Book Reviews

Stephen H. Watson. *Tradition(s): Refiguring Community and Virtue in Classical German Thought*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997. xiv + 253 + 56 pages of notes + detailed 14-page index.

1. The Purpose of the Book(s)

Tradition(s) must rank as one of the ten most important works within the hermeneutic tradition to be published in the 1990s, alongside recent books by Jean-Luc Nancy, Drucilla Cornell, Simon Critchley, John Caputo, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida. In *Tradition(s)*, Stephen Watson, who is influenced by Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, and (interestingly) Alasdair MacIntyre, works out a historical hermeneutics with obvious connections to their views, but that also stakes out a different position "between" their respective accounts of reason, interpretation, and tradition.[1] This work builds themes introduced in Watson's earlier collection of essays, such as his paper on "Between Truth and Method: Gadamer, Traditionality, and the Problem of Justification in Interpretative Practices."[2] In the process, Watson also develops his innovative approaches to many particular figures in the history of modern philosophy, to their influence on and significance for one another, and most importantly (from my perspective), to an array of fundamental questions concerning the canons of reason, the status of personal subjects, and basic ethical concepts like friendship, character, and the good. It is in his treatment of these themes especially—and his general suspicion of transcendental methodology and universal principles—that we perhaps see the Aristotelian influences most clearly in this text. At the same time, Watson's is always a deconstructive version of Aristotelianism, refracted through his reading of Heidegger, whose notion of *Erwiderung*, or "reciprocal rejoinder" with past thinkers in the formation of new ideas is introduced on the first page and becomes the schema both for his analysis of tradition and his treatment of individual authors.

Despite its importance, however, *Tradition(s)* is also in many respects a challenging book. Even a reader who has been through the text more than once will find it difficult to keep track of all the many issues on the agenda

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within a single chapter (since the author often returns to a given point many pages later); it is even harder to keep clear on the relation between these issues, and hardest of all to recognize that an overall position is constantly being developed on the fundamental themes at stake. Occasionally, the reader is faced with particular passages whose obscurity is reminiscent of the later Heidegger or Derrida at their most enigmatic. These problems will make the book hard going for graduate students just beginning their journey in continental philosophy, which may unfortunately prevent *Tradition(s)* from attaining the status of a work like Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, a status it otherwise deserves. But despite the difficulty of its prose, the book will repay a close reading, especially for readers who already have sufficient background in the history of German Idealism and are interested in its influence on the phenomenological and hermeneutic movements in twentieth-century philosophy.

The book's subtitle is accurate in this regard. For Watson's aim is to connect the theme of "tradition" with "central figures and topics of classical German thought" (p. xiv) in what are really three distinct but interconnected ways:

(i) by looking at Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Hölderlin and others as writers who recognize modern scientific demands for critique and proof *and* the need for truths of transcendence and analogy that exceed rational demonstration, and who thus retrieve the ancients in their ethical and political thought, despite the fact that scientific rationalism and empiricism had left the Greek philosophical tradition in "ruins";

(ii) by describing German Idealism in particular, and European philosophy from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century in general, as the period in which "the problem of tradition emerges in post-Enlightenment thought" (p. xiv), or the time in which the historical horizons of intelligibility are recognized and articulated in terms of the concept of tradition "as the hinge between history and reason" (p. xiii);

(iii) by showing that the divisions in twentieth-century continental philosophy are inescapably rooted in the "tradition" formed by the German idealists and romantics, and that the concept of tradition is therefore crucial for understanding the "contemporary theoretical debates" we find in Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Levinas, and their interlocutors (p. xi).

It is important to understand the book in this way because Watson intends *Tradition(s)* to lay the historical and theoretical foundation for the arguments of a second book, *On the Dispensation of the Good*, which analyzes and evaluates the major figures and debates in contemporary continental philosophy. While these books can each stand alone (they are not two *volumes* of a single work), some comprehension of the overall perspective developed in *Tradition(s)* will be required to read the second book as a unity aimed at confirming a nuanced position in hermeneutic theory, rather than just as a series of commentaries. But this only makes it more vital to clarify the overall position advanced in *Tradition(s)*.

It may be because of the author's own at least partial sympathy with "postmodern" positions on basic questions about meaning, truth, knowledge, and interpretation—and his less ambiguous commitment to a "postmodern" style and phraseology—that he never explicitly summarizes his "theory of reason" in anything like a straightforwardly propositional form. But it is part of Watson's point both that (a) there is no other way—no sure transcendental methodology—by which we can gain knowledge about such basic questions as truth, meaning, reason, and their connection to history and tradition, except to think along with (and sometimes against) great writers on these themes in our heritage; and (b) yet this does *not* reduce these philosophical concepts to merely subjective status, or imply that some approaches to them are not more adequate than others. Interpretive warrant on any substantive issue always lacks certainty or perfect phenomenological "adequation," but it still exists. Some interpretations are better than others, and improve human understanding, even though we have never had Archimedean or nonsituated criteria by which to judge which are the better interpretations.

