It Flies: Concerning Responses to the Book *The Second Birth*

Tilo Schabert

That it may "fly" is one of the wishes accompanying a new book. The five contributions to this symposium, and the editors' introduction, show this wish to be working strikingly well for *The Second Birth*. In reading those responses to the book, I have learned things about it that, in a way, transformed my role. I had thought I knew the book, being the author of it, and now I saw that its tale can be heard in ways which certainly are true to it, but which are ways that also open up tales *in* the tale or tales proceeding from it, of which, in my author's consciousness, I had hardly been aware. I was told what apparently I had told, or what could further be told, in consequence of my study. *The Second Birth* evidently is on its way, independent of its author. It has found partners in a hermeneutical dialogue.

I extend then my sincerest thanks to the editors of this issue and to the participants in the symposium. And I gladly follow the gracious invitation by the editors to continue the dialogue by a response to the responses that *The Second Birth* has received. In accordance with the logic of a dialogue, I shall concentrate on what the responses to the book have produced: tales *in* the tale and tales proceeding from it.

There were three questions posed which sharply formulate the inquiry that has engaged author and commentators alike: What does it mean to be human (Thomas Heilke); how do I become a human being (John von Heyking); and whence does the political form of human life arise (Barry Cooper). In different ways, all comments (and I also include in the term "comments" the editors' introduction) put these questions within the context of a political cosmology. *The Second Birth* suggests the necessity of a political cosmology and sketches such a cosmology. Here, this necessity is affirmed and the sketch is further shaped up. The cosmos (or world), so the discourse proceeds, is a phenomenon of politics, 'from beginning to end' (Steve McGuire). It is built in the mode of a society (or community) and only politics sustains such a construct. The cosmos, besides, is issuing from a creation, and the particular modality of this creation intensifies the political thrust. The immense multiplicity of forms – and among them are human beings in the form of their bodies – through which the creation appears is, by itself, explosive rather than orderly. For humans, a 'war of bodies' (Peter Nitschke) may be their existential situation. The world couldn't be if it weren't governed.

Interestingly, the comments seize that inference and prominently evoke the rule of God, and the importance of theology in consequence. In *The Second Birth*, when the difference between a "beginning" and a "start" – a difference crucial for any understanding of the book – was discussed, the argument was pursued very far indeed, and it was succinctly stated – not without a tinge of provocation – that 'God is a politician, a magistrate of the world'. However, in consideration of what the book wished to study, namely "beginnings", a borderline was reached with such a statement, and it seemed advisable that it be respected. To go beyond would have meant to enter into a fully-fledged political cosmology. That is for a different book. Difficult as it certainly would be, the comments clearly suggest the project of such a book.

Let us beware, though. The intent couldn't be to produce a systematic treatise full of affirmations. As John von Heyking points out, at the heart of *The Second Birth* is the notion of

"political creativity". And all comments observe that the book, through its own making, follows and represents the processes of this creativity, as they can be discerned in the physical and human world. It is, structurally and linguistically, an image of them – hence the perfect aptness of the term 'architectonic science' (John von Heyking) to define methodologically the purpose of *The Second Birth*. Only an 'architectural code' (Peter Nitschke) corresponds to the architecture of the world, its ongoing appearance in this and that *Gestalt*. In the *Timaeus*, let us recall, Plato called the creator of the world a *theos tektonikos* and Augustine, in the *Confessions*, designated God as *artifex*. The image of the processes of political creativity drawn by *The Second Birth* is largely a matter of a language that suggests architectural perceptions. To have used the term *Gestalt* – a central element of that language – and to have maintained it for the English translation resulted therefore from quite carefully considered choices (and had nothing to do with the "Berlin School" or any other influence or source of inspiration). The word represents, architecturally speaking, more than a "shape" and less than a "form", in expressing a figuration of something (like a structure of arches, columns, and roofs) within which much can still happen (such as, given the example, a painting of surfaces, a certain styling of the columns, an arranging and detailing of arches and roofs). It ideally pictures the process and the event of creativity: *Ge-* (the process towards creation) *-stalt* (the creation accomplished).

In a way, *The Second Birth* is a paradoxical work. It is, on one hand, an attempt at a representation of processes of creativity. On the other, it presents its image of those processes in definitive words, as if the question of "beginnings" – at the origin of all this study – were settled. However, as the book may demonstrate, it is never settled.

The truth of the paradox was the reason for moving beyond Aristotle, "backwards", as it were, from beginnings being accomplished in the form of the *polis,* to the issue of beginnings from this and that cosmogonic and anthropogonic *Gestalt*. Compared to Aristotle, *The Second Birth* is indeed 'more radical' (Steve McGuire). It starts to study politics with the politics of creation and not with the human response to it.

Theory, if it fully follows the logic to which the material that is considered invites, will be shaped by a strong thrust of empiricism. It will dare its practice of thinking wherever it is led to by the material. The apparent para-Aristotelian radicalism of *The Second Birth* is, like all the theory it sets forth, thoroughly empirical. In view of the comments, this empiricism seemingly needs to be emphasized here. The notion of a contemplative life, for instance, may be intensely attractive to a philosopher. All the existence would be concentrated on the fulfillment of one's mind. A practice of life would be pursued, so the philosopher may assume, within the realm of his or her thought alone. What an illusion! All human life, without exception, depends upon sustenance of some form, and such sustenance is always socially mediated. Consider monasteries, for example. They are entities that allow every monk to devote his life to prayer and contemplation, but they are economic entities too. The monks couldn't respond to their vocation without the economics of their institution.

In taking up statements made in the comments on *The Second Birth*, two theoretical conclusions ought to be accentuated. First, 'Thought, by its very nature, is practical' (Steve McGuire). Indeed, for thought of course includes its required condition: a human person, physically living in this world, that practices his or her existence by acts of thinking. The empiricism of thought is existential. To assume the conduct of a 'contemplative' life is in contrast to a 'practical' one is misleading.

Secondly, 'Thought is sociable' (John von Heyking). Again, the empirical evidence carries an unequivocal message. Much of this evidence is presented in *The Second Birth*, and discussed in the comments. More evidence, actually quite a striking one, is given by the emergence of human languages through sounds. These are, empirically, sounds emitted and heard, and hence communicative cues that emerge in a *social* dimension[1]. Language couldn't be included among the *Gestalten* that were dealt with in *The Second Birth*. There is not *the* language present, wholly and primordially, from which beginnings could be made towards fulfilling the *Gestalt* of this language. Language is, rather, a consequence of beginnings, when, by movements in the human understanding of things, the apperception of those things – thoughts – are gradually turned into sounds. These beginnings of "language" do not lead to *a* language, of course, but to a great many *languages* that are conducive to the appearance of as many communities. Thinking thoughts would surely fail if it wasn't a social activity. If it wasn't be a practice of partnership.

Notes

[1] See for this paragraph: Tilo Schabert, 'Things Turned into Sounds: The Eranosean Hermeneutics' in *The Eranos Movement: A Story of Hermeneutics*, ed. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2016), 9-56.