

BOOK REVIEW

Gregory Fried and Richard Polt's

After Heidegger?

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Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, eds. *After Heidegger?*
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Gregory Fried and Richard Polt's edited volume *After Heidegger?* is a welcome addition to contemporary Heidegger scholarship. Comprised of thirty-three single-author contributions organized under seven headings, the project covers a good deal of ground. From the impact of the recent publication of the *Black Notebooks* to the developmental trajectory of phenomenology to the event, this undoubtedly ambitious effort speaks to a wide array of issues brought thoughtfully to bear upon a single question: after Heidegger?

As Fried and Polt explain in the "Editors' Introduction," they chose to title the anthology interrogatively on account of a prescribed methodology. That is to say, on the premise that Heidegger's thought is not only thought-provoking, but its philosophical relevance is assured insofar as "philosophy today takes place 'after Heidegger,'" Fried and Polt demand of the contributing authors that they delimit the key questions Heidegger's work poses while critically appropriating rather than

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merely reiterating them (xv). To this end, the titular question mark does double duty. It emphasizes response to a common animating question while calling attention to the articulation of those questions each author identifies as most integral to Heidegger's thought.

Foregrounding the question in this way makes plain the extent to which Heidegger informs the prescribed methodology. Lee Braver (Chapter 18), alert to the resonance of the question – *after?* – observes, “part of [Heidegger's] legacy is that he even taught us how to understand how legacies of thought work, how to work out an endowment of thought placed in us, and to work off the debt of gratitude such thoughts place us in” (192). By contrast, Stephen Crowell (Chapter 20) insists, “the question [*after?*] concerns something we must formulate for ourselves, taking Heidegger's narrative as a contribution to a conversation that includes Heidegger but whose terms are not dictated by him” (211).

Though one gesture to the question is gracious and the other austere, taking them together is precisely what Fried and Polt call each contributing author to do. In other words, each author is asked to undertake a critical retrieval (*Wiederholung*), to deploy the very same tools of *Destruktion* Heidegger forged for the history of philosophy in his interpretive appropriations. This time, however, the iron for the proverbial hammer is not the history that predates Heidegger, but the one that includes him. A tenuous balance must be struck, then, between the piety of faithful reading and the critical posture required to steer clear of the disciple's mere reiteration.

Indeed, several contributors concur that a kind of blind discipleship has plagued Heidegger scholarship for some time. Peter E. Gordon (Chapter 4), for example, reports, “even today, [Heidegger's] intellectual legacy seems to impose upon the reader a stark choice: either one assents to the holy script as a faithful disciple or one is branded as an uncompromising heretic” (39). This spirit of wry dissatisfaction is shared by Günter Figal (Chapter 27), who opposes to those who “have followed Heidegger as if his work were a doctrine. . . [who] have become Heideggerians” those others who, presumably like Figal himself, have shared Heidegger's insights without being subordinate to him (284).

At the opposite end of the spectrum stands a vocal minority often identified with the position of Emmanuel Faye. On the charge of virulent anti-Semitism they hasten to excise Heidegger from the canon. Such detraction in the extreme Lawrence J. Hatab (Chapter 11) characterizes as “long on polemics but very short on philosophical competence” (112), which may account for the seductive salability that Babette Babich (Chapter 9) portrays in decrying the whole “moraline cottage industry whose self-appointed role it is and has been to denounce Heidegger” (88).

The co-existence of these two extremes, i.e., of discipleship and disavowal, sets up an either/or scenario that many contributors recognize as parasitic on the scholarship today. As Bret Davis has it, the choice is between polemical attack and apologetic defense (Chapter 32, 340); either, per Donatella Di Cesare, resentful orphans gate-keep the archive as though it is the property of their idolatrous cult, or ideological anti-Heideggerism rules the day (Chapter 6, 60). Some make this opposition slightly less stark, but nonetheless maintain a dramatic stance. Tom Sheehan (Chapter 5), for one, argues the either/or is embedded within the scholarship, which is *ab intra* under attack for its failure to reach a consensus “regarding what Heidegger’s own work was about” (55). Though for Sheehan the real danger lies less in the *ab extra* attack mobilized by the revelation of the *Black Notebooks* than in the way infighting threatens to paint Heidegger scholarship into a corner of “self-congratulatory irrelevance,” the “acute crisis” demands immediate, decisive address (55, 54).

