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Alan Bass. *Interpretation and Difference: The Strangeness of Care.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 194 pp. $25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-5338-8.

Reviewed by Richard Ganis
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Interpretative Care and the Postmetaphysical Tradition: The Legacy of Two Freuds

Navigating the dense philosophical terrain carved out by Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Derrida is by any metric a daunting proposition. However, Alan Bass's *Interpretation and Difference*–an addendum to his earlier study titled *Difference and Disavowal: The Drama of Eros* (2000)–proves a helpful, albeit highly demanding, excursion through the labyrinthine cracks and fissures of their respective texts. To frame his discussion, Bass appeals to the no less imposing figure of Sigmund Freud, underscoring the terms in which Freud's work intersects with and diverges from that of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. According to Bass, there are, in fact, two Freuds to be considered in this context: Freud the *Aufklärer*, who remained convinced of the "inevitable progress in understanding according to the principle of reason"; and an opposing Freud, who resisted the metaphysics of presence, discovered the irreducibility of the effect of deferral, and ultimately revealed the "*necessary* non-interpretation at the heart of the interpretable" (p. 179). It is, of course, the latter Freud who resonates with the arc of postmetaphysical thinking elaborated in the Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida tradition.

Proceeding chronologically, Bass devotes the first chapter of his book to a consideration of how a postmetaphysical engagement with Freud's text is already anticipated in Nietzsche. On the one hand, Nietzsche presents an express challenge to the scientificity of Freud's psychoanalytic model, which aims to apprehend the mind's unconscious contents in terms of equalities and identities. On the other hand, there is in Bass's estimation another, often overlooked, trajectory of Freud's work that is entirely consistent with Nietzsche's idea of "active" thought and its attendant critique of the deterministic unconscious. Repositioning psychoanalytic interpretation outside the conventional notions of causality and history that delimit all metaphysically closed systems, this dimension of Freud's theory reimagines psychopathology as an unconscious registration and repudiation of difference. Whether he "knows it or not," says Bass, it is precisely his appropriation of a "Nietzschean logic of difference" that allows Freud to "deconstruct some of his own fundamental oppositions, for example, the opposition of libido and self-preservation, the opposition of unconscious and world, the opposition of time and timelessness" (p. 31).

The two contrasting Freuds are likewise the backdrop for the book's second chapter on Heidegger. Heidegger's encounter with Freud is pivotal, in that it allows Bass to elaborate his central theme of "care"–specifically, psychoanalytic care. Critical in this context is Heidegger's objection to Freud's attempt to base his model of the psychic apparatus on objective, mechanical principles, a perspective that, in turn, leads him to conceive of the patient's self-preservative need for analytic care as a problem of "helplessness" or "empirical finitude." Heidegger's aim, in contrast, is to understand care–along with time and interpretation–in relation to *Angst*, uncanniness, and stress. From Heidegger's alternative standpoint of "differentiating finitude," argues Bass, we are positioned to shatter the mechanistic biases of Freud's account of the psychic apparatus and rethink the unconscious dynamics of interpretive care, and indeed the analytic setting itself, along the model of an "uncanny living machine" (p. 68).

While he sees the orientation of uncanniness as primary in both Heidegger and Freud (again despite the latter's own unexamined logocentrism), Bass maintains that neither author "can remain in the out-of-joint time-space of disruptive spectrality of which both give glimpses" (p. 134). It is, of course, Derrida, the subject of Bass's third and final chapter, who gestures toward such an extension of their respective projects. Indeed, in proposing a new metrics of time, a spectral messianicity that is not in itself messianic, Derrida repositions analytic care as

"the 'promise' of *revenance*, the promise of a repetition poised on the tip of the opening and closure of the time-space of interpretation" (p. 168). Intrinsically "uncanny and uncontrollable," the promise of disruptive spectrality threatens "to usurp the [dedifferentiating] mastery sought in opposition, presence, and tension reduction," resituating the unconscious as a nondeterministic "surface apparatus" shot through with the differential traces of what Freud calls "primary narcissism" (p. 161).

Bass's effort to think psychoanalytic care "postmetaphysically," alongside the frameworks of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, is likely to prove challenging for nonspecialist readers of its four principal interlocutors. Bass delves headfirst into myriad crevices of their writing (including many lesser-known works), packing his prose with their rarified terminology and agentic concepts. Even seasoned scholars of the postmetaphysical tradition are likely to pine for occasional "empirical" illustrations (which are offered, but all too infrequently). More problematic, however, is Bass's failure to confront the political implications of a possible nonmetaphysical psychotherapy. Is the remit of such a project confined to the analytic setting alone, or does it extend well beyond this milieu (as Derrida, for one, insists)? If so, what are the potential political costs of disfiguring the distinction between interpretive care and Enlightenment principles of egalitarian reciprocation?[1] This lacuna aside, *Interpretation and Difference* fills a notable gap in the existing literature and stands as an important and welcome intervention.

Note

[1]. For an excellent primer on the interchange between Derrida and Jürgen Habermas in this context, see *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, ed. Lasse Thomassen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

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