

BOOK REVIEW

Richard Capobianco's  
*Heidegger's Way of Being*

*Katherine Davies*

Richard Capobianco. *Heidegger's Way of Being*.  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. 122 pages.

*Heidegger's Way of Being* continues Richard Capobianco's thoughtful conversation with Heidegger, extending the close, attentive readings of Heidegger's texts which Capobianco also composed in his earlier *Engaging Heidegger*. Capobianco's reflections on Heidegger's call for meditative thinking centrally recall Heidegger's lifelong question, namely an abiding concern with Being itself. Capobianco calls for renewed attention to this predominant ontological task of Heidegger's thinking. Though he lauds more recent scholarship for articulating how Heidegger productively converses with social, political, environmental, and design philosophies, Capobianco worries that the matter of Being at the core of Heidegger's project has been obscured or perhaps abandoned entirely, to the great detriment of the duty Heidegger scholarship bears to faithfully preserve and emblemize that which is most distinctive about Heidegger's thinking. Though the human being may derive meaning from Being, this does not thereby imply that

*Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 8 (2018): 97–108.

Being is depreciated to that which the human being may glean from Being. Capobianco writes, “Being structurally precedes and exceeds meaning. Being is irreducible to meaning” (5), a thesis which recurs throughout *Heidegger’s Way of Being*.

Supporting his insistence that Being is Heidegger’s ultimate reference point, Capobianco immerses his readers in a dexterous set of considerations which engage an impressively vast array of texts spanning Heidegger’s corpus. Despite the slimness of the volume, Capobianco parses translated and untranslated texts ranging from 1919 through 1976. He writes that his twin aims are to attend to passages within central texts which have been underrepresented in the scholarship and to draw attention to texts not yet translated into English, providing valuable resources for scholars and others interested in further pursuing Heidegger’s thinking.

Capturing his thesis in both a tangible and memorable way, Capobianco poignantly and poetically describes a sculpture in Biscayne Bay in Florida, the home of the Tequesta indigenous people. The bronze sculpture entitled *El Centinela del Río*, by Manuel Carbonell, portrays a Tequesta sentinel blowing into his conch shell horn. Tracing the etymology of “sentinel” back to the Latin *sentire*, Capobianco describes the sentinel as one who practices sustaining openness and sensitivity to that which he experiences. In this way, the sentinel is not merely one who guards against an impending threat, though his sensitivity may subsequently have this effect. In sensing that which is happening in his vicinity, the sentinel is also required to alert others to whatever hazard or blessing may be approaching. This sculpture of a sentinel also becomes the herald and, in so doing, “makes manifest what is manifest” (66), be it a time of day, the passing of the river’s waters, or even the bustling of the busy port which has taken up residence nearby at the mouth of the Miami River. Capobianco invites his reader to ponder the sentinel’s announcing of that to which he is sensitive as a testament to the human’s being task to reveal that which *is*. However, Capobianco also cautions against equating what the human being makes manifest with the manifestness of Being as such, which will always transcend

what the human can figure or grasp of it. Rather, the sentinel's heralding always retains a certain humility, recognizing that he is only ever detecting and announcing a tiny fragment of Being.

In his first chapter, "Reaffirming 'The Truth of Being,'" Capobianco traces Heidegger's concern with Being from its nascent phase as early as 1919 through some of his last remarks in 1973. Capobianco emphasizes this unshakable focal point in the wake of what he understands to be a "*Seinsvergessenheit*... setting in anew – and in Heidegger studies of all places" (8). Capobianco argues that Heidegger took increasing distance from Husserl's phenomenological approach from 1919 onward, expressing discomfort with conceptualizing things as inert objects which are utterly dependent on receiving meaning from the sense-giving subject (8). Instead, even very early in his thinking, Capobianco shows that Heidegger stresses that things, the world, and whatever else the human being might encounter have the character of *Ereignis* – the event of showing themselves. Through Heidegger's study of Aristotle, Capobianco deciphers Heidegger's oft-rehearsed phrase the "truth of Being" as "belonging most properly (*kyriotaton*) to the being itself" (9), not to Dasein's constitutive meaning-making. Capobianco notes Heidegger himself rejected any interpretation of *Sinn* in *Being and Time* as merely rearticulating Husserl's sense-giving acts of consciousness. Meaning, then, for Heidegger is properly understood as articulating a prior responsiveness to the manifestation of Being itself. The phrase "the truth of Being," which appears especially in the 1930s and '40s, Capobianco shows is Heidegger's attempt to further gesture toward this fundamental manifestness, not as demarcating an epistemological or logical phenomenon. Tracing Heidegger's criticisms of Aquinas, Descartes, and Wittgenstein, among others, Capobianco unfolds Heidegger's repeated rejection of the claim that Being is essentially whatever is produced by human cognition. In contrast to alternative readings of Heidegger's vernacular as confused or obscure, Capobianco argues that Heidegger is instead playfully developing a wide array of load-bearing philosophical terms (*Ereignis*, *Aletheia*, *Physis*, and *Lichtung*, among others) to express his essential concern with the manifestation of Being itself.