Yet precisely because the development of this theory is not made fully clear in *Tradition(s)*, and its novelty and scope are therefore not easy to recognize (especially if sections of the book are read piecemeal for their contribution on a particular philosopher), it will be helpful to sketch out what I take Watson's overall position to be. This outline will only highlight some of its central elements, but it should facilitate a reading of *Tradition(s)* as a unity, and clarify the significance the book has beyond the important light it sheds on under-appreciated aspects of Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, etc. After this thematic overview, I will then look at how Watson develops his main themes in his discussion of Kant and Hegel.

2. *Theses Possibly or Actually Attributable to Watson*

Watson's aim is to move beyond "the opposition of critique and tradition" in modern philosophy by exhibiting "the rationality that accompanies the endless (and unavoidable) refigurations . . . of the traditional" (p. xii). In the introductory chapter on Heidegger's *Erwiderung*, he locates a *dialectical* kind of rationality lying between the strictures of modern epistemic analysis, unlimited romantic intuition, and simple, uncritical reinscription of Western metaphysical canons. Heidegger argues that the ordinary propositional conception of truth depends for its meaning upon a prior process of *alethia*; this original "disclosed truth" within appearances requires an interpretation that reappropriates and refigures symbols and narratives of the past in the new situation which care (as the fundamental structure of Dasein) always faces. Thus both the motivation for Heidegger's own investigation of the experience of the Good as a "heritage," and the relevance of traditionality for the problems of ethics is implicit in his own text. But while this experience supports a rationality that resists the reduction of natural law to formal decision procedures, it does not rely on appeal to authority, simple teleology, or a univocal and unbroken tradition. Rather, the historical experience in which Dasein-as-interpreter is involved includes *both* a genealogical relation to/dependence on the past, and a pluralizing distance from its inheritances, i.e. the transcendence which fractures this genealogical relation and opens the space for innovation. In short, experience always involves "reciprocal rejoinder," and as a result, the reason which we can still claim for humanity, dependent as it is on analogy and narrative, is not rendered meaningless or worthless for its lack of critical attainment to certainty or universality.

In this in-between lives the significance of traditionality, which is taken up directly in chapter 1 (on "Traditionis Traditio" or the modern tradition of invoking the concept of tradition). This chapter begins with a reflection on the traditionality of concepts, including the concept of tradition itself. Traditions form temporal horizons for meaning, yet without necessarily implying any historicist reduction. As the hinge between reason and history, the weave of traditions limits the possibilities of retrieval, ensuring that meaning will be schema-specific, but without levelling off the transcendence in which reason can survey traditionality. In its Aristotelian guise, tradition is articulated through a community whose historical continuity it helps to define, demarcating a rationality understood in terms of its internal

coherence and specific relations to others. This Aristotelian formulation is not wrong, but one-sided. In our own modern rejoinder with the concept of traditionality and the "tradition" of analogy itself, we find that the positive function of tradition (in the face of reason's antinomies) can only be recovered by reconceiving it as a process of *interpretation* that can simultaneously look to the past and yet transcend it through critical distance. At once "destruktion" and recreation, "tradition" rightly understood—as it has always worked—thus constantly opens towards new possibilities, but possibilities that *trope* the past, and thus never begin *ex nihilo* or unconditioned by past choices and events. As subsequent chapters argue, even the ideas of Nature, the universal, and transcendence itself are traditional: what remains of them cannot be separated from the possible "extensions" of sense opened by the remainder of tradition. Even in the *excess* of the sublime, its expression is rediscovery—but it is always a retrieval that transforms, introducing differences even into unconscious reinscriptions of the past.

As a process of *active* reappropriation of past concepts, interpretations, and narratives, the possibilities opening in tradition(s) are always both temporally incomplete and transcendentally reiterable—but never in "iterations" that exactly match the earlier paradigm, according to Watson. We cannot reserve validity to identically instantiable universal archetypes without collapsing significance into a formalism that denies time any shape or significance, but neither can we reduce all norms to arbitrary processes of change. This is the dilemma that traditions negotiate. Moreover, because of its simultaneous finitude and openness, the traditionality of reason as a whole is never simply an appeal to "the" univocal Tradition, nor simply a relativism of incommensurable schemes, but rather a *pluralism* of tradition(s), moving between temporal difference and eternal unity, between genetic and structural explanations (p. 27). The possibility of translation between concrete traditions arises from the expressive extendability of "ordinary languages," which in turn depend on their implicit traditions.

To this very general summary of Watson's view I add a list of theses introduced in chapter 1 and supported in the case studies throughout the rest of the book.

