

**Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor, eds.** *A Companion to Derrida*. Wiley 2014. 652 pp. \$195.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781444332841).

What does it mean to come after Derrida? At this moment of realignment in ‘Derrida studies’, we see that Derrida is not only in the air. Like a spectre, he blows through the philosophical landscape, whirling and catching everyone in his path and exposing everyone to the conflicting currents of his philosophical reflections. It has been said that Derrida is like a Parisian Heidegger. It might also be said that he is a new Socrates: a *writing* Socrates for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as much because of his continual reflections on current events as because of the singularity of his historical, philosophical, and literary vision.

*A Companion to Derrida* offers the latest, most up-to-date portrayal of Derrida as philosopher. The volume is composed of 35 essays divided into three groups: ‘Fundamental Themes and Concepts in Derrida’s Thought’; ‘Derrida and...’; and ‘Areas of Investigation’. In the Introduction, Direk and Lawlor say that the aim of the book is to introduce and clarify ‘concepts such as truth, the transcendental, difference, decon-struction, ethics, time and history, signature, and remainder’ (1). They also seek to help the reader ‘to see how Derrida’s philosophical reflection is conjoined not only to other thinkers such as Plato, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, Barthes, de Man, Heidegger, and Nancy, but also to other philosophical movements and ideas: psychoanalysis; cinema and photography; feminism; religion (Christian and Islamic); and education’ (1). Finally, they seek to indicate ‘areas of investigation that Derrida’s thought has inspired or within which his thinking might be inserted: animal studies; forgiveness; cosmo-politanism; violence; and the law’ (1).

Given the length of the volume, I will give an overview of only a few of the book’s essays. The reader should understand, however, that the volume as a whole is a rich and penetrating resource for all those thinking alongside Derrida.

In ‘Truth in Derrida’, Christopher Norris describes the philosophical scene that Derrida first entered. Norris begins with the *genesis/structure* antinomy, an intinomy that ‘shows up not only as a fault-line throughout Husserl’s own writings but also throughout their reception-history as an unresolved aporia between, on the one hand, a phenomenological foregrounding of subjectivity or lived experience and, on the other, a countervailing stress on those *a priori* structures that he took to constitute the conditions of possibility for thought, judgment, knowledge, and experience in general’ (30). The concept of structure/s, in other words, involves a method of analysis within a system, a system of differences that is precisely a system of presences and absences, and *eo ipso* it immobilizes the historical play of meaning in the text. Norris’ dense essay, a sort of philosophical excursus, closes by recalling a significant statement of Derrida’s: ‘I am trying to elaborate a logic, and I would call this ‘logic’, in which the only possible x (and I mean here any rigorous concept of x) is ‘the impossible x’. And to do so without being caught in an absurd, nonsensical discourse. For instance, the statement according to which the only possible gift is an impossible gift’ (35). It is in such a way that deconstruction is at work: the absent ‘e’ of *différance* calls forth another meaning implicit in difference, the *différance* of difference.

Claire Colebrook’s essay focuses on the famous Derridean bipolarity *difference/différance*: ‘There are’, she says, ‘(at least) four ways in which one might approach the concept of difference in

the work of Jacques Derrida: difference as a poststructuralist critique of the supposedly post-metaphysical attention to meaning as generated through systems; difference as the post-phenomenological problem of time; sexual difference; and the difference between humans and non-humans' (57). The conditions for a possible structure of differences are a spatial distribution and a temporal deferral. For this reason, Derrida coined the term *différance*, combining both temporal delay/deferral and spatial difference. After an interesting discussion Colebrook concludes: 'The privilege of the same is a privilege of the proximity, and there can only be proximity, retrieval, recall, representation, and restoration if there has already been the rupture of difference. The closeness of touch always presupposes the distance of difference' (71).

Taking his cue from 'White Mythology', Geoffrey Bennington discusses the relations between rhetoric and philosophy, and the apparent irreducibility of 'metaphor in the text of philosophy'. He argues that 'although this gesture has often been understood as a promotion or celebration of the 'literary' aspects of philosophical texts over their 'conceptual' aspects, or as what Habermas sternly called a 'leveling of the genre distinction' between philosophy and literature, it seems clear that is not quite what Derrida is doing in his essay' (89). When Derrida in his later works speaks of the *eve* of philosophy, philosophy has already been *in* deconstruction from the start, as the milieu in and out of which it has twisted and turned in its various tropes. Metaphor and analogy are, among many other figures, means of access to thinking, as Plato understood.

Kelly Oliver's contribution explores the notion of unconditional hospitality. She posits that 'there is no concept of hospitality without the notion of pure hospitality, even if all instances of that concept are corrupted' (106). She also maintains that 'pure unconditional forgiveness or pure unconditional hospitality are always contaminated with auto-affection and concern for self, and projections onto others. Yet, this distinction between self and other becomes one of the most profound oppositions subjected to Derrida's deconstruction, or to deconstructive ethics' (106). Lastly, she claims that 'deconstructive ethics' hyperbolic command is to take one more step toward this aporia of impossibility, even if to do so is to risk living on unstable ground when it comes to answering any of the perennial questions of philosophy' (106). Put more simply, deconstructive ethics' hyperbolic command calls for responsibility.