Chapter two, “On Hölderlin on ‘Nature’s Gleaming,’” traces Capobianco’s rehearsal of Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin’s “Last Poems.” Capobianco continues to take meticulous care to accentuate Heidegger’s interest in allowing the manifestation of Being to shine forth. He shows that this shining of Being takes on the particular valence of “nature’s gleaming” in Hölderlin’s poem “Autumn.” Heidegger references several other poems from Hölderlin in reading “Autumn,” and Capobianco masterfully gathers these sprawling insights into an integrated whole. He unfolds how Heidegger’s reading reaffirms the ontological difference while avoiding the potential pitfalls of straightforwardly expressing himself in those terms. He does this, Capobianco shows, through differentiating “nature” from “landscape” (31) in his engagement with Hölderlin’s poem. “Nature” collects the temporal unfolding of Being itself, whereas “landscape” configures the beings within nature at any given time. Further, Capobianco argues that Heidegger’s interpretation of nature as Being reflects a maturing of his thought, from a younger man’s perspective that anxiety and strife constitute the tenor of the Being/Dasein relationship to a more seasoned view that nature is “*inclined* toward us” (32) in nurturing that to which it tends. Heidegger claims “Autumn” illustrates how the wholeness of the year is gathered in each manifestation of a particular season of that year and that the seasons are not to be understood as merely sequentially following upon one another, a point Capobianco finds echoed in Heraclitus’ *hen-panta*. Reiterating *Being and Time*, in this poem time is not understood as a “mere succession of ‘moments’ or ‘nows’” (33) but rather as a fundamental happening which renders and makes possible the articulation of the connective fabric between the part and whole, between particular expressions of the landscape and nature itself. In reading Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin’s poetry, Capobianco is able to draw out the centrality of temporality for Heidegger’s thinking of Nature as Being even as late as the 1970s.

In chapter three, “The ‘Greek Experience’ of Nature-*Physis*-Being,” Capobianco explores how, despite Heidegger’s own insistence that his 1962 lecture “Time and Being” was a mere reiteration of consistent themes across his career, in fact there is a philosophically significant

variation in the “emphasis on the ‘letting’ character of Being itself” (39). Capobianco argues that this letting was already implicit in Heidegger’s recourse to *physis*, but that letting emerged in a particularly crucial way at this later point. Heidegger himself accents this in the Le Thor lectures in 1969, claiming the emphasis is fundamentally different from his approach in *Being and Time* and that “letting” and “giving” were interconnected in his 1962 lecture. Marking “Ur-words” such as *physis*, *Logos*, *hen*, and *aletheia* as those terms Heidegger employed to gesture toward the “movedness” of the coming-to-presence of Being, Capobianco cites Heidegger self-interpreting his concern to draw out the dynamic, temporalized Greek sense of Being over and above the impoverished, modern, static metaphysics of presence. What this justifies, Capobianco writes, is that “the manifestness of Being is structurally prior to Dasein’s manifestive activity” (41) – i.e., humanly manufactured meaning does not exhaust Being. In the chapter’s remainder, Capobianco references Heidegger’s lesser-known philosophical travelogues from a trip to Greece in 1967 in which he offers a reading of Theocritus’ *Idyll, The Harvest Festival*, the Le Thor lectures, and the earlier 1957 lecture “Hebel – Friend of the House.” In so doing, Capobianco unfurls Heidegger’s conception of what he calls the “Greek Experience” as the counterpoint to the scientific-technological and even the Romantic view of nature from the fixed perspective of the subject. The “Greek Experience” instead attends to “nature as *physis* as Being” in subsisting immediately in nature’s manifestation of Being. Although Capobianco points out the difficulty in understanding whether Heidegger assigned this kind of relationship to nature to the historical-cultural Greeks and thus limited its provenance, Capobianco finds it more plausible that Heidegger instead articulated this “Greek Experience” in order to make “every effort to recover this experience for all human beings” (46), especially artists, musicians, poets, and thinkers sensitive to the superabundance of *physis*. He concludes, “focusing on Dasein’s constitutive sense-making structure or on Dasein’s absorbed, everyday, skillful coping practices simply does not get to the heart of the matter of Heidegger’s lifetime of thinking. Both approaches, I think it is now clear, fall short of the ‘Greek Experience’” (47).

