



The Turn towards Home

Richard Capobianco. *Engaging Heidegger*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. xvi + 182 pp.

I

Capobianco's work is fittingly titled, for it is indeed an engaging treatment of Heidegger. It is furthermore a very fine piece of scholarship that argues for some important claims about Heidegger, with solid grounding in Heidegger's texts and a thorough command of the literature on Heidegger. The work has dual theses: (1) that the "fundamental matter of thought" remains the same for Heidegger through all phases of his work (the question of what Being itself is, as contrasted with the structure and characteristics of beings), and (2) that Heidegger's views on the human existential and phenomenological significance of this question did undergo significant changes, all the same. In both theses Capobianco is delivering challenges to views widely held by prominent Heidegger experts, and he does so with impeccable scholarship and remarkable lucidity and simplicity—qualities rare in writing on this philosopher. I find that he is quite successful in defending his claims, and I am sure that they will be received with great interest and play an important role in the debates about Heidegger. The glowing words of William Richardson in his introductory comments are an indication of this. Richardson is of course one of the oldest and most eminent of Heidegger scholars in the English-speaking world.

Before saying more about the book's arguments, I will say about its style that it is truly a pleasure to read. Excess verbiage is avoided as Capobianco goes right to the heart of the matter. He locates precisely those texts in Heidegger that support a given point, without overloading the text with citations, and offers clear views of the chronological development between texts. He resists the temptation to engage in speculative and pseudo-poetic flights, to which writers on Heidegger so often succumb. Yet he offers his own judicious judgments on very large questions and at times offers criticism of Heidegger, unpretentiously and with persuasive reasoning. Somehow he manages to combine an appreciation of Heidegger's speculative depth with an evaluation that evinces solid common sense and a thoughtful, humane outlook. This by itself

is a most worthy achievement. There is nothing about his approach that smacks of the trendy, even as the prose is eminently readable. Capobianco distances himself from “postmodern” developments in Heidegger-interpretation, although he understands well the motivations for these within Heidegger’s work. He stoops to no tricks in an effort to render Heidegger’s thought other than what Heidegger meant it to be: a serious philosophical reflection on fundamental questions.

Capobianco’s book is unlike any other I have read on Heidegger in that it provides a comprehensive overview of Heidegger’s thought from major early formulations (*Being and Time* and roughly contemporary works) to the very last seminars and publications, while being neither an introduction nor a massively detailed recounting of all the works. It is not an introductory text and assumes that the reader has some basic familiarity with the concepts and arguments of the best-known texts, such as *Being and Time* and *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Yet it does not presume more than basic knowledge, and so it is not addressed only to the Heidegger *cognoscenti*.

Nor does it concern itself with narrowly technical matters, as it seeks to convey what Heidegger means and why it is important in terms that are broad as well as carefully expounded. The book will have Heidegger scholars as its primary readership, but it will also attract the attention of (and be quite helpful to) readers for whom Heidegger is an intriguing but rather baffling or even forbidding figure and about whom they want to have a better grasp. This second group would include bright middle-level or advanced philosophy students as well as teachers and scholars (and some literate non-academics) whose primary interest is not Heidegger and who are not necessarily in philosophy. As the book is not written in a highly technical fashion it will be accessible to readers in a wide range of disciplines—assuming they have already made some first ventures into Heidegger’s thought.

I turn now to the argument of the text. What is novel about Capobianco’s treatment of Heidegger is succinctly stated on pp. x–xi of his introduction. As I already mentioned, Capobianco argues that Heidegger always had the same fundamental phenomenon in view, which the Greeks first espied: Being as the appearing of beings in their beingness (chapter I; Thomas Sheehan is the contemporary scholar who is the target of some pointed but fitting criticism here). He shows that several central terms of Heidegger’s writing have the same meaning as Being (*Sein*), in particular two terms which are quite difficult to translate: *Ereignis* (event, appropriation, or event of appropriation) and *Lichtung* (lighting, clearing). These terms are carefully related to a cluster of conceptions that belong to the account of Being (unconcealing of beings,

emerging of beings, presence etc.). In this area Capobianco shows that this term, which period, does not involve a l Here he takes issue with Ker much of a recently published (*Beiträge zur Philosophie*). In central discussions of content sober, measured, and illumir

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emerging of beings, presencing of beings, freeing of beings, giving of beings, etc.). In this area Capobianco breaks new ground. With respect to *Ereignis* he shows that this term, which comes to prominence in Heidegger's middle period, does not involve a break with the reflection on Being (chapter II). Here he takes issue with Kenneth Maly, who is one of several writers making much of a recently published manuscript of the late 1930s focusing on *Ereignis* (*Beiträge zur Philosophie*). In these first two chapters Capobianco enters into central discussions of contemporary Heidegger scholarship on which he offers sober, measured, and illuminating perspectives.

