

Between Impossible Wishes: An Interview with Babette Babich

by Nicholas Birns

*B*abette Babich is one of the most exciting and exacting philosophical commentators at work today. At once a reverent student of tradition and an explorer willing to assume the risk of a rapprochement with challenging ontologies, Babich is equally at home with architecture and textuality, in ancient Greece, modern Germany, and postmodern America; in the ruined temple and the networked seminar room. An extraordinarily knowledgeable commentator on Nietzsche and Heidegger, she is yet blown forward, like Benjamin's angel of history not abiding in merely reverent homage to past master thinkers, Babich's *Words In Blood, Like Flowers; Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger*,



published by SUNY Press in 2006, is one of the best books of this decade and *The Agonist* contacted Babich in the hope of discussing her ideas further. She generously agreed and the interview below is the much-appreciated result.

NB: When you compare Nietzsche and Heidegger, does Nietzsche's training as a philologist make his approach to 'truth' or its negation different?

BB: Nietzsche's philological training certainly makes all the difference here, but the key difference between Heidegger's approach to truth (or its negation or its "untruth" or the negation that is the lie for Nietzsche), turns upon Heidegger's philosophical formation. At the same time, Nietzsche's approach to truth shares with Heidegger a certain resolutely critical orientation, stemming in Nietzsche's case from his own philological formation. Here I am not merely referring

to Nietzsche's reliance on Gustav Gerber's *Die Sprache als Kunst* in composing his "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," but Nietzsche's reflections on truth throughout the course of his philosophy. In addition it matters that from very nearly the start of his philological academic career Nietzsche wanted to be, as it were, a philosopher. This cross-disciplinary ambition is not as presumptuous as it might appear: in classical philosophy a philological formation is often, although this is regrettably waning, interchangeable with a philosophical formation and Nietzsche concluded his inaugural lecture at Basel with a confession of his own philological faith which he identified for his listeners as an inversion of Seneca: "what was once philology has now been made into philosophy." If Seneca's original "what was once philosophy has now been made into philology" exemplifies the spirit of classical philology, Nietzsche's inversion may be heard in a definition Hans-Georg Gadamer once offered of philology and philosophy. The two were indistinguishable save where one or the other failed in its task. And Nietzsche's book on *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (which Eugen Fink prized so very highly), does not depart from this convertibility. Philologically, Nietzsche would always attend to the question of "personality" or personal style; philosophically, Nietzsche posed the question of truth not only formally, as any scholar or scientist might do, but also and always reflectively or, as Heidegger would say: thoughtfully.

To go back to the question as you have framed it, of Nietzsche's philosophical distinction with respect to Heidegger (and to philosophers in general) regarding his approach to 'truth' or its negation, a good, rhetorical handbook of grammar and style (say a text dating from the mid-twentieth century, or else a 19th century German handbook like Gerber's, or in English, like Fowler's 1906 *The King's English*), can be of use, as Wittgenstein especially saw this, to philosophical discussions of logical analysis. In the case of philology, such broadly philological handbooks outline the limitations of 'truth' as Nietzsche explores the notion but one quickly moves beyond the boundaries of philology proper inasmuch as for Nietzsche the contrast between truth and lie was to be coordinated to a broadly 19th century question. Consequently Nietzsche did not separate the question of truth and lie from the broader question of the origin of anything at all out of its opposite. This includes the origination of the living from the dead, or put in the scientific, geological and evolutionary (and theological context of his times), the organic from the inorganic, or else and on the conceptual level, the genesis of science out of myth, or the progress to truth from lie as the development of scientific rationality as such is also the heart of epistemological evolution. Heidegger's *aletheic* truth on the other hand, even if rejected by certain philological temperaments (and endorsed by others at least in Heidegger's time), likewise depends on Heidegger's own fundamental philological skills as a philosopher in a German context, where, and this remained true until recently, one could not study philosophy without a large bit of both Greek and Latin—when I was in Tübingen and Berlin in the mid-eighties, one only needed a great bit of *either* Greek *or* Latin, but now I think one can get by with neither.

