

BOOK REVIEW

Richard Capobianco. *Engaging Heidegger*.
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Reviewed by Lawrence J. Hatab

Richard Capobianco's impressive book, *Engaging Heidegger*, tackles some fundamental questions in Heidegger's thought, and does so in a remarkably clear and pointed manner. In this brief review I address the following salient topics covered in the text: the status of the *Seinsfrage* in Heidegger's later thought, particularly in relation to *Ereignis*; the question of homelessness and being-at-home; and the position of *Angst* in some of Heidegger's writings after *Being and Time*.

In his first two chapters, Capobianco challenges some readings of Heidegger that see the later writings moving beyond or supplanting the centrality of being in the early works. The primary example of this supposed shift is the focus on *Ereignis*, understood as that which "gives" being (as in *es gibt Sein*). Capobianco makes a thoroughly convincing argument that the being-question remains the fundamental *Sache* in Heidegger's thought through to the end (well documented in the late text, *Four Seminars*). This argument is trenchant as long as being is shown in its "difference" from beings and metaphysical constructs drawn from beings—a difference named in such words as *Seyn*, *Sein selbst*, *Sein als solches*, and *Sein als Sein*. Being is then different from beings (*Seiendes*) and from the metaphysical "beingness" (*Seiendheit*) of beings. In Capobianco's analysis he draws these distinctions quite effectively. Yet he is careful to maintain that being is always the being

of beings and that something like Dasein's ecstatic dwelling in, and correspondence with, being never recedes in Heidegger's thinking. Capobianco then shows how various focal words in the course of Heidegger's work—e.g., unconcealment, presencing, the freeing, letting, or giving of beings, *Lichtung*, and *Ereignis*—are variations on the primal theme of being. There is a very helpful chart (*Engaging Heidegger*, 8–9) that organizes the different ways in which Heidegger expresses the being-of-the-beingness-of-beings (drawn in terms of being itself), metaphysical beingness, beings, and human responsiveness.

Capobianco also does a great service in his attempt to render the features of being itself that can be tracked in Heidegger's thought, which I will cull from different passages (*Engaging Heidegger*, 4 and 50) as follows: Being as such is the temporal-spatial, finite and negated, appearing of beings in their beingness, which calls forth from Dasein a cor-responsence in language that allows both what appears and appearing itself to become manifest. According to Capobianco, being itself in this sense is the "same" as key words in the later writings, including *Ereignis*. Capobianco concedes that Heidegger's language in the 1950s and 1960s was not always careful on this matter—for instance, the idea that *Ereignis* is that which "gives" being. Yet through a meticulous analysis of various texts, and especially the four seminars given between 1966 and 1973, Capobianco is able to show convincingly that the *Seinsfrage* was the single question animating Heidegger's entire thought, and that *Ereignis* gives the *beingness* of beings, not being itself, for which *Ereignis* is "another name" (see the summary discussion in *Engaging Heidegger*, 43ff).

I have no criticism of Capobianco's work in these first two chapters; I am in complete agreement with their contents. But I would like to offer what I think is a supplement to his argument by considering how we should understand the language of Heidegger's core words. As with any thinker, we are prone to look for the fundamental terms, what these terms mean, and whether any change in terms is a change in the thought. Capobianco is warning us against asserting the latter notion, and his account of being itself that I culled earlier is an impressive

articulation of what seems to persist throughout Heidegger's thinking (with duly noted variations or shifts of emphasis, of course). With such an articulation of *die Sache selbst*, I don't really care what we call it, although care *is* called for when selecting or considering the resonances of a focal word or phrase.

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger called ontology "the effort to bring being into words."¹ For me, Heidegger's thinking, from beginning to end, was an "experiment" in bringing the question of being *into* words, not in the typical philosophical manner of canonical terms meant to govern thought, but an attempt to gather in language a resonant response to the enabling *environment* of language and thought, which as such cannot be exhausted by language and thought. For this reason I think we should recognize "term limits" with respect to Heidegger's focal words, or to paraphrase his remark about the *Gesamtausgabe*, we should attend to "ways, not words."

