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Heidegger's Way of Being by Richard Capobianco

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In Search of the Being-Way

Heidegger's Way of Being by RICHARD CAPOBIANCO

University of Toronto Press, 2014 \$18.95

Reviewed by **BRIAN MCCORMACK**

Richard Capobianco draws on a plethora of texts, many of which are not yet translated into English, to make a very strong argument that Heidegger was consistently focused throughout his career on Being as manifestation. A significant trend in recent Heidegger scholarship (Thomas Sheehan is the primary representative) abandons this question in favor of highlighting human forms of meaning-making. Capobianco argues that doing so severely diminishes both the scope of Heidegger's concern and the value of his critique of subjectivism in the history of philosophy. Heidegger was working against a historically sedimented approach, intensified through the work of Descartes and other early modern philosophers (and ultimately conserved in Husserl), to formulating philosophical problems from the perspective of a subject for whom objects appear:

In other words, from Descartes to Husserl he detected the ascendancy and triumph of the philosophical position that views 'what is' principally in terms of the meaning—constituting or sense-making activity of the human *logos*. It was this decisive turn in modern philosophy to the human *logos*—and to the preoccupation with 'meaning'—that he sought to counter by a decisive return to the question of Being. (4)

Each of the six chapters comprising Capobianco's text show how, throughout his career, Heidegger consistently argued that Being, qua manifestation, is structurally prior to human meaning-making. He illustrates his argument with the example of a Cézanne painting of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Cézanne made many paintings of the same mountain, and commentators are never able to exhaust their interpretation of just one of these works, or of what the work makes possible for interpretation. Being qua manifestation is always "more" than human meaning-making can draw out of it:

Cézanne painted Mont Sainte-Victoire more than sixty times by several accounts, but never once did he think he had exhausted its showing, its manifestation. Similarly, we, in turn, can never say enough about even one of Cézanne's paintings of the mountain! All things show themselves to us and address us—again and again—and they are always more than their sense or meaning. Presence (*Anwesenheit*) always exceeds, overflows, meaning and therefore is not reducible to meaning. *Sein* is not reducible to *Sinn*. (42)

The debate into which Capobianco makes such a strong and engaging contribution addresses the very core of Heidegger's thought itself, but it also concerns the future of the phenomenological approach, including how it might be appropriated in other contexts. Capobianco works primarily to answer the question: which interpretation comes closest to what Heidegger intended? However, the considerable confusion over Heidegger's fundamental position,

exacerbated by Heidegger's writing itself, leads scholars to put the first question into dialogue with a second: which interpretation best enables new work to emerge on the problems that Heidegger was preoccupied with? Finally, it is within the context of these questions that we might look to see what Heidegger and his commentators could offer to contemporary humanistic scholarship on environmental thought and human-animal relations.

The problem with Heidegger's thought, from the perspective of the last question raised above, is that it is anthropocentric. To draw on Heidegger to pursue a non-anthropocentric ecological or animal ethics requires transforming some of the pillars of his philosophy. This is not Capobianco's project, but his astute reading of Heidegger provides a starting point for such work.

Capobianco acknowledges that Heidegger was wrong in his estimation of animals, and he opens the door to a reconfiguration of Heidegger that invites other nonhumans into the open. But doing so might radically alter what Dasein is in its relations both to Being itself as well as to other beings. Dasein is defined by the unique ability to derive meaning from Being. If nonhumans are also able to make meaningful worlds for themselves, would this not fundamentally change the nature of Dasein and, by extension, Being itself?

Capobianco does not underscore just how radically Heidegger's thought is invested in an anthropocentric perspective. In the following quote, he presents an intractable problem, the centrality of Dasein to Being, as a mere oversight that can be amended:

We are the 'bearers of tidings' in the originary sense of this English

expression. 'Tiding' originally meant 'a happening, an event, an occurrence,' and we bear, we bring, to all—we announce—this most marvellous happening (*Ereignis*) of all beings and things. And yet not only by us, it is reasonable to think. (97)

Capobianco presents Heidegger as a meditative thinker. Meaning, as Heidegger sees it, should be understood as a provisional response to Being and not as a performance or achievement. Capobianco highlights the importance of the *lethe* of Being, that which never is revealed to us and which keeps us humble and unsure before Being. Dasein is purported to be uniquely endowed with the capacity to look at a landscape and see the primordial unfolding of Nature (itself a pseudonym for Being in Capobianco's estimation) that underlies and brings forth all things, tuning into this process of coming to presence and passing away and harmonizing with it somehow. But in what sense is Nature holistic? In what sense is the relationship between Dasein and Nature harmonious? Finally, who is best positioned to 'see' this primordial Nature?

The unique relationship between Dasein and Being suggests that a Heideggerian environmental humanities of the future may only be possible on the basis of a radically critical engagement with his work. Capobianco's text, through a rigorous and patient explication of Heidegger's central concern, points the way down such a path: "*Physis* opens us so we may open up a world of meaning. The core matter for Heidegger—and for those inclined to his thinking—is that *physis* is the measure, not Dasein" (63).

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