Interview

More generally, given questions of influence, Nietzsche's critical, philological approach would seem to have affected Heidegger if it is fairly patent that Heidegger's question of truth, which to be fair to Heidegger is one of the more rigorous in his philosophy as it is indeed the core of his engagement with language, takes Heidegger on his own philosopher's way, and that means with (but also away from) Nietzsche as from Hegel, Kant, Aristotle, etc.

NB: Wow, a feast of questions can arise from that . . . but most immediately, does this shared philological outlook have a consistent valence (I am not talking about the linguistic education of philosophers, which I assume was pretty consistent from the Scholastic era on) that goes back beyond Nietzsche to say Kant and Hegel, or did Nietzsche's philological training—which I assume was greater than any predecessor except possibly Hegel's) inflect a tradition and Heidegger was then able to turn this in a more idiosyncratic way? (You are saying that Nietzsche's philological mode was *more* connected to the way the establishment was doing it, right?)

BB: I should clarify a bit here inasmuch as what Nietzsche does with his philology is fairly radical and was perhaps for that same radical quality not well received. This is in part because Nietzsche's own philological formation reflects several divergent trends as these coalesced at the end of the 19th century, trends which have only been vaguely transmitted to us in Nietzsche's case in terms of the Ritschl/Jahn, controversy—which is usually reported as an issue regarding collegial egos and stepped on collegial toes. But Nietzsche was influenced by both Ritschl *and* Jahn and philology for Nietzsche included both historical/linguistic as well as cultural dimensions.

Almost half a century ago, William Arrowsmith tried (and arguably failed) to revive the relevance of coordination for his own generation. In his own time, Nietzsche conscientiously emphasizes both the historical/linguistic as well as cultural and technological dimensions. Philological fashions were moving towards what the 19th century establishment regarded as a more "scientific" (we today might say: objective) kind of philology, which could be broken down into linguistics but also textual history, on the one hand, and archaeology (which Nietzsche, following Jahn also emphasized along with music and ancient technology), on the other hand. This sundering remains the rule and recent years have seen less and less grammar and metric analysis (there are professors of classics today who eschew grammar in favor of what they call "history"). And of course philosophers have long been able to write dissertations on Aristotle or Plato without reading Greek as indeed many Nietzsche scholars write on Nietzsche without reading German. For me the question remains: why did Nietzsche have so little impact on the course of his own discipline? Some have argued that Nietzsche's first book almost had to fall, as it is popularly expressed, not a little bit after Hume's own author's complaints about his own book as falling, "dead-born" from the press, but I think it could have gone either way just because "success" in the very social world that is the academic world depends upon the reception of a book by one's colleagues. Indeed several readings of the quarrel surrounding *The Birth of Tragedy* suggest that Wilamowitz was a

Interview

kind of hatchet man, sent out (by others, or imagining himself to have been so commissioned) to do the work of taking Nietzsche out of play and thereby instituting a kind of normal philological science. Wilamowitz was breathtakingly effective at this elimination and Nietzsche's exclusion from classics endures to this day. As today's media-savvy politicians know: *calumniare fortiter, et aliquid adhaerebit*, sling mud, some will stick. Today's philologists look at Nietzsche as a literary figure not a philologist. Hence, with rare exceptions, classicists believe they have nothing to learn from Nietzsche.

NB: Is the principle thrust of this tradition backward, as it were, or forward (using inevitably Hegelian imagery)....

BB: I think, without being too, too Hegelian, that the thrust, at least on Nietzsche's side is *both* backward and forward. Backward in that Nietzsche is fairly convinced that, as it he puts it in his notes, we stand before a lost world to touch the barest part of which would be an extraordinary privilege—a privilege not to be had in this lifetime, no matter one's history, no matter one's archaeology. A little awe Nietzsche thinks can do us a world of good—hence he considers the relevance of such “history” for life, that is, for the future.

NB: And in terms of Greek and Latin...