I draw these remarks from my understanding of Heidegger's early notion of formal indication, where philosophical concepts arise out of concerned dealings in factual life and then point back to the task of factual enactment. Formal indications are consequently shot through with the finitude of existence and consequently they cannot be construed as *a priori* necessary structures, generalizations, universals, or essences—all of which are meant to "govern" what can be said of things. Such constructs are drawn from the presumption of reflection upon objectified entities. Formal indication is responsive to what is already operating *before* reflection and objectification—hence concepts such as *Zuhandenheit*, *Befindlichkeit*, care, etc. This is why philosophy, for Heidegger, is hermeneutic phenomenology, because it can only engage in the *interpretation* of what is "already" showing itself in factual life. The point is that philosophical concepts are self-limiting *indications* that can only be "fulfilled" in factual experience. The "hermeneutic circle" is a circulation between language and lived experience that cannot presume to offer fixed truths or objective explanations. At one point in *Being and Time* Heidegger acknowledges the circularity of his own text as interpretation; it can engage, not in "proof," but only in

“allowing to come into words” an understanding of being, from which readers can discern for themselves whether the text’s “formal-indicative sketch” is disclosive of understanding or not.² In other words, there is no free-standing measure for the success of a text, only what I would call an experiment calling for “reader response.”

I find a similar notion even in the later text *Time and Being*. Heidegger begins and ends this essay with a warning about its presentation in “propositions” (*Aussagesätzen*), which are an obstacle to addressing the *Sache* of the text, which is an *experience* of *Ereignis*.³ The *Protokoll* of the lecture appended to the main text is called an experiment (*Versuch*) that attempts to open up an experience of *die Sache* of the text by way of a conversation between participants in the lecture.⁴ Thinking deploys notions such as “extending” and “giving,” in order to work from them (*abarbeiten*) and to perform and consummate (*vollziehen*) the *Übergang* to the experience of thinking. Such an ambiguous relation between language and *die Sache* is not something we can talk about (*darüber reden*). It can only be decided performatively, “by whether such a saying succeeds or not.”⁵

My point is that we should avoid the hypostasization of any fundamental terms in Heidegger’s thought. *Die Sache selbst* is a continuing circulation between thoughtful language and the factual environment “giving” language—which is measured not by the “right” words but by whether words succeed in resonating with listeners, in eliciting the finite field of being that Capobianco has articulated so well.

In Ch. 3 of his book, Capobianco does a wonderful job of trying to navigate the changing ways in which Heidegger deployed the terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, referring to being and not being at home. The course of this deployment seems to be as follows: In *Being and Time* the *unheimlich* is “more primordial” than the *heimlich*, in that *Angst* lurks beneath, and then disrupts, Dasein’s everyday familiarity. In the 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Sophocles’ ode from *Antigone* sets a clear divide between the *unheimlich*, transgressive character of the creator and the protective hearth of the normal world. In the 1942 *Der Ister*, Heidegger seems to offer a different reading of the ode, wherein

humans can become at home in being, but in the mixed sense of das *Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein*. In this and other reflections on Hölderlin, Heidegger speaks of the joy in coming to terms with the finitude of being as one's true home, rather than the fleeing absorption in beings. Finally, in the 1955 *Gelassenheit* and the 1961 Messkirch Address, Heidegger emphasizes the "rootedness" of the homeland (*Heimat*), contrasted with the *unheimlich* character of technicity and calculative thinking. Being at home can now be accomplished in the calm of meditative thinking and letting-be, rather than the constant assault of technological machines and controls.

Capobianco is right to see this course of thinking as complicated and apparently conflicted, and he makes a noble effort to chart the movement. He is also right to question how the last sense of being at home—which is at rest and even "gladsome"—can be squared with earlier insights about engaging the disrupting finitude of being. I learned a lot from Capobianco's account and I concede the difficult complexity in this topic. But I want to question some of the terms of his analysis, not to discount it entirely, but to revise it. For one thing, I wonder if the kind of circumspection Capobianco provides on the supposed shifts from the *Seinsfrage* might be appropriate here too, at least in some respects.

I am not sure that the different treatments of home and homelessness are as distinct or divided as Capobianco suggests. Take the rootedness-*unheimlich* contrast in *Gelassenheit*, where variations of *Wurzel* are employed. It turns out that variants of *entwurzeln* were used in *Being and Time* to describe Dasein's everyday absorption in beings.⁶ This seems to mean that Dasein's authentic existence sparked by the *Unheimlichkeit* of *Angst* is a kind of "rootedness," and so the primordially of the *unheimlich* can imply some sense of being at home. Although Heidegger does not spell this out clearly in *Being and Time*, I do not think that everyday being *heimlich* in the world and the *unheimlich* character of *Angst* should be sharply divided. We should remember that the "unity" of care also joins the "double meaning" of *Sorge*—concernful devotedness and worriedness—as a *single* phenomenon,⁷ a twofold disposition that could be said to mark authentic existence. Authenticity is not a

departure from, but rather a modification of, inauthenticity,⁸ where Dasein “exists finitely”⁹—which I have always taken to mean *embracing* the *unheimlich* dimension of existence, given the “unshakable joy” that Heidegger connects with Dasein’s anxious potentiality-for-being.¹⁰ So I am not sure Capobianco is right when he contrasts the *unheimlich* in *Being and Time* as a “destination” with the *unheimlich* as a “passage” to joyful dwelling in the Hölderlin essays (*Engaging Heidegger*, 64).

