pleasingly and provocatively continues the conversation started by Socrates in *The Republic* when he asked pious old Cephalus: What is justice?

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*Heidegger Toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*

JAMES RISSER, Ed.


This volume displays the latest concerns in Heideggerian scholarship. Its editor, James Risser, provides a fluid introduction that succinctly summarizes each of the very diverse fifteen essays that comprise this work. Risser tracks Heidegger’s thinking toward the supposed “turn” in his thought from *Being and Time* to *Time and Being*. Heidegger’s interest turns toward a preoccupation with the question of language to escape the rhetoric of metaphysics that inhibited him in *Being and Time*. His newer focus concerns “the question of truth, an expansion of the task of the destruction of metaphysics, and an attempt to re-think the question of history out of the turmoil of the 1930s” (4). Increasingly, Heidegger’s thought turned from the meaning of being to the truth of being, to ask the forgotten question of being. Heidegger would remain with politics for only so long, as the events of 1933–34 suggest. Although Heidegger would come to see National Socialism as a “ruined revolution” (6), two books would come to sensationalize his involvement in the movement. Following this, “Heidegger turns his attention to art and poetry around this same time—a time that follows his distressing experience with politics” (5). We see a rough turning from the question of truth and politics to art, poetry, ethics, and meditations on the “Da” of *Dasein*.

John Sallis opens with his reflections on the problem of truth in Heidegger’s thought. It appears that there is always an interruption in truth that occurs, curtailing any easy essentialism. Modern epistemology characterized knowledge as representation; our ideas agree with the thing itself in a correspondence model. With Heidegger, what is meant agrees with the thing as perceived; knowledge arises out of self-disclosure. In Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy*, however, self-disclosure is arrived at using a different method from that in *Being and Time*. The appeal in the *Contributions* is made using common sense, popular definitions of what truth is; it is decidedly not phenomenological. The discontinuity is evident in Sallis’s account; the *Contributions* reveal that there is a subverted discourse being sublimated. There is untruth within truth, concealment within disclosure and nonessence within essence. The inherent instability within truth gives way to a discordant bivalence:
Its effect is, rather, to interrupt that discourse by inscribing untruth within truth, by ... letting the non-essence within the essence.... Within that essence untruth is older, Heidegger would say—but in a way that could also unsay—an ordering that would exceed all the words by which it has been named in the history of metaphysics (29).

This view favors a deconstructive stance, emphasizing the discontinuity between *Being and Time* and the *Contributions*.

Rodolphe Gasche continues the meditation on the nature of truth by problematizing it in terms of “accordance.” The external modes of accordance seem to be two: material and propositional. Material accordance takes the form of a mild realism that could broadly characterize premodernism, while propositional accordance functions as the representational model of modernism. Both of these are subsumed under “accordance” because both necessitate a kind of agreement: matter with idea, matter with proposition. In addition, both of these theories of knowledge also have to accord with a certain teleology; this is the traditional concept of truth.

Heidegger wants to explore the inner possibility of accordance, presentation instead of representation. Following Gasche, presentation presupposes a certain openness and relatedness. “Accordance as a presenting comportment rests on the statements being directed toward something that in itself (and from itself) instructs the statement as to what and how the thing is” (37). This is the inner possibility of accord. This is the “letting be” of things in their presentative comportment. This is the disclosedness of beings.

This indeterminate attunement emerges in the self-showing of *aletheia*. But because this disclosedness has the freedom of indeterminacy, it discloses in degree, and therefore also includes concealment to the degree that the thing is more or less shown forth or concealed. But this is not a symmetrical reciprocity. This concealment, this discord, is older than the letting-be of beings and, in this way, functions as a more originary mystery.

John Caputo articulates Heidegger’s notion of understanding and links it together with the event of revolution. Heidegger, however, failed to see that the actual act of radical questioning is itself the act of revolution. In a provocative fashion, Caputo unleashes Heideggerian questioning onto National Socialism, and still further, unleashes Heideggerian questioning on Heidegger himself, turning Heidegger against himself so that even the idea of Heidegger’s philosophy of being, wedded to the destiny of the German people, would be brought into radical question.

Dennis Schmidt wants to problematize the possibilities of Heidegger's “recovery” of the Greeks. He articulates the instability that inheres in the notion of “the” Greeks and whether “they” can speak to us today: “I believe that [Heidegger] is struggling more to invent Germany than to recover Greece” (80). There is a hermeneutical nostalgia that surfaces in the ontological pathologies within
Heidegger's thinking. Heidegger feels the weight of history pressing in on every moment as well as our indebtedness to high Greek culture. Schmidt is skeptical about the possibilities of a "we" in the present that can access—on Heidegger's account, somewhat arbitrarily—the splendor of past Greek culture. Caputo's point is to turn Heidegger's questioning against even the Greeks and to privilege nothing but the revolution of questioning itself. This was the true splendor of Greece.

