

BOOK REVIEW

Ian Alexander Moore's  
*Eckhart, Heidegger, and the  
Imperative of Releasement*

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Ian Alexander Moore, *Eckhart, Heidegger, and the Imperative of Releasement*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2019. 331 pages.

One strand of recent Heidegger research has focused on the systematic investigation of key sources that endure over the length of his long philosophical career. The preoccupation with Heidegger's sources, often his religious sources in particular, began with scholarly interest in his first Freiburg period (1915–23), occasioned by the publication of those early courses in the *Gesamtausgabe* and, in the English-speaking world, by Theodore Kisiel's magisterial *The Genesis of Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (1993), followed closely by John Van Buren's *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (1994). In the last half-decade, the exploration of these early courses and the degree to which they anticipate *Being and Time* has given way to an examination of how their key figures reappear in less obvious ways or at crucial moments in Heidegger's later thought beyond 1927, often despite his attempts to disavow or distance himself from these influences.

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Heidegger himself seems to have been fond of listing his influences. The lists are not always identical, but a particularly influential one occurs at the beginning of *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (GA 63), where he writes that “the companion of my search was Luther and its model Aristotle, whom the former hated. Kierkegaard provided impulses, and Husserl gave me my eyes” (GA 63: 5/4, tm). Needless to say, detailing the Husserlian precedents to many a Heideggerian concept, method, or analysis has become the necessary scholarly preamble to anyone working in the field. In recent years, however, we have seen a set of analyses beyond the Husserl-Heidegger relationship. To name just three related to the figures above, there is Ryan Coyne’s *Heidegger’s Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in “Being and Time” and Beyond* (2015), Duane Armitage’s *Heidegger’s Pauline and Lutheran Roots* (2016), and, for German readers, Gerhard Thonhauser’s meticulously researched monograph on Heidegger and Kierkegaard, *Ein rätselhaftes Zeichen: zum Verhältnis von Martin Heidegger und Søren Kierkegaard* (2016).

Yet Kisiel’s decade-long work did not inaugurate a new field so much as provide an existing one with new resources and renewed momentum. The “mystical element” of Heidegger’s thought and its conceptual and terminological indebtedness to religious sources was evident to many of his students and readers. In the North American context, an important work was John Caputo’s 1977 *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*. Caputo’s work is significant in part because it locates that mystical influence in a figure not mentioned by Heidegger in 1923, Meister Eckhart.

These two strands of research meet in *Eckhart, Heidegger, and the Imperative of Releasement* (2019) by Ian Alexander Moore, which makes an enduring contribution to both of them. Moore’s book develops and expands Caputo’s early work by moving beyond and beneath the latter’s “four analogies” between Heidegger and Eckhart to provide a fully systematic account of Heidegger’s engagement with Eckhart over the length of his career. In relation to contemporary research, it adds a landmark study of a figure that ought to be counted among the likes

of Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard. We know Heidegger was reading Eckhart as early as 1910, and Moore presents the philosopher on record at 59 years old saying, “Since 1910, the master of letters and life, Ekehardt [sic], has accompanied me” (3). Yet Moore’s analysis does more than corroborate and supplement the work done by others. In showing us what Heidegger learns from Eckhart and how he develops it, Moore raises substantial philosophical questions for our consideration.

The book comprises seven chapters divided into three parts, as well as three substantial appendices of key sources translated into English for the first time by Moore. Part I consists of a single chapter that does the philological work which secures a textual and conceptual foundation for the analysis of both thinkers that unfolds in chapters two through seven. Here Moore’s considerable linguistic capacities for Greek, Latin, and German are on display as he moves deftly through the corpus of Eckhart’s writings. The “Introduction” and opening chapter set up three key claims to be defended over the course of the book. First, there is an interpretive claim that many of the infamous idiosyncrasies of Heidegger’s prose are in fact linguistic devices that he learns from Eckhart and uses, like the Rheinland mystic, in a performative attempt to provoke in us what he is attempting to articulate. Second, that both Eckhart and Heidegger are attempting to show that thinking and being are in some sense one, and that to know this truth we must in some sense become it: “Become who you are,” in Eckhart’s suggestive phrase. In other words, to access the truth of being requires a particular mode of being, *Gelassenheit* or releasement (xv, xvi). Finally, there is a third claim that this imperative of releasement necessitates a “practical apriori” for certain forms of philosophical investigation. We will examine each of these claims in turn.