In 'The Transcendental Claim of Deconstruction', Maxime Doyon reminds us that according to Derrida, the 'classical' transcendental philosophers like Kant or Husserl were not radical enough—not transcendental enough, as it were. Derrida considered it necessary 'to pursue their heritage and take over where they left off' (147). One thinks of the Derridean *quasi-transcendental* categories like the trace or difference. To be sure, 'if Derrida still deems it necessary to ask transcendental questions, and to do so endlessly, it is because he considers that it is the *only way* to avoid the dangers of empiricism, relativism, skepticism, historicism, positivism, psychologism, and objectivism, which are so many forms of the same philosophical nihilism he fought against from the start' (148).

In his essay 'Derrida and Ancient Philosophy', Michael Naas asserts that 'when Derrida returns to Plato or Aristotle it is often with Heidegger in mind, as if Heidegger's "explication" with the Greeks became a privileged site for his own contestation of Heidegger' (233). This contestation deals with the complex question of how exactly we should relate to our Greek inheritance. In *We Other Greeks*, Derrida revisits his distinction between polysemy and dissemination, claiming that 'polysemy and dissemination can be interpreted, and this would hardly be a stretch, as an "objection" both to Aristotle and to Heidegger' (233.). So Derrida 'engages Greek philosophy in places where

Greek philosophy is hardly mentioned; and in other places where Greek philosophy is explicitly at issue... But this question of the limits of Ancient or Greek philosophy is not just methodological but thematic' (233). That is to say, Derrida's engagement with Greek philosophy can never be completely delimited.

Kas Saghafi's essay, 'Safe, Intact': Derrida, Nancy, and the "Deconstruction of Christianity"', dwells on the intersection of the writings of Derrida and Nancy concerning the topic of religion. In a general sense the goal of 'religion' for Derrida remains to keep the living. Derrida's views on the matter, Saghafi eloquently observes, may be better understood remembering the terms used by Derrida in the late works: safe, intact, the restoration of the unscathed, the holy *salut*, that is, those whose physical integrity is intact, and who are also capable of conferring *le salut*. The essays deals with a chain of analogous motifs, inspired, according to Derrida, by 'the sacro-sanctifying attitude or intentionality, in relation to that which is, should remain or should be allowed to be what it is (*heilig*, living, strong and fertile, erect and fecund: safe, whole, unscathed, immune, sacred, holy [*saint*] and so on)' (451). This intentional human attitude, Derrida continues, bears 'several names belonging to the same family: respect, modesty, restraint, inhibition, *Achtung* (Kant), *Scheu*, *Verhaltenheit*, *Gelassenheit* (Heidegger)' all of which mark a restraint or holding back [*halte*] in general, constituting 'a sort of universal structure of religiosity' (451). Through *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, the monumental book on touch, touching, and the *sense* of touch, Derrida turns to what links 'religion', specifically Christianity, to touching.

The book's final section consists of papers on topics into which Derrida's thought might be inserted: animal studies; forgiveness; cosmopolitanism; violence; and the law. In his essay 'A Philosophy of Touching Between the Human and the Animal: The Animal Ethics of Jacques Derrida', Patrick Llored considers what he sees as the most important question of Derrida's late philosophy: the question of animality. Llored maintains not only that the question of animality is at the heart of deconstruction, but also that Derrida's late thought presents a philosophy of living being, including non-human life. In his evaluation of touching, Llored calls *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy* the basis for a Derridean animal ethics. 'It is the massive presence of animal figures that confers on the major Derridean concepts such as *différance*, the trace, the supplement, the *pharmakon* and, finally, touch [*le toucher*], their primary meaning' (509). Aristotle writes of the 'coextensivity' of touch and living body. 'What does it teach us about touch, but also about the body and the life of the animal? To what extent is it capable of renewing our knowledge [*connaissance*] of non-human life and of generating an animal ethics reconceived from top to bottom? If touching is coextensive with the living body, that implies not only that we place the haptical question at the centre of reflection on the animal, but also that we take into account the consequence that is most disruptive for us today: a reconsideration of our relation to the animal through the question of touch and everything that it involves, as much from the side of what I will call the politics of animality as from the side of our ethical relation to animals' (512). The question of touch promises to transform everything we have understood until now about animality, beginning with our power over it.

There are numerous difficulties with trying to relate Derrida's thought to so many movements, thinkers and problems in a single volume. Despite their differences, the papers in *A Companion to Derrida* succeed in highlighting the complexity of Derrida's thought, and in demonstrating the continuing relevance of his work. This is an absolutely excellent volume that should be required reading for anyone interested in Derrida—or, for that matter, in many current debates on

philosophical, historical, religious, linguistic, literary, juridical, and political topics. Above all, it makes us want to keep talking and thinking.

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