



Book Review

The Weirdness of Being

Ivo De Gennaro (2013). *The Weirdness of Being: Heidegger's Unheard Answer to the Seinsfrage*. Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing.

Hard Cover (194 pages). ISBN: 978-1844655595

Cost: £45.40 (USA \$90.00)

by **Rafael Winkler**

Ivo de Gennaro's *The Weirdness of Being: Heidegger's Unheard Answer to the Seinsfrage* is a difficult book to read. This is due primarily to two aspects of the author's approach.

In the first place, De Gennaro engages with Heidegger's later works and with those of his middle period. He thus approaches the works of the early period from that perspective – without, however, adopting the cautionary and critical distance to Heidegger's language which, in a commentary on Heidegger, seems to be necessary, at least in order to make itself intelligible to the uninitiated reader. Of course, this may not have been the author's intended audience. Nevertheless, the author's language seems at times to be unwieldy even for the initiate.

Secondly, and relatedly, the author is very much concerned in this book with the question of how to translate and interpret some of Heidegger's key words into English so as to convey Heidegger's creative linguistic gestures – that is, the way Heidegger frees up possible ways of thinking and experiencing the relation between man and being (understood as the event of world-disclosure) in his interpretation and appropriation of certain words from the pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Kant, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and so forth. But it is not clear that such creative gestures can be conveyed in the manner De Gennaro intends, namely

by stretching the boundaries of the syntactic and semantic structure of the English language in linking together idiosyncratic neologisms in sentences.

To be sure, the author is not unaware of the difficulty of his prose. As he writes in the Preface, the chapters are “attempts [that] speak from the weirdness of the word that belongs to no language, in that any mother-language owns this word as such – [they are attempts that] let the weirdness of being resound in English” (p. xiv). Thus, the author is concerned with, in Chapter 1, the question of how to translate into English the concept of possibility in Heidegger (pp. 15-26); in Chapter 2, Heidegger's use in the *Contributions to Philosophy* (pp. 34-42) of the archaic forms of the words denoting being (*Sein*) and history (*Geschichte*); in Chapter 3, Heidegger's concept of difference (*Unterschied*) (pp. 53-54); in Chapter 4, the meaning of *Dasein* in Husserl and Heidegger; and, in Chapter 5, the words essence (*Wesen*), *Da-sein*, and *Aufmerksamkeit*.

It can hardly be denied that, throughout his works, Heidegger, like a poet, exhibits not only an extreme vigilance to the manifold historical contexts in which the words he uses have resonated, but also an infinite devotion and care to highlight this history by laying out the kind of experiences of disclosure that have endowed these words with their meaning. In other

words, Heidegger does not indulge in word-mysticism when he presents the etymology of some of the words he uses. The etymology of the word 'answesen', for example, which ordinarily means possessions, but which also includes the senses of being and of the present, offers no 'proof' in Heidegger's eyes that being has always been understood by reference to time or to the temporal mode of the present. After all, etymology is an empirical discipline, and for that reason it cannot tell in favour of or against a phenomenological-ontological thesis such as that being is understood on the basis of time. It can at best illustrate such a thesis, or translate it into a particular linguistic environment. Indeed, the fact that the etymology of *aletheia* shows that this word did not carry the sense of disclosure for the Greeks, as Heidegger acknowledges in *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, in no way contradicts his thesis that the notion of truth as correctness presupposes the event of world-

disclosure.

Etymology, for Heidegger in the 1930s and thereafter, seems to be a means at the disposal of what he will later call a "phenomenology of the inapparent", which amounts to a description of those linguistic and non-linguistic experiences in which the disclosure of entities manifests itself – a disclosure that manifests itself precisely as something that is not in turn disclosed or apparent. When reading Heidegger's middle and later works, it is admittedly not always easy to distinguish between the archaeological work of excavating the root of words for its own sake and the work of thought that brings language back to the phenomenological origins in which it takes root. Although De Gennaro's "attempts" in his book are certainly worthy philosophical pursuits and endeavours, the effective realization of these "attempts" in each chapter sometimes seems to fall under the former category.

Referencing Format

Winkler, R. (2014). The weirdness of being [Review of the book *The weirdness of being: Heidegger's unheard answer to the Seinsfrage*, by Ivo De Gennaro]. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 14(2), 2 pp. doi: 10.2989/IPJP.2014.14.2.7.1246

About the Author



Rafael Winkler is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. His areas of specialisation include 19th and 20th century European philosophy, phenomenology, Heidegger, Husserl, Nietzsche, Bergson, Hegel, Kant, and Aristotle. His areas of competence include German idealism, early modern philosophy and contemporary epistemology.

E-mail address: rwinkler@uj.ac.za

References

- Heidegger, M. (1977). The end of philosophy and the task of thinking. In D. F. Krell (Ed. & Trans.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic writings* (pp. 373–392). New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1969)
- Heidegger, M. (1999). *Contributions to philosophy* (P. Emad, Trans.). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. (Original work written 1936–1938 and published 1989)