

Richard Capobianco: Engaging Heidegger
University of Toronto Press, 2010, 182 pp + Index

William Koch

© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2011

Richard Capobianco's book, *Engaging Heidegger*, is an example of the best type of scholarship in Heidegger studies. He offers eight careful studies that trace developments, changes, turns and returns in Heidegger's thought as they relate to specific themes and topics. His perceptive eye for nuance and cautious, close and historical reading allows the author to avoid the deceptions inherent in large scale narratives about the development of any philosopher's thought as well as the distortive projection of a single position onto a thought that twisted and turned its way through decades of critical self-reflection. In this way Capobianco places himself in the service of the burgeoning self-differentiating thought of one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century.

Capobianco also reveals himself to be committed to presenting Heidegger's thought with a clarity that makes this work accessible to both new and experienced students of Heidegger's philosophy. We see the author's striking skill for both clarity and cautious interpretation in his definition of Being as "...the temporal-spatial, finite and negative, unconcealing of beings in their beingness as made manifest meaningfully by *Dasein* in language." (p. 34) Through careful explanation of each of its elements, Capobianco's use of this definition repeatedly throughout his book ensures that the reader never loses sight of what precisely is meant by Being. The use of this definition also allows Capobianco to demonstrate the way in which different words for Heidegger's central concern, Being, remain terms for the same thing while highlighting specific aspects of it. The author's skillful clarity even grants him the chance to get Heidegger out of his own way by pointing out where he may have slipped into misusing one of his own terms. For bringing such light to the shadowy winding paths of Heidegger's thought, Capobianco's book is a valuable gift to those interested in this seminal figure.

W. Koch (✉)
Department of Philosophy, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, USA
e-mail: wkoch@mail.usf.edu

The first two chapters of the work deal explicitly with the question of whether Being was really always the subject with which Heidegger was concerned. Capobianco generally avoids overtly wading into contemporary debates concerning the thinker's work. Twice, however, he offers valuable confrontations with recent controversies in Heidegger interpretation. The first such confrontation occurs in these first two chapters where Capobianco, with a gentle force, wades into recent claims that Heidegger either withdrew his claim that Being was the main subject of his thought or that he never considered Being the central subject of his thought. The first claim we find in the work of Kenneth Maly and the second in Thomas Sheehan's influential argument for a new paradigm in Heidegger studies.

In these chapters Capobianco convincingly reveals that the idea that Heidegger stopped being concerned with Being, or was never centrally concerned with it, rests upon any of several mistakes. First, there is the mistaken assumption that the move to a focus upon *Ereignis*, i.e. the Event nature of disclosure, marks a rejection of Being as the central subject of investigation. Heidegger himself contributes to this confusion when he states, during the seminar at Le Thor in 1969, that "If the emphasis is: *to let* presenc(ing), there is no longer room even for the name of being [*Sein*]. *Letting* is then pure *giving*, which itself refers back to the It [of *Es gibt*] that gives, which is understood as *Ereignis*" (Capobianco 2010, pp. 21–22). The meaning of this quotation rests on two questions. First, how is *Sein* being used here and throughout the course of the Le Thor seminars and, second, how is *Ereignis* understood to be different from Being as it was conceived throughout the course of Heidegger's work? In answering the first question the author effectively demonstrates the second mistake that the first mistake rests on, namely the confusion of Being with beingness (which is a common translation of *Seindheit*). As Capobianco points out, Heidegger maintains a distinction between Being itself and the beingness of beings. A focus on the beingness of beings, in turn, becomes in Heidegger's thought the hallmark of metaphysical thinking which undercuts the temporal event nature of disclosure through a search for that which is always present, understood as the essence or beingness of all beings. Being itself, in contrast, is understood as that which makes any experience of presence possible and, in being so understood, turns our attention to the non-present aspects of the temporal event, i.e. the no-longer and not-yet. It is precisely the presence of the non-presence of these elements of the temporal event and the ungrounded nature of the event which partially constitutes the "negated" and finite aspects of "...the temporal-spatial, finite and negative, unconcealing of beings in their beingness as made manifest meaningfully by *Dasein* in language" which is Being (p. 34). The important point for Capobianco is that in the Le Thor seminars Heidegger fails several times to use *Sein* and *Seindheit* in the clearly distinct way that characterizes much of his philosophy. It is clear in several places that it is the metaphysical understanding of beingness which is being addressed as *Sein*. When we recognize this, what we see is that the focus upon *Ereignis* dismisses the concept of stable universal essence which dominates metaphysics but in no way dismisses the non-metaphysical use of Being which Heidegger employs. Rather we see clearly that *Ereignis* is Being understood in such a way as to place particular emphasis upon its temporal nature.

