

Even granting the reservations I mention above, I recommend the book for upper-division (and, possibly, graduate) courses. It is well-informed, relevant, engaging, and entertaining.

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Engaging Heidegger

Richard Capobianco, Foreword by William J. Richardson

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Of the three dozen variations on the meaning of the verb, “to engage” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, certainly the twentieth (9b) befits well this book’s intent—“to secure for oneself.” For *Engaging Heidegger* is first and foremost Richard Capobianco’s masterful achievement of making Heidegger’s question his own. The first two of eight essays take directly Heidegger’s *Seinsfrage* (the question of Being) while the latter six interestingly related topics draw the reader through many of Heidegger’s works in a thorough, informative and careful manner.

Capobianco claims that throughout Heidegger’s work, expressed variously through the years—and not always consistently—Being, *das Sein*, remained his steadfast concern. Being, *das Sein* is “thought in an originary and fundamental way as the temporal-spatial, finite and negated, unconcealing of beings (*Das Seiende*) in their beingness (*die Seiendheit*) as made manifest meaningfully by *Dasein* in language” (34). Whether the texts under discussion occur in the early, middle or later years, terms such as *Ereignis* and *Lichtung* and *Aletheia*, to name a few of the major variations, name Being itself. Capobianco untangles the mass of terminology and the texts in a way that is both enlightening and helpful to students and scholars alike.

Herein lies Capobianco’s talent. He carefully unpacks the above rich definition of *das Sein* and defends it against some who argue either that the terms are not synonymous or that the central question shifted for Heidegger from Being to other matters. The first two chapters are indeed this unfolding. Commencing with a work in the last decade of Heidegger’s life, *Four Seminars* (1951–1973), Capobianco then with precision traces Being in a multitude of Heidegger’s well-known,¹ yet often misconstrued, works. He corrects mistranslations and misunderstandings, not for the sake of correction alone, but always with the central concern of redirecting the focus to Being. The issue, of course, is commentators’ usage of these terms, which often confuse different aspects of the one phenomenon: the ontic—beings in their Being (*Seindes in einem Sein*) and the ontological—Being of beings

(*Sein von Seindem*). The latter is Heidegger's fundamental concern. Ontic variations have been the subject matter for philosophers throughout history.

The basic point of scholarly contention centers on the meaning of *Ereignis* in chapter 2. How are we to understand *Ereignis* in the above distinction? Recent discussion has argued that Heidegger in his use of *Ereignis* from 1960s until 1976 has subordinated the theme of Being. Capobianco assembles texts that illustrate that, on the one hand, *Ereignis* was not used as extensively as some have argued during these years, and on the other hand, when the term was used it was meant to express the temporal spatial expression of Being. Thus, these commentators overextended *Ereignis*' meaning and wrongly folded Being into *Ereignis* as part of its temporal occurrence. Another discussion clarifies a row among scholars; some attempt to undervalue the meaning of both Being and *Ereignis* altogether. These contend that Heidegger was searching for a simpler topic, "what is meaning?" Here too, Capobianco allows the texts to speak for themselves; *Ereignis* is only another name for Being, which is never a thing. While these two dense chapters may seem to some effete, internecine scholarly splitting of hairs, the issue at stake is whether philosophy merely discusses its own house of cards or whether it does indeed discuss what is the case. Both Heidegger and Capobianco, following him with clarity, intend to bring light to this near-opaque discussion.

Skipping ahead to chapters 5 and 6, which examine the metaphor of lighting, we read of *Lichtung*, another term for Being. With the same precision Capobianco looks closely at the ways Heidegger used or could have used this term. *Lichtung*'s first etymological entry in *Duden* shows it as "a thinning out," Heidegger takes full advantage of this sense, from which translators have preserved as "clearing." In these less dense, but still scholarly, chapters Capobianco employs Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* as his source. He inquires why Heidegger in later years shunned the second of the two possible sources, "a making brighter." Capobianco points to the obvious problem—the metaphor of light with Plato's cave, the medieval and modern uses of *lumen naturale* and Western metaphysics misdirect the reader's attention to the ontic. More remarkably, Heidegger illustrates his point in one, deft move: whether it is light or dark, "One can still bump into something in the dark."² Thus, in one, well-crafted sentence he distinguishes the issue at hand; not one of perceptual ability, epistemology or Metaphysics, but the issue at hand is the ontological instead of the ontic, which does not rely on perception. The matter of concern is Being, not beings; or better yet, the Being of beings. Here, even a beginner can appreciate Heidegger's striving to separate what he holds from the Western tradition.

