

Das Denken Martin Heideggers

III 1

herausgegeben von
Hans-Christian Günther



Heidegger and
Kant

Frank Schalow

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In order to get into this dimension of philosophizing, which is not a matter for a learned discussion, but rather is a matter about which the individual philosopher does not know and which is a task to which the philosopher has submitted himself, this setting free of Dasein in the human being must be the sole and central [thing] which philosophy as philosophizing must perform.

Um in diese Dimension des Philosophierens hineinzukommen, was keine Sache einer gelehrten Diskussion ist, sondern eine Sache, über die der einzelne Philosoph nichts weiß, und die eine Aufgabe ist, der der Philosoph sich zu beugen hat, muß diese Befreiung des Daseins im Menschen das Einzige und Zentrale sein, was Philosophie als Philosophieren leisten kann.

—Martin Heidegger

“Davoser Disputation”

Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik, p. 285

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§ 1 Introduction

Whatever controversies may overshadow Martin Heidegger's thought today, his creative and provocative encounter (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Immanuel Kant's Critical philosophy stands out as one of the greatest philosophical achievements of the past century. Perhaps what is most telling is that Heidegger's dialogue with his German predecessor admits both rebirth and reinvention, suggesting that as a path of thinking (*Denkweg*) it can be re-opened in new and diverse ways, rather than closed-off in finality. Moreover, we find that Heidegger confronts many challenges posed by Critical philosophy at several key junctures over the entire span of his philosophical life. Thus, the Heidegger-Kant dialogue affords us a unique glimpse into the development of philosophy as a historical enterprise and the expanding horizons for re-asking the most perennial of all philosophical questions, i.e., the question of being (*die Seinsfrage*).

In order to develop a dialogue or reciprocal rejoinder (*Erwiderung*) with Kant, Heidegger must traverse a historical gulf that both separates the two thinkers and makes the similarities between them a fruitful source of philosophical discussion. That gulf creates a terminological disparity that Heidegger must first overcome in order to address Kant's thinking and otherwise seek to appropriate his insights into a new way. The irony is that Kant was among the first modern philosophers to develop a complex and uniquely technical lexicon. By the same token, Heidegger proceeds to an even deeper level of complexity to develop a groundbreaking vocabulary, which stretches the limits of the German idiom in order to reanimate the most perennial of all philosophical questions from its inception in the Greeks. Yet the terminological differences between the two thinkers cannot simply be resolved semantically, because they also pertain to the thematic issues that shape each philosopher's project and the methodological innovations that mark a sharp break with the status quo of the philosophical tradition. Thus, the controversy that sparks this dialogue is ultimately waged on a methodological as well as a thematic front. While much of the scholarship on this topic centers on the latter, only by addressing the former can we fully appreciate the intricacies of Heidegger's appropriation of Kant's Critical philosophy. Kant's legacy in opening forth a distinctive philosophical epoch hangs in the balance, not because his importance in the history of philosophy is in any way in doubt, but because only by rising to the challenge of deconstructing his philosophy from its deepest roots can Heidegger uncover the directive (*Weisung*) to recast and radicalize his project anew.

The actual design or “architectonic” of Kant’s critical enterprise—not simply his three major works taken alone—may actually have greater importance to unfolding the possibilities of Heidegger’s appropriation of the former’s philosophy than may first appear. That architectonic suggests a linear development in the organization of philosophical themes, that is, in a way that is congruent with a system. Yet, as far back as his 1923 lecture-course, Heidegger draws a sharp division between the development of a system according to a plan of dialectic and a hermeneutics of facticity; he suggests that any blending of the two is similar to mixing “fire and water.”¹ As outlined four years later in *Being and Time*, Heidegger proposes a hermeneutic strategy that expands the horizon of understanding through an inquiry which advances forward by returning to explicate its initial (and guiding) presuppositions. The circular orbit of such a philosophical inquiry, or hermeneutic circle, provides a new linchpin for developing a science of being. We will follow through on the hermeneutic pathway that Heidegger forges, in order to make explicit how this strategy undercuts the formal organization of Kant’s three *Critiques*. The architectonic of Kant’s system is displaced by a circular dynamic that interweaves his three major works into an interpretive whole. In the simplest terms, what initially appears to be an afterthought in Kant’s transcendental inquiry will instead re-emerge as the presupposition of his project. By harboring the nascent concern for language, Kant’s third *Critique* will yield the prototypical point of departure, the guiding precept for his entire project. Through a destructive-retrieval of imagination, the concern for language that is initially hidden in Kant’s account of art in the *Critique of Judgment* will reappear as the linguistic premise on which the self-reflexivity of his “tribunal” of pure reason hinges.

