The Topology of
Des Hégémonies brisées*

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Rather than focusing on one or more sections of Reiner Schürmann's Des Hégémonies brisées (Broken Hegemonies), in this essay, I will attend to the character of the book as a whole. Schürmann once dryly referred to his text as "a beast," and given spatio-temporal limitations and the fact that Broken Hegemonies is as rich as it is large—nearly 800 pages—indeed it is a daunting task to treat it in a rigorous manner. I have taken as my focus Schürmann's own characterization of his thinking as topological, a term for him closely related to phenomenology and therefore bearing a methodological significance. But before turning to topology, allow me to mention briefly, and in an entirely schematic fashion, the substance and structure of the work.

The Structure

Perhaps the most obvious question is "What is Broken Hegemonies about?" In the very first sentence of the book we read, "The pages that follow are meant to be read as a contribution to the age-old 'doctrine of principles,' the inheritance bequeathed by the Greeks about which philosophers have not ceased to speculate." Broken Hegemonies is about principles, and one might take such "a contribution to an age-old doctrine" to be, for lack of a better word, "optimistic," optimistic in the sense of hoping to expand, correct, modify, etc. a doctrine which
has been, for the most part, a tried and true philosophical optics through which to think whatever there is to think. Inasmuch as the traditional doctrine of principles finds its final expression in metaphysics, it would seem on this account that *Broken Hegemonies* promises an improved metaphysics.

Such optimism would be misplaced, for Schürmann’s contribution to the doctrine of principles parallels, in more than a few respects, Nietzsche’s contribution to moral philosophy in his *Genealogy of Morals*. The *Genealogy* shows those conditions under which life-orienting values of good, bad, and evil arose, as well as their decline and possible “overcomings.” As is well known, we find there noble and priestly epochs as well as the dawning of an atheistic epoch beyond good and evil. Similarly, *Broken Hegemonies* contributes to the doctrine of principles by bringing to light the movement by which principles are ‘set up’, the epochally specific manners in which principles govern thinking and acting, and the necessary conflict at the heart of principles that leads not to their rejection from without, but to their collapse from within. In this respect one may find in Schürmann another parallel with Nietzsche—where Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* traces how tragedy committed suicide, namely, by being consumed by that Apollonian principle that had transformed its imageless rapture into the artform of tragedy, thus dying of Socratism, Schürmann’s text shows that in its very archai, nomological thought initiates a ‘natural’ or ‘logical’ trajectory whose end is a certain destitution and, ultimately, a diremption of vouti, an an-archia. (To what extent Schürmann’s anarchia corresponds to Nietzsche’s ‘dawn’ must remain an open, if intriguing question.) To be emphasized here is that the contribution *Broken Hegemonies* makes does not advance the legislative functioning belonging to principles; rather, it exposes the strategic conditions of this functioning, conditions which are, for Schürmann, tragically self-tormented.

If the general substance of *Broken Hegemonies* is laws or principles, its structure therefore is not that of a metaphysical deduction, emendation, or refutation of principles. The very substance of law, of principles, is rendered by a historical—one might even say in light of Nietzsche—genealogical examination of thinking and its native impulse to institute legislative hierarchies. What does this examination yield? Formally stated, it reveals first a movement comprising three moments: the moment of the institution of the principles that govern thinking and acting in a given epoch—it is here that Schürmann often speaks of the “nomination of the normative referent,” a movement in which a preferred phenomenon is “named” and elevated to a metaphysically preponderating status. This “normative-nomination” necessarily entails