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George Pattison, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Theological Essay* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013). 170 pages.

Though it initially seems that George Pattison's book, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Theological Essay*, offers us a counterpart to Scott Campbell's *The Early Heidegger's Philosophy of Life* (Fordham, 2012), Pattison's intentions differ considerably. While Campbell's work thematically and chronologically deals with Heidegger's early thinking of life, Pattison's work is more meditative, critical, and contextual: "[*Heidegger on Death*] is not primarily intended as a contribution to the ever-growing philosophical literature on Heidegger. Heidegger is taken as a companion on a path of enquiry and not as an object of study in his own right" (7). Throughout the introduction and the six following chapters, Pattison tries to understand how Heidegger's account of death in *Being and Time* borrows from and is related to German and Danish theology and idealism.

In the introduction, Pattison situates Heidegger within the larger context of Hegelian and post-Hegelian conceptions of death. Certain readers of Hegel, such as D.F. Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Friedrich Schleiermacher began to reconsider the possibility of individual immortality. Far from being an entirely unexpected development, the emphasis Heidegger places on death as a limit and barrier for the authentic life can be seen as part of a much larger movement within German philosophy and theology. Pattison then highlights a number of more contemporary accounts of Heidegger and death, such as those by James Demske, Paul Edwards, and Carol White. Throughout, he argues that Heidegger's account should not be strictly associated with Nazism or linked too strongly with common medical or biological understandings of death. Rather, Heidegger's account puts forward ontological aspects that are both fundamental and relevant to but go beyond ordinary experience.

The first chapter, "Running Towards Death," provides a largely exegetical account of Dasein and death in *Being and Time*. In a standard reading, Pattison outlines the basic features of Dasein: Dasein is not isolated from itself or its world as an independent observer but is always engaged in its world, manipulating objects, and active. Such a comportment precedes any division between subjectivity and objectivity. Dasein is, further, characterized by its use of language, its thrownness, understanding, and anxiety. Following Kierkegaard, Heidegger distinguishes between the particularity of fear and the generality of anxiety as an ongoing uneasiness about nothing in particular. But such characterizations are necessarily incomplete: Dasein always exceeds itself as a

thrown projection. As such, we can only really grasp Dasein as a whole from the perspective of death: “to understand Dasein as a whole . . . it would seem to be necessary to see it in the light of its end” (19). This end, as death, is each Dasein’s own possibility, a possibility that cannot be exchanged, avoided, or taken over from another. And as a structural possibility of the end of possibilities, death is an existential/ontological affair that Dasein, in its default state of fallenness, is unaware of always being a possibility. Authentic Dasein, by contrast, anxiously understands that death is always a possibility and anticipates it as an event it must face for itself. Pattison closes the chapter with a review of Heidegger’s call of conscience, the call that comes both from beyond as Dasein is thrown towards nothing, the nothing that Pattison identifies with death.

In the following two chapters, “Death and I,” and “At the Scaffold,” Pattison deals respectively with how Heidegger draws from and responds to German Idealism and theology. Concerning the former, Pattison points out that even though Heidegger waited until after publishing *Being and Time* to lecture on German Idealism, the influences of the latter on the former are evident. Unlike Max Scheler, Heidegger believes we cannot limit philosophy to an anthropology; we must go beyond a study of human beings in order to assess the metaphysical presuppositions that make such projects possible. For Heidegger, German Idealism, as Fichte exemplified with his extensive emphasis on the ‘I’ and effort to “eliminate the unknowability of the thing-in-itself” (41), was ultimately misguided. For one, Fichte’s fundamental principle of identity as the principle of the identity of the subject leaves out or forgets being as the ground of the ‘I’ or the primordially of temporality. Heidegger ultimately accuses him of sacrificing truth for certainty. Similarly, Hegel also forgets the primordially of time or “the temporal character of the I” (46). For both Fichte and Hegel, the ‘I’ precedes any kind of thrown-projection or any kind of ‘not-yetness’ while for Schelling, the will is absolutely central. Taking Heidegger’s critique of German Idealism into consideration, Pattison sees *Being and Time* as Heidegger’s effort to reinterpret the ‘I’ temporally, in terms of thrownness, death, the world, and possibilities. Insofar as Heidegger’s account of Dasein emphasizes the selection of certain possibilities over others, his account resembles Schelling’s and insofar as Heidegger highlights the central role of Dasein, he is following German Idealism. However, insofar as Heidegger situates Dasein in a relation to being and temporality, he is going beyond German Idealism.

