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Review of George Kovacs, *Thinking and Be-ing in Heidegger's Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2015; pp. 477.

In this review, I will not only summarize and evaluate George Kovacs' recent contribution to Heidegger studies, but will also raise a question as to the future direction of that enterprise.¹ In this respect, the emphasis and overall hermeneutic thrust of Kovacs' attempt to decipher *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* helps to provide some possible orientation and directive. "Thus, one should recognize that it would be a mistake to simply conceptualize and re-systematize Heidegger's insights, the open and free play of moves and ventures of his journey of thought. Everyday habits of thought and conceptual structures lead to the obstruction, not to the opening up, of the language and experience of thinking" (p. 67).² At the conclusion of my review, I will return to consider the import of this "formal indicator" as a guideline to reinterpret Heidegger's thinking.

I.

Throughout his lengthy career, George Kovacs has consistently and steadfastly provided penetrating and cogent hermeneutic accounts of Heidegger's writings, not to mention lucid interpretations of a wide spectrum of other European thinkers from Viktor Frankl to Albert Camus. Indeed, among contemporary scholars, Kovacs stands out through his vigilance in allowing the originality of Heidegger's texts to speak, on the one hand, and, on the other, eliciting the key distinctions by which the grounding-words (*Grundworte*) of his thinking can resonate in a new way. In *Thinking and Be-ing in Heidegger's Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Kovacs explores perhaps Heidegger's most arduous and provocative text, *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*. In the process, Kovacs seeks to project-open the horizon of inquiry that pervades this monumental text, while giving voice to the language of Heidegger's being-historical thinking as such. As Kovacs states in the "Preface":

¹ A complementary and expanded version of this review will appear under the title "Time, Be-ing, and Enowning: Re-enacting the Thinking of *Beiträge*," in *Heidegger Studies*, 33 (2017).

² Kovacs employs the "capitalized" form of "Being" and "Be-ing" for the corresponding German terms, "*Sein*" and "*Seyn*," respectively, and thus I will follow his translation in this review. I will cite passages from his book in parenthesis.

This study, grounded in comprehensive, focused research, traces an experience of learning with and from *Beiträge...*[is] my attempt to rediscover and thus to wonder about thinking and “to be.” It is a hermeneutic labor in contending with this unique and endurance-testing “text,” in becoming attuned to the main “matter” or central issue at stake in it, to what is arguably the most worthy and troubling of all questions, to the question of “to be,” to the beckonings and language of Be-ing (p. 11).

Kovacs’s book is both lengthy and detailed, as we might expect in any serious and steadfast attempt to confront as formidable, and, in some respects, enigmatic text as *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. His study comprises seven chapters, with a “Preface” and an “Epilogue.” The comprehensive “Bibliography” (pp. 459-477) is also worth noting; it gathers together key studies on *Beiträge* in French, German, and English. Referencing a remark from Heidegger’s personal assistant (1972-1976), Professor Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, Kovacs characterizes *Beiträge* as Heidegger’s “second major work” (p. 25n). Given that this is the case, then from the start it benefits us to outline the trajectory of inquiry arising from Heidegger’s first major work, namely, *Sein und Zeit* (1927). If the leitmotif of his *Gesamtausgabe* is “ways not works” (p. 29), how does the enactment of Heidegger’s “method” illuminate a pathway, both from the outset and in its subsequent transformation? “The ‘way,’ for Heidegger, is free from prefixed procedure and method; ‘the way is a way in being-under-way”” (p. 31). When distilled into the onefold of its simplicity, Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology poses a basic, albeit unique challenge: namely, to cultivate a *logos* (Λόγος) sufficiently primordial and nuanced, which can radiate the light of the phenomenon as such, the “thing itself,” what shows itself, in the effervescence of its possibility, richness, and diversity, i.e., Being. In *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, we consider, likewise, the origination of this saying along a wider arc of deferral, or in Heidegger’s terms, the orbit of be-ing historical thinking (*seynsgeschichtliches Denken*), in which the refusing of the phenomenon, as designated anew by the 18th century, orthographic insignia “*Seyn*” (rather than “*Sein*”), unfolds simultaneously with the possibility of its “gifting.”