1. *Tradition as "Reciprocal Rejoinder."* The paradigm of traditionality is neither simple repetition of past forms, practices, and ideas, nor blind submission to sources of authority without critique (p. 42), but rather the *inventive recovery* of the past authorities; argument that reformulates past beliefs in light of new evidence but without assuming that

critique itself proceeds from presuppositionless criteria; not simply applying old models to new problems but *creatively extending* and reinterpreting those old models in the process; or in general, any mode of reliance on horizons of significance and archives of understood reasons that cannot entirely be called into question, yet in such a way that reopens vital questions and thus changes the horizonal context itself (in terms of which arguments and concepts become intelligible to future thinking).[3]

2. *The Traditionality of Concepts.* The content or reference of a concept cannot be neatly separated from its "historical life" (pp. 23–24) and its relation to "a circle of interdefined concepts" whose articulation over time is "as much invention as discovery" (p. 24). Watson describes this as a "Hegelian commitment to the historicity of the rational" (p. 25). Even the transformation of past concepts still depends on relation to prior practices for its coherence (p. 42). Conceptual analysis is a tradition-dependent interpretative process. This implies the impossibility of any completely transtraditional rationality (p. 57). Reason remains analogical, "halfway between the univocal and the equivocal" (p. 78).

3. *The Analogical Status of the Concept of Tradition.* "Tradition" itself is a "concept" only in a limiting sense, whose meaning cannot be univocally specified but which refers rather to a "family resemblance" between many different types of temporal connectedness. The concept of tradition is at once modern and thoroughly traditional (p. 5). As we see in its origins with the Christian church fathers, tradition was understood both in terms of an order of succession transmitting authority, and the belonging-together of a community (pp. 50–52).

4. *The "Analogical Past of Conceptuality"* (p. 32). Metaphysics cannot give us univocally defined essences, because the basic concepts of philosophy always have a meaning that is analogically extended through the weave of past interpretations. The result is that no new interpretation of them can be demonstrated with certainty; however, this does not rule out progress or imply a contextualism in which the rational warrant for any interpretation is relativized to incommensurable traditions.

5. *Interpretation Depends on Tradition Yet Remains Underdetermined by It.* The reasoning involved in interpretations is not groundless, because it

starts from a received background of significance; "interpretation as a logic of iterability, repetition, and reproduction demands a *Vor-structur*" of ordinary or received understanding (p. 35), an ambiguous historicity out of which interpretation proceeds (p. 78). But interpretation does not proceed out of this background by "strict syntactic entailment;" the interpretation always remains underdetermined by its fore-structure and new evidence, requiring risk for the sake of truth without certainty (p. 31). Yet neither can this "indetermination" of interpretation be resolved by any "simple reinstitution of the *regime ancien*" (p. 80). Tradition is the hinge between inherited meaning (fore-conception) and invented meaning (active Interpretation).

6. *Tradition Depends on Interpretation for Its Life.* Traditions are histories of interpretative receptions of themselves, i.e. connected chains of past interpretation that are continued by future reception that acknowledges and reinterprets the connections. Traditions are thus reflexive phenomena; that interpreters *see* each others' ideas as having an inheritance is partially what constitutes their actually having such an inheritance. Thus at every stage "[t]he reception of tradition will always be . . . an interpretative event" underdetermined by the past interpretations (p. 30). The same is true for reflective judgment; "without simply dissolving its evidential origins, judgment likewise never exhausts the differences in which it is constituted" (p. 39). Thus tradition, rightly understood, includes and depends on precisely the originality that reaches beyond accepted usage, and changeless or inalterable tradition is impossible (p. 28). Traditions necessarily always imply unexplored possibilities, and thus can never declare themselves complete or systematized.

7. *The Plurality of Traditions.* For this reason, no one tradition can justify itself as "definitely, determinately, and ultimately right" (p. 31); thus "traditionalism" in the monolithic sense is ruled out by recognizing the traditionality of reason (p. 32). Nor can a single tradition even demarcate itself absolutely from other concurrent traditions; rather "traditions are in fact never homogenous, never 'metaphysical'—in themselves never determinate" (p. 31). The borderlines between different traditions are themselves matters of interpretation in historical narratives telling how different traditions flow into and out of one another. Thus "the interpretation of tradition always remains constituted in historical difference that precludes in principle a timeless account of

the tradition. . . . We will have to speak of traditionality—as indeterminately plural, 'tradition(s),' a unity within multiplicity" (p. 58).

8. *Phenomenology is a Moment or Aspect of Traditionality.* Phenomenology cannot be a pure "logic of discovery" based on uninterpreted "givens" (pp. 34, 83). Thus phenomenology becomes divided between the Cartesian demand for demonstration and "the inexhaustability of Aristotelian lived experience" (p. 33). Philosophical argument cannot be based solely either on appeals to the past or on presuppositionless transcendental starting points (pp. 35–36). Thus while he tried to find a basis for reason outside tradition (p. 41), Husserl ultimately had to admit that "reasons exists only through tradition" (p. 42). Still, while there are no phenomena that are "ordinary" in the sense of "uninterpreted" or entirely pretheoretical, as Gadamer argued, our reliance on a background of "pre-posits" in terms of which the appearances we interpret become intelligible "cannot be simply equated with mere prejudice" or uncritical dogmatism (p. 76). The relation between foreground and background is instead always another type of reciprocal rejoinder.

