

Book Reviews

The Essence of Human Freedom and The Essence of Truth

Martin Heidegger

translated by Ted Sadler

London: Athlone Press, 2002

Several times during his career Heidegger said that he had originally planned to add a section on the history of metaphysics to his *magnum opus Being and Time*. Although he never did this, these two volumes give us an idea of what such a section would have looked like, which is why they are such a welcome addition to the Heidegger texts that we have in English. These lectures were delivered at a pivotal time in Heidegger's career; he had published *Being and Time* a few years earlier and was about to begin both his ill-fated attempt at political engagement and a change in his thinking that transformed him from a philosopher of Being into a philosopher of poetic thinking. These two volumes are translated from a series of lectures that Heidegger delivered at the University of Freiburg between 1930 and 1932 and they deal with many of the thinkers who were most important to the development of Western metaphysics. Heidegger's style in these lectures is more like the standard philosophical inquiry that he did in *Being and Time* and *The Essence of Reasons* than the more poetic work that he did in later texts like *Poetry, Language and Thought*. The first volume, *The Essence Freedom*, which was originally published in German as Volume 31 of his *Gesamtausgabe*, focuses on the meaning of Being in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and on the development of the concept of freedom in the work of Kant with special emphasis on his *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. The second volume, *The Essence of Truth*, which was originally published in German as Volume 34 of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* focuses on two truly foundational works of Western metaphysics, the Cave Allegory from Plato's *Republic* and Plato's *Theaetetus*. The translator is Ted Sadler who is the author of *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Question of Being* and *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption*. The translation as a whole is excellent, especially since these are essentially lecture

notes and Heidegger's prose is normally dense and full of wordplay. My only criticism is that Sadler rarely includes the original German vocabulary of important Heideggerian terms such as *Wesen* for essence or *Entborgenheit* for reconciling. He does, however, include an excellent glossary of both Greek and German terms.

Heidegger begins the *Essence of Human Freedom* by introducing the contradictory nature of human freedom: it is at once a "freedom from" (p.4) and a "freedom for" (p. 16). Rather than trying to resolve this contradiction immediately, Heidegger is content to let it play itself out through his discussion of Kant and Aristotle's work because it leads him to the root of the question of freedom, which is ultimately the question of being itself, since freedom is a "way of being" (p.28). Heidegger spends much of the second chapter in a lengthy discussion of the concept of being [*ousia*] in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. At first this looks like a lengthy digression, but it allows Heidegger to lay the groundwork for a discussion of freedom and causality in Kant's work. For the Greeks, being was understood as constant presence (p.78), so any discussion of freedom (or being-free) must also include a discussion of freedom as a process that unfolds through time.

Heidegger takes up this definition of freedom in the second part of the book, which is a lengthy discussion of causality and freedom in Kant's work. The importance of causality to Kant's discussion of freedom reveals the temporal nature of freedom as a constantly unfolding process (a being-free) which really must be discussed in terms of being and time. But, as Heidegger points out, Kant's idea of causation is problematic because he had not properly surveyed the ground of freedom, which is being itself (p.140). This makes it difficult for Kant to unify his two ways of freedom (the possibility and the actuality of freedom), since his discussion of causality is never able to get beyond causality itself. Therefore Kant is unable to focus on the "first cause" which, as Heidegger pointed out in *The Essence of Reasons*, is being. As Heidegger frames the problem of freedom in Chapter 3, freedom is not a thing or a property of man, but man is the possibility of freedom (p.93). Kant's overemphasis on causality leads him to see freedom as a thing that is separate from man and is produced through external causes, so it is not the ground or essence of humanity.

In *The Essence of Truth* Heidegger deals with the problem of freedom on a much more fundamental level through his discussion of

Theaetetus and The Allegory of the Cave in Plato's *The Republic*. This is one of Heidegger's most clearly written and accessible works and I am surprised that it has not been fully translated until now, particularly since it anticipates so much of Heidegger's later work. The book opens with a short discussion of truth as correspondence, which, Heidegger argues, is a notion that is so self-evident that it actually stands in the way of our getting to the truth of truth (p.5). Instead, Heidegger argues we need to go back to the more originary idea of truth as *aletheia* or truth as "unhiddenness." which we find in the Greeks. After a short discussion of *aletheia* in the Pre-Socratics, Heidegger begins a detailed reading of this concept as it is developed through the Allegory of the Cave in Book VII of Plato's *The Republic*. In this discussion Heidegger points out the essential similarity of the revelation of truth through poetry and Plato's presentation of truth as "unconcealing" which became extremely important for Heidegger's later work. He also finishes the inquiry into the essence of freedom that he began in his discussion of Kant. *Aletheia* is both a "freedom from" delusion and a "freedom for" the truth. (p.43). However, Heidegger finds Plato's discussion of "hiddenness" insufficient, so in the second part of the book he turns to the discussion of knowledge [*episteme*] in Plato's *Theaetetus*.

Knowledge, like freedom, is not a thing but a comportment or way of doing things. Thus knowledge is vital to human *Dasein* (p114). Heidegger refines this notion of *Dasein* in an uncharacteristic move by showing the relationship between knowledge as perception and the body. We perceive things through our sense organs as sensual impressions that are dispersed throughout the body, but it is the soul which brings these individual sense perceptions together. Thus, knowledge and human *Dasein* are dependent upon a working together of body and soul. Ted Sadler has done English-speaking Heidegger scholars a great favor by translating these two volumes. They present Heidegger at a pivotal point in his career when he was refining many of his ideas about being and time and developing new ideas which would lead to his turn to poetic thinking a few years later.

Reviewed by Jonathan Derr