

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-07044-7 - Appropriating Heidegger

Edited by James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall

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## CHAPTER I

*Appropriating Heidegger**James E. Faulconer*

In Britain and North America today we find a division between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy. To be sure, the division is an unequal one, with most philosophers in each region to be found on the analytic side of the divide. However, the near absence of this division in continental Europe suggests that it is as much political as anything else, often a quarrel over whose students will get jobs and which work will be recognized as genuinely philosophical.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the rationality of the analytic/continental distinction, one of its oddities is that in recognizing the division or even in overcoming it (as may be happening today), we often neglect the diversity within each side of the division. There is nothing that could properly be called either continental or analytic philosophy. At best, those terms designate family resemblances or constellations or even clusters of constellations.

In continental philosophy, one such constellation in the cluster is that of the “Heideggerians,” philosophers with research programs based in the work of Martin Heidegger. Within that constellation we find considerable difference over what might seem to be basic issues: why is Heidegger important? What did his work do? What should we do with it? – and the differences on these issues sometimes carry with them considerable philosophical suspicion. No one is surprised when John Searle says, “most philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition seem to think that Heidegger was an obscurantist muddlehead at best or an unregenerate Nazi at worst.”<sup>2</sup> However, many would be surprised to hear similar, though usually more guarded and less caustic, remarks of one Heideggerian about another: there is little consensus among Heideggerians as to what Heidegger’s work does or how we are to deal with it.

This volume is an explicit response to that situation, though the essays in it are not attempts to overcome the supposed problem of those differences. James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall brought the

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philosophers in this volume together in May 1999, in Park City, Utah, to provoke an encounter between several different and important ways of talking about and using Heidegger. Some of the writers reflect explicitly on their relation to Heidegger and the relation of their work to the work of others. Other writers show those relations in the juxtaposition of their essays rather than in explicit reflection. That itself says something about the difference in approaches.

In *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, Simon Critchley discusses the difference between analytic and continental philosophy by picking out a number of the distinguishing features of continental philosophy, including its focus on particular thinkers rather than on problems, its refusal to dissociate philosophical problems from their historical origin and context, and its insistence on the primacy of practice (and, therefore, crisis) rather than technical analysis.<sup>3</sup> To Critchley's list one could at least add a consideration of the connection between rhetoric and argument (an interest indissociable from the primacy of practice) and a focus on important texts. However, whatever list one would draw up would also more or less describe the differences *between* the approaches to philosophy taken by continental philosophers, including Heideggerians, as the pieces in this volume illustrate.

Each philosopher in this collection appropriates Heidegger differently, but each shares with the others that he or she does *appropriate* Heidegger. They share the belief that a philosophical response to Heidegger's work – or the work of any philosopher, for that matter – is always more than a scholarly reconstruction of the best interpretation of the philosopher's texts. Scholarly work is the spadework that makes appropriation possible; it makes it possible to think with Heidegger, the goal of the philosophers who take Heidegger's work seriously. And, the ambiguity of *with* in "think with Heidegger" – Heidegger as tool? Thinking alongside him? – marks one of the differences in how these writers have appropriated Heidegger's work. In no case, however, does their appropriation result in an uncritical attitude toward that work. "Thinking with" means neither simple repetition nor discipleship, but there is nothing that all agree constitutes an appropriation of Heidegger.

Besides the differences between these philosophers as to what it means to think with Heidegger, there are other differences. Some of their essays focus on texts more than on problems, and between the essays that focus on problems, there is wide divergence as to what constitutes an important philosophical problem. Some Heideggerians are less insistent on the historical dimension of Heidegger's thinking than the rest. The

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work of some looks more like the technical work of analytic philosophy than the work commonly associated with continental philosophers (at least associated in the minds of most English-speaking philosophers). For some of the writers, one's style is critical to one's philosophical thought, part and parcel of it. To others, style is a matter of saying straightforwardly what one wishes to say and no more (though the philosophers in the other parts of the constellation might well argue about what constitutes straightforwardness). For some, it is impossible to understand Heidegger without incorporating his destruction of the history of ontology. For others, that destruction is only important insofar as it is relevant to the particular philosophical problems in which they have an interest.