In “The Early Saying of Being as *Physis* (as *Aletheia*),” Capobianco’s fourth chapter, he positions his reader much earlier in Heidegger’s corpus, in a thoroughgoing engagement with his work of the 1930s. Resisting what he argues is an overstatement of the philosophical import of the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Capobianco calls for renewed attention to “the principal theme of Being as *physis* as *aletheia*” (50) which he understands as culminating in the 1935 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In unpacking this theme, Capobianco tracks preceding comments in the 1929–30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World Finitude, Solitude* and the summer 1932 lecture course *The Beginning of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides*. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Capobianco discerns some of Heidegger’s first depictions of *physis* in its relation to the human being. Here, Capobianco writes, “Heidegger states a position that he will insist upon in one way or another for the remainder of his life: in the relation between the human being and *physis* (Being), the structural antecedence belongs to *physis* (Being)” (53). Later in this same lecture course, Heidegger cleaves apart two meanings of *physis*. On the one hand, *physis* can refer to “‘whatever prevails,’ that is, what is manifest (beings) ‘for immediate experience’” (53), which came to refer to “a ‘region of beings,’ namely, natural beings” (53) as opposed to those beings which humans made or produced. On the other hand, *physis* can mean the “*prevailing* of whatever prevails” (53–4). Recalling the same dynamic which supports the ontological difference, Capobianco demonstrates Heidegger is tracking that which in Greek thinking first allowed Aristotle to pursue metaphysics. This kind of thinking also gestures toward relating *aletheia* and *physis* to sustain its philosophical coherence. Turning briefly to the summer 1932 lecture course, Capobianco shows – through a close reading of a line from Sophocles’ *Ajax* – that Heidegger understands a fundamental temporalization of *physis* as well. In Summer Semester 1935, *Introduction to Metaphysics* arrives and, on Capobianco’s reading, announces itself as Heidegger’s true masterwork of this decade in part because Heidegger’s thinking

of *physis* is here decidedly prominent. Indeed, Capobianco quotes Heidegger writing “*Physis* is Being itself” and clarifies that “*physis* unfolds beings in such a way that both the movement (becoming) of beings and the abiding (being-ness) of beings can now be seen as but two aspects of the single temporal-spatial way or process that is Being itself/*physis*” (58), where *physis* now grounds both becoming and being. Tracing Heidegger’s etymology of *physis* alongside the definitive philosophical interweaving of *physis* and *aletheia* with Being, Capobianco shows how Heideggerian truth is not merely local to the human being’s capacity to understand, but rather transcends this narrow interpretation. Capobianco concludes, “the *aletheic character of Being as physis* is Heidegger’s distinctive philosophical claim” (61).

Chapter five, “Sentinels of Being,” opens with the remarkable scene of the bronze sentinel statue. Indicating his hermeneutic phenomenological stance, Capobianco writes, “Being ever approaches and ‘hails’ Dasein, Heidegger tells us, so Carbonell’s sculpture puts us in touch with the core of Heidegger’s thinking” (67). This hailing is not reducible to mere meaning-making, rather that which is hailed must instead strive to resist forgetting Being all over again. Capobianco finds Heidegger to make his case in the untranslated 1943 lecture course on Heraclitus. Framing his discussion as complementing Manfred Frings’ extant work on both Heraclitus lecture courses, Capobianco unfolds how and why *physis* is figured as prominently in this text as it is. In proposing to reorder Heraclitus’ fragments in this lecture course, Heidegger re-translates several fragments in order to draw out the centrality of *physis*. Capobianco writes, “according to Heidegger, the Greeks experienced *everything* as ‘living’ (*zoe*) insofar as everything emerges from out of the pure emerging itself. And since this pure emerging (unconcealing) was also experienced and named by the Greeks as *aletheia*, the Greek *Ur*-words *physis*, *zoe*, *aletheia* all say ‘the same’ and illuminate each in a somewhat different manner, Being itself” (70). Reading fragments 123 and 30, Heidegger thinks *physis* as inapparent only because it is tracing Being itself rather than a particular being. In his conclusion to the lecture course, Heidegger