Moore argues that Heidegger is doubly indebted to Eckhart. To his “master of letters and life” he owed not only a conceptual and phenomenological debt for the idea and practice of *Gelassenheit*, but also a performative and rhetorical debt that is revealed in his appropriation of the mystic’s various extradiscursive strategies for provoking in his readers something of the truth they wish to understand. This hermeneutic

insight allows us to read both authors more fruitfully. In chapter four, Moore directs our attention to three such devices in Eckhart – dialectical logic, paradox, and deliberate mistranslation – and then in chapter seven he directs us to a related set of strategies – circular argumentation, paradox, unorthodox translation – that emerge in Heidegger’s “quasi-platonic” *Country Path Conversations*. In both authors, this rhetorical strategy is the expression of a philosophical claim that they share: that we must be in the right way in order to think in the right way. These extradiscursive practices are intended “to cultivate a different kind of awareness” in us and to “disrupt our reliance on reason” and our “ingrained modes of discourse” (82). This is the proper sense of *method* (*methodos*) in Heidegger, a way into the truth of being that can only be grasped to the degree that it is traversed.

The name for this “method” – and this is Moore’s second claim in the book – is *Gelassenheit*, a term that appears more than one hundred times throughout Heidegger’s works, including the year of his death (97). For that reason, the term is likely already familiar to many Heidegger scholars; it is also a key feature of Caputo’s 1977 analysis. However, Moore’s research adds a greater degree of nuance to the various valences this term has in Eckhart and also in Heidegger. In the first case (chapter two), this enables him to defend Eckhart against the related charges of intellectualist and ontotheological approaches to the question of God. Against these, Moore argues that “Eckhart’s *First Parisian Question* presents a meticulously crafted dialectic designed to explode rational distinctions” rather than indulge them (40). We learn from Eckhart that “a conceptual distinction between God’s being and God’s understanding is impossible. . . there is less a resolution than the need to move to a different sphere” (53). This is a particular example of a philosophical possibility that will be important to Heidegger: “If there is a kind of *Aufhebung* in Eckhart’s thought, it is not conceptual, but rather something that he calls on us to experience” (84). In the case of Heidegger (chapter 6), Moore’s nuanced and polyvalent interpretation of *Gelassenheit* allows us to see how the imperative of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) is operative throughout Heidegger’s life, even in the violence of his rectorate and courses in the 1930s where it is diminished, but not abolished.

Central to his defense of this second claim is Moore's explication of *Gelassenheit* as a "middle-voiced" phenomenon: "an event in which subject and object are implicated, in which neither one is entirely active nor entirely passive" (98). For both Eckhart and Heidegger, letting-be is an event that involves both activity and passivity. It is a transcendental condition that grounds the possibility of our relating to being and to beings, but it is also an ontic disposition that allows that prior condition to be experienced. Taking Heidegger's explication of a piece of chalk from his still untranslated 1927–28 *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, Moore explains, "there must be a prior "letting-lie [*Liegen-lassen*]" and "letting-be [*Seinlassen*]" that, again, is not passive, but a "doing" of the highest and most originary sort" (100). The third sense of letting-be is the transcendence of Dasein: "in explicit transcending, nothing less happens than that the Dasein who essentially transcends becomes essential in the explicit letting-happen of transcendence" (101; GA 27: 213). This question of access (*Zugang*) is the philosophical task *par excellence* for Heidegger and it reveals the sense in which philosophy is always at the beginning, always introductory, always a tarrying alongside. In this sense, Heidegger can claim that *Gelassenheit* is "decisive in all our methodological considerations" (102; GA 29/30: 137/91). In Heidegger, Eckhart's question of the relation between thinking and being is transposed into phenomenological categories, and his analysis is equally attentive to the complex dynamics of passivity and activity. "To let something show itself of itself," Moore notes, "is not to force it into appearance, nor simply to wait passively for it to do so, but to bring or help it along, to participate in, but not to determine, the process, the middle-voiced *happening*, of its self-revelation" (101).

These first two claims set up a third that animates the work, that Heidegger, like Eckhart, founds his philosophy on a practical apriori: "For Eckhart, and . . . for Heidegger too, thinking is dependent on a practical apriori. To think being at its most basic level, I must act in terms of the very way in which being is to be thought. I must do something before I can understand" (37). This practical apriori is a letting-go which allows the open-region (*die Gegnet*) to emerge. The first two

claims prepare for this one. The extradiscursive strategies reveal and also endeavor to provoke a way of being that can sublimate the merely ontic manners of apprehension by transcending them to a primordial, always already operative unity between being and thinking, and in light of these disclosures we are prepared to see the truth of Dasein and being: “*Gelassenheit*, as the essence of the human...is our free, open relation to being which is more originary than any particular action we undertake or any particular thing we suffer” (137).