Chapters 3 and 4 trace changes in Heidegger's view throughout his career on two topics respectively. First, the question of whether Dasein is existentially at home in Being and, second, the question of which ground moods are understood as most essential for Dasein's affective attunement to Being. I must admit I found these two chapters to be the most interesting of the book perhaps precisely because of the way in which they traverse the treacherous terrain which stretches between *Being and Time* and Heidegger's post 1930s work. In this they provide a very valuable map of several key aspects of the difficult changes through which Heidegger's work passes. In not drawing out the implications of these careful historical investigations, however, I feel that Capobianco has missed a great opportunity.

Chapter 3 is concerned with tracing the theme of whether Dasein is at home, or unhomely, in Being through six texts stretching from the 1925 *The History of the Concept of Time* to the 1961 address in honor of Messkirch's Seventh Centennial. The analysis offers four main phases of Heidegger's view on Dasein's relation to a home in Being. The first period is found in the 1925 work and *Being and Time* in which it is claimed that Dasein's relation to Being is a primordially a not-at-homeness. In the next phase, as found in the 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Dasein is still understood as ontologically unsettled and not at home and all homely ways of existing are understood as a seductive fleeing in the face of Dasein's being on the model of *Being and Time*'s inauthenticity. We also find here an added element. Being is conceptualized as the overpowering force against which Dasein must struggle in a relationship of *polemos* or strife. This perspective arises through an analysis of *Antigone* which Heidegger will re-analyze in 1942 in *Holderlin's Hymn 'Der Ister'*. This re-analysis is the move to the third phase. There we find the same ontological unsettled being-not-at-home suddenly equated to the possibility of a new way of being at home in the unhomely. The most striking difference between Heidegger's earlier reading of *Antigone* and his later reading rests in the early identification of the hearth with the inauthentic and the later identification of it with the site of being at home in an authentic way through an embracing of being-not-at-home. Finally we find the last phase in the 1955 "Gelassenheit" talk at Messkirch and the 1961 address in honor of Messkirch's seven hundredth anniversary. Here we find Heidegger having made two fundamental moves. First, being-not-at-home has been overtly historicized so that Dasein's unsettledness is understood as a historical occurrence related to the dominance of technology and calculative thought. Secondly, heroic strife and struggle has been rejected in favor of sheltering meditative ways of being at home in the world which might offer an escape from technological unsettledness.

Chapter 4 focuses upon the issue of Dasein's basic ground mood attunement with Being. In this chapter we find a development traced from *Being and Time*'s focus on angst to the 1929 claim in "What is Metaphysics" that angst can be seen to be the wonder in the face of which philosophy is born to a focus on bright moods such as joy, serenity, love and awe in the 1943 *Holderlin Elucidations* and "Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics'" until ending with an overt historicizing of ground moods in the 1949 "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics'" and the 1955 "What is That—Philosophy?" During this final phase angst is identified not as the ontological mood of Dasein but rather the ground mood of the modern technological age. In this last

development the Ancient Greek mood of wonder in the face of Being is now offered as a possible way out of the modern angst arising from being out of tune with Being.

