

philosophic quest and its outcome. Plato's Socrates, Bruell argues, sees as the prerequisite a willingness to face the contradiction involved in insisting that *to kalon*, or morality, involves a sacrifice for us and that it aims at some good, that is, it is a virtue. The outcome is somewhat different. This argument might illuminate as never before the strange co-existence in Plato of tremendous moral-political earnestness with arguments "reducing" the noble to the beneficial or good, as in the crafts ("technology"). For this thesis the reader should turn eagerly to the book itself.—Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University*.

CHANTER, Tina, editor. *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas. Re-reading the Canon*, vol. 17. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. xvi + 272 pp. Cloth, \$65.00; paper, \$25.00—Chanter's book offers a wide array of articles assessing whether Levinas's thoughts about the feminine and otherness hold any promise for feminist approaches in philosophy. Setting the tone for the book, Chanter's introduction begins by charting the parameters of a controversial debate surrounding Levinas's writings. As a launching pad, Chanter employs de Beauvoir's well-known footnote about Levinas's treatment of the feminine, noting how many of the commentators' problematize de Beauvoir's interpretation of Levinas's early writings. De Beauvoir chastises Levinas for defining women against the backdrop of men such that the female sex seems derivative, secondary. Woman, writes de Beauvoir, "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential. He's the Subject, he is the Absolute—She is the Other" (p. 2). As most of the contributors to this volume reveal, Levinas's writings are more complicated than de Beauvoir intimates. Because she fails to place Levinas's comments in the context of his overall framework, de Beauvoir neglects to recognize that Levinas's ideas about the feminine disturb and call into question the primacy accorded to patriarchal visions of totality connected with a "virile" and conquering masculine ego. Further, Levinas refuses to define the feminine vis-à-vis masculinity. Far from "reducing women to replicas of men" (p. 3), Levinas highlights that the feminine is not a complement to the masculine, nor is it comparable to it under a unifying scheme which could judge it as inferior. Notwithstanding this, the various commentators in this volume do not simply valorize or uncritically endorse Levinas's oeuvre. In one of his central books, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), Levinas portrays the feminine by wielding language that is stereotypically sexist. He attributes traits like "tenderness" and "welcoming" to the feminine which accomplishes dwelling by infusing the domicile with tenderness and care, offering silent refuge from a hostile and competitive public arena. This seems to relegate women to a mute and nonpolitical position, such that they never become ethical subjects, let alone

active participants in political dialogue concerning justice. More pressing still is Levinas's depiction of the "Beloved" in eros. Somehow the female lover is not fully human, not fully adult. A coy, coquettish lover, the "Beloved" becomes "an irresponsible animality" who merely provides the gateway to the higher domain of ethical life without entering such heights herself. Sexual acts debase her, lowering her to abysmal depths, "profaning" her while the man moves toward the ethical life in and through the birth of the son.

Luce Irigaray's classic article "The Fecundity of the Caress" raises such points. Seemingly the only way eros is redeemed is through fecundity—the birth of the son who issues from sexual encounters. However, this appears to occlude the feminine as it suggests that femininity is merely a stepping stone to the more serious work of ethical activity. Paternity assumes more prominence as exemplifying the ethical while femininity in eros is deemed suspect, since it can descend to the level of need, situating it alongside the debased level of egoistic jouissance. As Irigaray writes, "when the beloved woman presents herself or appears to the male lover as a paradise to be referred back to infancy and animality, then the act of love leads not only to profaning, but also to a destruction, a fall. The beloved woman would be cast down to the depths so that the male lover could be raised to the heights" (p. 129). Although Irigaray objects to certain aspects of Levinas's depiction of the feminine, she finds inspiration in his defense of radical otherness. Thus she uses Levinas's championing of otherness to criticize his phenomenology of eros. Refusing to reject the main contours of his philosophical endeavors, Irigaray presents an alternate version of eros. Her alternative allows eros to embody ethical injunctions such as calling the lover to attain a new plateau by shattering certain barriers—a birth of both self and other which refrains from transmuting the lover into a mirror image of one's own fantasy. Of the ten essays in the volume, Irigaray's article is the only reprint, but its inclusion is crucial because of its significant impact regarding the possibility of feminist appropriations of Levinasian strands.

One essay in particular which reads Levinas in a sympathetic manner yet challenges the boundaries Levinas himself sets upon the feminine is Clair Elise Katz's article "Rehabilitating the House of Ruth: Exceeding the Limits of the Feminine in Levinas." Katz begins by observing the paramount role the feminine plays within the dynamic of Levinas's account of otherness. She underscores how the feminine is a necessary condition for paving the road to ethical engagement. Without the feminine the masculine ego could not develop the resources to build up the recesses of interiority; a refuge in a hospitable home is needed. Further, the feminine reveals a different dimension in her own gentleness which acts as an important precursor to ethical life. It halts the masculine project of assimilation and domination. Intersecting her analysis of "the Dwelling" in *Totality and Infinity*, Katz convincingly argues that Levinas's confessional writings influence his depiction of the feminine. Quoting from Levinas's essay "Judaism and the Feminine," she outlines striking parallels in his descriptions of femininity in both his religious and philosophical writings. Although Levinas contends that there is a sharp distinction between his confessional and philosophical writings,