He offers another subtle account in his close examination of the history of Heidegger's use of the term *Lichtung*, which becomes central to Heidegger's writing only in the 1960s. As Capobianco notes, the term has received scant scholarly attention. Capobianco documents a shift in the term's connotations from "lighting" to "clearing," which shift corresponds to Heidegger's distancing his reflection on Being from the Platonic-Augustinian metaphysics of illumination, to which his early- and middle-period thought is still kindred (chapters V and VI). This is the part of Capobianco's study from which I learned the most, and by itself it would justify the publication of his book. Once again Capobianco argues that Heidegger's thought did not move away from its constant focus on Being, but that the reflection underwent a shift: one toward emphasizing the negative, elusive character of Being as the ground of appearing.

The other chapters discuss this same configuration—constancy of the underlying theme and the change in emphasis—with respect to existential and human implications of Being. These chapters consider Heidegger's move from a stress on human "unsettledness" toward a stress on human being-at-home (chapter III; the discussion of the lectures on Hölderlin's *Ister* is especially thoughtful and interesting here); his move from the centrality of the mood of anxiety (*Angst*) to that of awe and astonishment (chapter IV); the relation of Heidegger's approach to art, especially architecture, as centered dwelling in the richness of place, to the self-centeredness of modernist and the de-centeredness of postmodernist discourses on architecture (chapter VII; Capobianco's description of H. H. Richardson's work as embodying a Heideggerian sort of "de-centered centering" is quite valuable); and Heidegger and Lacan as interpreters of Greek tragedy who affirm human finitude even as they are critics of Greek (especially Aristotelian) notions of prudence and measure (chapter VIII). Along the way Capobianco also offers some interesting suggestions on Heidegger's affinity for East Asian thought (briefly in chapters V and VI), and on Heidegger's enthrallment in his early and middle period to German

romantic, especially Nietzschean, conceptions of heroic rebellion against convention (briefly in chapters IV and VIII).

In all, what the book offers is insightful and new perspectives on the whole issue of Heidegger's development, the so-called "turning" (*Kehre*) in his thought. As he shows, there was indeed a turning—one moving from concentration on human existence (*Dasein*) as the site of the disclosure of Being to the unconcealing-concealing disclosure of Being itself to the human. He offers detailed accounts about shifts in language and in existential themes involved in this turning, such as I have seen discussed nowhere else. But he also demonstrates that the turning constitutes no radical break in, or abandonment of, the guiding reflection on Being.

II

It cannot be missed that Capobianco has utmost admiration for Heidegger. Yet he is able to offer criticism, and well-taken criticism at that. Thus he wonders how the later Heidegger can speak without apparent reservation about the gladness of human dwelling, in light of all that has been said about the darkness of Being, and he takes issue with Heidegger's reading of *Antigone* as failing to note Sophocles' judgment of Antigone's excess in her unbending adherence to her interpretation of the law. It is worthwhile to look more closely at these two criticisms as developed in chapter III ("The Turn towards Home") and chapter VIII ("Limit and Transgression"), respectively. Although Capobianco does not expressly avow it, there is an inner connection between the two. Pursuit of this connection opens up a set of questions that I believe, perhaps not in line with Capobianco's views, will lead beyond Heidegger's thought.

Capobianco, in chapter III, observes that, in important writings of the 1920s and 1930s, Heidegger maintains that *Dasein* is primordially *unheimlich* and *unheimisch*. Noting that Heidegger often plays on the literal sense of "not at home" in *unheimlich*, Capobianco prefers the translations "unsettled" and "unsettledness," for *unheimlich* and *Unheimlichkeit*, to the more common "uncanny" and "uncanniness." The 1925 lecture course *Prolegomena to the History of Time* establishes a tie between unsettledness and anxiety (*Angst*) in the phenomenological analysis of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world that anticipates Division One of *Being and Time* (53). Fear, as the feeling of being threatened by something definite in the environment, is distinguished from anxiety, in which "what threatens us is nothing definite and worldly"; one has the

experience of feeling profound one's most familiar environment anxious about nothing in the transformation of being-in-fundamental phenomenon of being-at-home in flight affirmed for the most part from *Being and Time* describes how "into the at-homeness (*Zuhause*)

Heidegger no longer prioritizes *Metaphysics* but does reprise in the context of his remarks on Sophocles' *Antigone*, where Heidegger notes the authentic human acceptance of Being; "*Da-sein* is the final note, however, is disappearing the familiar and customary, "not surprising," takes the *Dasein*.