Besides the fact that they begin with Heidegger's work, these essays are held together by the Heideggerian project itself: attention to the enigmatic character of the everyday. The task of *Being and Time* was to retrieve the question of being by loosening up, destroying, the history of ontology, a destruction to be accomplished by attending to the enigmatic character of the everyday – exposing the unnoticed metaphysical presuppositions by means of which we understand the everyday and behind which the everyday is concealed. Heidegger's observation is that the obvious and given character of supposedly everyday objects and practices conceals a great deal. It conceals that what it means to be a thing is not easy to explicate. It conceals the character of our involvement with things. It conceals our being and how the world, an "environing world," as Heidegger reminds us (*Sein und Zeit* paragraphs 14–16), is constituted. It conceals the character of time and the temporality of being. It conceals what it means to be a person, a people, and to be in relation to others. The Heideggerian constellation can be said to cluster around attention to this observation, though there is a multiplicity of ways that one can think the enigma of the everyday. Some writers in this volume stress its character, focusing on the enigma. Without wishing merely to undo the enigmatic, others stress the understanding that Heidegger's analysis of the everyday brings to a variety of philosophical problems.

This collection brings together essays that attend to Heidegger's thinking about the everyday and its enigma, and they reflect on how they do so. We hope they will open a discussion between the various sorts of Heideggerians as well as show those outside the circle of Heidegger scholarship the variety of ways in which Heidegger is read and the variety of discussions to which his work is germane.

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Although there are many ways in which the essays in this volume could have been organized, we have divided them into three rough groups. The contrast between the essays within each part can give readers a feel for the distinctive ways in which Heideggerians of different stripes approach the related problems.

In the first part, each essay addresses Heidegger's attempt to think through the nature of the modern age and the technological understanding of being that shapes contemporary philosophy, the sciences, and indeed all human practices. Mark Wrathall asks how Heidegger's thinking can help us understand the historical situatedness of philosophy without, on the one hand, making philosophical problems merely historically contingent, or on the other hand, ignoring the historical character of the problems with which philosophers deal and the responses they make to those problems. By juxtaposing Heidegger and Thoreau, Stanley Cavell suggests a uniquely American, rather than German, response to the call to philosophize, a call understood in a Heideggerian fashion as the call to "dwell in what is one's own." Robert Bernasconi asks what we might learn from Heidegger's encounter with early twentieth-century race science, particularly what we might learn about how philosophers can respond to contemporary racism. And Albert Borgmann looks at Heidegger's work to understand the failure of standard ethics and the need for an ethics of obligation, arguing that only the latter can help us face contemporary ecological and social problems.

The second group of thinkers, John D. Caputo, Simon Critchley, and Françoise Dastur, examine the context of Heidegger's work. Caputo examines the effects on that work of Heidegger's willingness to return to the Greeks combined with his inability to see the contribution that biblical thinking made to his understanding: Heidegger's sharp distinction between philosophy and religion will not hold, but his insistence on it undermines his work. Critchley seeks to understand Heidegger's work from out of its background in Husserlian phenomenology, arguing that on Heidegger's view the natural attitude is neither natural nor an attitude. The result of Heidegger's attack on the natural attitude is an alternative that avoids the twin problems of scientism and obscurantism. Dastur argues that the anthropologism of *Being and Time* must be understood as a necessary part of the ontological project rather than as anthropologism as such, and she shows how that discussion of human being plays out in Heidegger's later thought as the "appropriating mirror-play of the simple one-fold of earth and sky, divinities and mortals."<sup>4</sup>

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In the final section, Rudi Visker, Hubert Dreyfus, John Sallis, and Mark Okrent each offer an essay based on Heidegger's first major work, *Being and Time*. Visker uses the phenomenon of philosophical styles – styles of the sort that separate various appropriations of Heidegger's work – to call into question the adequacy of Heidegger's account of facticity and everydayness in *Being and Time*. Dreyfus also begins with the question of everydayness, arguing that everyday public practices ground everyday forms of intelligibility and using that to try to clarify Heidegger's claim, from division II of *Being and Time*, that there is a higher form of intelligibility. He concludes by briefly reviewing some of the implications for ethics and politics of this higher intelligibility. Sallis's essay begins with the often neglected second division of *Being and Time* and its focus on temporality. He asks what time it is that gives us our ordinary understanding of time (both as the time of concern and as world time), what relation that "other time" has to the temporality of Dasein, and what it would mean to think that time. Sallis's answer is that "time cannot take place without also referring – or rather, submitting – to the gift of light bestowed by the heaven, preeminently by the sun" (p. 188). Finally, Okrent exploits the arguments made in *Being and Time* to articulate a pragmatist solution to the problem of intentionality.

