
II. BOOK REVIEWS

Dustin Peone, ed., *Essays in Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy: Considering the Views of Donald Phillip Verene*. Reddick, FL: Felice Mosca, 2025. 230 pp. \$24.99. ISBN: 979-8-9991676-0-6.

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*Thinking holds to the coming
of what has been, and is remembrance.¹*

What is the point of returning to a book once read, of watching a film already seen, of listening again to a song it was once impossible to stop humming, or of calling a friend we have not heard from in years?

There is an atmosphere of the past, so thick that one could cut it with a knife – smell the odor, see the hue, and hear the words re-echoed and reverberating as one recollects and conjoins with oneself in the past. A melancholy emerges from this brief homecoming, as one compares it with the place one currently inhabits in time. It is a profound confrontation with the self that has already changed with the passage of time, yet it also opens a path back to the original locus from which everything first arose (*augere*).

Picture a gathering around a dinner table with old schoolmates: the shared life stories which started together split because everyone needed to grow and follow their own path, but there is a remembering and a backward look, once in a while, when the need to return to who one was rises up. *Essays in Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy: Considering the Views of Donald Phillip Verene* evokes precisely this sensation. A beautiful symposium of thirteen people, twelve of whom had shared the experience of crossing paths at a crucial point in their humanistic education with Professor Donald Phillip Verene.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 10.

This volume speaks of and to the humanity behind the art of loving wisdom, loving one's teacher as a guide and conductor – the author of a worldview that is then appropriated and molded personally by each of the gathered selves. The educator (*ex-ducere*) is the one who leads according to the sense of what it is to be alive and be with others while trying to make sense of the world. Here, in fact, the inexhaustible task is to make philosophy coincide with making a life, for there are as many ways of doing philosophy as there are ways of making a life. The researcher is not a “founder” precisely because the task of finding truth is as vast and infinite as discovering the beautiful; and, in fact, in Hegel's speculative framework, becoming is always a moment of synthesis, which in turn forms a new thesis, subsequently elevated to a higher synthesis. It is a progression, an ascent from the ground.

Verene's former students retrospectively trace their teacher's principles, which they preserved to transmit them to the curious in a way that precisely embodies the act of maintaining a tradition – one that etymologically demands that something be passed on within a close circle of people in order to preserve that which has been received. As the text reminds us, “Education is an initiation into tradition.”²

Each essay unfolds an autobiographical reflection, with confessions that examine what the authors took from their teacher and preserved, eventually transforming it so as to adapt it in a way that allowed them to reflect precisely and create a lifestyle. As Professor Verene pointed out to his former students, now educators themselves, philosophy should be directed toward creating a lifestyle. Making philosophy thus coincides with the art of making a life, in this symposium, where every word displays its roots in Verene's fertile soil. The challenges of “doctoring” (*docere*) emerge and are transformed into the art of the teacher's eloquence, as Raymond Barfield's essay reveals.³ The humane doctor, in every sense of the word, must indeed reflect, for as Travis Foster later notes, “eloquence begins in wonder and ends in inspiration”, and this eloquence is then mirrored “in the soul of the listener.”⁴ After finishing this book, I believe the reader should seriously consider the importance of similarly finding a guide – or perhaps four guides, as

² Dustin Peone, ed. *Essays in Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy: Considering the Views of Donald Philip Verene* (Reddick, FL: Felice Mosca, 2025), 188.

³ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

Verene himself did – in order to craft a meaningful life.⁵ The goal is to enable these guides, as authors of oneself, to converse with one another in order to continuously evolve and transform in one's own time, without allowing ideas to stagnate – perhaps in the way that Joyce conversed with Vico through his writings, merging philosophy, literature, and autobiography into a whole.

As one contributor explains, “Here’s a common way that tradition works. You encounter something that enchants you, that speaks to your inmost potentialities.”⁶ The process involves “imitating your masters and then go[ing] your own way.”⁷ Self-understanding prepares the ground for making philosophy, which always grows on fertile soil – watered, enriched, cultivated, and tended by a community to lighten the endeavor, undertaken in the pleasure of togetherness. This volume stresses that “self-knowledge [is] the necessary foundation of any other worthwhile knowledge”⁸, making this form of understanding paramount in the philosophical process.

Since every cultivation needs to be carried out in leisure and with taste – for in the end you are what you have been nurtured with, provided the waters do not come from Lethe – this becomes a transformative process, both retrospective and rooted in the present, truly embodying Verene’s principle of “two thinks at a time.” Philosophy emerges as a way of life, revolving around that which endures, persists, and leaves a permanent trace in one’s path.