Capobianco turns then to the lines of Sophocles in Heidegger's *Antigone*, in which Heidegger's *Dasein* is profoundly at home as saying that "human beings that their care is to become the *deinon* (unsettledness), and is most intimately beloved *deinon* "in the direction of home is now associated with (*Andenken*) of Being, as how through forgetful unsettledness through foreign lands in unsettling dispersal of German finds this commentary confirms truths of being unsettled and its holding that *Dasein* is a necessary passage to "re-

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experience of feeling profoundly “unsettled” as one “no longer feels at home in one’s most familiar environment, the environment closest to one.” *Dasein* is anxious about nothing in the world but about being-in-the-world as such. The transformation of being-in-the-world into “not-at-homeness” is indeed the fundamental phenomenon of *Dasein*, although *Dasein* clings to familiar modes of being-at-home in flight from unsettledness. Thus *Dasein* lets itself be determined for the most part from the world, in terms of worldly beings. Similarly *Being and Time* describes how *Dasein* characteristically flees from its condition “into the at-homeness (*Zuhause*) of the public world” (55).

Heidegger no longer privileges *Angst* in the 1935 lectures *Introduction to Metaphysics* but does reprise the theme of *Dasein*’s not-at-homeness, especially in the context of his remarkable commentary on the first choral ode of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, where Heidegger translates Sophocles’ *deinon* as *unheimlich*. The authentic human accepts, like Antigone, that he or she is without a home in Being; “*Da-sein* is the happening of unsettledness itself” (57). The chorus’s final note, however, is disapproval of the unsettled and daring ones who upset the familiar and customary, whereby the chorus, in a way that Heidegger calls “not surprising,” takes the stance of the average everydayness of inauthentic *Dasein*.

Capobianco turns then to a striking change of approach to the very same lines of Sophocles in Heidegger’s 1942 commentary on Hölderlin’s hymn “*Der Ister*,” in which Heidegger’s thought turns toward “home” and the view that *Dasein* is profoundly at home in Being. Heidegger now interprets Sophocles’ ode as saying that “human beings are, in a singular sense, not at home, and that their care is to become at home” (59). Antigone, who takes upon herself the *deinon* (unsettledness), at the same time exemplifies that which preserves, and is most intimately belonging to, the homely. We must think beyond the *deinon* “in the direction of the homely, the hearth” (60–61). Not-being-at-home is now associated with forgetfulness of Being; thoughtful remembrance (*Andenken*) of Being, as home, completes a journey through “foreign lands,” through forgetful unsettledness among beings. (One wonders: Does wandering through foreign lands in 1942 harbor an echo of the very unsettled and unsettling dispersal of German armies far from the homeland?) Capobianco finds this commentary compelling for its counterplay between the existential truths of being unsettled and returning to home. It shows admirable complexity in holding that *Dasein* experiences “de-centering” amidst the “they-self” as a necessary passage to “re-centering,” the return to being-at-home (62–64).

This depth and subtlety on unsettledness and being-at-home are not sustained in Heidegger’s work of the 1950s and 1960s, Capobianco argues. In

Gelassenheit (1955) and in a talk given on the seventh centennial of the founding of Messkirch (1961), Heidegger characterizes the *unheimlich* as the contemporary domination of the world by calculative thinking, the “thoughtlessness” of contemporary man rather than the fate of *Dasein* as such. “Releasement” toward things and openness to the mystery of Being offer the prospect of a new rootedness, of dwelling at home with Being. Unhomeliness is the defining feature of the modern age that can be overcome by restoring a primordial relation to the Origin. Through meditative thinking “everything is gladdened, everything becomes clear and transparent” (64–67). Capobianco finds this stance flat compared to the account of human duality in the *Ister* commentary, for in that earlier writing the joy of homecoming is tempered with the reminder that “mourning pervades the *Ister*... [I]t pervades the poet himself in his poetic essence” (68–69).