returns to fragment 16 and argues that *aletheia*, though not explicitly named, is nevertheless thought together with *physis* and is thus “the same.” This is so because, again, “*physis* is also *aletheia*, provided that we always keep in view that *aletheia* is un-concealment, that is, emergence from out of concealment” (73). Capobianco quotes Heidegger: “*aletheia* is not, as metaphysics up until now has meant in a ‘self-evident’ manner, a mere feature of cognitive comportment – but rather is the fundamental feature of Being itself” (73). In discussing fragment 93, Heidegger further connects *physis*, *aletheia*, and Being with *Logos* as gathering via the giver of signs, Apollo. Apollo gives signs, Heidegger claims, by uncovering that which is pointed out, while continuing to also indicate that which is not-shown in this same giving gesture; the sign and *physis* harmonize. Capobianco writes, “Heidegger’s creative reading of fragment 93, then, is really meant as a stern critique of the modern philosophy of consciousness, inaugurated particularly by Descartes, and its focus on the ‘*ego cogito*’ or ‘subject’ that is self-contained, isolated, and locked away with its ‘signs’ (language) with no possible access to Being” (77). It is instead revealed that *physis*, *aletheia*, Being, and now also language as sign are all interrelated; “the self-showing that is Being-*physis* is already ‘wordable,’ we might say” (79).

In his final chapter, “This *Logos* is Being Itself,” Capobianco investigates the 1944 untranslated Heraclitus lecture course. Crescendoing to the relation between primordial *Logos* and the human being’s *logos*, here Heidegger first questions logic’s role in the development of Western thinking, showing how it is predicated upon there being a subject of any given statement. Capobianco writes, “Heidegger’s line of thinking affirms the *ontological* basis of logical statements” (82). Though from Plato onward this ontological basis was fixed as the super-sensuous idea, Heidegger maintains the “*logos* of ‘logic’ is intimately related to the *eidos* of metaphysics” (82). He claims further modern philosophy of consciousness seems to have presupposed *eidos* is generated by the human *logos*. Heidegger reads Heraclitus, however, as differentiating between the primordial *Logos* (uppercase) and the human practice of

gathering, preserving, and sheltering as *logos* (lowercase). In fragment 50 Heraclitus claims that *Logos* and *hen panta* say the same, which, as Heidegger understand it, aligns *hen panta* – One is All – with Being itself as an Ur-phenomenon. The *Logos* is a *Versammlung*, a fore-gathering, of all beings before the human *logos* accomplishes a more selective gathering. Resisting metaphysical thinking, the challenge becomes to “think along with Heraclitus regarding the primordial *Logos*...to bring into view Being itself” (85). Primordial *Logos*, to be clear, is in no way related to the human activity of saying or stating. Instead, “the primordial *Logos* ‘is’ Being itself” (88). Tracing the theme of “breathing in and out,” Capobianco unfolds how this lecture course grounds all living beings in their principle of life (i.e. *psyche* or soul) which operates according to a rhythm of “‘reaching out’ (*ausholen*) into the Open and ‘bringing back’ (*einholen*) from the Open” (87). This gathering motion evinces the receptivity of the human being to the primordial *Logos* and the relation (which can never be thought as spanning the distance between two wholly independent entities) between it and the human *logos* Heraclitus’ fragment 50 names *homologeîn*. In contrast to a standard hermeneutical interpretation of the relation between *Logos* and *logos* as dialogical, Capobianco writes, the human gathering of *logos* “is first and foremost a matter of the silent (and obedient) hearkening to ‘the voice’ of *Being* as the primordial *Logos*” (90) which philosophically distances itself from the position that language is merely or primarily about accurately communicating. Rather, humans are first and foremost in a posture of obedience, cultivating a sensitivity to Being. Capobianco writes, “from his perspective the primary focus in Hermeneutics on ‘dialogue’ among human beings (as constitutive and important as this surely is) is misplaced because such conversation cannot have the proper depth and discovery unless we have first listened attentively to the ‘saying’ of the Being-way itself” (90–91). It is *Logos* which first addresses us, out of which our subsequent speaking address is made possible; “*homologeîn* [is]...a *cor-responsence* to and with the primordial *legeîn*” (92). In returning to fragment 112, Heidegger brings his thinking around to the relation between *Logos* and *Aletheia*, highlighting

their belonging-togetherness as well, by way of articulating the relation at work between *legein*, *poiein* and Being which Heidegger reads in this fragment. Capobianco summarizes, “*legein* and *poiein*, what he refers to as fundamental ‘thinking’ (*Denken*) and ‘poetizing’ (*Dichten*), although not ‘identical,’ are the ‘same’ as the two distinctive ways that the human being cor-responds (*homologeîn*) to Being as the primordial *Logos, Aletheia, Physis*” (93).

