

HEIDEGGER AND CLASSICS

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At the very outset of the introduction Turner tells us that this volume arose from an extended research project initiated by a 2018 London colloquium devoted to ‘establishing a dialogue concerning Martin Heidegger’s apparent estrangement from classical scholarship and the case for his rehabilitation’ (p. 1). Those who have worked extensively on the ancients and on Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) will surely acknowledge that the mainstream academic conversation about the former has shown little interest in the latter, despite Heidegger’s career-long engagement with classical material. In the words of G.W. Most: ‘For the professional classicist, there is almost nothing at all of interest in Heidegger’s work on Greek philosophy and poetry ... Heidegger’s work remains entirely marginal to the classics profession, except for a very few classicists who are themselves entirely marginal’ (p. 2). I for one was keenly interested in a volume that would take up this disconnect, this marginalisation of Heidegger’s undoubtedly deep and painstaking engagement with the Greeks, which covers the fragmentary remains of the Presocratics, the dialogues of Plato, the various works of Aristotle and the poetry of Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles and others. For this reason I was very excited to read in the introduction’s closing paragraph that ‘the fourteen chapters that constitute this volume serve neither to condemn nor condone Heidegger’s ostracism from classical discourse, but rather to prepare the way for a possible reconciliation between classical scholarship and one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century’ (p. 9).

The problem is that, with all due respect, I do not see that as having been accomplished. To be clear, I found the contributions generally expert and illuminating in their presentation of how Heidegger approaches Greek philosophy and poetry, how he sees the historical connections between his contemporary German culture and that of ancient Greece, and how precisely he hopes that a confrontation with the classical origins of late-modern European culture might open a horizon to living and thinking in radically new ways. All this is set out by some of the most eminent and established figures in Heidegger studies, with an undeniably impressive command of the German thinker’s extensive and challenging corpus. And all this spoke compellingly to me, as a continental philosopher working on the Greeks who already appreciates Heidegger’s contributions in that area.

For the professional Classicist mentioned by Most, however, as well as for the mainstream analytic scholar of ancient philosophy, standing before the already clearly delineated organising scholarly challenges and questions of their field, I do not see how this volume would ‘prepare the way’ for their changing their assessment of what they likely perceive as Heidegger’s unscientific, bizarre and even stubbornly wrong-headed misinterpretations of the Greeks. This is not a failure of the individual essays, so much as a simple disconnect between the volume’s purported aim and the work the contributions task themselves with accomplishing. In fact, including the introduction, there are only a few pieces that really brush up against this fundamental (and, for this reader, extremely compelling) incongruence. What the volume does successfully present is an illuminating, sometimes critical, array of interpretations of Heidegger’s thoughtful engagement with the

Greeks on its own terms, dealing with the metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, political and historical dimensions of that engagement in great depth and subtlety.

In the first section on early Greek thought, C. Bambach investigates Heidegger's interpretation of Sophocles, mediated as it is by Hölderlin's poetising of the late-modern German historical situation. He focuses on Heidegger's bold move away from questions of the tragic hero's agency, moral responsibility and fatedness and towards the privileged poetic presentation of the insuperable uncanniness of the site of human dwelling, amplified by the language of Sophocles. Bambach traces the decline of Western culture initiated by the forgetting of the essential ambivalence that belongs to the archaic Greek understanding of truth as *alêtheia*, literally 'unconcealment', where what is required of human beings is not an exhaustive revelation of beings, but comportment that marks the withdrawal of their inaccessible ground, Being. It is this tragic understanding of truth, ultimately, that Heidegger finds in both Sophocles and Hölderlin, which might just be returning in twentieth-century German. B. Babich addresses the volume's stated aim after a fashion, but primarily in the service of defending Nietzsche the philologist against Heidegger's criticism, namely that the former 'thinks in a purely Roman style' and that, therefore, Nietzsche's 'metaphysics can never conceive the Greek beginning of Western thinking' (p. 55). Babich convincingly complicates and then rejects Heidegger's claim that Nietzsche remains a representative, even if a culminating one, of the tradition of Western metaphysical, and ultimately scientific philological, thinking. M. Payne trains his eye on Heidegger's analysis of historicity as an existential feature of Dasein in *Being and Time*, experienced always in the 'first person', and then identifies an essential dynamic of 'expropriation', not the aligning of oneself to one's own essential historical source, but always 'the claim of an alien origin that is retroactively metabolized as one's own' (p. 97). Payne compares and contrasts Heidegger on this point with Derrida and with the problematic Grecophilia of H.P. Lovecraft. D.F. Krell wraps up this section with a fascinating thought experiment, wondering compellingly why Heidegger never substantively engages with the fragments of Empedocles, analysing his treatments of Empedocles mediated by Hölderlin and Nietzsche, and finally finding elements of Empedoclean philosophy that harmonise powerfully with Heideggerian thought.