9. *The Transcendence of the Ordinary.* Public, ordinary, or everyday discourse is always pregnant with possibilities that transcend any universal norms that might be derived from such linguistic practices ostensibly to provide a clear foundation for the demonstration of claims. Thus the linguistic turn could not "replace epistemology with the semantics of natural language" or replace truth and justification with the pragmatics of natural language games (p. 36). The natural, ordinary, and everyday are themselves not only cultural products, but pregnant with the potential for different meanings, plural interpretative extensions, never providing a sure foundation for scientific objectivity (p. 37). Even following rules of grammar and ordinary use is a matter of prudential judgment allowing for variation and violation that may even transform the rules (p. 38), or refigure them in accord with "the figurative discernment of the particular" (p. 251). The Vienna Circle forgot this "heterogeneity underlying language" (p. 39), just as Hobbes before them failed to recognize the "polymorphous and expressivist character of the ordinary" in trying to avoid the "underdeterminacy of speculation" (p. 40).

10. *Traditional Rationality Lies between Poesis and Objective Foundations* (p. 40). Even "objectivity" is a concept whose meaning cannot be

determined apart from a complex history that prevents its reduction to any simple test (p. 36). Contra Strauss, even appeals to "nature" are really appeals to a tradition of origins (p. 26). Yet the fact that there are no unambiguous "givens" means that Nature is always transcendent, irreducible to a decision procedure, *not* that there is nothing to the idea that some ways of being are more "natural" than others.

11. *Traditional Rationality Lies between Critical Reason and Pure Coherentism.* Traditions both depend on and generate "robust forms of coherence," but without resting all warrant on any coherentist standard that rules out critique and requires blind submission to consensus (pp. 41–42). The differences that must be introduced in any living renovation of traditional forms mean that the interpretation which accomplishes it must always be an encounter between tradition and its Other, an encounter in which past assumptions are challenged (p. 47). Tradition is thus not mere custom or "irrational repetition" (p. 52).

12. *The Only "Absolutes" Are Analogical and Transcendent Rather Than Universal.* Truth or essence is transcendent in the sense of being intelligible only in terms of an indeterminate horizon of particular forms whose plurality is irreducible to any univocal definition or concept, and whose unity is only analogical, held together by the development of tradition(s) of thought. "Significance rightly understood undercuts both bad accounts of objectivity, 'the view from nowhere,' and its skeptical or simply fallibilist perspectival replacements" (p. 60).

I have described these as theses *possibly* attributable to Watson, since the author does not formulate his theory this explicitly. Still, it is certain that the "reciprocal interdependence of tradition and interpretation" (p. 53) is at the heart of Watson's account. As the above theses suggest, Watson's general aim is to find a position for hermeneutics between the pragmatic relativism of Rorty and different forms of foundationalism, whether logical, linguistic, phenomenological, or Platonic: "The recognition that there is no final vocabulary need not simply result in out-and-out relativism, nominalism, and historicism—nor even consequently sceptical irony" (p. 39). Watson's thesis that tradition works through reciprocal rejoinder is perhaps most clearly illustrated in some examples he cites from art history; e.g. Renaissance architects whose solutions to their problems involved "not simply imitation, but invention, translation, and refiguration" of the classical orders (p. 46). But the point is general: A consciousness of one's bonds to the

past, as well as a sense of distance and refusal simply to accept as unquestionable the verdicts of past judgments, are *both* required if our reasoning is to avoid the opposite fallacies of (a) formalist reductions that supposedly make truth decidable in ways that entirely transcend dependence on tradition, and (b) traditionalism. Watson describes modernity itself as the realization that "[t]ranslation, interpretation, and the encounter with the Other, far from lying at the limits of rational coherence, are instead what underlie the virtues of the rational" (p. 47).

There are many questions to ask about the general theory of reason I have attributed to Watson, but I'll limit my criticism here to the twelfth thesis, which may not be as indispensable as Watson seems to think. In one sense, this twelfth thesis is the point where Hegelian and Heideggerian approaches converge. Watson constantly suggests that the traditionality of reason undermines Platonism. Universal laws applying equally to a range of instances, the analysis of particulars as iterations of essences, or universal conditions on the validity of judgments, always constitute formalisms that unduly limit possibilities of rational warrant, or level off the actual richness of our concepts. This richness is found only in the concrete finitude and complexities of their actual (past) interpretations and the indeterminate range of possible (future) extensions of these interpretations, which no general rule could capture without abstracting from the most relevant content.