Capobianco wonders if Heidegger’s later musings on *Heimat* by-passed earlier (and preferable) *heimlich-unheimlich* blends, and he may be right. But the later *unheimlich* absorption in technicity may recall the uprootedness of everyday Dasein in *Being and Time*. Since technicity is marked by securing and controlling the earth, it would seem that some kind of disorienting break with technicity would be called for. Perhaps Heidegger’s late writings try to stress the positive aspects of dwelling, but such things are not absent in earlier treatments. The “rest” and “calm” that Capobianco finds in later texts may indeed be strikingly different, but we should recall the calm that Heidegger attributes to *Angst* in the 1929 “What is Metaphysics?”¹¹ We should also not discount the possibility that the apparent quietism in later works was symptomatic of his own withdrawal after the disaster of his earlier politics.

In Ch. 4, Capobianco examines another possible transition in Heidegger’s thought: from *Angst* to astonishment, where a disrupting sense of *Angst* gives way to more positive senses of wonder (*Wunder*), awe (*Scheu*), and astonishment (*Erstaunen*) in later works. Here again I would call for some caution. Capobianco is certainly right in tracking these shifts, and in showing how *Angst* in “What is Metaphysics?” (and in the 1943 Postscript and 1949 Introduction) seems different from *Being and Time*. My sense of this, however, is that the “What is Metaphysics?” trilogy begins to articulate “being itself,” for which *Being and Time* was preparatory. The disruption of *Angst* in *Being and Time* sets up, I think, the structure of being and nothing in “What is Metaphysics?” As *Angst* opens up the possibility of authentic existence in *Being and Time*, *Angst* in “What is Metaphysics?” opens up the structure of the *being* of beings—*by way of* the experience of *das Nichts*.

Capobianco rightly shows that wonder and awe, rather than *Angst*, are emphasized after the 1920s. But I think that “What is Metaphysics?” shows a link. In the 1943 Postscript, *Angst* “guarantees the enigmatic possibility of experiencing being,” which is “close by” *Angst* and designated as “the wonder of all wonders: *that* beings are.”¹² Yet the original 1929 essay has *Angst* connected with the “nihilation of the nothing,” in which beings as a whole are shown in their “heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other—with respect to the nothing.” In *Angst*, “the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings—and not nothing.”¹³ In 1929 *Angst* seems necessary for evoking wonder, which arises *only* because of the nothing.¹⁴ Does *Angst* in 1943 still retain some essential role in wonder and awe, “guaranteeing” them, as it were? In any case, I’m not sure that *Angst* is exchanged for wonder and awe, and here’s why: The absorption in beings requires disruption to open up the meaning of being; *Angst* and *das Nichts* present this disruption, which nevertheless makes *possible* the awe over being itself: that beings *are—not* nothing. For this reason I question Capobianco’s apparent conjunction of the nothing and being itself (*Engaging Heidegger*, 75). In 1929 Heidegger does call them “the same,” but in the sense that they “belong together.”¹⁵ How? Not in being indeterminate (as in Hegel), but because “being itself is essentially finite,” which I take to mean: the *being* of beings can be shown only “out of” the experience of the nothing, in that beings are *not* nothing.¹⁶

Finally, Capobianco shows how the 1949 Introduction seems to link *Angst* with the oblivion of being in the modern age, such that (if I read Capobianco correctly) *Angst* no longer opens up being but covers it up. Yet Heidegger simply says we need to “endure anxiously” this oblivion.¹⁷ Can we conclude from this remark that *Angst* is now something different from its meaning in 1929 and 1943? If it is, I don’t understand, and perhaps Capobianco can say more about how this is so.

In any case, the foregoing survey of the three selected issues hopefully underscores just how highly illuminating and provocative *Engaging Heidegger* is.

Notes

- 1 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 43.
- 2 SZ 314-15.
- 3 *On Time and Being*, 2, 5, 24; tm.
- 4 *On Time and Being*, 25-26; tm.
- 5 *On Time and Being*, 51; tm.
- 6 See SZ 170, 173, 177, 222.
- 7 SZ 199.
- 8 SZ 129.
- 9 SZ 329.
- 10 SZ 310.
- 11 *Pathmarks*, 90.
- 12 *Pathmarks*, 234; tm.
- 13 *Pathmarks*, 90.
- 14 *Pathmarks*, 95.
- 15 *Pathmarks*, 94.
- 16 *Pathmarks*, 95.
- 17 *Pathmarks*, 281-82.