

REVIEW ARTICLE

Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas (eds.) *Transcendental Heidegger*
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At the Davos disputation with Heidegger in 1929, Ernst Cassirer remarked that, despite Heidegger's criticism of contemporary neo-Kantianism, he had found, quite unexpectedly, "in Heidegger himself a neo-Kantian [philosopher]." Since then the problem has been to demarcate Heidegger's relation to the "neo-Kantians" and "Kantianism" at large. This problem, however, does not stand on its own, as it has to take into account Heidegger's relation to Husserl's Kantianism, especially the project of transcendental phenomenology and, more specifically, Heidegger's own conception of phenomenological truth as "veritas transcendentalis" (SZ, 38). What thus emerges is the question of Heidegger's relation to transcendental philosophy, considered as a method and a mode of philosophical thought.

It is this question that stands at the thematic centre of the book *Transcendental Heidegger*, which contains, apart from a brief introduction by the editors, thirteen revised papers which were originally delivered at a Heidegger conference, held at Rice University, Houston, in 2003. While the focus of all papers is on the transcendental dimension in Heidegger's philosophy, the authors use the confrontation with Heidegger to reinvestigate the meaning of "transcendental" philosophy, especially in contrast to pragmatism, and other non-foundational modes of philosophy, be it in so-called analytic or continental philosophy. The book's thirteen essays are thus critical engagements with Heidegger and transcendental thought in light of contemporary philosophy at large. The overall tone and style of argumentation in the thirteen essays is analytic.

Since it is impossible in the available space of this review to give a detailed account of all the essays in the book, I want to give at least a complete list of the articles and their authors, before focusing on some select themes in more detail. The thirteen contributing authors are: William Blattner ("Ontology, the A Priori, and the Primacy of Practice"), David Carr ("Heidegger on Kant on Transcendence"), Steven Crowell ("Conscience and Reason: Heidegger and the Grounds of Intentionality"), Daniel O. Dahlstrom ("Transcendental Truth and the Truth That Prevails"), Karsten Harries ("The Descent of the *Logos*: Limits of Transcendental Reflection"), John Haugeland ("Letting Be"), Christina Lafont ("Heidegger and the Synthetic A Priori"), Jeff Malpas ("Heidegger's Topology of Being"), Dermot Moran ("Heidegger's Transcendental Phenomenology in the Light of Husserl's Project of First Philosophy"), Mark Okrent ("The 'I Think' and the For-the-Sake-of-Which"), Herman Philipse (Heidegger's 'Scandal of Philosophy': The Problem of the *Ding an sich* in *Being and Time*"), Robert Pippin ("Necessary Conditions for the Possibility of What Isn't:

Heidegger on Failed Meaning”), and Rachel Zuckert (Projection and Purposiveness: Heidegger’s Kant and the Temporalization of Judgment”).

As one should expect from this list of outstanding contributors, the essays are, without exception, of very high calibre. Anyone who wants to read or write about Heidegger’s transcendental thought in the future will have to consult this volume. While the book makes a convincing case for the cautiously worded thesis that “the transcendental is a key notion in Heidegger’s thought” (Editors’ Introduction, 1), it leaves open how much weight we have to attach to that “key notion” and how much it has to be relativised in light of its genuine transformation by Heidegger. It is one of the virtues of the book to leave this open and thus to invite more discussion on this problem. Advocates of a strong transcendental reading of Heidegger as well as sceptics will find that a “clean” solution is to be had only at the price of oversimplification.

What emerges in the course of the thirteen essays is the need for a proper distinction between the particulars of a transcendental method, transcendental arguments, and a more generic transcendental orientation (that can be divorced from the particulars of Kant’s and Husserl’s transcendentalism, without, however, becoming synonymous with mere abstractions, such as the search for unity, etc., which would make transcendental philosophy indistinguishable from, say, Aristotle, Plato, or Spinoza). A proper grip on these distinctions is essential for placing Heidegger within the transcendental tradition. In fact, the more precisely the authors delineate, in their own way, the concrete core of transcendental method in Kant (the Copernican Revolution, the a priori as universal and necessary truth, the search for necessary conditions for the possibility of experience, the transcendental apperception, the deduction, etc.) and in Husserl (the epoché, eidetic variation, the constitution in transcendental consciousness, etc.), the more apparent is the paradox that Heidegger is a vocal critic of the particulars of these transcendental methodologies but nevertheless tacitly maintains some sort of transcendental signature in his own writings. This suggests that Heidegger is not simply adopting or rejecting a transcendental standpoint. Instead, he searches for a “transformation” of the transcendental itself, which would avoid the twin dangers of reification and bland historicism.