## NOTES

- 1 See John McCumber, "Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era," *Diacritics* 26.1 (1996), 33–49, for a provocative analysis of the origins of the conflict between analytic and continental philosophy in the United States.
- 2 "The Limits of Phenomenology," in *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: MIT, forthcoming).
- 3 Simon Critchley, "Introduction: What Is Continental Philosophy," in *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, ed. Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 8–13.
- 4 Martin Heidegger, *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1959), pp. 30–1.

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PART I

*Thinking our age*

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## CHAPTER 2

*Philosophy, thinkers, and Heidegger's place in  
the history of being*

Mark A. Wrathall

## THE END OF PHILOSOPHY

The response to Heidegger in the analytical world is, to a considerable degree, a paraphrase of Rudolf Carnap's 1932 essay "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch Logische Analyse der Sprache." To the extent Heidegger intends to make philosophical claims with assertions like "the nothing nothings," Carnap charges, his writings are utterly meaningless; to the extent that Heidegger is creating art, he does it poorly. Or, more likely, Heidegger's work, like that of all metaphysicians, confounds art and philosophy:

Metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability. Instead they have a strong inclination to work within the medium of the theoretical, to connect concepts and thoughts. Now, instead of activating, on the one hand, this inclination in the domain of science, and satisfying, on the other hand, the need for expression in art, the metaphysician confuses the two and produces a structure which achieves nothing for knowledge and something inadequate for the expression of attitude.<sup>1</sup>

To respond to such charges with a defense of the meaningfulness of Heidegger's claims about "the nothing" would, however, miss the deeper point. Carnap's analysis of Heidegger's alleged "pseudo-sentences" is really ancillary to the project of rehabilitating philosophy as a discipline – a project driven by Carnap's view of language. For Carnap, assertions are meaningless unless they have empirical content. And if they have that, they belong properly to the empirical sciences. Thus, for Carnap and many others in the analytical tradition,<sup>2</sup> philosophy (at least, when properly done) has no substantive content; instead, it is "only a *method*: the method of logical analysis."<sup>3</sup>

This narrow view of philosophy – philosophy as a method of analysis – is grounded in a profound skepticism regarding our ability to discover truths about ourselves and our world through reason alone. Thus, even

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analytical philosophers like Dummett – philosophers who “no longer regard the traditional questions of philosophy as pseudo-questions to which no meaningful answer can be given” – believe that “philosophy can take us no further than enabling us to command a clear view of the concepts by means of which we think about the world, and, by so doing, to attain a firmer grasp of the way we represent the world in our thought.”<sup>4</sup> Philosophy, the analytical philosopher concludes, ought to abandon metaphysics (thereby leaving the empirical sciences in charge of the pursuit of substantive knowledge) and restrict itself to conceptual analysis.

Heidegger’s response to this view of philosophy can be seen in a concentrated form in a series of notes which draw their title, “Überwindung der Metaphysik,” from Carnap’s, and which Heidegger began writing shortly after the publication of Carnap’s essay. Indeed, the notes cannot be understood except as articulating an alternative to Carnap’s view of the failings of the metaphysical tradition. Like Carnap, Heidegger believes in the need to criticize and, eventually, overcome the metaphysical tradition, but Heidegger denies that Carnap’s approach is competent for that task. Heidegger explains: “this title [‘The Elimination of Metaphysics’] gives rise to a great deal of misunderstanding because it does not allow experience to get to the ground from which alone the history of Being reveals its essence.”<sup>5</sup> That is to say, Carnap’s conception of metaphysics (as something which can be eliminated simply through the logical analysis of metaphysical claims) will prevent us from understanding that to which the metaphysical tradition has been a response – the background understanding of being. If we are genuinely to overcome or eliminate the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger believes, we can only do so by thinking through the history of metaphysical efforts to understand the being of what is and, in the process, owning up to the task of thinking being non-metaphysically.