Having glanced at Heidegger’s reinterpretation of German Idealism, Pattison turns to Kierkegaard’s criticism of the same in *On the Concept of Irony*. In this work, Kierkegaard largely criticizes Fichte for forgetting humanity’s dependence on God. Human beings are not, for Kierkegaard, isolated or contextless egos able to manipulate the world as they wish. Rather, human beings are always dependent on God for their freedom. This Kierkegaardian freedom, Pattison points out, goes beyond the way Heidegger takes death as a limit to human freedom. Whereas for Kierkegaard, God is always a factor, for Heidegger, death is one among many possibilities. Kierkegaard’s meditations on death also anticipate Heidegger’s own project. For the former, we must always remain

aware of our own death while discussing it while “our attitude to death is, in the end, a test of how we are living” (53). Pattison finishes the chapter with a comparison between Heidegger’s valiant run towards death with Franz Rosenzweig’s more terrifying fear and “flight from death” (56). He argues that insofar as Heidegger favours a heroic, authentic, run towards death, he follows the German Idealists for whom the self or the ‘I’ energetically wills. Pattison argues that such a view of death is ultimately misguided. Far from easing the force of death, Kierkegaard’s and Rosenzweig’s more religious accounts reveal the terror of death in which God is not reduced to an objective, comforting, view from nowhere that reduces the force of death but a towering figure upon whom human beings are inevitably dependent.

The following chapter, “At the Scaffold,” continues Pattison’s critique of Heideggerian death by way of the reference Heidegger makes in his account of conscience and guilt in *Being and Time* to Leo Tolstoy’s novella *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. As Heidegger notes, the death of Ivan Ilych illustrates both the disruption death brings to those looking on while, at the same time, providing an example of someone who authentically approaches death. While agonizingly awaiting death, Ivan realizes that he is approaching nothing; death does not exist and this seems, for Pattison, to clarify what Heidegger means by the possibility of the impossibility of Dasein. But, Pattison continues, even as it seems to clarify Heidegger’s point, Tolstoy’s objective, third-person account seems to violate Heidegger’s claim that we cannot experience the deaths of others. Perhaps we do not experience death entirely alone; perhaps death entails a confrontation with what one is not, such that death is not a solitary affair: “To cry, to cry out, to rage against the coming of the night is to direct ourselves to what is *other-than-myself*” (79). Moreover, Pattison raises Dostoevsky’s account in *The Idiot* of a face-to-face encounter with death as a challenge to the possibility of Dasein completely reorienting its life in the face of death. Pattison refers to the story Prince Myshkin tells about a man who was sentenced to death. After being pardoned, the man admitted to his failure to value every moment of his life. Against Ivan’s and the Heideggerian heroic march towards death, Dostoevsky’s (clearly semi-autobiographical) account of facing death suggests that death, even in the face of a heroic existentialist, is not something towards which we run; rather, it often fails to change those who have come closest to it: Dostoevsky’s account “highlight[s] . . . the questionableness of claims to a decisive reorientation towards existence in the light of a face-to-face confrontation with the possible impossibility of my experience” (76). Like Kierkegaard’s and Rosenzweig’s conclusions, Dostoevsky’s account seems to challenge the legitimacy and nobility of a Heideggerian resoluteness in the face of death. They suggest that Heidegger’s account is but one possibility among others.