The second section on Plato opens with Turner's essay, which traces a crucial aspect of Heidegger's engagement with Greek thinking: his disputed claim that in the transition from the archaic to the classical period, or from the Presocratics to Plato, the basic Greek notion of truth changes from *alêtheia* or 'unconcealment', an initial emergence of beings into appearance from out of a concealed and irremediably inaccessible source, to the *orthotês* or 'correctness' of a subject's thought or speech relative to the objectively real present conditions. Turner meticulously traces the historical and cultural conditions that made possible the transformation, beginning with Anaxagoras, moving through the sophists and the Hippocratic corpus, and ultimately to Thucydides. Turner effectively demonstrates how a careful scholar might make valuable use of the methods and insights of classical scholarship, in a way Heidegger himself did not often do, to argue very persuasively for a Heideggerian claim. B.W. Davis organises his reading of Heidegger's Plato by reference to John Sallis's 1999 book, *Chorology*, a close reading of the *Timaeus* that has been enormously influential among continental Plato scholars. Sallis focuses on the notion of *chora* in Plato's late cosmology, which is usually understood as a space or a quasi-material substratum that allows for 'what is' to emerge into appearance, and Davis draws an illuminating and productive connection between this and the notion of the *Gegnet* or the 'open region' in the dialogical work, *Country Path Conversations*, which Heidegger referred to as his own 'Plato book'. Finally, D. Schmidt combs through Heidegger's lecture courses on Plato, gleaning vital lessons

for how philosophy should relate to and participate in human life generally from Heidegger's interpretations of Plato's *Republic*.

The third and final section addresses Heidegger's interpretations of his most important and generative ancient interlocutor, Aristotle. S. Golob opens the section accusing Heidegger of a violent misinterpretation, indeed a 'perversion', of Aristotelian virtue ethics, one in which Heidegger rejects the importance of 'stable, cross-situational character traits' in favour of an emphasis on 'openness' and 'flexibility' that is brutally imposed upon the Aristotelian text. I disagree with this assessment of both Heidegger's interpretation and Aristotle's ethics, but Golob is certainly not alone in his criticism of Heidegger's sometimes destructive readings. F.J. Gonzalez continues in this critical vein, carrying out a characteristically precise textual analysis and showing that Heidegger fails to appreciate the importance of the phenomenon of life in Aristotle's conception of temporality. Gonzalez moves on to point to elements highlighted in Heidegger's reading of Aristotle that are overlooked by classical scholars.

C. Baracchi, R. Eaglestone and L. Hemming all take Heidegger's phenomenological reading of Aristotle as inspiration for their own, focusing, respectively, on some surprising relations between the intellectual virtues in Aristotle, on the catharsis of the affects fear and pity at the centre of Aristotle's interpretation of the revelatory power of tragedy, and on the complex history of interpreting Aristotle's definition of the human as *zōon logon echon*, from Heidegger to classical scholarship, ultimately arriving at a Heideggerian elevation of poetry to the condition for the genesis of language itself. T. Sheehan offers a painstaking analysis of the stakes of Heidegger's retrieval of *kinēsis* and the dynamic ontology it entails, while S. Brill offers a clear-sighted and extraordinarily rich reading of Aristotle's notion of animality in its historical and intellectual context, producing a phenomenological interpretation of the animal's situatedness that is indebted to Heidegger even as it pushes back against his claim that the animal for Aristotle is 'poor in world'.

I found these contributions to be uniformly revealing and helpful in their presentation of Heideggerian philosophy and its constitutive relation to ancient Greek material. What was promised in the introduction, and what I believe is sorely needed, is that interrogation of the incongruence between Heidegger's thinking and classical scholarship, but *as fundamental and completely understandable*. This would require addressing the following basic problem. On the one hand, Classics and the mainstream (i.e. analytic) study of ancient thought understand themselves today as quasi-scientific disciplines, not hard sciences but human sciences, with a scientific method and scientific aspirations of arriving at an ever more satisfactory grasp of their subject matter, based on uninterrogated scientific principles. On the other hand, Heidegger calls into question this entire scientific project, viewing it as symptomatic of the reduction of Being to the sum of present, available and in principle exhaustively masterable entities. This most fundamental point of contention must be placed at the threshold and must remain at the centre of the discussion that is invoked but never actually initiated by the volume. Finally, to my mind, that discussion should not aim at Heidegger's 'rehabilitation' as a source for Classics (p. 1), but rather it should aspire to allow Heidegger's thinking to present its profound and perhaps quite devastating critique of the entire discipline of Classics and its scientific methodological presuppositions, in the hope that Classics might take up, respond to and even perhaps integrate into itself that deeply critical Heideggerian perspective.

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