However the matter of the crisis is portrayed, none dispute the claim that the *Black Notebooks* exacerbate rather than resolve its structurally consistent either/or. Fried and Polt acknowledge that the recent publication of several volumes of *Black Notebooks* has “exposed some disturbing anti-Jewish views,” which makes the matter of critical appropriation “especially pressing” (xv). But as Hatab observes, “graduate students are commonly warned against concentrating on Heidegger’s thought,” which suggests that the *Black Notebooks* in fact threaten to dissolve justification for continued study of Heidegger.

Bookending the editors' measured reply, Iain Thompson (Chapter 31) speaks to the problem by rejecting apologetics in the same breath as he damns myopic dismissal:

All of us would-be *post*-Heideggerians have to work through the significance of his deeply troubling Nazism for ourselves...that critical task is new only to those who are new to Heidegger (or who have somehow managed to avoid it by bunkering down in untenable and so increasingly desperate forms of denial)... [Disentangling the most insightful and troubling aspects of Heidegger's thinking] requires both care and understanding, and so a capacity to tolerate ethical as well as philosophical ambiguity, traditional scholarly skills that seem to be growing rare in these days of one-sided outrage and indignation. (324)

Julia A. Ireland, in an especially erudite contribution to the section "After the *Black Notebooks*" (Chapter 8), cites the trenchancy of the problem, in part, in the "after" itself. She argues that an inappropriately rigid chronological sense of "after" encourages scholars to behave as though something has been decided about what to do with Heidegger in light of his disastrous politics, when in fact, "nothing has been decided" (77). However, even if we follow Heidegger, as in the more productive sense of "after" that Ireland shares with fellow contributing author and sometimes co-translator William McNeill (Chapter 24), "it is disingenuous to pretend that the word 'after' implies a continuity and not a trauma" (77).¹ She develops this notion of trauma through a side-by-side study of Baeumler's racial biologism (which Heidegger explicitly rejected) and Heidegger's own 1934–35 lecture course *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"* (81). The veiled references to Baeumler in the latter are troubling enough to legitimate shelving a carefully defined Nazi Heidegger, though on the whole Ireland complicates the impulse to disqualify Heidegger as a philosopher *per se*. She wonders "about the imaginative construction of a reader in need of saving from

the act of reading itself and the terrible submission undertaken on her behalf” (77), which is to say that she rejects censorially – perhaps fascistically – doing away with Heidegger altogether.

In a similar spirit, Peter Trawny (Chapter 7) complicates the impulse to save the academy from Heidegger’s politics. In the alternative between moral disqualification (associated with Heidegger’s critics) and moral belittlement (associated with his apologists), Trawny locates the question of what “we” – the already problematized designation of an academic community – still want to or even should do with Heidegger (71). In a provocative argument that borders on controversial, Trawny insists that while Heidegger’s moral failings are “entirely plausible reasons to break off every interest in Heidegger’s philosophy,” ethics, understood as the God of philosophy, would bring the authentic activity of philosophy – viz., thinking – to a halt (74). Notably, Trawny declares the achievement of such moral desire impossible, however hypocritically it is deployed in the inhumane industry of academic philosophy (and for a particularly apt description of one such hypocrisy as it pertains to misogyny in the academy, see Babette Babich, Chapter 9, 90–91). He emphasizes the temporal continuity of thinking in contrast to the limits a non-philosophical moral judgment seeks to impose, and calls for a thinking that could itself “judge crimes according to moral standards” precisely by philosophizing (75).

The animate tension between moral judgment and the activity of thinking is mirrored in Dennis J. Schmidt’s (Chapter 13) relation of thinking to life. Whereas Trawny engages from the angle of the continuity of thinking in spite of the ethical *aporia*, Schmidt argues it is the impasse of thought that opens the space for the ethical: “what one needs to think as one begins is the *constitutive resistance* of that theoretical question to a theoretical, philosophical response. In doing this, one begins to arrive at the point from which something like a sense of responsibility begins” (139).

Where these accounts and several others agree is in the refusal of encampment. The path forward appears to involve taking up the problem oneself, reading for oneself, and cultivating responsibility without deferring the decision to a would-be authority. In the end, the

prescription to resolve the either/or crisis in Heidegger scholarship looks a lot – for better or worse – like Heidegger’s own *ēthos* of authenticity.

Given the Heideggerian methodology already in play, this is far from coincidental. An *ēthos* of authenticity – if the phrasing is permitted in fidelity to a reading of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* – emerges in response to a time of crisis. But still this says too little, for this *ēthos* is not, as the language of authenticity might suggest, restricted to the “early” Heidegger. The notion that our time is a time of crisis which calls for response and – above all, resolve – permeates the entirety of Heidegger’s thinking.

