

Dominique Janicaud, 1937–2002

The philosopher Dominique Janicaud died on 18 August 2002 at Eze on the Côte d'Azur from a cardiac arrest after swimming in the Mediterranean. He was sixty-four years old. Eze is just along the coast from his beloved Nice, where Dominique had been teaching philosophy since 1966, refusing many invitations to leave for Paris and elsewhere. He lived and worked in a wonderful house high on the slopes of the *arrière-pays*, close to the valley of the Var.

Born in Paris on 14 November 1937, Dominique studied philosophy with André Jacob at the Lycée Lakanal, and was first drawn to Bergson and the tradition of French spiritualism, particularly the important but little-known (in the English-speaking world) work of Félix Ravaisson. Dominique's doctoral thesis on this topic was published in 1969 as *Une généalogie du spiritualisme français*, reissued in 1997 as *Ravaisson et la métaphysique*. His crucial philosophical encounter was with Jean Beaufret, the most prominent of Heidegger's French interlocutors, to whom Heidegger addressed his *Letter on Humanism*. Beaufret was a cousin of the Janicaud family and Dominique was deeply impressed with Beaufret's influential translation and presentation of Parmenides' *Poem*. Dominique began to read Heidegger and was taught by Beaufret when he entered the École Normale Supérieure in 1958. It was with Beaufret's encouragement that Dominique studied in Germany and met with Heidegger on several occasions in the 1960s. Dominique's other teachers were Louis Althusser and Jean Hyppolite, and although the former left little impression on him, it was from the latter that he developed his interest in Hegel, who was the topic of Dominique's Thèse d'État, published in 1975 as *Hegel et le destin de la Grèce*.

Dominique belonged to a small group of Heidegger readers very much *contre-courant* to the overwhelming Freudo-Marxist hegemony of the early 1960s in Paris. An informal discussion group met in 1965 at the Fondation Thiers in Paris, and included Dominique's lifelong friend Michel Haar, as well as Hubert Dreyfus, Henri Birault and Jacques Derrida. Yet Dominique was no orthodox Heideggerian. Although captivated by the later Heidegger's analysis of the completion or closure of metaphysics and his thinking of the age of technology in terms of the *Gestell*, his work adopted a significant and growing critical distance from Heidegger. Evidence of this appears in four stunning studies of Heidegger in the 1983 book *La Métaphysique à la limite*, of which I would strongly recommend the essay 'Heideggeriana', which is a meditation on Heidegger's too little known text *Überwindung der Metaphysik*.

This critical distance from Heidegger is more obliquely but powerfully at work in Dominique's major philosophical work, *La Puissance du rationnel* of 1985, published in Peg Birmingham's excellent translation as *The Powers of the Rational* (1994).



Refusing to follow Heidegger's division between rational thinking and the thinking of Being, the book attempts an ambitious genealogy of rationality which gives a detailed phenomenology of the effects of techno-scientific power. The Hegelian pedigree of this concern with rationality leads into proximity with both Foucault and Habermas, but also Anglo-American philosophy of science. Far from abandoning rationality, Dominique was led towards an alternative notion of reason that he called *partage*. This term has many shades of meaning in French, of which Dominique liked to emphasize the idea of rationality as our human lot or portion. What he was after was a non-dominating, non-instrumental and dialogic experience of rationality as that which is *shared* by mortals in their everyday being with one another. In many ways, Dominique's critique of Heidegger's sharp division between meditative thinking and technologized reason echoes Habermas's critique of Adorno's univocal notion of instrumental rationality opposed to aesthetic experience. The concern with *partage* led into an original account of temporality in the 1997 book *Chronos*.

In an autobiographical text, Dominique wrote of his sharp disagreement with Heidegger:

I could no longer accept either the schema of history or that of Being, or the secret, destinal correspondence of the originary and the *Ereignis*. And I do not think that meditative thought can preserve a resource against technicist nihilism if it refuses all specific understanding of new realities, which always resound with ambiguity.

One of the most impressive features of *La Puissance du rationnel* was its detailed engagement with those new realities, and Dominique had an impressive knowledge of both the history and the philosophy of science and much contemporary scientific research. The critique of Heidegger was extended to the latter's 'unconditional destinal historicism' in a 1990 engagement with the effects of Heidegger's politics in French philosophy, *L'Ombre de cette pensée*, which also includes a powerful critique of Lacoue-Labarthe's work.

La Puissance du rationnel did not get the reception it deserved. As is often the case with philosophers, Dominique was better known for more occasional works, in particular two books that appeared in 1991: *À nouveau la philosophie*, a collection of essays, widely and favourably reviewed; and *Le Tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*, which initiated a whole series of debates and polemics among French philosophers. Essentially, the book was a polemic against the theologizing tendency towards a phenomenology of the inapparent or the invisible that can be found in the work of Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien and Michel Henry, but whose ancestry can be traced to the influence of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*. Phenomenologically speaking, Dominique's sympathies were always more Merleau-Pontian and committed to the idea that philosophy should attend to the concrete world and nothing besides. These debates were continued in a 1998 collection, *La Phénoménologie éclatée*. Dominique spent the last years of his life working on a hugely ambitious history of the reception of Heidegger in France, published in two volumes as *Heidegger en France* in autumn 2001. It is an extremely valuable piece of work that deserves to be translated.

I knew Dominique well. He was the supervisor of my M.Phil. thesis on the question of the overcoming of metaphysics in Heidegger and Carnap, a topic that he assigned to me. During my year and a half in Nice in the mid-1980s, we met regularly and he would sit patiently as I explained some text in demotic French. He was a good, kind and generous man, a person of great integrity, hospitality and warmth. He was intellectually and geographically remote from the paranoid and finally provincial world of Parisian philosophy and his life in the provinces paradoxically gave him the liberty of a more international outlook than other French philosophers of his generation.

Simon Critchley