Book Review

Robert C. Scharff, Heidegger Becoming Phenomenological: Interpreting Husserl through Dilthey, 1916–1925. London; Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, pp. xxvii + 186, ISBN 978-1-78660-773-7, (pb) $39.95.

Reviewed by **David C. Abergel**, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, USA, E-mail: david.abergel@bc.edu

https://doi.org/10.1515/jtph-2020-0022

The lecture courses delivered by the young Heidegger in Freiburg (1919–1923) and in Marburg (1923–1927) prior to the publication of *Being and Time* (1927) have received much attention in recent years in Anglo-American scholarship. This is partly due to the fact that many of these lecture courses have been published and translated just in the last few decades. Mainly, however, it is because scholars are finding not only that this material offers insights that enrich our understanding of the origins of Heidegger's thinking and *Being and Time*, but that it contains ideas that are philosophically significant in themselves.[1] Robert C. Scharff's work *Heidegger Becoming Phenomenological: Interpreting Husserl through Dilthey, 1916–1925* should be regarded as an important contribution to this field of research.

The investigation focuses on Heidegger's philosophical development from the period between 1916 and 1925. Although it draws widely across the volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, its primary source material comes from the volumes dedicated to his early Freiburg lecture courses.[2] Scharff interprets these lecture courses on their own terms and challenges several scholarly positions concerning Heidegger's philosophical development during these years. The main position that he challenges is that "Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is some sort of revision, mild or radical, of Husserl's" (xiv).[3] For according to Scharff, this position developed at a time when the early Freiburg lecture courses were not yet published, and now that they are, "they show conclusively" that "Heidegger was never any kind of Husserlian revisionist" (xiv). What Scharff seeks to show, rather, is that "*from the beginning, Heidegger's approach to Husserl – indeed, his whole approach to the question of what it means to philosophize at all – is informed by his prior*

1 For noteworthy book-length studies on Heidegger's early work, see Bowler (2008), Campbell (2012), Crowe (2006), Kisiel (1993), Shirley (2010), van Buren (1994), and Wolfe (2013).

2 See *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* (GA 56/57); *Basic Problems of Phenomenology; Winter Semester 1919/1920* (GA 58); *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression* (GA 59); *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (GA 60); *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research* (GA 61); and *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (GA 63).

3 Particular targets of Scharff's critique include Crowell (2001), Dreyfus (1991), Dreyfus and Haugeland (1978), Luft (2011), Mohanty (2011), and von Herrmann (2013).

reading of Dilthey" (xiv). Yet for Scharff, while this does result in the fact that Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is decidedly "non-Husserlian and intimately related to his prior study of Dilthey on understanding historical life" (xiv), it does not mean "that Heidegger is simply choosing Dilthey over Husserl" (xvi). What it means, instead, is that Heidegger's approach to Husserl is "hermeneutic – meaning that in order to 'retrieve' Husserl's contribution to philosophy's 'new grounding,' one must learn to read him with Diltheyan eyes" (xvi). Therefore, on Scharff's account, although both Dilthey and Husserl play important roles in Heidegger's early philosophical development, it is "Dilthey who helps Heidegger become phenomenological at Husserl's expense, not the other way around" (xxiii). The title of the work – *Heidegger Becoming Phenomenological: Interpreting Husserl through Dilthey, 1916–1925* – conveys just this.

According to Scharff, what the young Heidegger learns from Dilthey is a hermeneutical way of relating to texts, not as a knower who seeks to acquire knowledge from what authors explicitly *say*, but as an interpreter who seeks to achieve an understanding of what authors genuinely *mean* (xviii). This kind of interpretation involves attuning oneself to one's own lived-through experience, so that one's interpretations will be informed "not just by logical 'reasoning' but by 'an *existential* knowing'" of the fact that all expressions originate from lived-through historical life itself (5). Such a practice enables an interpreter to grasp an author's genuine motives from out of the lived-through historical situation in which they originally arose and thus as "unfiltered as much as possible" by the tradition-bound way in which they are expressed (xviii). Scharff takes this conception of a hermeneutic-existential relation to texts to be "Heidegger's philosophical expansion of Dilthey's concept of *Verstehen*" (xix).

As Scharff sees it, the philosophical importance of the *Erklären-Verstehen* debate does not concern the status of *Verstehen* as a scientific method, but the meaning of science itself as an expression of human life and the inadequacy of psychological and epistemological models of unifying the multiple ways in which human life articulates itself.[4] Along these lines, he presents evidence to show that what Heidegger finds to be philosophically significant in Dilthey is not his defense of a second kind of scientific method, but the "*nontraditional philosophical standpoint*" (28) from which he mounts this defense. For according to Heidegger on Scharff's account, in order to argue successfully for the ontological plurality of

4 Scharff takes issue with Husserl's and Gadamer's interpretations of Dilthey's concept of *Verstehen*, arguing that Husserl is "quite wrong to interpret *Verstehen* as something legitimately practiced only by human scientists, just as Gadamer wrongly encourages this view by paying excessive attention to Dilthey's plan for a 'critique of historical reason' at the expense of considering the 'basic philosophical posture' of this plan's author" (xix).

