BOOK REVIEWS

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SLOTERDIJK, P. *Regeln für den Menschenpark. Ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus.* Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1999.

This book is the publication of Peter Sloterdijk's controversial 1999 lecture given at the international symposium "Jenseits des Seins | Exodus from Being | Philosophie nach Heidegger" in connection with the "Schloss-Elmau-Symposien zur Philosophie am Ende des Jahrhunderts". In it, Sloterdijk opines that far from raising humanity from out of barbarity, humanism has in fact trapped humanity there. Taking what he sees as clues from Heidegger, Nietzsche and Plato, Sloterdijk seems to argue for an escape from barbarity through bio-technology. The emendation of individuals and society would then become biological and mechanical. His discussion of this view, having earned him the hostile attention of Jürgen Habermas, Ernst Tugendhat, and Rüdiger Safranski among others, is not without its critics.

Sloterdijk provides the common thread to his argument by quoting Jean Paul's remark that books are thick letters to friends. For Sloterdijk, humanism is a Greek chain letter of friendship concerned with cultivating the love of wisdom through right living. As such, bookish humanism becomes the "drawing back of humanity from barbarity [*die Zurückholung des Menschen aus der Barbarei*]" (16) through writing, which means that humanism is defined by its opposite, that humanism always has an "against-which," a "*Wogegen*" (16). Sloterdijk sketches the history of the effects of this chain letter through the Romans, the modern European gymnasium movement, WWI and WWII, and post-holocaust Europe. His *leitmotif*: the great humanistic texts are instruction manuals for good behaviour and hence reading has become the prime tool for taming.

Sloterdijk, clearly unhappy with the manner in which this taming is effected, seizes on Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* in order to overcome humanism, which he calls a "false harmlessness [*falscher Harmlosigkeit*]" (17). According to Sloterdijk, the *Letter* was for Heidegger a way to make friends anew in the aftermath of his disastrous involvement with the Nazi party. However, Heidegger's ownmost path of thinking would not allow him to use the old metaphysics for this purpose. Instead, he demonizes it. Humanism, says Heidegger, is responsible for fascism, communism, and Americanism through an unthematized expression of the *Seinsvergesenheit* that has engulfed western philosophy for the last 2500 years. The *Letter* thus becomes for him a way to radicalize friendship via an attack on this metaphysical humanism that defines the human being as the rational animal, as if our difference from animals is specific. It is instead, says Heidegger, an ontological difference; each Dasein is its own being-in-the-world, which means that being is at issue for it. The *Letter* radicalizes this sentiment from *Being and Time*: the human being is called to be the shepherd of being, and hence must befriend being there in what Heidegger famously calls "the clearing" [*die Lichtung*]. Thus Heidegger ontologizes friendship; in the place of ethics, in the place of interpersonal responsibility, Heidegger famously calls us to be responsible for being. Any ontic friendship becomes founded on our incipient friendship with being in the clearing.

Sloterdijk thinks that the clearing is a capital idea but that Heidegger weakens it by only understanding it ontologically. Thus, suggests Sloterdijk, we need a natural history of the clearing, which he provides in a two-pronged fashion: (1) We may only understand the clearing through the early birth and failed animality of humans. Our failure as animals leads to our ecstasis, to our standing out in being; it turns us mammals into "worldling[s]" [*Weltling*]. That is, unlike animals we are condemned to make sense of the world, which is what we do through language; our ecstasis would make us

psychotic if not for the house of being (language). (2) However, language is not our only house — we have real houses. Now, it is a mistake to understand houses only in what Sloterdijk sees as Heidegger's pastoral fashion, for they are the place of exclusion and hence of battles. The clearing, the "there" wherein the house stands, is thus also a "battleground [*Kampfplatz*]" (37).