The book is indeed a conversation between its contributors and itself; in another part, the leading figure of Verene is addressed, culminating in a meditation on how one became precisely who they are by addressing some of the musings and discoveries intimately connected to their professor – the one who, in a sense, authored them. Indeed, the author is the one who makes growth possible and prepares for its dissemination, as “[a] gardener ... grows in the character of others.”⁹

A teacher truly cultivates, disseminates, curates, and preserves for difficult times. So, re-reading a book, calling a friend – these are acts that involve finding imaginary universals intact, returning momentarily

⁵ Ibid., 217.

⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 122.

⁹ Ibid., 48.

to the past from the perspective and standpoint of the now. The history of philosophy here grows tightly entwined with personal stories of growth and evolution in the fabric of intimate lives, steadfastly maintaining one of the modalities that Verene inherited from Joyce, which it is right to repeat: “two thinks at once.”

This book is fundamentally about time, although it treats time in a way different from existentialism. Here, time is not a limit but a gift. It grants space for thought to grow, like Verene’s fountain pen, which must be refilled. Between one filling and the next, thought settles; if it endures, it leaves a trace, ready to spread and take root elsewhere.

The art of arranging words in a certain way moves an audience and transforms people – creating images and pointing to all possible imaginative universals. Storytelling is birthed in a collectivity, through gatherings, and forms communities that share the same identity. It gives meaning to collective and singular lives and tries to find this meaning for them, however unrealizable the task may be.

Philosophy must thus always engage us in a reflection to carry out a systematic review of culture¹⁰ – everything cultivated, everything that must be gathered from the soil and shaped through self-determination. Such cultivation and self-formation represent humanity’s path to self-emancipation, as Thora Ilin Bayer suggests. This is because, though the eloquent speech of the gardener-teacher instills an atmosphere that enables the good and beauty to spread,¹¹ this cultivation must also be practiced with irony and love. Through this disciplined practice, philosophical consciousness can be grasped and gathered (*con-capio*), revealed in a kind of poetic wisdom, in which the educator’s craft is simultaneously rigorous and playful, bringing forth what is essential while remaining open to unexpected revelations that can emerge in a genuine philosophical encounter. And in this sense, education requires that the essential be extracted, drawn out, and carefully tended. Hence, such a moment becomes a sublime instant in shared experience, in which everything is “intended to be passed along.”¹² As the intellect and soul ascend toward *theoria*, the divine can be contemplated and “the sublime is the epiphany.”¹³ Through this careful cultivation of both technique and wisdom,

¹⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹¹ Ibid., 48–51.

¹² Ibid., 47.

¹³ Ibid., 225.

philosophy becomes not merely an intellectual exercise but a living practice that transforms both teacher and student in the shared experience of wonder and inspiration.

One of the theses in this volume is that the human being is destined to always become and be the locus of transformation.¹⁴ We are moved by beautiful speech and stories in which we reflect on ourselves and discover the symbolic forms of our own life and its traces. Life, consciousness, and self-narration make *Leben* coincide with *Geist*. As we sit in the company of all the authors in this symposium, we get to know them through their work, savor their wisdom, learn to appreciate it, and nourish our souls with their stories, which collude in a greater philosophy. And if “taste is a form of self-knowledge”¹⁵, we learn to know ourselves by opening ourselves to the history of philosophy, forming the style of the lives we lead.

In Heidegger, telos is the final turn in molding a chalice – a vessel that carries and preserves a substance that quenches, nurtures or bedews its ambient surroundings.¹⁶ Being inevitably performs a turn at some point in life, retrospectively bringing the thread of the past into the present, tracing oneself and one’s origins, comparing past and present in a dialectical unfolding. This turn determines us as what we were meant to become. As Vico observed, “[t]he true is the made”¹⁷, and in this very act of making, we also author ourselves

Every author in this sublime symposium reflects on education, tradition, experience, the love of wisdom. They are united by their teacher – Verene, who writes both philosophy and Italian recipes with the Montblanc pen he never relinquishes, preserving and disseminating the true, the good, and the beautiful, nurturing the mind and soul. Philosophy as a map of life leads necessarily to sociability and togetherness,¹⁸ reminding us of the communal nature of wisdom. As Heidegger puts it, “It is proper to every gathering that the gatherers assemble to coordinate their efforts to the sheltering; only when they have gathered together

¹⁴ Ibid., 21, 34, 64, 161.

¹⁵ Ibid., 193.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper-Collins, 1993), 315.

¹⁷ Peone, 65.

¹⁸ Ibid., 191.

with that end in view do they begin to gather.”¹⁹ *Essays in Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy* traces influences, constellations, and confluences – inviting the use of both spontaneity and prudence as tools of philosophical reasoning, rather than surrendering to the mechanistic automatization of thought. It reminds us that the truest guides are those who lead us to become authors of ourselves, crafting the symbolic forms that shape the paths of our own and others’ lives.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 60.