

Introduction: Celebrating the Life and Work of J.H. van den Berg

This issue of *Janus Head* marks the tenth anniversary of its founding and as the Guest Editor I want to note how pleased I am that it is devoted to the life and work of Jan Hendrik van den Berg. This issue is a way of paying a debt of gratitude that I have carried for the forty years that I have known van den Berg and been influenced by his work. I want to thank Brent Dean Robbins, Editor-in-Chief, whose devotion and commitment to phenomenology has made this issue possible. In addition, I want to thank the authors who generously responded to the invitation to contribute to this volume.

The articles gathered here give some idea of the influence of van den Berg's work in phenomenology and metabletics across a wide spectrum of scholars, teachers and writers. Of course, given the range of van den Berg's work—some thirty-three volumes—this issue presents only a small fraction of his work. Yet, the principal themes that have guided his thinking and writing for more than half a century are on display here, and one of my hopes is that with this volume van den Berg's work will be introduced again to teachers, writers, and students in psychology philosophy, literary studies and the arts. I also hope that this presentation of van den Berg's work will tap into new audiences. Finally, I hope that he and his work are re-discovered by American psychology. His approach to phenomenology offers a much-needed corrective to the one-sided development of the discipline toward a narrow and reductive view of the human person. Indeed, as van den Berg himself says in the Interview with him in this volume, "I want to confess that the notion of psychology gets on my nerves," because, as he adds, "it fell on its knees before positivism."

I would be remiss in this Introduction if I were to leave out a personal note about the significance of his work for our day. I have in mind here his creative and original development of metabletics. That work, which a good number of the essays in this volume address, serves a cultural therapeutic function. While I believe that van den Berg has been too cautious about this implication of his metabletic studies, I have a deep sense of hope that their resurrection and dissemination will help a new generation of psychologists and historians appreciate how his studies of the changing nature of humanity's psychological life allows us to re-imagine our present as the

outcome of how we have taken up our past. In van den Berg's metabletic hands history is prologue and we are responsible for how we collectively engage and co-constitute the world. And with that sense of responsibility comes a small sense of freedom. Just listen to the closing remark in his interview and you get the point: "We need something else, a new grammar. In our modern era of successful science and technology—successful only for a certain range of problems—we lack the words to grasp and to understand the wonder of nature." That remark is no mere slogan. It is rooted in his deep metabletic understanding of the ways in which we have arrived at this place when, indeed, a new grammar is needed.

— Robert D. Romanyshyn, Guest Editor