As we seek our entryway into the text of *Beiträge*, or, put another way, yield to the momentum of our thrownness into it (as the task of thinking), we proceed from a new grounding-attunement (*Grundstimmung*). The questioning that arises and recedes in *Sein und Zeit*, however, temporalizes in its own way and yields to its own “moment,” that is, “the favorable time, as ‘the time of enowning’ (*die Zeit des Ereignisses*)” (p. 152). Time is not only the historical “name” for the disclosure of Being (*Sein*) in its diverse manifestations, e.g., permanence, presence, presencing, but, in the “turning” (*die Kehre*), is “re-thought” through its intimacy with the gifting-refusing of Be-ing (*Seyn*) as the “play of time-space” (*Zeit-Raum-Spiel*) (pp. 152-153). In this light, Kovacs puts to rest the scholarly debate as to the connection between “Heidegger I” and “Heidegger II,”

or parallel designations. The difficulty with these scholarly models is not that they may have some pedagogical importance, but rather that they inevitably break apart when cast upon the uncharted waters of Heidegger's being-historical thinking.

As indicated in the title of Kovacs' book, thinking and Be-ing are defined by the grammar of the conjunction, in a similar way that Heidegger had also emphasized in his *magnum opus* from 1927 that his inquiry always hinged on conjoining "Being" in relation to "time." Analogously, Being and thinking are each drawn to its "ownmost" through its relation to the other (p. 225), and, conversely, through the interplay of that otherness. Here thinking, within the province of "en-owning" (*Er-eignis*), assumes a new role, that is, the "double play" of simultaneously addressing and having been called to address "Be-ing" in its various historical manifestations. As Kovacs states at the outset in Chapter I, "...Be-ing-historical thinking, thus the thinking of Be-ing, is neither subjective nor objective," insofar as "the being-historical genitive ... is neither an 'objective' nor a 'subjective' genitive" (p. 31).

Kovacs properly emphasizes that thinking is a "journey" (see Chapter I), a transitional endeavor that is temporally and historically enacted. In Heidegger's case, however, this transitional, inceptual dimension becomes particularly acute, insofar as his questioning unfolds against the entire backdrop of the philosophical tradition and the epoch of its "completion" in the current age of machination. Appealing to Heidegger's 1964 essay, "Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens," Kovacs emphasizes that "thinking at the 'end' of philosophy means 'the opening-up of a self-concealing sheltering' that allows to (lets) speak the 'It gives'" (pp. 67-68). In Chapter II, Kovacs explores further the thrust and direction of this transitional thinking, and its responsiveness to an attunement that yields a "pathway" ahead of any contrived formulations of systems and theories. In Chapter III, Kovacs considers how thinking as the rethinking of "to be" occurs through the inception of "mindfulness" (*Besinnung*) (pp. 170-171). Such mindfulness is not free-floating meditation, however, but is grounded on the abgrund (*Abgrund*) of a thoughtful questioning of an impending, epochal crisis, which is born by the "flight of the gods" and the corresponding abandonment of (and by) Being (*Seinsverlassenheit*) in the age of technicity. The importance of differentiating being-historical thinking from the rivalry of fraudulent, conceptual models that are technically based, and indifferent to the disclosive power of language, shapes the discussion of Chapter IV. In Chapter V, Kovacs examines the need for thinking to nurture the seeds for its transformation, insofar as they are historically rooted, and, as Heidegger suggests at the close of his "Letter on 'Humanism,'" are incubated within the silent depths of language. Thinking can never master, but instead remains both dependent upon, and "owning to," the "enowning-throw" (*ereignender*

Zumurf) of its historical possibility. In Chapter VI, Kovacs expands this arc of questioning by specifically addressing Heidegger's enactment of "*Ereignisdenken*" or "enowning-thinking." Chapter VII considers the singularity of saying that is endemic to language, insofar as it is "owned-over" (*übereignet*) to Be-ing and differentiated from generic formulations in "technical" and "instrumental" modes of expression. For Kovacs, the crossing-over to being-historical language gathers together the "hints" of how thinking can facilitate its own transformation, that is, by deferring to the singular power of the word and its retreat into the silence of the "unsaid."

II.