scientific objects, Dilthey must occupy a general philosophical outlook that takes human and natural sciences as expressions of experience emerging from the same experiential totality. Importantly, however, Scharff notes that it would be wrong to suggest that Heidegger thinks Dilthey explicitly sees this for himself. For Dilthey's own self-conception marks him quite clearly as "a revisionist but still recognizable epistemologist of science" who formulates "a defense of *Verstehen* as part of an anti-positivistic *Critique of Historical Reason* that will do for the human sciences what *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* did for the natural sciences" (27). But what Scharff shows is that in spite of what Dilthey explicitly says about his plan for a Critique of Historical Reason, he seems, at times, to go beyond being an epistemologist of human science in that his work evinces a genuine motive "toward developing a nontraditional philosophical orientation that would be mindful instead of forgetful of the experiential roots of its own articulations" (61). And it is the spirit of this Dilthey that Scharff claims "is everywhere in SZ, even if his name appears just a few times" (9-10).

By showing that Heidegger's earliest philosophical concerns were informed by his reading of Dilthey, Scharff also aims to show that "Heidegger did not start his career by asking about the meaning of Being," but "by asking (with pointed references to the unsatisfactory options he saw around him) how he should philosophize" (xiii). For on Scharff's account, only once Heidegger learned from Dilthey *how* to philosophize from the standpoint of lived-through historical life itself did he then gain the "'confident assurance' to proceed with his topic(s)" (xiv). This view opposes what Scharff takes to be the "general interpretive trend" among "readers of Heidegger" to interpret his "path" of thinking strictly in terms of the topics about which he philosophizes (xiii-xiv). However, Scharff urges that this is not "just a scholarly point" (xiv). For if philosophers today are concerned only with what thinkers say and not with their deepest factical concerns in saying it, then it indicates that the question of *how* to philosophize "is about as elusive and neglected a question today as it was when Heidegger raised it" (xiii-xiv). In discussing the decisive influence of Dilthey on the young Heidegger, then, Scharff seeks to incite in his readers a renewed interest in this question.

The book consists of six chapters. Chapter one advocates for a hermeneutic strategy that takes the nature of Heidegger's "destructive retrievals" of Dilthey and Husserl to be more a matter of *retrieval* with respect to Dilthey and more a matter of *destruction* with respect to Husserl. Based on this strategy, the book is further divided into two main parts. Part one (chapters two and three) focuses on Heidegger's "destructive *retrieval*" of Dilthey: chapter two argues that what is philosophically significant about Dilthey's association with the *Erklären-Verstehen* debate, as mentioned, is not the distinction that he makes between two different kinds of science, but the "*nontraditional philosophical standpoint*" from which he

makes the distinction; chapter three presents evidence to show that Heidegger's hermeneutic of facticity in *Being and Time* is an appropriation of Dilthey's own attempt to interpret lived-through historical life from out of itself. Part two (chapters four and five) focuses on Heidegger's "*destructive* retrieval" of Husserl: chapter four spells out the ways in which Heidegger thinks Husserl's tradition-bound account of phenomenology fails to be a genuinely phenomenological philosophy; chapter five shows how Heidegger's critical appropriation of Husserl is informed by his prior reading of Dilthey. The study concludes (with chapter six) by explaining that, for Heidegger, if a philosophy is to be truly phenomenological, it must always remain "provisional." This is not just because life itself is a perpetual task, but because it has a structural tendency toward "forgetfulness." What this means is that even if a philosopher manages to capture in concepts the living-through of historical life itself, these concepts, by virtue of the fact that their intelligibility is governed by the shared, public interpretations of traditional inheritance, will always eventually become trivial and thus conceal what was genuinely grasped. As a result, a truly phenomenological philosophy must be practiced on the basis of the understanding that the living-through of historical life itself cannot be captured in concepts once and for all by securing in advance a proper method, but must be continuously won from the constant pull of tradition. The title of the work also expresses this point precisely: one cannot *become* phenomenological; one must continuously *be* in the process of "*becoming phenomenological*."

Scharff's interpretation and analysis of the young Heidegger's lecture courses are thorough and conducted with care. His work makes an important contribution to the growing body of scholarship on Heidegger's early thinking, and it will be of considerable interest to a wide variety of scholars working on Heidegger.

References

Bowler, M. 2008. *Heidegger and Aristotle: Philosophy as Praxis*. New York: Continuum.

Campbell, S. M. 2012. *The Early Heidegger's Philosophy of Life: Facticity, Being, and Language*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Crowe, B. D. 2006. *Heidegger's Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Crowell, S. 2001. *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths toward Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Dreyfus, H. L., and J. Haugeland. 1978. "Husserl and Heidegger: Philosophys' Last Stand." In *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, edited by M. Murray. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dreyfus, H. L. 1991. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's "Being and Time," Division I*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Kisiel, T. 1993. *The Genesis of Heidegger's "Being and Time"*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Luft, S. 2011. *Subjectivity and Lifeworld in Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
Mohanty, J. N. 2011. *Husserl's Freiburg Years, 1916–1938*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Shirley, G. 2010. *Heidegger and Logic: The Place of Logos in "Being and Time"*. New York: Continuum.
van Buren, J. 1994. *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
von Herrmann, F. W. 2013. *Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology*, trans. K. Maly. University of Toronto Press: Toronto.
Wolfe, J. 2013. *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.