Merleau-Ponty's Developmental Ontology by David Morris (review)

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Heidegger's thought remained methodically similar throughout his corpus (where "method" must be taken in the nonscientific sense that Heidegger himself develops), and that it is this method that, perhaps more than anything else, binds Heidegger to Eckhart. Part 3 thus challenges the somewhat customary division of Heidegger's corpus into an early period (characterized by an unrelenting focus on the will and its resoluteness) and a late period (characterized by a turn away from the will toward being itself), arguing instead for a certain unity of form, if not of content, throughout Heidegger's path of questioning.

The final eighty pages or so of the book consists of several interesting and helpful appendices that bear upon Heidegger's intellectual relationship to Eckhart, including a list of editions of Eckhart's books that Heidegger owned or referenced, a painstakingly researched account of the marginalia from Heidegger's own copies of Eckhart's work, as well as two previously untranslated scholarly presentations dealing with Eckhart's work presented by students of Heidegger. These appendices alone make the book an invaluable addition to the library of any serious Heidegger scholar.

If there is a chink in the armor of this otherwise masterful book, it is that it occasionally exaggerates Eckhart's movement beyond the strictures of metaphysics (or ontotheology), strictures that Heidegger himself underscores at times. This exaggeration reaches its highest point in the way in which the author elides some of the crucial substantive differences between Eckhart, who thoroughly remained a Christian thinker, and Heidegger, who believed himself to be operating after the death of God (his personal religiosity not withstanding). This elision is a consequence of his inability to sufficiently consider the implications of Heidegger's understanding of history, though the author broaches such a consideration at the end of the book. Despite this ultimately minor shortcoming, this book is an essential and enjoyable read for anybody interested in Eckhart, Heidegger, or their "relationship" to one another.—S. Montgomery Ewegen, *Trinity College, Connecticut*

MORRIS, David. *Merleau-Ponty's Developmental Ontology*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2018. xiv + 291 pp. Cloth, $99.95; paper, $34.95—This book is both an impressive work on the phenomenological project of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and an ambitious contribution to ontology that is inspired by that project. It is based on a bold but careful exegesis of the Merleau-Pontian corpus, one that focuses on the problem of sense understood as significance that is in reality or being prior to any human encounter, in contradistinction to meaning that is imposed on it through something like a Husserlian *Sinngebung*. In this decidedly nonanthropocentric conception, sense is not an artifact of human perception. Its ceasing to be merely latent does require a kind of

perceptual projection, but this work is rooted in and responsively motivated by it. So construed, sense challenges standard ways of understanding the relation between mind and world, and it poses profound ontological questions. Drawing largely on the unfinished manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible*, sympathetic readers of Merleau-Ponty have long contended that his work suggests a radically new ontological vision. But until relatively recently, that is all it was, a suggestive vision. However, with several of the lecture courses he gave at the Collège de France in the 1950s now published, it has become possible to develop this vision in more rigorous and substantive terms. This is especially true with regard to Merleau-Ponty's courses on nature, and these figure prominently in Morris's account. In picking out the problem of sense as the key thread underlying Merleau-Ponty's work, and in picking it up himself in an effort to update, extend, and bring that work to a kind of fruition, Morris shows with remarkable acuity what a "phenomenology of nature" has to offer.

The overall argument amounts to a transcendental elucidation of the underlying ontological conditions that make sense possible. The principal claim concerns what Morris terms "development," which he understands as internally dynamic ontological movement that engenders or institutes its own conditions dialectically and in so doing (literally) makes sense. The idea is that sense implies differences in being that are inherently or endogenously significant, which in turn implies the existence of norms that could not themselves be positively determinate. This ontological disparity or nonidentity between facts and norms amounts to a real negativity in being that propels development as a creative series of contingent events set against a background of radical indeterminacy. Sense occurs only as a precarious expressive achievement that would be nullified were it somehow pregiven in a cosmologically preordained or finalistic way. Space and time are likewise rethought in terms of this basic indeterminacy. Morris's claim is that ontological disparity ultimately emanates from deeper movements of place and temporality that coalesce in what he terms "templacement," which is the real dynamic underlying the quasi-epigenetic or enactive movement of development, and of which all human sense-makings are ultimately derivative.

Anchored on a particularly strong reading of *The Structure of Behavior* that shows how Merleau-Ponty first brought the problem of sense to light in a way that set his philosophical itinerary, the discussion traces the development of this itinerary through *Phenomenology of Perception*, his later lecture courses, up to *The Visible and the Invisible*. This approach shares in the view held by many commentators that there is a profound longitudinal unity across the Merleau-Pontian corpus. But Morris is able to establish this claim in a more compelling way than is usually done. This has much to do with a selective but stimulating reading of *Phenomenology of Perception* that foregrounds certain ontological implications, especially pertaining to temporality, that belie worries that Merleau-Ponty's *magnum opus* was mired in a philosophical subjectivism. Those familiar with current scholarship will find this reading valuable. But the biggest treat

lies in the phenomenology of life that Morris develops through autocritiques of embryology, immunology, and genetics. Here readers are served a feast of concrete detail vis-à-vis organismic self-transformation that goes a long way toward substantiating the claims about natural negativity. Reprising moves made by Merleau-Ponty, Morris applies these insights to Arnold Gesell's conception of dynamic morphogenesis, which, generalized in conjunction with the recent time realism of Lee Smolin, serves as the basic model of ontological development.

This is a far-reaching but well-founded proposal for a phenomenological ontology. Some issues, of course, remain open. One can always question whether there is sense in this sense, rather than another instance of the "myth of the given." Even granting that premise, one may still wonder if the transcendental reasoning succeeds: for example, whether the indirect and sometimes inaccessible evidence for a negativity that is prior to consciousness could not also be taken as indicating an essential intertwining of mind and world that would blur the duality of sense and meaning, or whether the "deep" invocation of templacement offers a solution to the problem of sense, or just an heuristically useful reformulation of it. But these are productive questions. Morris's book is an outstanding contribution that raises the bar of Merleau-Ponty scholarship in a way that will undoubtedly inspire and enable much further excellent work.—Bryan Smyth, *University of Mississippi*

PALMQUIST, Stephen R. *Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason's Light.* Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2019. xiv + 167 pp. Cloth, $90.00—One might have the following unfounded worry about Palmquist's *Kant and Mysticism*: "Of course Kant will have some features of his thought that can be construed as mystical. Are not all great philosophers mystics in a sense, who redirect a conversation by their seeming access to another realm? There are, of course, the literal mystical visions of a Plato or a Hildegard, but consider also the skeptical ascent in Hume's Treatise, or the otherworldly presence of David Lewis. Even Russell had his mathematical revelations. Is not Kant bound to come off as a bit of a mystic, as the one who saw the power of the 'moral law within,' as the voice of reason itself, to redirect metaphysics and rein in its speculative demands?"

However, this worry is not a reason to avoid *Kant and Mysticism*. It is a reason why books like it need to be written, particularly for figures like Kant, whom we so often think of as dry and austere. To that end, *Kant and Mysticism* does a good job of capturing what is mystical in Kant, pushing some key Kantian themes toward the mystical while seemingly preserving their spirit: "'Reason' is Kant's name for the ultimately unknowable mystery that generates all our human capacities for knowledge and