To give flesh not only to the claim, but to the necessity of the thematic emergence of crisis to any close study of Heidegger’s thought, we might begin by noting, as several of the contributing authors do, the various crises germane to the happening of being.² For instance, Richard Polt (Chapter 17) cites the emergence of the self from

events of disruption...in which the sense of our own being, and thus of all being, is challenged. We could call these events emergencies – *crises* in which being emerges as a burden. We might even call them traumas, which wound a smoothly untroubled would-be whole and force it to acknowledge its incompleteness. (186, em)

François Raffoul (Chapter 23) describes, citing GA 61, the crisis of life’s expropriation, i.e., life’s own tendency to fall, its tendency toward ruination. Thinking, alternatively, runs counter to this tendency, and in so doing, wrestles with the inapparent (244–45). In other words, thinking emerges as (the) essential (activity) in response to the crisis of expropriation, of ruination. Likewise, William McNeill (Chapter 24) and Miguel de Beistegui (Chapter 26) attend to crisis as both inherent in and resulting from the function of time. For de Beistegui, the “founding event” is displaced from the present because thinking is drawn elsewhere, to a past never present – to the time of the event that founds time – that makes the very history of which our age (the age of metaphysics) is a part (276). He writes:

And, at this particular point in time, a time of *deep crisis*, our history is out of joint, precisely because it is absolutely cut off from its origin, unable to access the ground from which it sprang, the roots from which it grew. Cut off from its origin, it errs – and this erring takes the form of planetary domination and exploitation. (278, em)

In principle agreeing with de Beistegui, McNeill argues that the event temporalized as the “authentic time of poetizing” (GA 39: 112/102) is, in contrast with the *Augenblick* of *Being and Time*, “never simply present...[and] can only be known in retrospect, only after the event – which is to say, as a trace” (253). Such time, the time that tears (following Hölderlin in GA 39), is the “unthought of the Greek understanding of Being as producedness and presence-at-hand” (260). Moreover, this understanding of being, through a reductive yet consummate interpretation of *technē*, leads to the complete subjection to “technicity, which we are witnessing today” (260). It takes shape in part as the academic valorization of science, which emphasizes knowledge “production” and its attendant metrics to gauge “real world” application (260). In this respect, McNeill’s diagnosis accords with Andrew J. Mitchell’s (Chapter 29). Mitchell argues that we must acknowledge the promise of the implied “ethical end of any thinking after Heidegger,” i.e., we must push back against the crisis of maximization and optimization to detect (the) singularity (of things), and to guard “latitude in our approach to the world” (308).

On the whole, to say that our history is out of joint, that we metaphysically subscribe to an understanding of being (or perhaps of time) that results in so complete a subjection to technicity that it exploits all beings as resource, is to acknowledge that if we follow Heidegger, we cannot help but find ourselves in a time of crisis. Indeed, were Heidegger to have his say, the very project of contemplating what comes “after” (Heidegger) can only begin in a time of crisis. As Gregory Fried (Chapter 2) explains, “Heidegger demands that we recognize we inhabit

a world in crisis, but crisis in the Greek sense of *krisis*, a moment of decision where what the world is and means is at stake” (18).

Tempting though it might be to follow Heidegger – as many do in drawing out the theme of crisis as a diagnostic tool for self-location (the literal sense of *Befindlichkeit*) – we would do a disservice to the diversity of voices in *After Heidegger?* should we overlook those who resist Heidegger on precisely this point. To be sure, such resistance takes numerous possible forms. For some, concession to the crisis of the West as the nihilist consummation of metaphysics is only permitted with stipulations. Daniela Vallega-Neu (Chapter 28), for example, acknowledges that Heidegger’s question of being was rooted in

what he experienced as a historical plight...[though] I (like many Heidegger scholars) am critical with respect to the way Heidegger frames...[it] in terms of a history of being that commences with the Greeks and for which he seeks to prepare another beginning in which the Germans (above all Hölderlin and Heidegger himself) are supposed to play a prominent role. (295)

As an alternative, she proposes unhinging Heidegger’s account of *Dasein* in the 1930s from the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*) to open the possibility of a plural ontology that “fosters sensitivity to differences without the need to subsume them under common denominators, a way of thinking that responds to and can be responsible to the complexity of the worlds we inhabit” (302).