Thus, in Heidegger’s way of understanding the task of eliminating metaphysics, “elimination does not mean thrusting aside a discipline from the scope of philosophical ‘education.’”<sup>6</sup> Instead, the response to metaphysics begins, for Heidegger, with an understanding of metaphysics “as the destiny of the truth of beings, i.e., of beingness, *as* a still hidden but distinctive Event, namely the oblivion of Being.”<sup>7</sup> On this view, two things characterize metaphysical thinkers. First, metaphysical thinkers manifest in their works an understanding of the being of everything that is – i.e., “beingness,” the one character or feature of things in virtue of which they are. Second, metaphysical thinkers are unaware of this



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understanding as a background understanding – that is, they work out of an “oblivion of Being.” If we see metaphysics in this way, Heidegger argues, it will become apparent that “metaphysics cannot be dismissed like an opinion.”<sup>8</sup> One cannot simply change one’s mind about metaphysics, simply decide to stop treating it as a serious and worthwhile branch of philosophy, because eliminating metaphysics in this way will, in fact, only heighten our oblivion to the way our understanding of the world is based on a background understanding of being and, in the process, make us more subject to it than ever.

In fact, Heidegger believes, the desire to eliminate metaphysics in the way Carnap proposes is itself a sign of the “technological” understanding of being. The elimination of metaphysics, he writes, might more appropriately be called the “Passing of Metaphysics,” where “passing” means the simultaneous departing of metaphysics (i.e., its apparently perishing, and hence being remembered only as something that is past), even while the technological understanding of being “takes possession of its absolute domination over what is.”<sup>9</sup> I take this to mean that, in the technological age, the understanding of the being of what is becomes so completely dominant that metaphysical reflection seems superfluous. Even philosophy itself no longer worries about the nature of what is, but simply works out a view of language and mind on the basis of the current understanding of being.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Heidegger would agree that the method of analysis is the “end” or “completion” of philosophy. Philosophy is able to restrict itself to conceptual analysis, and to cede all questions of theory and ontology to the empirical sciences, precisely because the scientific–technological understanding of being is so completely dominant: “philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity.”<sup>11</sup>

In short, Heidegger sees the effort to restrict philosophy to conceptual analysis, thereby ignoring or dismissing metaphysics, as a sign not that metaphysics is something past, but that philosophy is more subject than ever to the errors of the metaphysical past. Like the metaphysicians, contemporary philosophy works under the dominance of an understanding of being which is, for it, unquestionable. And like the metaphysicians, contemporary philosophy is oblivious to the need to think the background. The task of thinking at the end of philosophy is to overcome this oblivion, and to do this, we must become aware of our own place in the history of being. But we can arrive at such an historical awareness only through an engagement with the metaphysical past that Carnap and analytical philosophers in general would as soon ignore.

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## PHILOSOPHY AND ITS HISTORY

At this point, it might sound as if the disagreement between Heidegger and the analytical philosophers is shaping up as a familiar argument over the place of history in philosophy. On the one hand, there are those who see philosophy, like science, as a rigorous and timeless pursuit of truth, abstracted from any particular cultural and historical locus. From this perspective, philosophy's history is an accidental feature of philosophy properly understood. We might, out of a kind of curiosity, review the history of philosophy as if it were a catalogue of opinions once held on current philosophical issues. But in the final analysis, philosophy's concern is solving its current problems – problems for which historical figures have no authority, and can offer at most a little insight into an answer.

Against ahistoricism in philosophy are those who see philosophy as an ineliminably historical endeavor, and argue that the problems philosophers tackle and their approach to those problems are themselves dictated by their culture. To do philosophy is thus to work through the problems inherited from the past, problems made pressing by the philosopher's current historical situation. On this view, an effort to abstract philosophical problems and forms of reasoning from their history will misunderstand the philosophical past and, more importantly, obscure contemporary philosophy's most pressing task – that of responding to the tensions and crises of our age.

From what I have said so far, one might see Heidegger as advocating the historical picture of philosophy in opposition to the ahistorical. And there is some truth to that, provided that "history" is properly understood. But it would be a very crude misreading of Heidegger to attribute to him the view that philosophy is simply a cultural/historical phenomenon. To be more precise, cultural changes and crises are governed by a background understanding of being, and it is to this ontological background that philosophy is first responsible. To the extent that philosophers are responsive to the call to think being, they and their work are removed from ordinary historical and cultural influences. Heidegger thus argues that it is a mistake to explain the thought of a thinker in "terms of the influences of the milieu and the effects of their actual 'life' situation."<sup>12</sup> Heidegger's view of the role of history in philosophy hangs, then, on a distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie* – between history and historiology (or historiography – *Historie* is translated both ways). We'll return to this distinction later; for now, a brief introduction to the distinction must suffice.