The second overt confrontation with contemporary debates Capobianco offers us addresses the subject of the role of light in Heidegger's conception of the *Lichtung*. We find this confrontation in Chapter 5 and it has consequences for when, in the course of Heidegger's thought, the word *Lichtung* should be translated as "lighting" and when as "clearing". What is at stake here is the question of when Heidegger came to replace the visual metaphor, with its dangerous connections to traditional representational epistemology, with the spacial metaphors that are so important in his later philosophy. Capobianco convincingly shows that Heidegger's understanding of *Lichtung* in *Being and Time* is primarily in terms of light and thus should be translated as "lighting". He then goes on to show that the same understanding seems to be at work in the *Letter on Humanism*. However, once we see the understanding of *Lichtung* as "clearing" is a later development in Heidegger's thought which doesn't show up overtly until the 1960s it becomes clear that the currently dominant trend of translating *Lichtung* uniformly as "clearing" throughout all of Heidegger's work covers over a key development in this thought. We see this covering over, for example, in David Farrell Krell's alteration of Frank Capuzzi's translation of the *Letter on Humanism* in his edition of the *Basic Writings* so that *Lichtung* is consistently translated as "clearing" and not "lighting" throughout the collection.

The final three chapters of the book offer a different type of study, specifically attempts to extend Heidegger's thought as it was uncovered in Capobianco's careful historical readings to various other issues of interest. Chapter 6 builds on Chapter 5's discussion of the *Lichtung*, in conjunction with a closer look at Heidegger's many engagements with Plato's metaphoric connection of the good and light. It offers some analysis of Heidegger's "turn" and offers a comparison with eastern philosophy. Chapter 7 builds on the analysis of being-not-at-home and ground moods in Chapters 3 and 4 to discuss the ways in which Heidegger can be applied to architecture. Specifically a discussion is offered of two different interpretations of how architecture is to promote dwelling. Whether it should offer us a modern centering or whether architecture is to offer a postmodern decentering that might work against our tendency towards pacification and inauthentic drifting. The main conclusion of this chapter is that both modernist attempts at centering through a dedication to lived dwelling and postmodernist decentering fail to respect the sense of place in which a building is constructed, and it is this dedication to the unique place in which we build and dwell that Heidegger teaches us through his discussion of the "fourfold". Finally, Chapter 8 builds on Chapter 3's discussion of Heidegger's 1935 interpretation of *Antigone* in comparison to that of Jacques Lacan in order to demonstrate that both interpretations reject the usual reading of Greek tragedy as offering an ethics of self-control or *sophrosyne*. Rather each thinker is seen to offer a heroic reading of the tragedy which rejects human prudence and self-control.

It should be clear from this review that I have great respect for the work Capobianco has performed and gratitude for what he has offered students of Heidegger. However, I would like to conclude by discussing ways in which the work can be extended in order to more fully achieve the promise it embodies.

I believe the book offers avenues for two major extensions. First, Capobianco can extend his analysis back into Heidegger's earlier work. Second, Capobianco can more fully apply his careful historical readings to the difficult topic of the nature of Heidegger's "turn" and the status of his thought in the 1930s.

It is striking that the earliest work that the author engages with extensively is the 1925 *The History of the Concept of Time*. I was fortunate to be present for a panel discussion of Capobianco's book at this year's meeting of the Heidegger Circle and there Theodore Kisiel pressed Capobianco on the question of what Heidegger's most basic insight was throughout his career. Kisiel was hoping to hear that the insight was Dasein, or the relation between human being and Being itself. Capobianco, however, answered that Heidegger's basic insight was a sense of wonder in the face of the way that things manifest themselves to us and, in so doing, call forth a response from us. Heidegger was struck from the beginning, then, with the way in which humans exist in response to, or as responses to, the event of disclosure. This view is unique and powerful and it shows why Capobianco would be opposed from the start to Sheehan's new paradigm. Being aware of this perspective, however, would clarify the unique engagement with Heidegger the book offers. It would place the move from Heidegger's *Being and Time* identification of the *Lichtung* with Dasein to his later identification of the *Lichtung* with Being which grants Dasein a fresh importance insofar as this would suggest that *Being and Time* may represent, at least in this regard, a break from some of Heidegger's earlier thoughts. It would also suggest that Heidegger's "turn" in the late 1930s and beyond is a return to earlier pre-*Being and Time* insights. This is a position I very much favor, and which I often argue for. I believe Capobianco's book offers a good foundation to craft such an argument but it requires an extensive engagement with Heidegger's thought before *Being and Time*.