This is not to portray Watson as a nominalist about universals, nor even as a "traditional" postmodernist, but his account (as I read it) is anti-Platonic enough to hold that universals have only a secondary and derivative role in determining meaning, as part of the history of interpretation that transcends any universal law.[4] This leads Watson to follow writers we could more comfortably label "postmodern" in running together terms such as "universal law," "formula," "iterable meaning," "substitutability," "algorithmic," "demonstrable," "calculable," "univocal," "strict method," "formal rule," "*mathesis*," "necessity," "subsumption," "impartiality," and "decision procedure." For example, he construes the debate between the ancients and moderns on justice as a division between "justice as *transcendens* and justice as determinate formula" (p. 15) and says that "neither version of justice can claim sufficiency—neither *synesis*, sympathy, care and friendship, on the one hand, nor universal calculability on the other" (p. 17). He refers to Derrida's thesis that "justice exceeds law and calculation" (p. 15) (a topic on which Watson has written a separate essay); and in discussing democratic politics, he says, "The whole question is how to calculate legitimacy

while acknowledging its limits" (p. 82)—as if universalist standards of legitimacy were by definition "calculative."[5] He is surely right that "Just as the epistemic paradigms governing objectivity have forced the issues of legitimacy to be ever-present, they have likewise often needlessly constricted the limits of our accounts of intelligibility and rationality" (p. 40). But he is wrong to reduce universals to objects of calculative reasoning, to equate every appeal to subsumption under universal law with empty formalism, and to conflate requirements of universal application of norms with demands for algorithmic decision procedures (as in game theory). By constantly contrasting "dialectical development" with "a calculative machine or *Räderwerk*" (p. 235), and opposing "the construction of modernist *mathesis*" to interpretation which lives on "an indeterminate plurality of possible construals" united in a symbol rather than a univocal concept (p. 231), Watson sets up a false dichotomy. Reason may have places and necessary roles for a kind of universal law or standard that is neither an analogical "*pros hen*" nor simply a subject of "strict calculability or demonstration" (p. 16), neither transcendent in Watson's sense, nor deductive or abstract.[6] If so, then we need not concede that concepts like "nature, the *polis*, the *cosmos*, [and] the Good" can only be treated as "transcendentals" (p. 252); we can hold on to the modernist hope of treating their transcendence "otherwise" (p. 72) as universals of a rationality that might transcend even open-ended or hermeneutic traditionality.[7] This question is relevant for Watson's treatment of figures in the German idealist tradition, as we will see.

3. *Watson on Kant and Hegel*

It will be useful to say something about how Watson's general account is developed, applied, and illustrated in the subsequent chapters on the classical German philosophical tradition(s), even though I cannot here do justice to his innovative treatment of a number of subthemes in German Idealism related to moral personhood, such as law, virtue, friendship, selfhood, character, individuality, will, power, politics, and conscience. Instead I will look briefly at a few points in Watson's reading of Kant and Hegel.

Like Hegel, Watson traces the universalism he critiques to Kant, who is the main source of the error supposedly dominant in neo-Kantian thinking today. In detaching the right from the good, thinkers like Habermas try to replace "[t]he foibles that accompanied the interpretation of the [good]" with "the algorithmics of decision procedure, traceable most directly to

Kant's own codification of the natural law in terms of a determinate formula" (p. 6).[8] Yet Watson argues that despite the categorical imperative,[9] Kant's own mature ethics acknowledged the indispensability of "dialectics and interpretation of the law" (p. 6), along with reflective judgment on the human good, "in contrast to the logic of (deductive) subsumption of determinate judgment" (p. 128). Likewise, despite Kant's critique of Burke's appeal to tradition, Watson argues that Kant's practical philosophy retains a vital role for historical judgment in the *application* of general concepts and the education of a moral will (pp. 88–89). On this reading, Kant retrieves but transforms the ancient archives of eudaimonism, rather than simply rejecting them. Watson focuses on (a) the problem of how pure moral motivation, which cannot be "determined by (made conditional upon) an end" (p. 92), is possible for a finite individual, whose maxims must all contain ends (given their teleological structure), and (b) the related difficulty of the "faktum" of pure practical reason, given Kant's analysis of experience. The problem of substantiating the concept of freedom begins with the third antinomy of the first *Critique*, but is only answered through the derivation of freedom from morality in the second *Critique* (p. 109). In summary, Watson argues that Kant recognizes the need for a *premoral* basis for the accessibility of this moral command, a basis which will have to be analogical, symbolic, and hermeneutic (given the impossibility of schematizing the categories of moral judgment in terms of intuited content, as explained in the "Typic of Judgment" section of the second *Critique*). The needed connection between category and nature is provided by the transformed "Nature" of the *Groundwork* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, an imaginary union of rational persons.[10] But Kant ultimately relates the concept of right and moral motivation back to the notion of the Highest Good in order to answer the question about "the subjective conditions" of the determinability of a finite rational will as ethical (p. 108).