The scholar, too, finds sustenance in these chapters. Evidence in these chapters settles a long-disputed point: *Dasein* is the *Lichtung*. Capobianco traces the source of the problem to *Being and Time*, §28.³ Even the most rigorous of scholars have tripped on this line. Capobianco tracks Heidegger as he adjusts his thinking with the *Kehre*, the "turn." Providing later works

(*Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*) that assist the reader in discerning this shift more cautiously, Capobianco nuances *Being and Time*'s oft quoted line to mean: Dasein is indeed the clearing in one sense, but it is not the clearing properly speaking. Thus, the "turn" is clearly marked (referring to Heidegger I and Heidegger II in William Richardson's famous book, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*), but here it hangs together as a continuity. Why is this important? It illustrates that Heidegger's philosophy is not a humanistic philosophy and that Heidegger's foremost concern was not *Dasein*, but always was Being. *Dasein* moves aside and allows Being to have center stage, so to speak.

This point helps to situate chapters 3 and 4 with their discussion of *Dasein*'s anxiety with his finitude. Rather than presenting a humanistic focus on *Dasein*, Capobianco situates "unheimlich" as, in my term, a "discomfiting" relationship of *Dasein*'s encounter with Being, when *Dasein* sees that it is not in control. This encounter is not characterized as a feeling of fear, for fear latches onto an object, but of "unheimlich," for an object is not present. Here too Capobianco traces Heidegger's shift in understanding of this issue in *Being and Time* to later works, from Angst or Anxiety as the fundamental mood to include those of awe and astonishment. Again, the positive effect of this study draws out both *Kehre* and continuity. Perhaps if one were to reverse the order of these chapters with chapters 5 and 6, this realization—*Kehre* and continuity—could be illuminated more powerfully.

The final chapters engage Heidegger in a slightly different way than the previous six. Chapters 7 and 8 study Heidegger's work in other ways, positioning it in a way that perhaps furthers or extends Heidegger's own reach. Chapter 7 envisions architecture as evinced by *Building Dwelling Thinking*. Imagining the architecture on his own campus of Stonehill College, Capobianco exemplifies *Dasein*'s relationship with Being as offered through a later, and all-too-much-maligned, term of the Fourfold (*das Geviert*). Offering inadequacies of modern and postmodern perspectives, Capobianco builds upon Heidegger's thought in a brief seven pages, but one is left wanting more.

Chapter 8 draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis as a way to explore "negative finitude," the last phrase of Capobianco's definition of Being. Capobianco traces one possible way to envision finitude that moves beyond Aristotle's search for *eudaimonia*, often translated as happiness. The difficulty with happiness and the modern 'bourgeois dream' is that they don't reflect Being—they "both deny the tragic dimension of existence" (137). Capobianco lingers a while on Heidegger's study of *Antigone* and the importance of dwelling on the tragic. The reader does well to listen to its call.

One topic of which I was hoping to read further was a discussion on Heidegger's understanding of language. In language the relationship of Being and *Dasein* comes to fruition. Being calls forth, writes Capobianco, "and even compels from the human being (*Dasein*) a cor-respondence in language that allows both what appears—and appearing itself—to be made

manifest meaningfully” (4; Capobianco’s emphasis). A fuller investigation of this twofold understanding of language as both a Saying of Being and as a correspondence by *Dasein* would have added nicely to the previous chapters as a further way of unfolding Being, and thereby distinguishing both ontic and ontological sides of the phenomenon. While *Aletheia*’s (truth) careful treatment (Being as finite and negative) certainly was offered in chapter 7, nevertheless, language and truth were on several occasions the focal point of Heidegger’s study of *Dasein* and Being, not only in the early and middle years, but most especially in the later years.

Finally, the “Afterword” draws out more poignantly the definition of Being offered early in this review. Specifically Capobianco shows how each chapter highlights particular aspects of his original definition: “the unitary and unifying, temporal-spatial, finite and negative, appearing/emerging/arising of beings in their beingness” (142). Capobianco with finesse and erudition draws out what it means to investigate Heidegger’s meaning of “beings in their beingness” as different aspects of the same phenomenon. In this way Capobianco engages us throughout the book as he engages Heidegger. The book draws us closer to Heidegger’s texts; more importantly *Engaging Heidegger* draws us closer to our ownmost situation, not as *Dasein* as the clearing, but to *Being* which is the clearing most properly. Both students and scholars will find this book helpful and Capobianco an engaging thinker.

Notes

1. These works include, but aren’t exhaustive of, Capobianco’s focus in these two chapters: *Being and Time* (1927), “On the Essence of Ground” (1929), “Introduction to Metaphysics” (1935), *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–1938), *Mindfulness* (1938–1939), “The Overcoming of Metaphysics” (1938–1939), “The History of Being” (1938–1940), *On the Beginning* (1941), *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister”* (1942), *Parmenides* (1942–1943), *What is called Thinking?* (1951–1952), *On the Question of Being* (1956), “Language” (1950), “The Way to Language” (1959), and *Time and Being* (1962).

2. *Zollikoner Seminare*, GA 89:16.

3. GA 2, 177.

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