Hence Sloterdijk commences an investigation into Nietzsche, the thinker of conflict and violence, the man who philosophized with a hammer. Modernity, says Sloterdijk's Nietzsche, has chosen to breed humans as tame house pets. Nietzsche senses that there is at ground a struggle between two fundamental directions: the friends of humanity (i.e., of the herd) who wish to breed house pets, and the friends of the superman who have Zarathustra as their prophet. Sloterdijk teases from Nietzsche the proposition that if we don't seize a genetic understanding of anthropotechnology, we will simply repeat the mistakes of the humanistic priest-driven anthropotechnology culpable for every evil ever visited on humanity in the name of emendation. The priests have made us small, whereas the friends of the *Übermensch* can make us great; it is a question of the selections that we are willing to make. Whatever may be the weaknesses, hyperbole, and exaggeration of Nietzsche's position, Sloterdijk thinks that at least Nietzsche has put his finger on the main problem of humanism: its false harmlessness. That is, the friends of humanity have bred out that which is not conducive to good house pets, and have hence mutilated the potentiality for glorious humans in the guise of benevolence.

This false harmlessness indicates that humanism has always been about selection. In fact, its lessons and "lectures [*Lektion*]" are founded modes of "selection [*Selektion*]" (43); reading is properly an act of discrimination, for not everything can be read, and not everything which can be read is worth reading. Further, the literate have always been separate from the illiterate, and it is but a small step to claim, as does Sloterdijk, that one group effectively cultivates the other in both body and soul. Nietzsche is to be commended for thematizing this process of selection, but it is an old position that has been put forward with more or less transparency since Plato. Due to bad faith we usually ascribe this breeding power to a higher power (i.e., God), whereas we should seize it ourselves and admit that there are human objects and only human subjects of breeding. Hence, we need to develop a "Codex of Anthropotechnologies [*Codex der Anthropotechniken*]" (45), acknowledging, following Nietzsche, that humans are their own higher power and that they breed themselves with the explicit aim of the improvement of the race. To this end, it remains to be seen if we humans can drop our widespread "birth fatalism [*Geburtenfatalismus*]" and actively embrace "pre-natal selection [*pränatalen Selektion*]" (46). Instead of using the written word to advance the cause of civilization, Sloterdijk asks us to consider technological solutions.

So here we meet with Plato, whose *Statesman* discusses society as a human zoo with specific rules for its good governance. The zoo is Sloterdijk's metaphor, and it draws on the fact that Plato sees the state as a herd which must be cultivated, and that Plato suggests that the good king breeds out the bad characteristics in favour of good characteristics just as a zoo-keeper does. Hence, Sloterdijk presents Plato as the arch-humanist. Like all humanists, Plato wants to improve human beings. But Plato's brutal honesty distinguishes him from most humanists; the statesman explicitly engineers the qualities of his citizens. This taming and breeding has remained the "great unthought [*große Ungedachte*]" (43) for humanists in general. Thus Sloterdijk thinks that Plato anticipates Nietzsche as a master of dangerous thinking; Plato's position that the king acts from divine insight implies that humans are fundamentally unequal and that the breeders are apart from the breed; this is a specific and not gradual distinction. We moderns detect fascist eugenics in this programme, but Sloterdijk suggests that this is only because we have been raised on humanism, which stresses fundamental equality. Instead of equal individuals, Plato's king aims at a well-functioning society; he is a "trans-humanist [*Über-Humanisten*]" (54) ruling above but also for the society.

However, says Sloterdijk, Plato really cannot help us because his programme is based on a position that we no longer grant: the existence of God. The king only plays the earthly zoo-keeper within the divine trope of the good shepherd, and he draws his authority from this function. But the gods are gone and we are left to our own devices; yet without the gods, without the king's function of pointing to the gods, the care of humans becomes a "useless passion [*vergebliche Leidenschaft*]" (45). In the place of the gods are the books that point to them, but these books are no longer read by anyone except specialists and archivists. Hence they have ceased to be letters to friends, and are merely archived objects.

Sloterdijk then asks us if the archive can be the clearing, and the answer, although not supplied, is probably no. And on this extremely vague and maddeningly inconsequential point, the lecture ends, echoing in an inverse fashion Heidegger's equally inert 1966 insight that only a God can save us.