Overall, Watson's approach in this chapter is innovative and fascinating, though more effort to address some of the contemporary analytic literature on the Highest Good and the *Critique of Judgment* would have been desirable. Still, I remain unconvinced by Watson's argument that the teleological structure of maxims implies for Kant that "[w]illing per se is necessarily involved with happiness" (p. 106). As I read Kant, deserved happiness as part of the Highest Good is not the motivating *ground* of a moral will, even if it is the *end* of that will. Thus the "reference to outcomes, to results, to *materia*, to ends" (which is essential to the will) does not mean that its

subjective possibility depends on novel extensions in the interpretation of the agent's good, as Watson thinks (p. 107). The will is not just a "faculty of desire" (p. 108) for Kant after all. It is true that "[w]hat I ought to do is inevitably connected with what I may hope" (p. 108), as the discussion of the postulates of practical reason implies, but Kant derives the eschatological possibility of the happiness of the righteous from morality *without* making such hope a subjective condition for the acquisition of moral will. Thus Kant's break with eudaimonism is probably more radical than Watson acknowledges. Nevertheless, he succeeds in showing that the "relations between autonomy and happiness" in Kant's practical thought are more "complicated" than they are usually assumed to be (p. 112).

While (against all odds) Kant rises to runner-up status, Hegel is *almost* the hero in Watson's analysis of classical German thought. In several ways, Hegel's approach to ethics exemplifies the kind of reciprocal rejoinder in terms of which Watson interpreted the traditionality of reason. Hegel uses Greek ideas in a way that remains "distinct from mere reiteration or reproduction; this use involved, again, a 'hieroglyphics' of transformation that remained irreducible to formal reconstruction" (p. 68). In the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel retrieves Aristotle's focus on character, but with a new twist, recognizing the individual uniqueness and freedom of character in its temporal development (p. 214), the "plasticity" of the ethical character we judge in a person (and thus the hermeneutic status of that type of judgment itself—p. 220). Here, as in other contexts, Hegel rightly sees rationality as "hinged upon the disarticulation of *the singular* before the concept—not simply a matter of formal indifference and construction, but a matter of qualitative instantiation of rational difference" (p. 220). Such dissymmetry among singular concretions of a concept that is differently related to its concretions is rationally superior to symmetry (=indifference) among multiple *instances of a universal* that are simply subsumed under it (or to which the universal is "indifferently" related, as Watson puts it). Relative to this ideal, the differentiation among instances of a universal allowed by formalism remain "arbitrary," and hence its plasticity is "limited" (p. 221).

Similarly, "[a]gainst Kant and Fichte's formal cosmopolitanism," which had bourgeois motives in Hegel's view (p. 224), Hegel retrieves Aristotle's notion of the ethical life of the *polis*, but with more attention to the unique temporal development of particular forms of *Sittlichkeit*, thus reaffirming "the excess that accompanies singularity" (p. 223). Thus Hegel again articulates the relation between the one and the many "under" it in a way that fits

with traditionality, while formalism (allegedly) does not. The relation of singular individuals to concepts "requires not merely the categorical subsumption of particulars, but also speculative and analogical extension of concepts to their motivational forms" (p. 223).[11] In other words, their different temporal developments ensure that each individual form has a unique relation to the "same" concept. These relations are not logically equivalent or interchangeable, but only more or less similar (and hence the concept serves these forms as an analogical *pros hen* that *transcends* them rather than as a universal law covering them all equally).[12]

The pattern of this solution to the one-many problem will be familiar enough to students of Hegel; what makes Watson's development of it interesting is both the way he links this pattern to his general theory of the traditionality of meaning and reason, and his facility at showing how it informs Hegel's specific analyses. Watson particularly emphasizes Hegel's way of explaining individuals in terms of their narrative relation to contingent political and civil institutions, historical circumstance, and "a world-play of conflicts between individuals rather than eternal forces," or in terms of what he called the "prose of the world" (p. 227) (from the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, which as Watson notes, have "epistemic and moral, metaphysical and political" significance beyond aesthetic theory—p. 75). Since Hegel traces this innovation to Shakespeare's methods of characterization, Watson locates Hegel in the crosscurrents of multiple traditions. By articulating the prose of the world, Hegel seeks to avoid both the disintegration of modern plurality but without returning to the totality of "impersonal forces" and stock characters that dominated ancient drama (p. 228). In this everyday narrative represented by the modern genre of the novel, the individual is not entirely at the mercy of a fixed character, contingency, or fate; his own creative access to new possibilities opens a speculative route to fulfillment (pp. 228–229).[13] This conception fits well with Watson's own emphasis on the transcendent significance of everyday life and ordinary language (p. 74).