Allow me to suggest a few areas in early Heidegger that might be useful. Chapter 2's discussion of *Ereignis* would benefit from more than the passing mention Capobianco makes of Heidegger's use of the term in his class during the 1919 War Emergency Semester entitled *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* (Heidegger 1987/2000). There we see *Ereignis* described as an event which calls me to make it my own and in which the world arises as coming into its own. Already in 1919 this event is discussed in terms of a resonance, or echoing attuning, between the human and the world with a clear connection to the later concept of attunement that Capobianco engages with in Chapter 4. In the 1920 course *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression* we find *Ereignis* discussed in terms of history in its "event character [*Ereignischarakter*]" (Heidegger 1993/2010a, b, p. 46) which is neither a casual process nor a mere happening but rather "an occurring in the character of meaningfulness" in which I explicitly find myself and my world. In the 1920 course *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, we find prefigured the role of ground moods in Heidegger's claim that "I experience myself in factual life... in that which I perform, suffer, what I encounter, in my conditions of depression and elevation..." (Heidegger 1994/2010a, b, p. 10). What is most striking about the early Heidegger in all these discussions is the historical and ontic nature of his analysis of both *Ereignis* and mood. We see this again in *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression* when real philosophy is understood as having to arise from

the motivating emotional experience of being worried and involved with the world which is elided by a tendency towards reassurance and pacification that philosophy must work against by attempting to make “Dasein ultimately insecure” (Heidegger 1993/2010a, b, pp. 132–133). What is striking about the ontic nature of these analyses of mood’s centrality for philosophy is the way in which they resemble the need for a historical experience of wonder, awe or even angst, to counteract a reassuring securing we find in technological enframing which would blind us even to the unsettledness of modern life. In brief, we can learn a lot from the early Heidegger’s concern with how philosophy is to ontically begin in life without the transcendental pretensions that dominate in *Being and Time*. Indeed, in his earliest courses he is consistently critical of the securing and pacification that transcendental, especially Husserlian and neo-Kantian, philosophy brings about through its theoretical distancing of Dasein from its worldly existence. Although we do not find it in these discussions, we can see where the historicizing of both Being and ground moods may be coming from in Heidegger’s later thought.

I have already begun to touch upon the issue of the nature of Heidegger’s “turn” and Capobianco provides us with fodder to say much more. I am of the opinion that Heidegger’s famous turn actually consists of at least two turns. First, there was a turn away from some of his earliest commitments, which were still alive in *Being and Time*, during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Then there was a turn away from these very changes and a return to his earliest commitments in the late 1930s. It is fairly easy to see how Capobianco’s studies can contribute to this reading. For example, when considering the issue of being-not-at-home and Heidegger’s early heroic reading of *Antigone* we can see that the violence that is provoked in individual heroic Dasein in the period following what I consider the first turn is at odds with the resoluteness of *Being and Time* in which Dasein comes to see itself as part of a generation, history and destiny. We can also see how the later Heidegger’s interpretation of finding a home in being-not-at-home at the hearth in *Antigone* is akin to the at-homeness that is found in the birth of authentic philosophy through the breaking up of the securing pacification found in either the theoretical or technological enframing elements of modernity which we find Heidegger discussing in both 1919–1920 and the 1950s and 1960s.

References

- Capobianco, R. (2010). *Engaging Heidegger*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Heidegger, M. (2000). *Towards the definition of philosophy* (Ted Sadler, Trans.). New York: Athlone Press (original work published 1987).
- Heidegger, M. (2010a). *Phenomenology of intuition and expression* (Tracy Colony, Trans.). New York: Continuum Press (original work published 1993).
- Heidegger, M. (2010b). *The phenomenology of religious life* (Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press (original work published 1995).