The Subject of Praxis


*The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger* begins with the history of an irony. Recounting Arendt's evocation of the seriousness with which in the *Theatetus* Plato recounts the story of the peasant woman from Thrace who laughs as Thales falls into the pit, Taminiaux suggests that Arendt's own view of the story is much more ironic. Heidegger, Taminiaux points out, also recounts this story in *Die Frage nach dem Dinge*, a recounting in which Heidegger takes care to add that thinking is an activity about which housemaids necessarily laugh. What follows in this remarkable analysis of Arendt and Heidegger is a long reflection on how Arendtian irony increases in the course of her thought as she increasingly distances herself from the seriousness of professional thinkers, while Heidegger increasingly forgets the necessary laughter of the housemaids, joining ranks with those serious thinkers such as Plato for whom the housemaid's laughter becomes an indication of her inability to embrace the highest form of praxis, namely, the *bios theōrētikos*.

It would be impossible in the short space of this review to take up Taminiaux's myriad analyses of Arendt's and Heidegger's thought. Simply put, his reading of Arendt is remarkable, tracing her understanding of the relation between thinking and praxis from *The Human Condition* through *Life of the Mind* and to several shorter essays including the all important 1954 essay, "Philosophy and Politics." Taminiaux's analysis of Arendt is unparalleled in its attention to the nuances, subtleties, and radical originality of her thought. His penetrating analyses of her thought is such that the reader is absolutely convinced of the urgency of the last line of this book, "we cannot go on as if she has not spoken."

Less convincing is Taminiaux's reading of Heidegger. His reading from the outset and continually throughout the book places Heidegger in close proximity with Husserl and at a great distance from Arendt. In what follows, I would like to take up three crucial analyses in Taminiaux's reading of Heidegger that serve as the basis for how Taminiaux ultimately understands the status of Heideggerian thinking: 1) the status of intuition in Dasein's existential analytic, 2) the relation of um zu and worumwillen, and 3) Dasein's being-towards-death.

I

The status of intuition, specifically in *Being and Time* as well as some of the early lectures that surround and form the basis of this text, is central to
Taminiaux’s thesis that Heidegger as a professional thinker falls prey to the speculative fallacy that privileges the theoretical, intuitive gaze over practical engagement in the world, the latter always mediated through plurality and speech. Taminiaux’s fundamental claim is that Heidegger ontologizes the Husserlian discoveries about intuition, first and foremost in the analysis of Dasein. Indeed, he argues that the privileging of the intuitionist motif regulates the analytic of Dasein and concerns the status of Dasein as a self. Taminiaux claims that what Heidegger takes over from Husserl is the clear distinction between indication ( Ausdruck) and meaning (Bedeutung) — the first imbued with inescapable mediateness, while the second is amenable to an adequate seeing. In other words, Heidegger takes over the distinction between the intuitive register and the symbolic register. The conclusion Taminiaux draws is “The self has to be approached not at all by means of the symbolic, but through intuition” (62). Separated from the symbolic, the intuition of the self is aneu logos, without speech: “The relationship of Dasein to its being and the for-the-sake-of” that characterizes it has no need for symbols, signs, indexes. The distinction between the Um zu and Worumwillen is in fact tantamount to establishing a delineation between the order of the symbolic and the intuitive, nonsymbolic order of pure vision (67). While Um zu is at the level of circumspective concern that is the level of the symbolic and interpretation, Taminiaux argues that Worumwillen is at the level of care that is at the level of Bedeutung.

Taminiaux refers to Heidegger’s claim in Being and Time that the sight having to do with the “for the sake of which” is related primarily to transparency (Durchsichtigkeit). Durchsichtigkeit relates Dasein to its ownmost possibility, which it itself is, and which Taminiaux understands to be, a solus ipse. In the call of conscience (Gewissen), “there is an ultimate welding of phenomenon and logos because what this calling brings to a hearing, i.e., the Nothing, mere Nichtigkeit, is also what is given to sight” (76). And further, “According to the terms of this monadology, phenomenon in the purest sense is the only singular can-be of finite Dasein and logos in the purest sense is the silent voice by which Dasein signifies to itself its ownmost can-be” (89). In still other words, in the call of conscience Taminiaux argues that the inauthentic, fallenness of circumspective concern gives way to the authentic, solitary gaze of Dasein on its ownmost possibility to be. The call of conscience [Gewissen] as “internal knowing” empties out “every praxis in the sense of appearing interaction in the midst of a plurality and of every lexis that these biographical stages lead, since the Heideggerian Dasein is radically alone when it catches sight of its ownmost can-be in a seeing that overcomes every interlocution, even every monologue, as the analysis of Gewissen shows.” (182–83) Thus, Dasein’s authentic self, according to Taminiaux, is nonrelational, solipsistic and silent:

There is no other individuation than being-toward-death and, since one cannot discharge oneself of one’s death upon somebody else, it is not in