In line with Machiavelli and Montaigne, Hegel's interpretation of the ethical meaning of tensions within our cultural lifeworld yields forms of interpersonal "recognition" that transcend the Hobbesian "struggle to the death" (p. 69). And traditionality itself—as a form of reason standing between a "univocal *ordo traditionis*" (p. 71) and an inventiveness that would reject all past authorities—is possible only because there is a kind of recognition that can find connections without eliminating differences between the parties (p. 70). As a result, Hegel ends up with a "historical account of the

rational" comparable in some respects to Burke's, committed to the "underdeterminability of moral claims (in themselves) and to the fallibility of individual decision." Given the plasticity of virtue, he is committed to the need for "individual innovation and decision, to the necessity of decision within the possible," but he sees decision itself as a working out of interpersonal and historical relations, a "complex interchange between necessity and contingency" (p. 230). Watson here seems to be attributing to Hegel something like the notion of "thrown possibility" in Heidegger, a limited or factically constrained liberty in which no choices are unconditioned. This raises large questions, such as whether Hegel's mature view allows for any Kantian "spontaneity" or libertarian freedom at all, which I cannot treat here.

In any case, by rejecting both arbitrary choice and formalism, by embracing reflective judgment or an "art of discernment" that moves beyond "the strict algorithmics of justice" (p. 231), or by "exchanging the plasticity and rhythm of the speculative for the formal algorithm" (p. 234), Hegel comes closest of the German idealists to the proper interpretation of rationality. But Watson thinks that Hegel's insights in this regard are tainted by his own quest for an Absolute that transcends traditionality. Hegel is certain of perfect coincidence between "an exposition of the empirical content of Nature and its Notion" (p. 195). Thus ultimately, "For Hegel, 'Reason' required a higher sublimity, an elevation beyond the relative existence of prosaic particularity, finitude, circumstance, and historical detail, . . . a pure thought beyond understanding and a pure narrative beyond historiography" (p. 71). And despite "the indeterminacy his own narrative had opened up," Hegel's monarch "would once again always threaten to dissolve all forms of indeterminacy—including obviously the indeterminacy which underlies democracy itself" (p. 67). Thus Hegel's "exposition of the prose of the world" is at best "ambiguous," for he "acknowledg[es] the transcendence of the ordinary in the very moment that he attempts to reduce it to self-immanence" (p. 75). The problem is that Hegel assumes the possibility of discerning an "End" that will be the absolutely "concrete universal," the final conclusion of reflective judgment, beyond any need for further mediation or interpretation (p. 236). According to Watson, Hegel should have seen that his own "experimentalism" precluded any such final resolution of underdeterminability (p. 237). There are, of course, Hegel scholars (such as William Maker) who read Hegel's Absolute in the *Phenomenology* and *Encyclopedia* quite differently, and Watson does not try to address these

alternative interpretations directly.[14] Yet there will be plenty in both Watson's praise and criticisms of Hegel to challenge the most accomplished readers.

4. Conclusion

I have not had room to comment on Watson's rich treatment of Husserl, Fichte, Schelling, and Spinoza on selfhood, embodiment, freedom, and ethics in his chapter "On The Rights of Nature." This chapter also helps develop Watson's critique of Strauss, which runs throughout the book (e.g. p. 72), and draws together romanticism and logical positivism in unexpected ways that will be further developed in the sequel to *Tradition(s)*. It is the most mixed and least unified of the chapters in the book, but essential reading for those interested in this history of German Idealism and its relation both to earlier and later thought.

Overall, *Tradition(s)* is a ponderous work, as wide reaching and diverse in scholarly repertoire as Hans Blumenberg's treatises, yet more traditionally philosophical in its aims. It operates on two levels at once, both arguing for the usefulness of "tradition" as a paradigm for reason in general, and tracing the history of—and interconnection between—the ethical and metaphysical themes which now motivate and inform all the most vital debates in continental philosophy today. Watson has attempted to show that German idealism provided something like the traditional background or "fore-structure" for phenomenology, Heideggerian existentialism, critical theory, deconstruction, and Levinasian ethics, which will all be more directly explored in the expected sequel. Watson is convincing in his central claim that there is a kind of historical *phronesis* in which we can still find the possibility of rational warrant without reverting to contextualism or foundationalism. Yet as indicated, I remain unconvinced that this *phronesis* requires that every significant one-many relation take the *pros hen* pattern outlined above, or that it is incompatible with the universalistic alternative. But I expect more light to be shed on this difficult question as well in Watson's next book, *On the Dispensation of the Good*.

John J. Davenport
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NOTES

1. Watson is chair of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, where he was MacIntyre's colleague for several years, and where he regularly teaches graduate seminars on Heidegger

and Merleau-Ponty. Watson also studied with Derrida in France, and counts Gadamer among his friends.

2. In Watson, *Extensions: Essays on Interpretation, Rationality, and the Closure of Modernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 137–171 (new in this collection). *Extensions* includes other essays on Heidegger, Husserl, Schelling, Merleau-Ponty, Hegel, and other figures who appear again in *Tradition(s)*.

3. It is worth comparing this conception to Alasdair MacIntyre's analysis of "practices" in *After Virtue*: "Practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time—painting has no such goal, nor has physics—but the goals themselves are transmuted by the history of the activity" (pp. 193–194). Practices in MacIntyre's sense are thus reflexive, or self-consciously traditional, depending on an awareness of their tradition for the authority of their standards and on development and modification of the tradition from within for their continued life.