Thus far, I have referred to Kant’s Critical philosophy only in general terms. But to do so only begs the question of the scope of Heidegger’s appropriation of Kant’s thought. For in its barest outline the Critical philosophy includes the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the *Critique of Judgment*. Most of the writings that Heidegger devoted to Kant’s thinking center on the first *Critique*, particularly the portions of the Transcendental Analytic emphasizing Kant’s account of schematism and the temporal ground of imagination. In selecting which of Kant’s texts to address, as well as how to approach them, a decision (*Entscheidung*) is implicitly already in play. This decision is mediated by the historical epoch that Heidegger projects-open

¹ Heidegger, *Ontologie: Hermeneutik der Faktizität*, GA 63 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), p. 42. See Frank Schalow, “The Thread of Imagination in Heidegger’s Retrieval of Kant: The Play of a Double Hermeneutic,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Phenomenology*, ed. Cynthia D. Coe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021): Chapter 23.

through his innovative interpretations, but which also yields further horizons to access what remains unthought (in these texts).²

In re-opening Heidegger's dialogue with Kant, we need to consider not only the former's specific writings on the latter's thought, but also what is implied in the overall strategy by which he undertakes a destructive-retrieval of Critical philosophy. Conversely, reassessing that strategy requires that we weigh once again the ramifications of Heidegger's decision to engage Kant in a dialogue, and that involves exploring whether only "marginal" concerns, if not divergences and omissions, can forge a new pathway for extending the *Aus-einandersetzung* between these two great thinkers. For example, Heidegger's discussion of practical reason in his monumental work, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929), takes up only four pages.³ But when coupled with his lecture-course from the Summer Semester of 1930 (*Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*),⁴ which is devoted to addressing freedom as the ground of moral praxis, the possibility of a destructive-retrieval of the Kantian ethic enters the forefront of the dialogue.

Another case in point involves Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and its role in providing a linchpin to Kant's other major writings. Despite acknowledging the importance of Kant's treatment of the imagination in that text, Heidegger makes references to this text. Yet, precisely because of its subordinate role, the third *Critique* may mirror the development of Kant's overall project, thereby highlighting themes marginalized in his other major texts (e.g., affectivity and embodiment, language and communicability). Thus, when examined anew according to the strategy that Heidegger implements in his dialogue with Kant, the third *Critique* may very well provide an *alternative inroad* to access what remains unthought in his Critical philosophy.

The architectonic of Kant's philosophy follows three guiding questions—yielding each of the three inquiries of the Critical philosophy—that are unified in a fourth:

1. What can I know?
2. What should I do?
3. What may I hope?

² See George Kovacs, "The Unthought at the Limit of Heidegger's Thought." *Existentialia*, 17/5-7 (2007): 337-353.

³ Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, GA 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991), pp. 156-160; *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 109-112.

⁴ Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit: Einleitung in die Philosophie*, GA 31 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1982), pp. 291-296; *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 198-201.

4. What is the human being?⁵

The fourth question points to the centrality of human finitude as the cornerstone of all metaphysical inquiry. Heidegger, however, transforms this fourth question in terms of the key precepts of his hermeneutic inquiry. He preserves the focus on human finitude, but changes the arc of that inquiry by emphasizing the circular implication between the inquirer (e.g., human existence as *Da-sein*) and what is inquired into (e.g., being), Heidegger re-opens Kant's concern for metaphysics as a "natural disposition" of human reason⁶ within the space of the inquirer's self-questioning of his/her own *ek-sistence* (*Ek-sistenz*) Heidegger thereby transforms the generic concern for "man" (*Mensch*) into the self-referential enigma of "*who* (*Wer*) is *Da-sein*?" With this subtle transposition, Heidegger takes the first step along a lengthy pathway (*Denkweg*), in order to supplant the linear development of Kant's architectonic by the circular unfolding of his hermeneutic project. On Heidegger's side, the challenge lies in outlining a more original and comprehensive horizon of inquiry, which can gather together the separate parts of Kant's philosophy, or each of the three *Critiques*, and establish their relevance for re-enacting the circular implication between the inquiry into human existence and the question of being (*die Seinsfrage*). In this "overthrow" of Kant's architectonic, the sequential ordering of the three *Critiques* may be inverted, allowing the "third" (*Critique*) to re-establish the presuppositions of the "first" and the "second" *Critiques*. This methodological transformation begins to shake the roots of Kant's philosophy, thereby setting in motion Heidegger's task of a destructive-retrieval of what is "unthought" in the Kantian project, most notably, the creative power of imagination.

But how do we bring this unthought dimension to the forefront without succumbing to arbitrariness in the attempt to follow through on the revolutionary implications of Heidegger's destructive-retrieval of Kant's philosophy? To succeed in this task, we must formulate specific hermeneutic guidelines by which the key motifs of Kant's thinking can be transposed into a new philosophical horizon, and, conversely, the extension and deepening of this new insight (forged on the cusp of the *Auseinandersetzung* between these two great thinkers) reciprocally alter the historical trajectory of Heidegger's own inquiry into being.⁷ A hermeneutic guideline brings what is unthought to the forefront of the interpretation, in order to reprioritize the key motifs of Kant's thinking.

⁵ Kant, *Logik*, AA (*Akademie Ausgabe*) 9, p. 42; *Logic*, trans. Robert Hartmann and Wolfgang Schwarz (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1974), p. 46. See GA 3, p. 207; tr. 145.

⁶ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 22.

⁷ See Frank Schalow, "Heidegger and Kant in Conversation: The Search for a Hermeneutic Guideline," *Existentialia*, 22/3-4 (2012): 338-348.