The thirteen essays take very different views on what constitutes “the transcendental” and that alone makes for fascinating and informative reading. Moreover, all thirteen essays tackle concrete problems which arise within a transcendental reading of Heidegger. For instance, one of the problems in *Being and Time* is how Heidegger can avoid the resurfacing of the problem of the *Ding an sich*, given the central position of Dasein for truth and the meaning of Being. Philippe’s essay on this question is a tour de force, as he combines a state-of-the-art discussion of Heidegger’s “idealism” with many valuable and original micro-analyses of the concepts of the ready-to-hand and presence-at-hand. (Philippe does not comment on Heidegger’s baffling claim that there is indeed an understanding of Being that is “neutral” with regard to ready-to-hand and presence-at-hand (SZ, 364).)

Lafont’s essay addresses in great detail the sense in which Heidegger’s conception of the a priori must differ from Kant’s, as Heidegger “eliminates the implication of universal validity from the absolute authority of the a priori. In light of its historical alterability, that something is ‘a priori’ no longer means that it is ‘universally valid,’ but at most that it is ‘unquestionable from within’ (i.e., by those who share it). From this point of view, the crucial challenge to transcendental philosophy in *Being and Time* is to be found in Heidegger’s claim that Dasein’s ‘disclosedness is essentially factual’” (107).

In the same vein, Pippin observes that despite the transcendental flavour in Heidegger’s question of the meaning of Being (which, after all, aims “at the very possibility of intelligibility at all” (201)), it is precisely the hallmark of Heidegger’s philosophizing to emphasize that this question can pass into “forgetfulness,” without, however, thereby necessitating “any ontic ‘senselessness’” (203). In fact, the phenomenon of anxiety explores the total breakdown of intelligibility, at which point, of course, Heidegger parts ways with Kant. As Pippin

states: “Wherever Heidegger’s Kantian talk might lead us, we have to keep in mind how bizarre it would sound to refer to some sort of ‘breakdown’ in the constitutive-conditioning function of the experience-enabling categories of causality or substance” (204).

Dahlstrom and Harries remind us of Heidegger’s severe criticism of transcendental philosophy, already in *Being and Time*, and Heidegger’s later disavowal of his former transcendental position in the *Beiträge*. In fact, Harries quotes from *Being and Time*:

The ideas of a “pure I” and a “consciousness in general” are so far from including the a priori character of the “actual” subjectivity that the ontological characters of Dasein’s facticity and its state of being are either passed over or not seen. Rejection of a “consciousness in general” does not signify that the a priori is negated, any more than the positing of an idealized subject guarantees that Dasein has an a priori character grounded upon fact. Both the contention that there are “eternal truths” and the jumbling together of Dasein’s phenomenally grounded “ideality” with an idealized subject belong to these residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not as yet been radically extruded. (75/SZ, 229)

This alone shows that whatever “transcendental leanings” one may find in Heidegger, one cannot, without oversimplification, subsume Heidegger under a generic rubric of the *transcendental*. *And yet, it is just as clear that Heidegger is not simply opposed to all forms of transcendental philosophy*. The essays by Carr, Zuckert, and Moran demonstrate, in great detail, how close indeed Heidegger’s own philosophizing is to Kant and Husserl respectively. As Moran in particular reminds us, Husserl’s project of First Philosophy is not alien at all to Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. Both thinkers are united in their “resolute anti-naturalism” (139).

The contributions by Crowell and Malpas are particularly interesting in this regard, for they accentuate, in different ways, the dormant potential of transcendental reflection in *Being and Time*, which can be utilized to lay bare “the grounds of intentionality” (Crowell), or can be seen as a stepping stone towards the “topology of Being” (Malpas).

It is Crowell’s claim that contrary to the widespread view that Heidegger dismisses reason and the practice of giving reasons, *Being and Time* provides precisely a transcendental argument for grounding this practice in the call of conscience. Crowell grants that the normativity embedded in social practices does not transcend average everydayness of *das Man* (52). But it is precisely the breakdown of these practices in anxiety that lets the self recognize that it has to take over its own factual ground. Although my factual ground is certainly “out of reach” (in the sense that I have not made myself), I have, nevertheless, to decide how I want to take over this ground, that is to say, I have a choice with regard to how I want to live my life. This step, according to Crowell, indicates the space of accountability or responsibility of the self. For when Heidegger holds that the call of conscience calls me to own my Dasein by calling me “guilty (*schuldig*),” it shows that I am accountable, answerable, and thus responsible for my Dasein (55).

Drawing on Heidegger’s essay “On the Essence of Ground,” Crowell further argues that Heidegger himself recognizes that the call of conscience only makes sense if addressed to free and rational agents capable of “a *normative* distinction between better and worse” (58). Crowell thus concludes: “By grasping my situation in the normative light of what is best, the factic grounds into which I am thrown become reasons for which I am responsible” (58). Thus, the call of conscience is the ground for being answerable, responsible, and willing to live one’s own life in light of legitimating reasons. As Crowell writes, conscience “calls one to take over being-a-ground, to answer for oneself, to legitimate by *giving* grounds, that is, reasons” (61). Conscience is thus the necessary condition for the possibility of normativity in general, including the normativity of intentionality of whatever kind.