The turn continues with Heidegger's apparent flight from the political. But there is a subversive German nationalism that traces its way through even his discussion of art. Heidegger wants to overcome aesthetics and move toward a nonmetaphysical account of art, where its being can be thought to emerge in the relatedness of the ready-to-handness of the work. Indeed, a work in its pristine setting emerges as it really is once its originary world passes away: "There are no immortal works of Art. On this view great Art is from its outset always dying" (104). The political turn ensues; the failure of art, for Heidegger, is its reduction to secondary expressionism, and that it is not the catalyst that instigates the history of the German people.

Francoise Dastur analyzes the 1935 Freiburg version of "The Origin of the Work of Art" and notes that rather than containing overtly political undertones, it concentrates more upon the work of art. Art, rather than bowing to theories of representation, shows things ontologically in their relational proximities. Instead of falling prey to the designated utilities of producer (artist) and product (art), the artist is seen to be the facilitator of what is already present. Great art presents itself. Art, seen in this way, "is the institution of history" (123). It is a kind of aletheia, a self-showing of history, a presencing of something. If the more general discussion of art provides a clearing for our thinking on this issue to emerge, then Holderlin's poetry allows us to center our meditations historically and textually. Gadamer explores both the nearness and the distance of thinking—a synthetic mystery that is hidden deeply within the texture of the word: "What is most truly mysterious about language is its power to let us see, so that something is there. This brings us back to what I call the truth of the word" (150). This is the un concealing power of words to reveal truth, to reveal what is there. But to name the unnameable is the task of the poet and the thinker. For Gadamer, Holderlin and Heidegger hold these two posts respectively. It is when the naming power of words reaches a limit that words must be inverted and recombined to discover new possibilities: "But the unnameable, that which surpasses the poet's art as well as the thinker's concepts, is precisely that which one must take risks for, must try to grasp and hold onto" (159). This is what was being attempted in Holderlin's poetry and in Heidegger's efforts to overcome metaphysics.

It seems strange that Heidegger characterizes the decade from 1934 to 1944 as his "confrontation" with National Socialism (considering his lectures ranged from presocratic philosophy and the history of metaphysics to Nietzsche and Holderlin's poetry). This, according to Veronique Foti, is Heidegger's subverted...
questioning that surfaces as crypto-politicization. That Greek tragedy should be the vehicle for this in the person of Sophocles seems curious, if not ironic, considering that he was awarded a "first prize with a view to his political conservatism" (165). Foti charges Heidegger's readings of the *Antigone* as being overly philosophical and disengaged from praxis. These readings are highly theorized and do not take into account singular agency within political or ethical spacings; they do not find any traction in the public realm. It is in Heidegger's construal of homecoming that the charge of idealism may be levied against him. For Heidegger, Germany is the awakening reincarnation of the glory of ancient Greek culture and society. That is why we must look to the poets as prophets. This heightened politicization functions as a romantic ideal but delivers very little on the small scale of everydayness.

Foti accuses Heidegger of a totalizing national vision that collapses into essentialism. There is no room in Heidegger's reading for human singularity. When reading *Antigone*, "Heidegger neglects this Holderlinian emphasis on self-consciousness since any such preoccupation is, for him, part and parcel of the humanism and subjectivism of modern thought, which he criticizes" (182). It would seem that Heidegger's use of Holderlin functions as a turn toward the political, but his construal is so theorized and so universal that its idealism has no traction in the concrete world of particularization.

Using a high degree of poetic finesse, Wilhelm Wurzer problematizes the relationship between *mythos* and *logos*, privileging poetry as the more originary phenomenon that "frees thinking from the weariness of dialectical discourse" (187). Once discourse exhausts the boundaries of language, poetry takes over as the "exposure to being" (191). Poetry " touches on the fringes of the primordial essence of man's historicality" (193). Heidegger's privileging of poetry is almost totalizing: "Thus, the historical task of poetry throws beings as a whole into a new projection in which nature and history and the gods are gathered together through the founding language of the poet" (194). Openness to this triadic flux has some far-reaching implications for more conventional appraisals of history as such: "History is not the mimetic play of subject and object in a particular terrain, but, rather, the sigetic promise of precise shadings" (201). Following this, the task of history is to tell "a story beyond spatio-temporal reporting" (202). History, in this way, is the poetic tension between presence and absence. It is Holderlin's poem Germanien that calls us forward to new beginnings, not toward new political spacings of a reconfigured nation state of Germany, but to "other" beginnings "bidding us catch up with its greatness" (205).