The work does not succeed as a philosophical text. To begin with, Sloterdijk treats Heidegger's *Letter* in isolation; in reality, the *Letter* answers a letter from Jean Beaufret, who was challenged by Sartre's *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, which in turn is a response to Marx's *Thesen über Feuerbach*, which in turn is a critique of Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums*, and so on. Heidegger's work, which Sloterdijk thinks overcomes the chain letter that is the tradition, finds itself safely ensconced within a chain that fittingly Sloterdijk's own book continues. And despite Sloterdijk's assurances to the contrary, these and other works of classical humanism cannot merely be the denizens of lonely archives. If they were, his whole thesis would fall apart since he spills much ink on the fact that classical humanism lasted well into the twentieth century. Further, he admits that it is this humanism against which both he and Heidegger are fighting; if they are no longer active works, then both are tilting at windmills.

As the subtitle indicates, Sloterdijk thinks that this lecture is an answer to the *Letter*. His making it an "answer" allows him to avoid discussing the work systematically. But what kind of answer are we given? Apparently that Heidegger is too ontological, that Heidegger needs to dip into the pool of natural history, anthropology, and technology. This is perhaps a fair comment, but hardly original after more than 50 years of secondary literature on Heidegger. And yet, he utterly fails to address Heidegger's ante-technological position cogently. Heidegger wants an open space that is prior to technology, hence he attacks the totalizing tendency of technological humanity. Sloterdijk, on the other hand, seems to see technology as the answer to the equivocities of human dwelling, and yet he offers no convincing argument for why technology will help us to dwell better. Instead, he suggests its efficacy by way of contrast: the word has failed, so perhaps the machine will help. His claim that there are real houses in the clearing totally misses Heidegger's point. There are houses in the clearing — Heidegger openly acknowledges this (cf. *Building Dwelling Thinking*). The point for Heidegger is that dwelling is *ex*istence before it is *in*sistence: dwelling first finds itself in wonder before it finds itself in domination. Sloterdijk wants to move straight to mastery; nature - in this case, human nature - remains a Cartesian *res extensa* to be conquered through improvement. Hence does he drown out the quiet solitude of the clearing with the sound of industry. If the clearing is technological, it is simply something else to be exploited, or worse: tweaked.

And yet once Sloterdijk jumps headfirst into this pool, he merely surfaces to tread water cautiously. That is: in what mood are we to conjugate Sloterdijk's work? Is it indicative, optative, or even jussive? Does he actually condone genetic engineering, and if so, does he condone it in the post-ethical and purely technocratic framework in which he displays it? He really gives the reader no positive indication that he does; his language in the *Anthropotechnologie* section is remarkably vague: "whether development in the long term will also lead to the genetic reform of the characteristics of the [human] species - whether a future anthropotechnology leads up to an explicit planning of characteristics; whether the whole species of humanity will be able to consummate a reversal from birth-fatalism to optional birth and pre-natal selection — these are questions in which our evolutionary horizon, however hazy and uncanny, begins to clear itself before us [*ob aber die langfristige Entwicklung auch zu einer genetischen Reform der Gattungseigenschaften führen wird - ob eine künftige Anthropotechnologie bis zu einer expliziten Merkmalsplanung vordringt; ob die Menschheit gattungsweit eine Umstellung vom Geburtenfatalismus zur optionalen Geburt und zur pränatalen Selektion wird vollziehen können - dies sind Fragen, in denen sich, wie auch immer verschwommen und nicht geheuer, der evolutionäre Horizont vor uns zu lichten beginnt*]" (46-47). I quote this key passage extensively and literally so that you may judge: is this explicitly a call to arms? It is certainly neither indicative nor jussive; my guess is that it is optative.

Further: what genetic technology is Sloterdijk talking about? His generic description of prenatal selection is quite unhelpful. He presents technology as a silver bullet answering questions instead of raising them. However, we must ask when presented with such a eugenic programme: what biological features do we actually associate with moral behaviour? Long noses? Black hair? Bedroom eyes? Intelligence? Hereditary breast cancer? Any decision as to what the breeders could actually breed

for the emendation of the race would then be an arbitrary decision, clearly outside of the universality that ethics requires in order to command respect. True, social biologists such as Richard Dawkins and state projects such as the American Violence Initiative supply genetic reasons for morally charged behaviour. However, the gene does not recognize the moral rightness or wrongness of actions, but merely their adaptability for survival (and to talk about "recognition" at the genetic level is a strangely anthropomorphic metaphor that even biologists seem unable to avoid). So it is difficult to understand how a putative selection for ethical traits at the genetic level could ever be justified, let alone how these traits could ever be established with the certainty requisite of science. It is not for no reason that most ethicists, foremost among them Aristotle and Kant, expressly tell us to leave the realm of nature behind when we discuss ethics.

