Haunting Resonances at the Threshold of Contemporary Philosophy


John Sallis’ book *Echoes: After Heidegger* is a book about listening and writing after Heidegger. In a sense, the work is about the place of this “after” in which an author such as John Sallis, who has thought through Heidegger’s philosophy into its end, finds himself. It is a book about this space in which one who is truly “after” Heidegger dwells. It is a text, therefore, that owes its drift to Heidegger, but could not have been written by one who would simply analyze or represent Heidegger’s thought. This book is certainly a book on Heidegger, but it is also a reading that reinscribes Heidegger’s texts and extends Heidegger’s thought in a way that displaces and sets in movement the limits of Heidegger’s thinking. In one regard, Sallis and Heidegger are interchangeable interlocutors in this text. As when Heidegger reads Kant, Aristotle, Nietzsche, etc., and one hears Heidegger’s own original thinking in his careful, submissive analysis of the texts of these authors, so also it is difficult to attribute the voices that echo in this book to either author alone.

*Echoes* offers us a series of essays that follow certain central themes in Heidegger’s work: the theme of time and ecstasy, the theme of the nature of the thing and the return of the sensible, the theme of the movement from ontology to metontology, the theme of the meaning of Being and the effacement of imagination, the theme of death and mortality, the theme of understanding and its sacrifice, the theme of art and poetics. Each essay has four parts that carefully trace the movement of Heidegger’s thought as he addresses these themes in the course of his work. Sallis warns against applying facile grids and schemas to Heidegger’s work (23), and I certainly hope to avoid cutting off the circulation of Sallis’ thought by an overattention to methodology that would make it appear as though the method were external to the movement of thought. Still, it would be remiss of me not to mention that this is a very carefully constructed work, and one could learn much about how to read Heidegger, and, indeed, about how to read and write philosophy after Heidegger by following the circuitry of Sallis’ path in each of the essays in this volume.

In the first three parts of each essay, Sallis traces the shifts in Heidegger’s
thought. In the final section, Sallis frees Heidegger’s texts into the space of what he calls a doubling return, a return to what is not said but is able to be heard echoing in Heidegger texts. This double return at the end of and after Heidegger is “neither simply present in nor simply absent from Heidegger’s texts” (13), but is required at the end of Heidegger’s thought. Sallis offers several descriptions for what occurs at this site of doubling return after Heidegger—a dismembered, resounding echoing, a sensible shining of the beautiful, a displaced ecstasy, a sheltering and nurturing earthliness, a spacing of time and difference, an abysmal imagining, a politics of submissive sacrifice. One is left at the end of each chapter with a sense of awe at what is exploding and unfolding after his careful analysis of the theme of the chapter. But here Sallis is very brief, only hinting at what this space of return after Heidegger would sound like. Other works by Sallis explore the space of his own writing. This is a book about Heidegger, and Sallis is always listening to Heidegger in this text, even in those endings that attempt to delimit Heidegger’s thought and return it to Heidegger. This attempt by Sallis to articulate the character of the space opened up after Heidegger is not accomplished by simply moving beyond Heidegger. Rather, it is a movement that cannot be decided with regard to whether it is inside or outside the thought of Heidegger. The peculiar logic of this movement after Heidegger reverberates throughout this book. It is a book that cannot be owned, and that puts under erasure its own originality. It is a book that echoes.

The Introduction and first chapter of Echoes are about the postmodern situation, which Sallis addresses in terms of its relationship to Heidegger’s thought. With Heidegger, certain irreversible shifts have occurred: the shift from the metaphysical vision of full, intuited presence over to a nonsubjective pluralizing of speech, a “voice cast into space” (13). Likewise a shift from the light required of vision over to the resonating voices of the clearing. Finally, a shift from measured, continuous time “to a mixing of time and space in the resounding of an echo across an open enclosure, within the clearing” (13). Then also, through the ear that Sallis brings to Heidegger’s texts after Heidegger, there is the echoing in Heidegger’s texts of a double return. But the attunement to this echo, such that the echoing is at all possible, is the task of the postmodern listener.

In the first chapter, entitled “Nonphilosophy,” Sallis asks how nonphilosophy, thinking at the end of philosophy, can be possible in a way that does not draw it back into philosophy or reduce nonphilosophy to the negation of philosophy. These themes: the end of philosophy, the overcoming of metaphysics, the task of a thinking beyond philosophy, the need for a repetition and return are all themes that Heidegger struggled with in his work. In this chapter, Sallis traces Heidegger’s progressively more radical attempt to release metaphysics into its end and transform philosophy into a