In the “Afterword,” Capobianco reprises his thesis that Heidegger, above all, was attempting to think Being as that which transcends and supersedes the human being’s capacity to grasp and articulate its emergence in particular beings. Yet in re-emphasizing this primacy of Being, Capobianco also claims his work is “concerned not only with clarifying the proper character of the Being-way, but also with clarifying *our* way in relation to the Being-way” (96). Capobianco understands each chapter in his volume to be extending an invitation to return to a life inflected by a more authentic thinking relation to Being. In the final pages, Capobianco expresses an organizational schema for the thematic succession of his chapters; he begins with “awakening the way of Being” in chapter one, then explores how Being gleams and sets us free from a limited Cartesian conception of the subject in chapters two through four, and finally invokes our responsive “joyful noise to herald everything that is gathered before us” in chapters five and six (97). This scaffolding draws Capobianco’s authorial purpose into sharp relief. Relating each chapter to one another as individual stepping stones which he understands nevertheless to culminate in a more complete demonstration of his thesis contributes greatly to the accessibility of this pointed construction for his reader. Somewhat regrettably, this resolution does not emerge until the conclusion of the book, relying on the reader to commit fully to the experience of Capobianco’s way of thinking without knowing the path to the destination in advance or why the reader is propelled, often abruptly, back and forth through Heidegger’s corpus without a clear guiding thread across chapters. But while the book can feel as if it lacks internal connection and coherence, it also invites readers to performatively abandon their own scientific-technological presuppositions about what it means to read

and think with someone, allowing Capobianco's own way of thinking to emerge when and as it will.

Capobianco offers a passionate and academically rigorous collection of reflections on cardinal moments in Heidegger's thinking. That said, two points could have been more fleshed out in his account. First, Capobianco does ultimately offer a reading of Heidegger's thinking of the dynamic relation between primordial *Logos* and human *logos* relation in chapters five and six. Therein he directly acknowledges the importance of *Logos* as preceding *logos*, highlighting the need for listening before a human response is formulated in speech to that which language itself first says. However, there are several points in earlier chapters in which Capobianco seems to imply a flat, even mistaken understanding of Heidegger's conception of language. In the first chapter, Capobianco describes Heidegger's attempt to name Being as follows: "Heidegger reveled in this 'play' of saying and naming – indeed, we may imagine, as he walked the forest paths or gazed out the window of his study, meditating on how he might bring 'it' into language yet one more time" (19–20). A reader might be forgiven for gleaning from this description that language is merely the tool whereby Being is conveniently packaged and circulated, though this interpretation does not square with Capobianco's later, more detailed exegesis of Heidegger's thinking of language. Indeed, the first epigraph Capobianco selects for his final chapter – "The *Logos* is accordingly something hearable, a kind of speech and voice; but manifestly not the voice of a human being" – evinces that Capobianco is more than sensitive to Heidegger's more complete and nuanced thinking of language.

Second, the rhythm of Capobianco's understanding of the relations between the Ur-words he reads Heidegger as playfully developing is heavily reliant upon the analogical "as" or a very particular notion of what constitutes "the same." Heidegger's thinking often relies on what we might understand to be a poetic (rather than a mathematical) "order of operations." In attempting to say Being in this way, Heidegger is not merely attempting to define those terms he relies upon. Additionally, I would understand Heidegger's analogically interrelated conceptual

vocabulary as working to expose a dynamic cartography of relationality – a charting out of thinking’s proximity to Being by way of language. That this cartography compels anyone who attempts to think along with him to slip between and into other names and terms constitutes Heidegger’s distinctive philosophical vitality. That any reader of Heidegger encounters this “as” or “sameness” so rapidly, then, is to be welcomed, not minimized or interpreted out of his thinking. However, a further philosophical explanation of the “as” or “sameness” which punctuates his thinking is justifiably needed. On this point, Capobianco comes up a bit short. I would have expected a discussion, perhaps, of the philosophical distinction Heidegger himself draws and develops in the *Beiträge* or in the “Triadic Conversation” between what is “the same” and what is “identical.” The character of the Guide in the “Triadic Conversation” describes the distinction as follows: what is identical is utterly separate from that which it is identical to, while what is instead the same as (or self-same with) something else instead belongs together with it (GA 77: 38–46). Even adding a cursory analysis of the philosophical stakes of “the same” as grounded in a relational belonging for Heidegger would have, I think, reinforced Capobianco’s heavy reliance upon this notion as inhering in the relation among *physis*, *Ereignis*, *aletheia*, and *Logos*. These suggestions, however, intend to think along with Capobianco, expanding upon and fostering greater self-consistency within his profound and formidable call to recall the heart of Heidegger’s thinking.