As Sloterdijk is fond of saying, the Greeks wrote their humanistic chain letter to people unknown. Here we can see a direct parallel to his own project. He gives us an unclear idea of genetic technology: prenatal selection is merely that — selection. But from what are we selecting? Sloterdijk does not tell us, but presently human selection is made from among randomly formed embryos. The clinical idea is to create many embryos and to select the healthiest. This of course is a waste of resources and time; it would be much better to modify the human stock such that we are not choosing from among randomly created beings, but rather from among designed beings. Here we enter into the realm of, among other things, stem-line genetic engineering. And here we have our parallel with Greek humanism: as they did not know to whom they were sending their missives, we too would have no idea to whom we are sending these genes. Once these laboratory-induced germ-line mutations enter into the gene pool, they are there forever. In other words, my desire for a particular designed being will resonate throughout the rest of human history. Of course, there are benefits to this. But there are also drawbacks: nothing guarantees the beneficence of the mutation. In effect, I am damning future generations to my will for the present. The parallel with the chain letter breaks down, though. I can throw away the letter, but not mutated genes. Thus Sloterdijk's rejection of written formation and ambiguous acceptance of technological formation could dissolve quite easily into the choice between suggestive discourse and autocratic diktat.

More disturbingly, since humanism has ended, ethics too must have ended, as Tugendhat notes regarding Sloterdijk. Sloterdijk seems to equate ethics with taming via the written word, but this taming somehow leads to the holocaust through its abiding by the metaphysics of presence. Instead of being written and ethical, our taming is to be practical and scientific. But what are the criteria with which we are to judge improvement? This is the problem that all nihilists must face: is not the idea of civilization, which Sloterdijk wants to protect, precisely the idea of bookish humanism? And yet this format is rejected. So the new criteria must be something else. They must be technological, which is made quite clear by Sloterdijk's *Codex Anthropotechniken*. For we are beyond good and evil, as his use of Nietzsche indicates, and the only measure can now be the arbitrary will of those who hold the power that technology has given them. Remember that Sloterdijk ambiguously proffers the idea that some humans are more equal than others. These are the supermen. Nietzsche, though, had the wisdom to realize that if you reject humanism, you reject civilization and affirm only the will of the one able to will most strongly. Hence the superman is not interested in the herd, in the community. Or rather: the superman is a fundamentally egotistical being concerned with society only in so far as he can exploit it, which is clearly Nietzsche's doctrine. Thus, what improvement can the superman offer? If the failure of humanism rests in its inability to pull us up from barbarity via the written word, how could society fare any better under the superman, under Dionysus? And how can we even have a consistent idea of the importance of civilization from a Nietzschean position?

Although Sloterdijk tacitly admits these problems when he notes Nietzsche's possible hyperbole, he does not press this line of questioning; he thus posits Nietzsche without expressly answering his challenge. We must agree with Sloterdijk that Nietzsche broaches the subject of humanism's violent selection process, but Nietzsche is not the only thinker to have done so. On this score, dozens of thinkers are his equal if not his better — including Heidegger and, say, Josef Pieper. The problem remains: once we have contemplated the Superman, what are we to do with him? Are we allowed simply to move on, as has Sloterdijk, or should we not thoroughly problematize him? Instead, Sloterdijk turns Nietzsche into a watchman, into a categorizer, into a pale reflection of Plato; his Nietzsche simply divides the world into two

species. His Nietzsche is thus harmless, Dionysus turned Apollo.

