

*Heidegger's Way of Thought:
Critical and Interpretative Signposts*

Theodor Kisiel

Edited by Alfred Denker and Marion Heinz

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Roping In Heidegger – Philologically Speaking.

This collection of nine essays by Theodore Kisiel is in many ways a companion to his opus *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (1993). The nine essays span more than two decades beginning with the earliest in 1973 (“The Mathematical and the Hermeneutical: On Heidegger’s Notion of the Apriori”) and ending with the latest in 1997 (“The New Translation of *Sein und Zeit*: A Grammatological Lexographer’s Commentary”). The only essay that does not deal with “the Genesis Story” of *Being and Time* is the 1973 essay mentioned above.

The title of this collection is reminiscent, of course, of Otto Poeggeler’s major work on Heidegger in 1963 entitled *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers (Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking)*. The focus of Poeggeler’s work was on understanding Heidegger’s thought and its development, not on the philosopher’s political engagement with National Socialism. Poeggeler has addressed the question of Heidegger’s political involvement in numerous subsequent essays and, thus, has moved from an earlier position of immanent criticism to a more balanced one.

The conflict in Heidegger’s reception has been mainly between Heidegger sympathizers and Heidegger detractors. Those sympathetic to the importance of Heidegger’s thought rely for the most part on the position of immanent criticism while detractors rely primarily on uncovering the factual circumstances of Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism in newspapers, speeches, letters, texts, and quotations from colleagues. This conflict, however, has been based on a false dilemma fueled by political and ideological fears on both sides: sympathizers fear that an emphasis on Heidegger’s relationship to Nazism will result in diminishing the importance of his entire thought which they believe ultimately goes beyond Nazism, and, thus, they tend to favor imma-

nent criticism. Detractors fear that an emphasis on immanent criticism will minimize the extent of his factual political involvement and hide aspects of his entire philosophy that may be “nazified.”

This is a false dilemma because both “sides” are needed in order to make a fair assessment of Heidegger. Both sides have their own form of blindness which the other side can correct: immanent criticism is blind if it will not take up the full factual case against Heidegger, not to mention his silence on the Holocaust. Assessments made on the basis of the factual political case are blind if they are unwilling to interpret those facts within the full context of Heidegger’s thought. In other words, we have to be empirically demanding, politically savvy, and philosophically learned when it comes to assessing the case of Heidegger.

What I mean by saying that both “sides” need each other is the following: on the one hand, detractors such as Farias and Ott need immanent criticism because the facts gathered about Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism still need to be interpreted in the context of Heidegger’s thought. If aspects of Heidegger’s thought are “nazified,” then his factual involvement must be explicated fully in relation to his philosophy. How else are we going to determine the extent to which his thought may be influenced by Nazi ideology? Both Farias and Ott, however, fail miserably in their attempts to interpret the political Heidegger in the context of his thought.

On the other hand, immanent critics such as Beda Allemann in his essay “Martin Heidegger und die Politik” (“Martin Heidegger and Politics”) use the following principle: when we begin to understand the philosopher better than he understood himself, then the philosophical as well as the ideological assumptions by the author, intended and unintended, will rise to the surface [*Heidegger*, ed. Otto Poeggeler (Koeln and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969), 260]. This assumes that there may be values and prejudices lodged in his political involvement which do not find expression in his philosophical thought. Thus, immanent criticism needs to take up the most extensive reliable argument that can be made regarding Heidegger’s political involvement in order to test intended and unintended ideological assumptions that emerge in the context of his thought.

We are at an important crossroad in the reception of Heidegger where both sides are recognizing the need for the other. Ruediger Safranski’s intellectual biography of Heidegger is a more balanced ap-

proach, but he, too, is not skilled enough philosophically to determine which aspects of Heidegger's alleged Nazism belong to his philosophical thinking and which do not.

So how does Kisiel's work figure in this crossroad in the reception of Heidegger? First, Kisiel's work is all about getting Heidegger right – factually, politically, and philosophically. Kisiel's position is that both sides forget that their arguments depend on the reliability of manuscripts and the transcription of manuscripts, on the reliability of an accurate chronology as well as an accurate biography. In this sense, Kisiel is holding the feet of both sides to the fire in his demand that they first establish sources with philological rigor. Like Hölderlin's poetry, there is no easy way to get Heidegger right other than through the long, arduous “donkey-work” of philological scholarship. Kisiel's archival work at Marbach with regard to the transcription of manuscripts is astounding. The richness of this collection of essays related to the genesis of *Sein und Zeit* is a tribute to that work. Kisiel has taken the time, much time, to begin this arduous task and has made a remarkable effort to get it right on both sides. Heidegger scholarship after Genesis and this collection of essays will never be quite the same. No doubt, Heidegger scholarship will continue in his footsteps; it will affirm, revise, and add to this remarkable effort.