Having put forward these criticisms of resoluteness towards death, Pattison turns, in “Guilt, Death, and the Ethical,” to the question of how being guilty and having a conscience relate to death. Tempering his earlier comments about boldness in the face of nullity, Pattison points out that Heidegger’s account of guilt and conscience challenge those nihilists for whom death has no

significance. His insistence on Dasein's guilt has clear theological sources, pointing back to Kierkegaard, Luther, and Augustine though this is not to say that such theological sources are any more problematic than philosophical ones. Heidegger, Pattison argues, is himself guilty of misusing such theological sources for a secular project, using ontic theological investigations to sustain his ontological investigation: "Dasein is developed from the ontic material that Heidegger finds in the historical testimony of a particular line of Christian theologians, he uses this material in such a way as to occlude key elements that are present in the theologians—primarily Luther and Kierkegaard—under consideration" (86). In his early Luther seminar, Heidegger emphasizes the fundamental character of sin for Luther: sin affects every and all human life. Because death is a consequence of sin, all must concern themselves with death while they are alive. Adding to this, Kierkegaard distinguishes between 'mood' and 'seriousness.' *Mood* takes death casually while *seriousness* approaches it as something important and decisive. Taking death casually, *mood* puts off thinking about death whereas *seriousness* recognizes that death is always a possibility. Kierkegaard then takes these dispositions a step further, saying that it is not enough merely to recognize that death is always possible; rather, we must, in accepting this truth, focus on our own disposition: "death's 'decisiveness' is precisely the revelation that death is not decisive. What is decisive is how you are, now—today!—in your life" (89). Ultimately, then, for Kierkegaard, "death and our attitude to death is, in the end, a test of how we are living [while] it is how we are in life that determines our relation to death and not vice versa" (91).

Pattison then wonders whether Heidegger can follow Kierkegaard and Luther without committing himself to the Christian faith or a uniquely Christian ontology. He claims that Heidegger could have done so in two ways: first, by investigating whether Dasein is thrown toward nothingness or something 'more' (93). Second, by examining "the transcendence of the other human person" (93). In both cases, Heidegger would have had to deal more with ethical interactions with others at the cost of, perhaps, emphasizing his more solipsistic concern with authentic/inauthentic living. But instead of highlighting the possibly fundamental character of our obligations to others, Heidegger argues that our ethical obligations to others are grounded on a more original and individual authentic being. This leads Pattison to state that, "if the primary locus of authenticity is my relation to my own thrownness towards death the relation to the other can surely be no more than a secondary source of obligation" (94). Turning to Knud Løgstrup's work on Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Pattison describes how Løgstrup finds the human being's relation to the infinite and eternal to be grounded on an absence or a loss—the absence of our self-sufficiency. Further, by acknowledging the infinite-loss towards which we are directed, Løgstrup states that the self is possible only once we accept that we have this loss towards the infinite. This is especially clear in Kierkegaard's account of the human being as "movement, becoming, striving, and passion" (97) and in Heidegger's account of factual Dasein. The difference between the two, however, lies in how Kierkegaard relates the self to the infinite while Heidegger, in his ontology, has no corresponding

feature. For Heidegger, “there is [no] infinite or eternal power to demand anything of us” (97). Ultimately, Pattison disagrees with Løgstrup’s claim that Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the divine “short-circuits the presence of that demand in the claim of the human other,” arguing, instead, that it is precisely through our relation to the divine or the infinite other that we come to be directed towards and obligated to others. Pattison concludes, contra Heidegger, that “it is not death that most urgently and most demandingly calls us to our finitude, however, but the responsibility . . . to which we are called in our relation to others” (103).

In the following chapter, “The Deaths of Others,” Pattison continues his discussion of absence, but this time in relation to friends and others we have known who have died. At one point in *Being and Time*, Heidegger does bring up the deaths of others but only to state that we can witness these deaths indirectly. Against this, Pattison suggests, borrowing from Gabriel Marcel and Edwin Muir, that the deaths of others are not on the same level as the disappearance of a tool or some other object. The deaths of others, though different from our own deaths, do not bring an end to our own experiences. But such deaths *do* take something away from us. As Marcel explains, any death is important and world-altering if it is the death of something we love. Such a death does not just highlight the possibility of our own death, it also takes something away from us: a former presence, friendship, life loved. “Learning,” Pattison writes, “of the death of another is not simply a prompt to meditate on my own mortality. It is already, in and of itself, a diminishment of my own humanity—of my *humanity*” (111). Our task, then, becomes one of remembering the dead, not *as* dead, but *as* living, by remembering certain experiences, by remembering someone who, in part, completed us. Returning to Kierkegaard, Pattison explains that our relation to the dead indicates who we are as living beings, as beings who live off of and in relation to former lives. Referring to Muir, Pattison argues that we should engage in a continuous vigil for the dead, a certain loving relation that recognizes their ‘echoes’ unlike those who “ignorant of their relation to the dead . . . are incapable of being the selves they really are. Nor will they, until they are able to sorrow” (123). Thus Pattison seems to suggest that there is an authentic mode of relating to the dead, a mode that recognizes their absences and ‘echoes’ in the world. This authentic mode of relating would contrast with the inauthentic mode of forgetting the dead and forgetting that our world, the world that sustains our lives, is grounded in large part on the absence of those who lived.