Of course, Crowell knows that in Heidegger's analysis the call of conscience remains faceless, leaving it "regrettably" opaque "to *whom* reasons are finally given" (61). But this does not affect the analysis of the always prior origin of responsibility and self-binding in the call of conscience.

Crowell's investigation raises the old debate about Heidegger's supposed lack of a moral philosophy to a new and more sophisticated level. In particular, Crowell is able to demonstrate that what is said to be the root of Heidegger's decisionism (authenticity or resoluteness) is actually the very origin of responsibility. Crowell's original and daring intervention also sheds light on old and more recent neo-Kantian theories about norms and normativity (and their lack of properly grounding them), all of which also reminds us, as it were, of Heidegger's own original philosophical apprenticeship within the neo-Kantian tradition. Moreover, precisely because of his emphasis on discursivity, the giving of reasons, Crowell's interpretation provides a welcome alternative to Levinas' transcendental account of responsibility, which identifies the face with the call of conscience.

Like Crowell, Malpas suggests that the transcendental standpoint in *Being and Time* has not yet been fully analysed and appreciated. Furthermore, Malpas claims that it contains the seeds for its own transformation into later Heidegger's "topology of Being." According to Malpas, "the method of topographical surveying is one that looks to build up a map of a certain landscape, not by looking to some single vantage point from which all can be seen or by deducing that landscape from some underlying and determining structure, but rather by looking to the way that landscape is constituted through the interrelations between the landmarks that make it up – a set of interrelations worked out through repeated triangulation and traverse" (125-6). For Malpas this method is an articulation of the given field from within, and, as such, has a certain similarity to transcendental investigation, understood as the articulation of the unity of the field of experience from within, which does not rely on causal, psychological, or metaphysical deductions from extra-experiential principles.

Armed with these preliminaries, Malpas holds that the phenomenological-transcendental analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time* can be seen as a survey of Dasein, mapping Dasein in terms of its salient features from within, rather than deducing it from some antecedent principle from without. Heidegger's insistence on the non-reducibility of equiprimordial elements is of the highest importance here (125). There is no question that Heidegger's analyses of worldhood, considered as an existentials, exhibit what Malpas calls the topographical method, precisely in relation to a thoroughly topological subject matter. For Heidegger, the world is never an abstraction or mere background horizon. It is always centred on particular things or entities which, as he would have it, allow the world to take place. As Malpas writes, "Heidegger takes the encounter with the world to have its origin and focus in our prior involvement with a particular thing that is itself implicated in a larger system of relationships. The world is thus understood as relational but also as brought to focus around particular nodal points within the web of the relations that constitute the world. Moreover, in the encounter with the thing, we also encounter ourselves and others" (121-2).

Of course, Malpas is aware that Heidegger's topological approach in *Being and Time* is still subordinated to the overall structure of temporality and Dasein's own activity in projecting itself into the future (124). But Malpas observes that this privileging of temporality over place is slowly reversed in Heidegger's work from the 1930s onward ("The Origin of the Work of Art," the *Beiträge*, etc.), where Heidegger makes "the place of the understanding of Being" the fulcrum of the question of Being (129).

In fact, the emergence of a proper "topology of Being" in Heidegger goes hand in hand with rejecting "the transcendental" (and its grounding of Dasein's transcendence), because it is still caught up in a subject/object division, as if Dasein was not the very site where Sein is. *Da ist Sein = Dasein*. But that means that *Sein* is always at a place within a world, and Being must be understood in topological terms. As Malpas writes, Heidegger's thought is "the attempt to articulate the place of being" (134).

Malpas' interpretation suggests that the unity of Heidegger's thought lies in this topological motif that guides his work from the very beginning, but comes into its own only in Heidegger's writings after *Being and Time*. If Malpas is correct, one would expect that Heidegger's earlier emphasis on temporality would not just go away, but be transformed and redeployed within the topology of Being. It would mean that the historicity of Being would re-emerge as an archaeology, or at least it would call for such an archaeology.

In this regard, it is quite interesting that if there is a notable lacuna in the book *Transcendental Heidegger*, it would be the omission of historical reflection on the historicity of transcendental philosophy. For the emergence of transcendental philosophy in the eighteenth century, Husserl's turn towards transcendental phenomenology, and Heidegger's own adoption of a certain transcendental conception of the question of Being are events in the history of philosophy and are related to historical circumstances which, even if one does not want to claim a genetic dependency, are important for a complete account. Even Husserl and, in particular, Jacob Klein put forward something like a transcendental history of philosophy. None of the essays collected in this volume deals with these historical entanglements. This, however, should in no way detract from the great value of the volume.

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