Katz makes a plausible case for cross-fertilization. Wielding quotes from the Talmud which read “[t]he house is woman and Proverbs tells us it is through woman as a keepsake of the hearth that the public life of man is possible” (p. 150). Katz maintains that the very confines of Judaic tradition prevent Levinas from adopting a more radical nonsexist interpretation of the feminine. Calling Levinas to task for his wrong-headed claim that his analysis of otherness is neutral regarding sexual difference, Katz also rebukes him for not devoting sufficient attention to the pivotal role the feminine plays in the drama of the self’s ethical encounter with the other. In a clever and ironic twist, Katz employs resources within the Jewish texts to illustrate a neglected dimension of the feminine in Levinasian writings. Taking the biblical story of Ruth’s devotion to her mother-in-law, Naomi, Katz points to another facet of the feminine which is hardly mute or apolitical. Ruth forsakes her country and religion in order to offer her undying devotion and loyalty to Naomi. This gesture evokes ethical behavior since it leaves homeland behind in favor of attending to the other. Moreover, Ruth’s proclamation transpires on a political level—it is a public affirmation that opens up questions surrounding laws. Ruth’s allegiance to Naomi assumes a political dimension since her mother-in-law’s domestic abode rests within a particular country with certain legislation and regulations. Thus Ruth is not only the mute, gentle presence of the feminine welcome. She has a voice that can enter the arena of justice. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas seems to exclude justice from the feminine since it is relegated to the domestic sphere, or further still, to the abyss of sexual profanation which isn’t revealed to the eyes of any third party. Ruth stands as an encouraging example of a feminine figure who exceeds the limits set by the boundaries of Levinas’s own analysis of the feminine in *Totality and Infinity*. Katz introduces resources from within the religious tradition seemingly holding Levinas back from depicting a nonpatriarchal account of the feminine. Katz not only shows the limitations of Levinas’s philosophizing about the feminine, she also suggests positive ways of moving beyond them from within.

This volume of articles is worthy of attention on at least three counts. First, it sets the theme of Levinas’s possible contributions to feminism within the context of his writings such that they are given a better hearing. Second, many of the articles cover different works of Levinas, ranging from his early tract of *Time and the Other* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987) to an interview in the mid-1990s. Such a task is needed since Levinas’s views on the feminine develop over the course of his work. Wide-sweeping condemnations or wholesale acceptance are polar opposites which do an injustice to the complexities and ambiguities of Levinas’s corpus. For the most part the selected essays do not fall victim to simplistic generalizations. Third, the articles manage to convey the significance of the theme of the feminine in Levinas’s oeuvre. Often relegated as merely an incidental topic by mainstream Levinasian scholarship, the contributors to this volume illustrate that the feminine is at the very least a transcendental condition for ethical life if not a paradigmatic metaphor for the meaning of what ethics demands—namely, a being-for-the-other which is epitomized through the trope of

maternity. Because Levinas portrays the feminine as inaccessible to the masculine logos, it can lead to future philosophical forays into what the feminine might involve albeit in a tentative oscillating fashion lest it be forever encapsulated in a "said" which necessarily betrays what it conveys. As Ewa Plonowska Ziarek muses at the end of her essay, "what the feminine side might look like in the light of Levinas's ethics liberated from the restrictions of the patriarchal thought—well, the answer to this question is still very much a matter of invention" (p. 94).—Meredith Gunning, *Stonehill College*.

CHARLES, David. *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. 432 pp. Cloth, \$65.00; paper, \$24.95—The central topics of this work are Aristotle's conceptions of meaning, essence, and necessity. These are dealt with in the two parts of the book: in part 1, "Aristotle on Language and Thought," and then in part 2, "Aristotle on Definition, Essence and Natural Kinds." Aristotle is examined both from the perspective of his improvements on his contemporaries and predecessors, and also in relation to current twentieth-century views. The two leading current figures whose views are discussed are Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam. David Charles argues that Aristotle provides us with a viable rival alternative to the leading current views on the meaning of natural kind terms and associated essentialist claims.

The central differences between Aristotle and his twentieth-century rivals on the topic of natural kind terms are addressed in terms of two notions: what Charles calls "semantic depth" and existence. Kripke, Putnam, and their followers require that natural kind terms such as "water," "man," and "eclipse" have their meanings in terms of objects that are known to exist and in terms of "deep" scientifically established features of such objects. For Kripke and Putnam these scientifically established features are the essential ones and the presence of scientific structure is a requirement for a proper understanding of a natural kind term. Essentialism here is scientific and in a sense such essences follow from the existence of these items. In general, metaphysical features follow scientific ones. By contrast, Aristotle's account of the meaning of natural kind terms is independent both of the existence and the scientifically established features of water, man, and eclipses. Further, metaphysical considerations of a somewhat pretheoretical sort play a guiding role in determining the nature of natural kinds and their essences.

In this short review I cannot do justice to the insights offered in this work and the contributions to Aristotle scholarship. Instead, I will try to elaborate in a few words how Aristotle's views differ from the current ones and why they might provide a worthy rival. One argument offered as to why existence is secondary in Aristotle's account is that in order to present evidence that the natural kind exists, for example, that water exists, one must rely on at least one premise which predicates some feature to that kind, that is, to water (p. 71). So discussions as to a kind's existence are in this sense subordinate to the predications about the

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