

# APPROPRIATING HEIDEGGER

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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

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

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.

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>



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.