4. Watson frequently depends on this thesis in arguing for other specific mediations, e.g. between *a priori* critique or transcendental deduction on the one hand, and traditionalism or classicism on the other. Thus he cannot also achieve a general mediation between universal principles and transcendence, or give them 'equiprimordial' status in his theory of meaning (though he does occasionally *propose* this mediation as well).

5. There are many other examples of this. For instance, Watson writes that the moderns "conceived objectivity in terms of the iterability of universal relations and substitutability" (p. 16). He later equates the notion of a "view from nowhere" with "the reduction of meaning to rule-governed practice" (p. 251). In general, Watson seems to decry "post-Kantian elevations of universality, iterability, and communicability as the condition of objectivity and truth, all of which (doubtless) continue Kant's own investments in modern accounts of the rational based upon deductive exemplars" (p. 124).

6. And this could be true even if norms having this kind of universality can only be applied to concrete circumstances through a phronetic process of interpretation involving reciprocal rejoinder, or both appeal to precedent and innovative trope.

7. Indeed, Husserl was arguably after precisely such a third alternative when, as Watson says, he opposed "the 'perversion' that underlies the (Hobbesian) reduction of the rational to subjective calculability" and instrumental reasoning (p. 184).

8. This is an instance of the error protested above, since Habermas's well-known "Discourse Principle" for norms is formal, but not "procedural" in the sense of specifying an algorithmic decision procedure to demonstrate the validity of a norm (one of the respects in which it differs from Rawls's Original Position).

9. Watson seems to agree with Arendt's critique of the categorical imperative as a demand for "univocally decidable criteria," although its application remains hermeneutic (p. 123), and in the kingdom of ends formulation, it clearly becomes dialogical (p. 126), as Habermas has urged. Still, many contemporary interpreters of Kant would argue that the formal test of universalizability posed in the categorical imperative was never meant by itself to provide a complete decision procedure for moral norms.

10. Watson sometimes portrays this idea as implying a pragmatic coherentism; for instance, he praises Hegel for "realizing that right is a matter of recognition and more than simply rational coherence among atomized agents" (p. 239). This misconstrues the nature of the universality at stake in Kantian practical laws, reducing it to Rawlsian overlapping consensus, a contingent universal acceptance on divergent contingent motives by all actual affected rational parties.

11. And thus like Pufendorf and unlike Aristotle, Hegel is able to affirm "the priority of individuals in the articulation of rational institutions, but "Unlike Hooker, Grotius, and Locke, however, Hegel did not hold that 'natural law' is simply independent from its historical institutions, nor did he think that the rights of individuals are simply distinguishable from their instantiations" (p. 224). Note again the same refusal of the universal-distinct-from-coequal-instances model of moral concepts here.

12. It is the explication of concepts in terms of this kind of analogical concretions that Watson means by "semantic exposition," as opposed to the merely "syntactic" relation of formal universal to its members (p. 223).

13. It is worth noting that this is only one of the many places in *Tradition(s)* where Watson discusses literary theory and psychology (Bakhtin, Cavell, Freud, Lacan), symbolism, and the history of literature (from Shakespeare and to Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Proust) linking them directly to the ethical themes in German philosophy which are his focus. There is much in this book that will interest readers who approach continental philosophy from the direction of literary studies.

14. Watson himself seemed somewhat more optimistic in his earlier paper on "Hegel, Hermeneutics, and the Retrieval of the Sacred." He wrote that Hegel's "experience of the Absolute . . . requires an extension beyond proof," and the awaited "unification in which the different is not extinguished" involves a kind of dialectic beyond demonstration (*Extensions*, p. 77).

Michael Baur and John Russon. *Hegel and the Tradition: Essays in Honour of H. S. Harris*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. xv + 349 pages.

Hegel and the Tradition: Essays in Honour of H. S. Harris is certainly in the spirit (and the tradition) of Hegel and Harris. The volume focuses on the theme of tradition, which unites the many different essays within a rich yet integrated whole. Contributing authors discuss a variety of Hegelian texts and topics. Their essays relate these issues to figures as diverse as Locke, Fichte, Hamann, Winckelmann, and Fries. Nonetheless, the editors and contributors leave no rough junctures showing. The volume provides a nearly perfect balance between new, interesting interpretations and a coherent, thematic tribute to Harris (and Hegel).

The foreword and introduction to *Hegel and the Tradition* deserve to be read for their own sake. In "Hume, Hegel, and Harris" (foreword), John Burbidge provides an excellent summary of Harris's accomplishments as an interpreter of Hegel. He discusses the cooperation and overlap between the history of philosophy, British empiricism, and continental philosophy, which Harris's work exemplifies. Burbidge focuses particularly on the influence of Hume on Harris's interpretation of Hegel. He also undermines the false dichotomy between "original" systematic philosophy and "mere" commentary or historical scholarship. As Burbidge argues, a philosopher such as