It is instructive to put another line of Capobianco’s criticism next to this one, as he uncovers another limitation of the analysis of *Dasein* in the 1935 (*Introduction to Metaphysics*) reading of *Antigone*. Heidegger’s interpretation shares, with that of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, a concern with compelling modern man to come to terms with finitude, while at the same time both interpreters are “uneasy with a traditional understanding that the ancient Greek notion for limit and measure, *sophrosyne*, is at the core of the message about human existence” (131). They share an enthusiasm for Antigone as the heroic transgressor of convention and custom, as such transgression is a necessary condition for authentic selfhood and creativity (132). In this regard Heidegger’s thought was clearly influenced by German romantic thinking, and especially Nietzsche’s Dionysian critique of the Greek tradition of *sophrosyne* in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Antigone exemplifies *Dasein*’s standing out in *polemos* to confront Being as the awe-inspiring Overpowering. Her disaster, as a creative force, affirms *Dasein*’s greatness, as indeed all creators through their striving become “apolis, without city and place, lonely strange and alien... without statute and limit” (130, 138). But Capobianco notes that Heidegger “conspicuously passes over the passages which would suggest that not just Creon, but Antigone, too, is flawed by excess and lacking measure, balance, and perspective—the life-wisdom—that is ingredient to living a complete and happy life” (134). Against the readings of Heidegger and Lacan (and Nietzsche), Capobianco maintains that the “meaning of the tragedies is very much in keeping with the message of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition: measure, wisdom, *sophrosyne*, *phronesis*, is ‘the best of all our wealth’” (135). On the other side, he adds that in spite of the romantic twist of Heidegger’s thought, “the ethics of authenticity... may celebrate an ethics of transgression,

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Capobianco’s two criticisms move away in the later writing as heroic transgression. As being-at-home in unsettledness as *the* primordial is no longer the most not abandoned. At least in a sense of human life as shadow 1950s, even with the new turn from the gods in the “fourth the affirmation of mortality with which Capobianco represents in terms of accepting mortality and cannot prevent the fall

My suggestion here is that criticism of Heidegger’s apparently single-mindedly focused ontology, Heidegger does not take a moral and political. Thus “in a recovery of classical *sophrosyne* as requirements of the turn to Being through meditations. The rootedness rootedness in a city, in a specific setting for the restored dwelling appear (if they appear the jug, the wine, the plow, disclosure. In sum, one is concerned about the political condition *way* a lack of restraint and meditation, undeniably proof of the technological world.

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but in the end, this is not a transgression of finitude, not a transcendence of a radically finite existence” (139). Antigone manifests nobility in the choice and embrace of death, for the resolute acceptance of this limit is the condition of the possibility of living authentically.

Capobianco’s two criticisms, taken together, seem to imply that Heidegger’s move away in the later writings from the Nietzschean conception of authenticity as heroic transgression remains faithful to affirming the limit of mortality. As being-at-home in the later writing involves a turning away from unsettledness as *the* primordial phenomenon of *Dasein*, as heroic estrangement is no longer the most authentic condition, the concern with finitude is not abandoned. At least in the *Ister* commentary, the turn to home retains the sense of human life as shadowed by mortality. But also in the writing of the 1950s, even with the new tone of gladness, the humans as mortals are set part from the gods in the “fourfold” (*das Geviert*). The question then arises: Does the affirmation of mortality fail to save the later account from the “flatness” with which Capobianco reproaches it? Is it possible that the account of finitude in terms of accepting mortality is not a sufficient approach to the phenomena and cannot prevent the fall from complexity into flatness?

My suggestion here is that it cannot, and at this point I would make a criticism of Heidegger’s approach to finitude not proposed by Capobianco. As single-mindedly focused on the relation of *Dasein* to time, history, and mortality, Heidegger does not address the finitude inherent in human existence as moral and political. Thus “releasement to things” in the later work is not truly a recovery of classical *sophrosyne*, for it does not reflect on measure and *phronesis* as requirements of thought and action in relations between humans. The turn to Being through meditative relation to things supersedes all other considerations. The rootedness in the ancestral home or *Heimat* is not really a rootedness in a city, in a sphere of deliberation and action, but merely the passive setting for the restored relation to Being. Indeed the fellow citizens of this dwelling appear (if they appear at all) as inert fixtures in a pastoral tableau, like the jug, the wine, the plow, the homely things that provide the site for Being’s disclosure. In sum, one is compelled to wonder whether the absence of thought about the political conditions for human being-at-home does not signify *in its way* a lack of restraint and of measure, one that compromises Heidegger’s meditation, undeniably profound, on the overcoming of the “thoughtlessness” of the technological world.

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