

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Questioning Martin Heidegger: On Western Metaphysics, Bhuddhist Ethics, and the Fate of the Sentient Earth

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In this interesting book, Eric Meyer refers to Heidegger's *Overcoming Metaphysics* (1936-1946) as providing a decisive turning-point in his thinking and break with the typical western metaphysical tradition and its emphasis on subjectivity. Protagoras provided the early impetus for the tradition by making a human being "the measure of all things." The position reached its zenith in Hegel and Nietzsche as the apotheosis of the absolute metaphysical subject. Even Heidegger saw the human being as the subject of philosophy early on in his *Being and Time* (1927) in analyzing *Dasein* as uniquely related to *Sein* (Being), subordinating all the rest of the cosmos to itself, viewing things as instruments or 'ready-to-hand' (*griffbereit, zuhanden*), and creating a dichotomy between thinking (epistemology) and being (ontology), which so characterizes all of western metaphysics. However, Meyer sees Heidegger as moving away from this early viewpoint in *Overcoming Metaphysics* by recognizing that the 'subjectification' of western technology is perverting the ancient Greek notion of *technē* and annihilating the planet through its 'machination' and 'enframing' (*Gestellen*). Meyer believes this 'turn' in Heidegger represented a 'scathing critique' of the Nazi regime and constituted a decisive break with his former allegiance, although "slightly disguised as a scholarly critique of 'Western technology' as 'completed metaphysics' or 'completed nihilism'" (xxviii). Meyer hopes his analysis will help exculpate the image of Heidegger from the incessant criticism of recent years, which basically ignores this work in accenting Heidegger's complicity with the Nazis. Meyer is certainly correct about this emerging theme in Heidegger and its importance in challenging Nazi (and western) subject-ification or the 'will to will' in dominating and consuming all of life around it; and yet, Heidegger never connects the dots so clearly as Meyer and ever remains outside the world of unambiguous meaning, with his propensity toward elliptical or circular questioning and deferral of definitive answers—just as Meyer admits on certain occasions in his treatment. Heidegger always postpones the *eschaton* for another multifaceted view of the issue and finds it difficult to leave the ambiguity

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and the dialectic with subject-ification behind for a clear denunciation of the Nazis or even the Holocaust in the post-war era. If *Overcoming Metaphysics* is an indictment of the Nazis, it is only in an indirect manner through its criticism of the entire metaphysical tradition of the west and its abuse of *technē*. In fact, Heidegger explicitly says that the work is not discriminating between nations, leaders, people, war, or peace in its indictment of western technology. (The *Schwarze Hefte* seem to confirm this interpretation.)

Meyer wants to merge Heidegger's later concept with eastern thought, like the "Mahayana Buddhist 'original mind' or Zen Buddhist 'no mind'" (159), where the self of western metaphysics and its destructive tendencies are emptied and voided in an ultimate nothingness. He says that eastern thought lives beyond the western dichotomies of subject/object, being/nonbeing, and existence/essence. It merges being and thinking, ontology and epistemology, and subject and object together with what Heidegger called the 'thinking of Being' in recognizing the sentient nature of the entire cosmos, not just human beings. It turns humanity from the lord of all creation to a shepherd, who must draw near to the whole sentient earth as a 'being-in-the-world' and take care of it. Meyer recognizes this eastern-type of emphasis in the later Heidegger as a vital imperative for the survival of us all in the west (and the east) and warns us against an impending ecological disaster to indigenous species, rainforests, and the entire biosphere if a new concept of *Dasein* does not e-merge and merge its being with the cosmos. Meyer is more zealous in his advocacy than Heidegger and demands conscientious activity of his audience in wanting to change the world and offset the imminent disaster. Heidegger is waiting for the 'turn' (*die Wende* or *die Kehre*) to come in a more passive manner through a personal 'lightning flash' or an apocalyptic manifestation of Being in the world at large, as if looking like some Christian for grace or help from the heavens to resolve the issue. Meyer rejects this western metaphysical hope in a future event or transcendent Being and prefers to put the onus on us to discover our Buddha nature and get to work fixing the problems.

Overall, Meyer's study makes an important contribution to the understanding of a crucial theme in the later work of Heidegger. It might take some license in overemphasizing its importance and negating other, Nazi-like elements that remain a part of Heidegger's thought and career; it might overstate its own ecological/eastern perspective in the process of interpreting Heidegger's world and resolving our own problems, but its interpretive zeal and consistent apologia also provide a significant context for developing insight into Heidegger's thinking and a necessary corrective for those who are unable to find this perspective in his writings—a perspective that clearly proceeds away from the subjective or voluntaristic appetites of the Nazis' will to power. Meyer is a master of his subject. His work is steeped in the writings of Heidegger and able to participate and relate its style, texture, and complexity: the self-questioning, the self-criticism, the polysemous and antithetical meanings, and the play on words, often mimicking his style and making it accessible for an English audience in a clear and lucid manner. Meyer is also steeped in the canon of western and eastern philosophers and able to draw many interesting comparisons and contrasts in situating his discussion of the subject within a larger perspective. His individual paragraphs are somewhat reminiscent of Nietzsche's work, often self-contained and complete in discussing a topic, sometimes containing a whole book in just a few words. The text has a few problems with transcribing Greek and German words,

leaving out diacritical markings and interchanging xi for sigma at the end of some words, but outside of these minor infelicities, the work displays few typos and is a pleasure to read.

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