Others are less forgiving. For Figal, the blind discipleship of the Heideggerians is only encouraged by Heidegger’s oversimplified vision of history, and of modernity in particular (284–85). So if we wish to think for ourselves, we would do well to reject Heidegger’s resentments and exaggerations in favor of a more phenomenological view (289). Hatab and Crowell broadly concur that phenomenology should serve as the measure of Heidegger’s thought, citing Heidegger’s political errancy in his departure therefrom. For Hatab, it was Heidegger’s subsumption of the details of factual life to the larger goal of “getting

to some fundamental essence that can ground thinking...that made him a very poor political agent – too prone to see National Socialism in grand epochal terms, at the expense of careful attention to its actual practices and implications” (116–17). For Crowell, in recognizing that the politics of the '30s and '40s derive from non-phenomenological commitments, we stand to benefit should we explore “whether elements of [Heidegger's] philosophy are motivated by his politics, perhaps to cover for it, to rationalize it” (212).

John McCumber (Chapter 10) holds perhaps the most dramatic of these positions, portraying the *Seinsgeschichte* as the infected part of Heidegger's philosophy to be surgically excised so as to save the otherwise worthy body for posterity (102). Gordon similarly argues that the *Seinsgeschichte* “interlaced insight with ideology” such that the history of being itself smacks of totalitarian submission (34), while Polt, in examining the concurrence of the *Black Notebooks* with Heidegger's articulation of the history of being, warns that we should take care not to follow Heidegger's critique of modernity too readily. For though Heidegger excoriates National Socialism as an instance of the metaphysics of modernity, this critique is “not accompanied by a moral or political one” (180). Thus fundamentally agreeing with Hatab (above), Polt concludes that Heidegger – despite his critical effort – fails to resist.

Whether it is the crisis in Heidegger scholarship, the crises germane to the happening of being, or the crisis the history of being presents to the curator of Heidegger's future corpus, the continual re-emergence of crisis throughout *After Heidegger?*² is not only not coincidental, it is necessary to any assemblage of close readings that attempt to gauge the stakes of Heidegger's thought. To this end, the anthology is an uncontested success. It delivers to the interested reader who wishes to selectively sample the issues as they confront scholarship today a variety of viewpoints rendered in short form, thereby avoiding the common grievance that readings of Heidegger rely too heavily on jargon and intra-corporeal reference.

In closing, I have but one criticism. *After Heidegger?*² is the sixth edited collection issued by Rowman & Littlefield International's relatively

young series New Heidegger Research, likewise edited by Fried and Polt. To their credit, they make explicit in the “Editors’ Introduction” that they “invited the members of [the] editorial board to write brief essays on what remains philosophically relevant and provocative in Heidegger’s work now” (xv). They continue,

Most members of the board were able to accept our invitation, and we were also able to include a few other voices from the diverse world of Heidegger research. . . [allowing] readers to discover a wealth of interpretive issues and lines of thought that a variety of successful scholars consider important (xv-xvi).

In a time when the future of Heidegger scholarship is under siege, to pose the question – *after Heidegger?* – so restrictively does not serve the effort well. Arguably Heidegger’s voluminous writings demand a careful assessment, indeed one that has not only invested considerable time and energy in its findings, but can also, as Fried himself insists, stand the test of self-articulation (Chapter 2, 11). Though these stipulations tax young scholars most gravely, they likely motivated the editors’ choice. Put simply, it is no easy accomplishment to speak from a place of authority as to where Heidegger’s “thought leaves philosophy today, over forty years after his death” (xvi).

That said, it would be refreshing to encounter, perhaps as a second volume inclusive of blind, peer-reviewed junior scholarship, a work custom tailored to the address of Heidegger’s legacy vis-à-vis the critical turn in contemporary continental philosophy toward feminist, racial, decolonial, and disability concerns (to name a few). This would offer a fresh perspective on the viability of Heidegger’s thought for the next generation – taking seriously not only the veritable desert of new positions seeking Heidegger scholars to be filled, but also the troublesome insularity of the Heideggerian community. *After Heidegger?* thoroughly and carefully articulates the current challenges of being a Heidegger scholar, but perhaps the time has come to speak to those of *becoming* one.

NOTES

- 1 See in particular McNeill's suspicion of the chronological "after" on the grounds of its complicity with the age of technicity, when "we are constantly oriented toward what comes next, toward the next newest thing, product, or thinking, all in the naïve belief that what comes next will constitute some form of progress over what has gone before" (260–61). Thus, he concludes, we "do not come after Heidegger, but remain well before him" (261).
- 2 This argument owes a debt of gratitude to Charles Bambach's *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).