Our next turn considers the possibilities of ethics within Heidegger's thought. Charles E. Scott, through an analysis of *Dasein*, considers possible ethical constructions within *Being and Time*. If ethics is primarily enmeshed in the everydayness of existence and if Heidegger's call to authenticity is a turning away from the public realm as a form of the forgetfulness of our being—from the publicness of the "They"—then how is it possible to have a discussion con-
cerning ethics? *Dasein* is called to realize its being on the horizon of temporality, not to actualize any inhering value in the form of a particular instantiation of itself.

As it turns out, *Dasein* becomes such a thinned out version of human subjectivity that selfhood disappears into a self-effacing mirage. *Dasein* cannot deliver the moral traction that is necessary to construct meaningful accounts of how we need to get on with each other in the polis: "As we turn to the possibility of ... authenticity, we are turning away from ethics as we know it" (216). But this turning away from the forgetfulness of the public realm is not a turning away that takes place outside *Dasein*'s cultural and historical locality. It is a turn away from the "I" of subjectivity to the "non-I" of *Dasein*'s ontic presencing. If there is a possible ethics within *Being and Time*, it is an ethics of unintentionality: "It is like acting without knowing the necessity of the action. It is like having to be without resolving the question of being" (221).

There is a violent covering over of being, on Reiner Shurmann's account, that shows itself as a bifrontal nexus, a differing double bind. This takes place as an event of tragic denial. Just as life remains so long as it suppresses death, the Heideggerian differing of appropriation-expropriation "is always born from a repression of the transgressive other" (248); this is the inherent instability within being—every showing involves a covering over. There is the veiling over of blindness—a bivalent discord—that disturbs any possibilities of order, oneness, and ultimate standardization. It is this discordant dissymmetry that refuses easy classification into the bifurcations of modern categories. The complexity that is traced throughout being shows up as asymmetrical otherness. This is Heidegger's resistance to simplicity. It is what is meant by the "overmeasure in the Essence of Being" (253).

The mysteries of "life" in all their unutterable intricacies are gathered together into the great cleavage of being. David Krell maintains that Heidegger hears past the rationalists and the biologists and becomes attuned to an upsurge of life that is gathered together into a presencing of being itself. This ontic advent, worldness, gathers animate life, earth, sky, and gods into a proportional hermeneutic where their related significance may be realized.

*Dasein* is always embedded in the tonal texture of its world. Mood functions as *Dasein*'s ingress into reality, a reality that cannot be rejected. Michel Harr suggests that it is because of this that we are always engaged with being. If this is true, does "boredom," as a lack of mood, pose a problem as a way of finally detaching from being itself? Is there ever a point—an interruption upon the horizon of our temporality—where we become disengaged from our ontological backdrop? To enter into boredom, in the most extreme measure, is to feel the imposing weight of time upon our own subjectivity. It is as if we were dwelling in an extended moment, an elastic present, where the horror and fascination of all eternity is appropriated by us in an instant of singularity. If anxiety is a revelation of being, then boredom is a revelation of time. The porthole of boredom becomes
a new entry point for a renewed reappropriation of time: "In boredom the subject feels itself to be stripped of its attributes and reference points, carried back to the abstract nudity of pure being-there" (309). This is where Dasein comes face to face with its temporal depths.

There is a certain Heideggerian ambiguity that displays traces of a very disturbing bivalence when coming to consider the reoccurring theme of Heimat (homecoming). There are statements that Heidegger has made that place this conversation within the regional discourse of National Socialism. Following this line of argument, the Germans would experience a nationalistic homecoming that would set them against the larger backdrop of the grandeur of the Greeks. Germany would take its place, in turn, as one of the great civilizations destined to lead the West onward into the future. The two prophets of this homecoming are the thinker and the poet.

But if we remain with the theme of the poet, we come closer to a more nuanced understanding of what Heidegger means by homecoming, one that is endorsed by Will McNeill. This thinking finds a close symmetry between “home” and “word,” so much so that being—Dasein’s instantiation—will emerge in the linguistic layerings of the mysteries of language. There is a dwelling in language that the poets have experienced as homecoming. This is the homecoming that Heidegger wants the German people to be a part of, a world-historical people. This goes beyond internationalism (of the old liberalism) to a world democratization (Critchley) that is more commensurate with the decentralization of modern subjectivity. Homecoming, then, is a poeticized encounter with the textuality of the ancient Greeks who were the first to experience the true ontological spirit: the violence of being.

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