Further, his description of humanism is suspect, to say the least. Although he does provide a consistent version and does well to tease out its implications, his humanism seemingly has more to do with Irving Babbitt than with, say, Erasmus, or the Enlightenment, or even twentieth-century atheistic humanism, simply to rehearse a few scenes from the humanistic pageant. Just as Heidegger over-simplifies "metaphysics", so too does Sloterdijk "humanism". There is nothing wrong with defining any term, but the severe reduction which the term receives in Sloterdijk's hands is not true to the richness of its historical manifestations. This is especially damning as Sloterdijk wants to overcome humanism, but a humanism of his own choosing, of course. Further, defining humanism as the taming of barbarity is hardly a sufficient definition. Insofar as any culture institutes a symbolic system, that culture has begun the taming necessary to claw back barbarity. And many cultures that would not describe themselves as being based on Greek humanism have done this through books, the Jews and the Moslems most conspicuously.

And although this is hardly the final criticism possible for such a vague and troubling book, is it not a bit suspect to draw on a former member of the Nazi party, Heidegger, to provide an indictment of humanism? What is even more disturbing is that the person to whom the *Letter* was written, Jean Beaufret, doubted the existence of the Nazi gas chambers (see Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, Boston: MIT Press, 1992, p. 281). So we have a rich stew here: Heidegger was a member of the Nazi party, the addressee denies the gas chambers, and the Nazis practised large scale eugenics. Even if these *facts* do not successfully challenge his project, they certainly merit discussion, one which is sadly missing. However, I do agree that basing arguments on Heidegger is not an intellectual crime. I am merely taking issue here with what seems to be a sorry lack of finesse in his lecture. His apology for technocracy seems too naive for someone so well versed in the history of philosophy. His archeology of the holocaust obscures Heidegger's silence regarding it.

So we see that the book is fundamentally ambiguous. Humanism must be overcome; Heidegger must be overcome; Nietzsche is dropped; and Plato is anachronistic. What are we left with? A vague understanding of biotechnology, an isolated treatment of Heidegger, a taming of Nietzsche, an arbitrary definition of humanism, and silence regarding arguably the largest programme of eugenics of the 20th century. These all indicate that this book has no real binding logical dynamism at its core, but is merely propelled by the half-hearted affirmation of some post-ethical, post-humanist ideology. The best that we can say about his thesis is that it recognizes the true scope of the failings of humanism, but this of course is the faintest of praise. Technocracy is no improvement on humanism, but is rather the product of the humanistic veneration of the self-evident and perfectible human being. This, in fact, is the point of the *Letter*, an irony seemingly lost to Sloterdijk.

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STANGOR, C., (ed.), *Stereotypes and Prejudice*. Psychology Press, Philadelphia, 2000, 400 p.

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The problem of stereotypes and prejudice that was once thought to be a characteristic only of certain immigrant nations with a dominant founding racial, religious, ethnic group has increasingly become, with advancing globalization, a world-wide problem. Genocides and atrocities in the most developed nations not only continue but also seem to increase in violence. National policies seem unable to cope with the problem, and the mass media either ignore the problem or directly or indirectly fan various forms of stereotypes and prejudices. In this context, this book is most welcome, especially a book of this quality and thoroughness.

This textbook reader is superb in many ways. The volume includes all of the major theoretical traditions, major authors, and covers all of the major divisions of study on the topic. The contributions represent an excellent review of the major research literature. Part 1 provides an overview of concepts and theories; Part 2, measuring stereotypes; Part 3, how stereotypes develop; Part 4, why stereotypes are maintained even when they are inaccurate; Part 5, contexts in which stereotypes are used; Part 6, the degree of impact of stereotypes and the conditions in which they develop; Part 7, a section on how to improve inter-group perceptions and behaviour.

The book combines both classic readings, such as Gordon Allport's classic essay on "The Nature of Prejudice", and many more recent review articles of newer issues such as questions of gender. The selected

readings are good summaries of the state of the art of theory in a particular area, such as the chapter on social categorization or that dealing with stereotypes as individual and collective representations.

The book is well organized for easy student use: helpful introductory summaries, very clear language, good bibliographies and good study questions at the end of each chapter.