Having said that, however, I do have some critical comments. First, a comment on what the editors refer to as the basis for selecting and ordering the essays in the volume. They say that selection “is based on Kisiel's own hermeneutical principles (biography, chronology, doxography) . . . We have not ordered them chronologically but in such a way that they follow Heidegger's path of thinking” (*Heidegger's Way*, viii). I see the basis for selecting the essays; that is, these are the best essays that exemplify Kisiel's use of “the traditional principles of hermeneutics” (*Heidegger's Way*, vi). What escapes me is the basis for ordering the essays. The first essay is on Heidegger's political involvement with National Socialism. How does this follow Heidegger's path of thinking? It seems to suggest that there may be a proto-Nazism from the beginning in Heidegger's thought. This is supported by Kisiel's statement that “In view of the grave charges mounted against the very essence of Heidegger's thought since Farias, one can no longer restrict the examination of its political implications merely to the works from 1933 on. One must also become sensitive to the seeds of the tares of nazisms

latent at the very roots of this philosophy" (*Heidegger's Way*, 25). This would also place Kisiel's methodology for a philosophical biography under suspicion insofar as he appropriates Heidegger's process of the hermeneutics of facticity as his own which may turn out to be "nazified" (more on Kisiel's philosophical biography below).

Second, I have some difficulties with what the editors call Kisiel's hermeneutic approach. The editors in their foreword emphasize how Kisiel has reintroduced the traditional principles of hermeneutics (philology) to his research and state these principles to be biography, chronology, and doxography. I have no problem with chronology and doxography; Kisiel deserves high praise for maintaining precise philological standards in his transcriptions of Heidegger's manuscripts. The problem I have is with biography. Initially, the editors include biography as one of the traditional principles Kisiel uses, but then they go on to describe this "biography" in terms of Heidegger's "early 'hermeneutics of facticity'" (*Heidegger's Way*, vi). The latter, however, no longer understands biography simply as a traditional aid to scholarship. Kisiel stretches the term until it breaks from its traditional hermeneutical moorings.

This is clearly evident in his first essay entitled "Heidegger's Apology: Biography as Philosophy and Ideology," originally published in 1991. The editors say that "This careful essay typifies Kisiel's hermeneutical approach" (*Heidegger's Way*, viii). I suspect that the editors are referring to Kisiel's use of philology. But the essay goes far beyond traditional hermeneutics. Let the reader be aware: what Kisiel is doing in his first essay is no longer akin to doxography and chronology; biography in this essay is not simply the factual determination of events in an author's life.

Indeed, what Kisiel proposes in "Heidegger's Apology" is a philosophical biography, an animal radically different from its pale traditional philological counterpart. Thus, the essay is an attempt to transform traditional biography into the early Heidegger's own process of "biographizing" as a hermeneutics of facticity. Using Heidegger's own notion of "an 'ontic ideal of authentic existence'" (*Heidegger's Way*, 2) from *Being and Time* as a guide, Kisiel selects the story of Socrates' *Apology*. This story of Socrates' self-defense is a "narrative argument," a "Wisdom Story," "a story in which autobiography itself becomes philosophy" [autobiography or Plato's biography?] and thus "provides us

with a striking parallel to the ongoing story of the Heidegger case” (*Heidegger’s Way*, 2). He even touts this philosophical biography “as a way of resolving the most crucial question in that case: Do Heidegger’s political engagements mean that his thought is at bottom an expression of one of the most destructive ideologies of this century” (*Heidegger’s Way*, 2)?

The “striking parallel” between Socrates’ *Apology* and the Heidegger case in terms of philosophical biography is stimulating and provocative: both men living their lives as forms of philosophizing to the point that Kisiel talks about “the fusion of life and thought” (*Heidegger’s Way*, 24) and also the “diahermeneutics” at the end of Kisiel’s essay on Heidegger and Emil Lask (*Heidegger’s Way*, 136). I, for one, hope that Kisiel will follow up his “Notes toward a philosophical biography” (the penultimate section of “Heidegger’s Apology”) with a full-blown version of it – if he can find that “new fiction” which will allow for the “creative use of biography to promote thought” (*Heidegger’s Way*, 11, 11-12).

I will close with a few issues I find troubling about this “striking parallel.” First, is what Socrates practices really parallel to what the early Heidegger calls the hermeneutics of facticity? Is Socrates’ procedure in his narrative really a hermeneutics that practices a radical *Abbau* as Heidegger understands it in terms of deconstructing one’s own presuppositions? I think not. Kisiel cites Heidegger’s letter to Karl Loewith of 19 August 1921 to support the “ontic founding of ontology” and, more importantly, the “an-archic sense of the philosophical community” (*Heidegger’s Way*, 14,15). I do not find that radical an-archic sense in Socrates. After all, Socrates is arguing “before Apollo, the tribunal of Truth” (*Heidegger’s Way*, 35). Truth here, especially with a capital T, would hardly be amenable to a radical *Abbau*, not to mention an an-archic philosophical community.

Second, the ontic ideal Kisiel choses is one that Heidegger did not follow. In Socrates’ narrative, autobiography becomes philosophy; when Heidegger was “on trial,” he did not choose to share how his autobiography was a philosophizing in relation to Nazism. But is Socrates’ narrative really autobiography? After all, Plato wrote it, and it is his version of Socrates’ autobiography as philosophy. Furthermore, there is very little we have to go on in terms of an independent verification of the factual Socrates. A closer parallel to Socrates’ *Apology* would have been a Heidegger sympathizer’s version of the dialogue between Heidegger and

the de-nazification committee.

Finally, although I agree with Kisiel that there is a strong sense in which Heidegger lived his philosophizing and that this is fertile ground for a philosophical biography, I believe Kisiel's focus on the early Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity reduces Heidegger's later thought to the solution offered in *Being and Time*. We mustn't forget, however, that Heidegger regarded *Being and Time* as a failure of sorts.

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