In sum, “knowing the truth is dependent on action or a way of being” (139). For Heidegger, thinking and being are one, in the same way that, for Eckhart, God and the soul are one. And for both, the path to this realization is practical, not theoretical, and demands that we let go of ourselves. Thus, Moore’s title: the correct disposition, releasement, is necessary and so an “imperative” if we are to arrive at the place that is also the knowledge of this sameness. This imperative to be in order to know, or more precisely to be who you are in order to know who you are, is the “practical apriori.”

Returning full circle to Caputo’s early work, this is, in a new sense, a mysticism – although for Moore it is not a mystical element, but rather a “mystical foundation” (xvii). He intends this, however, in the etymological sense of the word *muein*, namely, that there is a reality in preparation for which we must undergo an “initiation” in which “you must close your eyes and shut your mouth” (xvii).

Moore’s monograph has many virtues. It is carefully researched and makes contributions to studies of Eckhart and Heidegger independently, as well as to the field of research pertaining to the former’s influence on the latter. Not least among its virtues is the lucidity of its prose and clarity of its argumentation. Moore handles complicated concepts and familiar Heideggerian ambiguities with clarifying precision. The book as a whole expertly escapes from beneath the tyranny of the dependent clause, and it bears none of the telling marks of a “dissertation book.”

Precisely because the text is both well-researched and enjoyable to read, one may finish it wanting more. There seem to be some natural

points of contact with other thinkers and other Heideggerian concepts that the work does not address directly. I suspect the author would rightly plead considerations of length and scope in his own defense. Nevertheless, I think it would be useful to indicate some lines of possible development.

First, a Heideggerian question. We are told that Heidegger makes reference to Eckhart throughout his life, up to and including its final months. But the Heideggerian portion of the book concentrates on his engagement with Eckhart only up through the 1940s. Is there any substantive engagement that takes place after this period? What we are provided is more than enough evidence to secure the philosophical consideration of *Gelassenheit*; however, a fuller sweep would be pertinent for historical and developmental investigations.

Second, there are a handful of Heideggerian phenomena that seem to fall naturally within the orbit of a discussion of *Gelassenheit*, yet which are not addressed in the text. For example, in the thorough discussion of the open-region there is no engagement with the earlier notion of the clearing (*Lichtung*). Yet this appears to be one attempt in *Being and Time* to navigate precisely the “middle-voiced” quality of Dasein’s mode of being in its relationship to being. Is the idea that Dasein is the clearing cognate with this later discussion of *Gelassenheit* and the open-region, or is it too committed to the Dasein-heavy bent of that work and therefore superseded by this later discussion and terminology? Another phenomenon worth engaging is that of formal indication, which is mentioned in passing (92), but not addressed in any degree of depth. There seem to be significant similarities between the method of *formale Anzeige* and what it endeavors to avoid and to accomplish, and Moore’s description of *Gelassenheit*. As with the influence of Meister Eckhart, Gadamer claimed that formal indication was something that held for the whole of Heidegger’s thought. But the term, if not the approach, gradually fades. Perhaps its eclipse has something to do with the later emphasis on *Gelassenheit*?

Finally, regarding Heidegger’s extradiscursive strategies, I found myself asking if there was anything Moore claims Heidegger learned

from Eckhart – dialectic, paradox, mistranslation – that he might not have learned from Kierkegaard? These various extradiscursive devices are all forms of indirect communication designed to achieve a similar end, the (in Kierkegaard’s terminology) “subjective” or comportmental dimension of truth. Of course, Eckhart is likely a common influence for both thinkers. Yet it seems a missed opportunity to discuss the “moment of vision” (*Augenblick*, 106–8) – almost certainly a Heideggerian transposition of Kierkegaard’s “moment” (*Øieblikket*) – without discussing the gloomy Dane for whom the moment is the experience of eternity in time and reveals the *afgrund* that is the “source” of both consciousness and being.

Admittedly, each of these proposed directions of inquiry requires a lengthy treatment, and a great merit of this volume – in addition to its precision, clarity, and philosophical argumentation – is its economy. Another merit is that beyond explaining the material and formal similarities between Eckhart and Heidegger, Moore helps us see with them the manifold sense of being and the peculiar destiny of human being – a good example of Heideggerian *Mitdenken*.