

# On Hans-Helmuth Gander's Sixtieth Birthday

Jeff Malpas

Hans-Helmuth is not your average German philosophy professor. It may be an unfair stereotype (and probably has its origins in an outmoded nineteenth century perception – in Mark Twain perhaps? ), but there is a commonplace image of the German 'Herr Professor' as a somewhat narrowly-focused and stuffy individual with little care for the 'ordinary' mortals below him. Never could this be said of Hans-Helmuth - so much so that a standing joke between us has been that it is obviously his Swiss background that predominates rather than the German.

That Hans-Helmuth is indeed far from 'average' is absolutely clear. How many professors of philosophy anywhere can be said to have taken up philosophy as an alternative career to motor racing? Not only does Hans-Helmuth possess an intriguing previous life 'before philosophy', but his personal demeanour – his friendliness, his easy-going manner, his openness and accessibility – is also unusual in the sometimes closeted world of academia, while he displays a breadth of interests that is in itself quite remarkable. Here we have a phenomenologist (and I would like to say, a hermeneuticist) who engages with topics in art and architecture, with issues of risk and security, with questions pertaining to business and management – and this alongside a wide engagement with philosophy that goes well beyond the phenomenological or hermeneutic alone.

These characteristics might alone be thought more than enough to establish Hans-Helmuth's exceptionality. Yet in addition, he is a hardworking and committed administrator – taking on the job that most of us in academia dislike more than any other. In this, one of Hans-Helmuth's most important characteristics is his commitment *to service*, and it is this that seems to me to shine through as one of the distinguishing marks of his career perhaps more than anything else. It is that commitment to service and to the academic community of which he is part that is evident not only in his work as Dean, but in his vital role as Director of the Freiburg Husserl Archive, in the development and expansion of the Archive to include the work of Bernard Waldenfels, and in his leadership of the scholarly community that is such an important part of the Archive's functioning.

There is a distressing tendency nowadays to think that all that matters in academe is publication and grant success. Unfortunately, this tends to mean, especially in the Humanities, that the achievements that are valued most highly are those associated with individual research performance – something evident, for instance, in the tendency to measure academic success by standards such as the 'h-index' (supposedly a measure of the productivity and impact of a scholar's publications). But the real measure of the contribution we make to academia is not just an individual one nor is it restricted to our grants or publications. The real measure is in the extent to which we contribute to an academic *community* – the extent to which we contribute to founding, building, and maintaining such communities.

The communities at issue here are not just the communities, international, national and local, made up of our scholarly peers, but perhaps more importantly, the communities made up of students, graduate researchers, assistants, colleagues, and others who are typically brought together around

projects and centres, in departments and faculties, who form the real foundation of the academy and of the 'university' (if the latter term still has any real meaning in today's too-often devalued academic currency).

The building and maintaining of such communities demands a real capacity for leadership and for personal interaction and engagement; it requires genuine integrity and commitment as well as a great deal of hard work. It does not always lead to individual accolades or personal recognition.

It seems to me that above all his other achievements (which are themselves considerable), what most deserves recognition in Hans-Helmuth's case is indeed his commitment to and success in this sort of genuine service and genuine building of community. It is this that really makes him stand out so much from the average – that makes him truly exceptional.

I am especially pleased to be able to congratulate Hans-Helmuth on his sixtieth birthday, to wish him many more years of academic and personal success, and to offer him my personal thanks for his friendship and his collegiality.

Jeff Malpas, Tasmania, October 2013