Enigmatic Sayings


John Llewelyn’s *The HypoCritical Imagination: Between Kant and Levinas* exhibits the harvest of the cross-fertilizations of a post-Heideggerian phenomenology of imagination and his own unique contribution of imagination as “hypoCritical creation.” In this challenging twelve-chapter book, he traces the multiple ways imagination has been regarded in the most important texts by Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, Sallis, and Henry. Llewelyn not only provides a detailed genealogy of imagination in the history of modern Continental thought but also adds a unique “post-structural” exploration of this theme beyond Levinas’ concern for the event of a face-to-face ethicity. Hence, we encounter a detailed exploration of what Kant, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, calls “the festive majesty” of respect for a distinctive regarding. Indeed, Levinas’ own “metaphor” of face is in part inspired by Kant’s extraordinary emphasis in the second *Critique* on how we regard the other—the respect and dignity we manifest toward humans. In the history of modern aesthetics, notably in cinematic art, perhaps only Alfred Hitchcock was able to interlace the delicate boundaries of the imaginal and the ethical. Llewelyn attempts to do this by a post-dialectical discursivity, stunningly rich in philosophical and epistemic acrobatics. While Heidegger invites the attentive reader to think and write differently, Llewelyn conjoins Heidegger’s desire with a fierce and admirable Kantian longing for a new reflective engagement with reason. Attending to the significant relation between Kant’s saying on imagination and Levinas’ expression of the face as a singularity that is universal, the author exceeds the limitations of both Kant and Levinas by expanding this theme in works by Derrida and Sallis. Accordingly, Llewelyn shows how imagination emerges in manifold components of judgment, invariably exceeding the phenomenal-noumenal relations of Selfhood, without abandoning the ethical schema. In relation to contemporary culture, Llewelyn’s perspective of ethical elasticity introduces a dimension of *In-eins-bildung*, a forming into one of the good and beautiful beyond the dialectical contours of the Socratic
method. The *mimesis* of cognition and morality is no longer founded on the idea of a transcendental ground, but rather on the itineraries of reason “imitating” imagination in its new search for the ethical. Applying the lessons learned from readings of German Idealism by Derrida and Sallis, Llewelyn looks at imagination as mediating the infinite and the finite, the natural and the moral. Reason’s interests are shown to dissolve into the hypoCritical, counter-mimetic, ethical affectivity of imagination. Mimesis is no longer aligned to the principle of ground, but to the *Ab-grund* of the uniquely chosen face-to-face saying. This “pretense” of imagination happens when reason turns to the post-Hegelian singularity of a “hypoCritical” eye, regarding the other as if it were the one regarding it—a thinker’s inevitable risk.

Working from the spark of a “medial diathesis,” that is, a sublime middle voice, Part I explores imagination from viewpoints common to Kant’s *Einbildungskraft* and Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*. This five-chapter section highlights the constructive power of imagination as connecting the theoretical and the practical architecture of reason expressed by Schelling, Hegel, Derrida, and Sallis in their idiosyncratic readings of Kant. Llewelyn argues that imagination is not merely the “land in-between” sensibility and understanding, but more importantly, the *Fügung* of reason and reality in relation to the historical unfolding of a “perpetual crisis.” In short, he agrees with Sallis that imagination is “essentially” the creative openness of *Dasein*. In Sallis’ words: “Imagination is freed from the rule of understanding that, conversely, it can govern understanding—though in its own playful way—by provoking thought” (118). While Llewelyn does not always explicitly articulate this idea, these intriguing sections manifest the poetic intimacy of *Denken* and *Einbildungskraft*. On Llewelyn’s view, Schelling indicates this gesture in his preference for letting imagination be (*Seinslassen*) thereby distinguishing it from a ratiocinative grasping (*Begreifen*). Indeed, this unique imaginal *Seinslassen* is the point of departure for the hypoCritical turn in the history of modern philosophy. Of course, everything in this text depends upon Llewelyn’s understanding of the “hypoCritical” as imagination’s ability to displace the image by focusing on the enigma of seeing. While not excluding the operations of imaging, Llewelyn views imagination as seeing/hearing and in its face-to-face regarding there is forever a seeing in a glass darkly, “ceaselessly troubled by the look” of the other. Paradoxically, this displaced, ethical regarding in the modern genealogy of imagination is thereby caught in a contradictory performance. Quite plainly, the hypoCritical “function” of imagination