

Holger Zaborowski, *Spielräume der Freiheit. Zur Hermeneutik des Menschseins*, Freiburg / München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2009.

Friedrich Schiller once said that the human being is only fully human where he or she plays. Human existence is, indeed, a playful existence. Human play is intrinsically related to human freedom. For there is no freedom without play, and no play without freedom. Freedom is a specific relation that humans have to their own nature, to their own selves, to other human beings, to artefacts and nature, and to God. *Spielräume der Freiheit. Zur Hermeneutik des Menschseins* (*Leeways of Freedom. On the Hermeneutics of Being Human*), written by the German philosopher Holger Zaborowski, is a study that explores these relations in several beautifully and persuasively written essays. Zaborowski thus examines what it means to be human: the dignity, the challenges, and the greatness of human existence. In doing so, he provides an outline of an anthropology that focuses on the singularity of human life, on what he calls "existence as an icon," as an image of the Other who calls one to respond to, and to take care of, the Other.

The first foundational chapters explore the meaning of freedom. They convincingly show the limits of a naturalistic understanding of the human being that denies the very fact of freedom, rigorously examine the relation between freedom and responsibility, and forcefully discuss the significance of divine freedom for an adequate view of human freedom. It is the performance of human existence that needs to be taken into account in order to understand the meaning of being human. Any kind of generalizing abstract anthropology, Zaborowski presupposes, does not suffice to gain such an understanding. For the performative "essence" of being human can never fully be analyzed and explained. It can, however, be explored hermeneutically and thus requires a hermeneutics of human life in its givenness that takes its own presuppositions and perspectives seriously and invites the readers to do hermeneutics themselves.

Other essays focus on concrete human acts to show what it means to be human. One of these chapters focuses on playing itself and its relation to freedom and time. It makes a plea for a kind of thinking that is itself playful—of which the book itself provides a wonderful example. Thinking playfully, Zaborowski devotes a chapter to eating and drinking. Against the background of a famous idea proposed by Ludwig Feuerbach, he raises the question as to whether or not the human being is (*ist*) what he or she eats (*isst*). Another chapter focuses on dwelling and its human dimensions. For Zaborowski, human dwelling is a "caveat without caveat." Human beings want to dwell somewhere. There is, therefore, a deep desire for a home, a place of one's own. But human life is finite. As humans, we cannot dwell forever, but only for the time being. Our dwelling thus shows what it means to long for eternity while irrevocably being finite and facing death. Death and dying stand at the center of another essay that focuses on the creation and the gift of death. It is the present itself that death bestows on us. Whoever wants to understand the present moment and our relation to it, needs to take into consideration the end of human life, too.

Spielräume der Freiheit. Zur Hermeneutik des Menschseins is an important and impressive contribution to the hermeneutics of human existence. In developing a hermeneutics of human life in action and in thus thinking about the human being, Zaborowski also thinks about thinking and delineates the outline of a way of philosophizing that can do justice to the performative dimensions of human life in its singularity. Zaborowski draws on the classical tradition and particularly on contemporary phenomenology and hermeneutics, but also on art, literature, and popular culture. In that he helps to see more deeply and clearly, his book is truly phenomenological, too. Whoever thinks about the human being, will have to consider this book and many of Zaborowski's subsequent writings that expand and develop his hermeneutics of the human being.