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The Question of Hermeneutics

Timothy Stapleton

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THE QUESTION OF HERMENEUTICS



THE QUESTION OF HERMENEUTICS

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF JOSEPH J. KOCKELMANS

edited by

TIMOTHY J. STAPLETON
Loyola College in Maryland, U.S.A.



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CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHENOMENOLOGY
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Scope

The purpose of this series is to foster the development of phenomenological philosophy through creative research. Contemporary issues in philosophy, other disciplines and in culture generally, offer opportunities for the application of phenomenological methods that call for creative responses. Although the work of several generations of thinkers has provided phenomenology with many results with which to approach these challenges, a truly successful response to them will require building on this work with new analyses and methodological innovations.

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This volume was presented to Joseph J. Kockelmans by his friends and colleagues in December of 1993, at the Eastern Division Meetings of the American Philosophical Association in Atlanta, Georgia.

TIMOTHY J. STAPLETON

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FOREWORD

by Pierre Kerszberg

Joseph J. Kockelmans: A Biographical Note

Joseph Kockelmans was born on December 1, 1923, at Meerssen in the Netherlands. In 1951 he received his doctoral degree in philosophy from the Institute for Medieval Philosophy, Angelico, Rome. Earlier on, he had earned a "Baccalaureate" and a "Licence" from the same institution. Upon his return to the Netherlands, he engaged in a series of post-doctoral studies. His first subject was mathematics, which he studied under H. Busard who taught at the Institute of Technology at Venlo (1952-55). A major turning-point then occurred when, from 1955 to 1962, his post-doctoral research centered simultaneously around physics under A.D. Fokker at the University of Leyden, and phenomenology under H.L. Van Breda at the Husserl Archives of the University of Louvain. Still in the Netherlands, his first position as professor of philosophy was at the Agricultural University of Wageningen from 1963 to 1964. Even though he had been a Visiting Professor at Duquesne University in 1962, the year 1964 marked the actual beginning of his career in the United States. He began by holding a professorship at the New School for Social Research in New York (1964-65). Before establishing himself permanently at the Pennsylvania State University from 1968 onward, where he became a Distinguished Professor of Philosophy in 1990, he also held a professorship at the University of Pittsburgh from 1965 to 1968.

Kockelmans' arrival in the United States was the decisive event that was instrumental in fostering the recognition of Continental European philosophy in this country. Indeed, from 1965 to 1967, not only did he create (together with John Anderson and Calvin Schrag) an internationally-acclaimed journal, *Man and World*, he also published two books which turned out to be essential tools for a generation of students of European philosophy: these are his introductions to the works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In addition, he edited a most useful anthology of fundamental writings in phenomenology, which include both primary and secondary sources.

Kockelmans' intellectual journey is not quite dissimilar to Husserl's. Like Husserl, he began by working on issues related to the foundations of mathematical and exact sciences. His own path to phenomenology reflects his primary concern for the history of these sciences. His aim is to reflect critically on the ontological status of scientific entities. Technically speaking, this brings him close to a position known as constructive empiricism, but his originality lies in the claim that the truth of scientific entities is thereby not dissolved, but is still at issue. At the same time, Kockelmans has always shown a permanent concern for the quality of education in our contemporary world. He likes to think of himself as an educator. This concern is reflected in the publication of several anthologies dealing with various aspects of philosophy, all primarily designed for undergraduate students.

Herman Van Breda and Alphonse de Waelhens introduced Kockelmans to the world of phenomenology during his years at Louvain. Kockelmans' own position can be aptly referred to as "hermeneutic phenomenology," a position which is deeply influenced by Heidegger. By hermeneutic phenomenology, Kockelmans means a philosophical reflection which dwells within a sphere prior to both the theoretical and the practical level. This position combines the classical notion of subjectivity and the Heideggerian notion of concern. Thus, all understanding of intentionality, intuition, or temporality is to be mediated by interpretation, but the emphasis on interpretation does not discharge us from a systematic attempt to master these ultimate entities for their own sake. On this account, Kockelmans does not associate himself with the strong current of deconstructionism now advocated by several "post-modern" philosophers. Man's Being is inherently temporal, which for him implies that our task is to reflect upon what is needed in order to pursue some of the themes of classical metaphysics which are still relevant and significant today. A concern for the totality of meaning is not to be abandoned. As he put it himself: "Philosophy consists effectively in the critical reflection on our human experiences and on the world in which we have these experiences as well as on our own self, and this reflection is to be enacted from the perspective of the totality of meaning of which we can now conceive."