excellent demonstration of what we might call the central 'method' of continental philosophy as it is practiced today—close textual analysis in the service of a kind of thinking that engages the past not to repeat it but precisely to think anew. We read, Merleau-Ponty, for example, not merely to know what he thought but also to think for ourselves. It is true that we think with the text and through the text, but crucially we also must think beyond the text if we are to have novel, transformative thoughts, which is the very lifeblood of philosophy. Lawlor's approach demonstrates this very well. Thus, the very structure of the book serves as an introduction to the 'method' of continental philosophy. Of course, as an introductory text, this approach has its limitations. It seems

obvious but worth mentioning that it would be difficult for this book to function as a general introduction to continental philosophy for absolute beginners (undergraduate majors with no prior familiarity with the field, say) without also taking up and reading at least some, if not all, of the original texts treated here, but happily these are short texts. So this book could easily serve as an excellent companion to the original texts and a fine introduction to continental philosophy.

In this book, Lawlor conceives of continental philosophy as a coherent philosophical project uniting at least the thinkers he treats here. The four main chapters treat Phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty), while first two consider Bergson and Freud, and the final chapter is on Foucault. Of course, an introductory survey of twentieth-century continental philosophy could include other 'strands,' schools, or movements, which Lawlor acknowledges. His is an idiosyncratic approach, but for good reason. What Lawlor calls "the great French philosophy of the Sixties" (vii) is, in fact, the "guiding thread" (109) of the account of 'continental philosophy' developed here. Other than Foucault, he does not explicitly treat Derrida, Deleuze, and other well-known figures from this period, but their presence is undeniably felt throughout the book. Indeed, their thought polarizes all the analyses and interpretations. In effect, this book is an account of the intellectual precursors to "the great French philosophy of the Sixties" (hence the "Early" in the title of the book) but with an eye towards the central themes and concepts that characterize that period. While one might quibble with this approach, Lawlor's reading here is important insofar as it serves as a useful counterweight to the manner in which the story of continental philosophy is typically told, namely, as one of rejection and repudiation, specifically the repudiation of phenomenology by Derrida, Foucault, and others from this period.

Rather than fragmentation and disunity in continental philosophy, Lawlor finds a deeper unity, a common philosophic project. Early in book, the central problem of continental philosophy—and what continues to animate it as a coherent philosophical project—is articulated, following Heidegger, as the question of thinking: "what is called or what calls for thinking" (1). In the conclusion, this project is summarized as an ongoing attempt to "invent concepts that lead us to an experience that transforms how we think of ourselves, that transforms who we are and what we do" (203). The central notion is that what defines continental philosophy is a kind of thinking, which Lawlor further specifies as having four "conceptual elements" (209) or "conceptual features" (viii): immanence, difference, thought, and the overcoming of metaphysics.

The task Lawlor pursues in this book is to show the emergence and transformations of these conceptual elements in the thought of the six thinkers treated in the book. Immanence, for example, begins as subjective, internal experience but due to the universal *epoché* and the temporal nature of experience, Husserl is forced to recognize that consciousness cannot be absolutely enclosed on itself but that it opens out onto what Lawlor calls, "the outside," which can no longer be understood properly as transcendence. Bergson and Freud, who likewise begin from subjective experience, both follow separate paths but reason their way to "the outside" as well. In Heidegger, immanence becomes nothing but "the outside;" immanence comes to be immanent to nothing but itself. It is the *Abgrund* or abyss. In Merleau-Ponty's thought, a key feature of immanence, namely auto-affection comes to be seen as hetero-affection. Finally, in Foucault, immanence is understood as an ungrounded experience of language; thus "the subject

is in language" (201) rather than possessing language. The overall thrust of Lawlor's treatment here is that after Husserl immanence becomes radicalized, first at the hands of Heidegger, and later by Merleau-Ponty and Foucault. What Lawlor does for immanence, he also does for the other conceptual elements (difference, thought, and the overcoming of metaphysics). By tracing these four elements through these six thinkers, Lawlor is able to tease out of the selected texts deep resonances (between Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, for example) that are difficult to detect and, therefore, often overlooked in the secondary literature. This is what Lawlor does best, and seeing these four conceptual features emerge, diverge, and intertwine in the thought of these six thinkers is reason enough to recommend this book as an essential read for scholars interested in continental philosophy.

It is also, however, somewhat unsatisfying. For the reader is left wondering what, in the final analysis, precisely *is* the relationship between the various articulations of these four concepts as they emerge in the thought of the selected thinkers. Can we even say that these concepts reach their most robust articulation in "the great French philosophy of the Sixties"? The Foucault chapter seems to imply such a reading, but the rest of the book pulls in another direction, implying something more like an autonomous becoming of the concepts as they emerge, diverge, and mutate in the thought of the various thinkers considered in the book. It is certain that the concepts exceed any single articulation, but they also seem to resists any kind of developmental account in which latter articulations are understood as fulfilling or completing earlier ones. So the precise relationship among the various articulations remains obscure. Although Lawlor is silent on this issue—and we wish he would speak—one is left wondering: Is it forever beyond our ken to define precisely what the relationship between the various manifestations of these concepts is and instead recognize that it is our task to participate in the thinking that continually manifests them anew? That is, is it the case that as practitioners of continental philosophy, our work is to follow the concepts' manifestations in the various thinkers that make up the tradition, and if we are able, *in our own thought*, to engage in the task of bearing witness to the emergence of ever new formulations of these concepts? The latter seems most likely, given Lawlor's presentation, but the reader is left without a clear answer. In any case, this is a very minor shortcoming in an otherwise excellent book. It is, however, important to point out that ultimately what is at stake in this question is the very nature of continental philosophy as a unified philosophical project. How are we to conceive this unity, given the seeming multiplicity?

Finally, by identifying the common philosophical project of continental philosophy as a kind of thinking, and by tracing four salient conceptual features through their emergence and alterations in twentieth-century continental thought, Lawlor hopes this book will serve not only as an introduction to continental philosophy but also a "renewal" (xi) of its central, defining philosophical project. Such a renewal is necessary, for he sees that project in danger as the last decade or so has witnessed a "re-emergence of naturalism and a call for a 'return to Plato'" (xi) in continental philosophy. While this book will function well as an introduction to continental philosophy (and should be so used), it remains of course to be seen whether it can serve as a renewal of the common philosophical project. That history has yet to be written. At the very least, however, Lawlor has clearly and forcefully articulated the central driving impulse behind continental philosophy and thereby reminded us of what we lose if we continue down those alternative paths.

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