Pattison concludes his book with a brief account of language and death. Language, he reminds us, is what distinguishes human beings from animals even as it is the mode through which we begin to control the world. Language and interpretation made management possible: “Although we may have dominion over ocean, earth, and animal, we would never be conscious of what this dominion meant and we would never know the ocean *as* ocean, the earth *as* earth, or the animal *as* animal without ‘the powers of language, understanding, attunement and building’” (134). And yet, Pattison points out, death continues to escape our control: it is always a possibility, a possibility of an ultimate silence and, in being such, can never be totally managed. As we noticed in the preceding

chapter, the deaths and absences of others continuously haunt our lives. Similarly, silence haunts and grounds the possibility of language: drawing from Jean-Louis Chrétien, Pattison notes that silence pervades speech, whether this be the silence of an interlocutor, the gaps between thoughts, or the silence of thought. Such silences point towards the central importance of listening whereby listening, as a certain kind of silence, directs itself towards words and even the call of conscience coming from beyond: “The question is, in the end, a question of listening, of how well we listen, and . . . true listening will always be marked by deep silence on the part of the one who listens and an accompanying reticence and modesty in setting out what has been heard” (144-145).

In a final section, Pattison asks the question that perennially haunts the possibility of making Heidegger compatible with Christianity: is faith in eternal life compatible with Heidegger’s account of death? Initially, Pattison explains, the answer seems to be ‘no.’ Any commitment to eternal life would render problematic the force of death, making death just a stage through which we must all pass. Pattison examines three of Heidegger’s later public lectures, two of which took place in Heidegger’s hometown, Meßkirch. In all three, Heidegger tries to make sense of what it means to return home. Here he points to the graveyard or ‘God’s acre’ as our resting-place. In the modern age of dislocation and homelessness, we are homesick, drawn perpetually to our origin. This origin, Pattison points out, is closely related to our mother tongue or a specific dialect. We are perpetually drawn back to these sites—language and the graveyard—such that death can be called our ‘home.’ Though this ‘home,’ for many Christians, points to a future heavenly dwelling, Pattison recognizes that this is probably not what Heidegger is here referring to. Nevertheless, he does notice a certain progression in Heidegger’s thought: “The authentic relation to death is no longer that of freely affirming our thrownness towards death. Instead, it is now a matter of taking to heart the poetic word in which death, correlated with the sheltering earth from which we were made and to which we return, is what calls us *home* so that we can become who we are: mortals, wandering on earth beneath an open sky and in the face of the gods” (151).

Throughout, Pattison’s book, far more meditative and critical than Campbell’s work, draws from a wide range of sources in order to engage with and modify Heidegger’s account. Without dismissing Heidegger, Pattison manages to tread the careful path of creatively blending Heidegger’s insights with those of Kierkegaard, Luther, and others. As a result, we have a work that provides an existential account of death that emphasizes, more than Heidegger, the terror and intersubjective character of dying as well as the silences that haunt the living. As such, Pattison’s project is entirely worthwhile and important, well-argued and rich. *Heidegger on Death* adds another voice to the question of what it means to die. As Campbell shows, life is something *excessive*, something always ahead, yet to be obtained; as Pattison demonstrates, death is an absence towards which life advances and an absence that grounds the possibility of advancing. Both life and death resist any definition that tries to circumscribe them absolutely, subordinating both to an essential definition. Though we might

be inclined to think of death as rigid, unchanging, and permanent, even it moves beyond a “metaphysics of presence.” Death, as Pattison shows, haunts, calls, grounds, and hides. Once dead, we do not remain fixed and unchanging for even the dead continue to live.

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