In the concluding section (of Chapter Seven) of his book, "Saying the Unsayable," Kovacs provides important clues as to the possible direction that the continuing investigation of Heidegger's thinking may take, as its scholarship today finds itself in a new crucible of conflict. "The experience with language, according to Heidegger, exposes the ups and downs, the successes and failures, the depth and the range...of the disclosive potential of any saying, of speaking, it leads to the discernment of the main difficulty endemic to the saying (to the speaking) of Be-ing, to 'expressing' Be-ing in words, in telling silence, in words that come from telling silence as well..." (pp. 441-442). Conversely, the difficulties, pitfalls, and inadequacies of seeking to speak the dynamic of the verbal form, "to be," should not result in "pessimistic resignation," but should instead point to a "favorable or 'right moment' (*Augenblick*) for (bringing about) the 'sudden turn' in thinking..." (p. 443). As if by example, rather than through explicit pronouncements, Kovacs' study resists the predominant tendency to compartmentalize Heidegger's thinking into discrete issues, including the concern for the "political," and their contentious debates within a standard discourse of the logistics of argumentation. In this spirit, Kovacs brings a questioning-understanding to the study of Heidegger's texts, by calling attention to the "fissure" (*Zerkliftung*) that traverses his thinking and harbors new possibilities for its appropriation (p. 440).

Through his careful, hermeneutic investigation, Kovacs shifts the focus from examining statements and remarks extracted from Heidegger's writings, to exploring instead the "dwelling-place" (*Wohnsitz*) of his thinking (p. 67). In this way, Kovacs' inquiry speaks in a more subtle tone, that is, through the reservedness (*Verhaltenheit*) that shapes the thinking of Be-ing in and through the trajectory of its retreat, refusal, and withdrawal. He appeals to the unsaid to redirect thinking to what is most question-worthy (*frag-würdig*) at the origin (*Ursprung*) of the Western tradition (p. 385). The *withdrawal* of this origin harbors the *hidden fault line that cuts across Heidegger's philosophy and counter balances the various criticisms of its deficiencies by the fruits of what is still to be thought.*

As a hermeneutic venture, then, thinking welcomes the gift of what remains to be thought, by allowing this fault line to disrupt and overturn the conventional formulas that inhibit Be-ing's power to reveal itself in language.

Readers and interpreters, friends and foes, of Heidegger's texts, most of all in assessing his second main work, as well as his "later thought," need to attend carefully to the polymorphy, diversity, and creativity of "his" language (vocabulary) of, and names for, Be-ing. For Heidegger, neither the language nor the thought of enowning is simply derived from the historical systems of philosophy; according to his persistent claim, there is a radical difference between traditional ontology and being historical thinking (pp. 362-363).

Let me close with a "personal" observation which, while it may not seem "objective" in the course of a book-review, may also be more "venturesome" and owing to the path of thoughtful inquiry. As Kovacs emphasizes, confronting the vast reservoir of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* is a "hermeneutic labor," requiring the accumulation of insight throughout a "life-work," rather than presuming the claim of any authoritative perspective or outlook. Indeed, since I first made Kovacs' acquaintance in May 1986 (at the 20th Annual North American Heidegger Conference), I have had the good fortune of benefiting from the finely chiseled insights that are the fruits of his vast publications over four decades. Most of all, I have marveled at the careful craftsmanship of his writings, an understated tone that yields to the spirit of inquiry and always redirects the reader to what recedes below the surface as possibilities still to be explored. In this regard, Kovacs' book does not simply provide another account of *Beiträge*, much less presume to add to the proliferation of "Heidegger scholarship" today. Instead, with a style and forbearance uniquely his own, Kovacs provides a "formally indicative" example of how to approach Heidegger's thinking anew, with a steadfastness of holding what is said in tension with what is *not*. In this way, *Be-ing and Thinking* exhibits a rigor that exceeds the fervent debates as to the rightness and wrongness, adequacy and inadequacy, of Heidegger's "philosophy," which shape the landscape of scholarship today. Most of all, Kovacs' book is a tribute to the perennial mystery (*Geheimnis*) of the "to be," which challenges us to carve out new pathways of thinking and experience the lighting-flash of Be-ing's enowning-throw.