

Review of

Santiago Zabala, *The Remains of Being: Hermeneutic Ontology after Metaphysics*.

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True philosophy, perhaps, is always found at the end of time, and amidst the remains of Being. In this brief, dense book, Santiago Zabala writes after Heidegger, reminding us that philosophy is never far from the concerns of theology (it is not by accident that Martin Luther makes a brief though significant appearance at the end of the book) or the ever shifting motions of hermeneutics. Zabala owes much to the thought of Gianni Vattimo and his philosophy of *pensiero debole* or ‘weak thinking’ and its exploration of the existence of moral values beyond and outside the guarantees of any external authority. Yet his conversations spread broadly and are with a rich company of thinkers including Derrida, Nancy, Tugendhat, Gadamer and Reiner Schürmann, though his voice always remains his own.

If, as Zabala asserts at the very outset, “Western humanity, in all its relations with beings, is in every aspect sustained by metaphysics” (2), we are in a time of remains and remnants, a time “to interpret what remains of Being” (7). And if interpretation is also a form of recollection, one is left with the suspicion, and more than the suspicion, that the contemporary has *always* been with us and that to be human is always to know a sense of an ending. There is something almost liturgical in the measure of the three main chapters of Zabala’s narrative, following the functioning of philosophy after metaphysics in the steps of destroying, interpreting and generating, the last being realized through interpretation “from within” by which is shown the gift or the “gratuity” of the remains of Being (112).

The times are waxing late, run the words of the hymn, and worn-out Being becomes Being destroyed, leaving but the trace of the remains of Being: from

Heidegger to Derrida. Only then can we abandon all hints of nostalgia for essential foundation and for metaphysical yearnings as existence dares uniquely to “*respond to and from* the there is of Being.” (74). It is here, in the very heart of his book, that Zabala echoes most poignantly the call of Vattimo to ‘weak thinking’, related, one supposes, even if remotely, to Tillich’s notion of the courage to be – a hermeneutic condition, and, perhaps, a condition of faith. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that in the closing pages of the book we find ourselves in the presence of Luther’s principle of *sola scriptura* as “a description of the hermeneutical situation in which Dasein is not the interpreter but the interpreted of a remnant.” (113-4). We focus not on the generation or deciphering of meaning, but on the event of interpretation itself as an experience of the remains of Being.

The more one reflects on this book, the more it becomes evident that it is most deeply a work of theology. Nietzsche is mentioned but three times, yet his is a pervasive presence, for this is, finally, a meditation on what it is to ‘do’ theology after the ‘death of God’, and this is only possible in profound and mature hermeneutical thinking. It is perfectly right that the book ends with Heidegger’s *What Is Called Thinking?*, but even more with Hölderlin, of end and beginning – *Wie du anfiengst, wirst du bleiben*. Zabala has given us a book which deserves wide reading and debate. It cannot be said to be easy, but it is never less than serious and its author, might, perhaps accidentally, have found himself, at the end of time, as a serious theologian as well as a philosopher.