Both thinkers seem to pay far more attention to Greece than Rome, see Rome as a corruption of Greece and even philosophy—is this a simplification? Have we been too influenced in this respect by books like Butler's *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany*? Did studying Latin and Latin philology have an influence on either Nietzsche or Heidegger? A lot of Heidegger's terminology is Scholastic, of course...

BB: This is a great question, though your question on Latin philology is too complicated to answer otherwise than to say, yes! especially with regard to Heidegger's rhetorical style but also, and on Nietzsche's own account of it reflecting on what he “owes the ancients,” for Nietzsche as well. The issue of Butler's *The Tyranny of Greece over*



Roman copy in marble of a bronze by Polykleitos (ca. 430 BCE), ca 69-96 CE. 185.42 cm., Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC; 1 March 2008.

Photo: Babette Babich, with Iphone (original).

interviewed by:

**Nicholas
Birns**

Germany concerns, of course, a very specific (and not at all accidentally Anglophone and even very British, it was first published in 1935) perspective on Germany—although my German friends swear that it has truth on its side. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger approach the question historically—how are we to understand a Greece we tend to approach through the Latin world that transmitted not only the idea of Greece and its philosophy, myth, history, etc. to posterity but the grammar books and schematic order of scholarship as such? It can be tempting from the vantage point of the 21st century to look at Greece and Rome as of a piece (maybe even—some survey courses do this—adding in the Egyptians as well as Chinese and Mayan culture, etc.) But this is a fairly imperialist (and that is not at all incidentally Roman) perspective. The key here is not the (German-imposed) tyrannizing of Greece over Germany as much as it is Milman Parry and Albert Lord and the trouble has everything to do with understanding how very, very alien to us the ancient Greek world would have been, and that is at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the day! What kind of culture, what world invents tragedy and invents it as a competitive festival, as a glut of tragedies, over several days, with one musical-tragic performance after another, as long as the light lasts, only to give oneself over to burlesque, and when the next day dawns to do the same thing all over again? All the while, as Nietzsche emphasizes, telling only the same story in variant upon variant? With sculpture, architecture, epic poetry and tragedy, and indeed philosophy and law, Greek society also and Nietzsche always emphasized this, included, better said, *depended upon* not only slavery but an understanding of the role of women in society which amounted to slavery. And as for the Presocratic favoring, the very language of the “presocratic” tells us that the favoring is already at work from the outset: it is Socrates or better said, Plato and his students who set the agenda for philosophy and for what should count as philosophy. We can still use a return to the pre-platonic thinkers, again and again, until we can begin to approach them on their own terms.

NB: You said classical languages were no longer as much a part of philosophical training in Germany now as when you studied twenty years ago . . . is this because a certain generation has died off? Americanization? EU standardization? Or is it the delayed effects of everything Heidegger in his lifetime seemed to fear about technology?

BB: Ah! I would love to say the latter and blame everything on technology but I think more soberly (if, to me, still rather surprisingly) a kind of admiration of the American university system inspired the transformation of higher education in Germany (and the rest of Europe). This does not of course mean that Europeans now follow the American curriculum. Indeed: by the time an American student has earned a Bachelor’s Degree, age-wise, the average European student will have been fast-tracked to a Master’s Degree, and, speaking as an educator, I do not think that this parallel (or “globally” competitive) happenstance is anything like an accidental outcome of the reform. But this has little to do with the historical fact that both Nietzsche and Heidegger enjoyed a rather more extensive formation in Greek and Latin than we today think necessary (even in

Interview

classics) and that this made a difference for Heidegger's discussions of truth, of language, and indeed Being/beings. The difference for Nietzsche goes without saying. Your original question though, as I recall, had to do with the relevance of Nietzsche for Heidegger on this and related themes and I think such relevance can plainly be seen throughout Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche and in his later writings.

NB: I totally understand about Nietzsche and Heidegger both rescuing it from a normativizing scrim—I have just been teaching Greek drama (in one class) and Homeric epic as well as Hesiod (in another) and it has struck me that, for all the rhetoric about their cultural centrality, very few people actually care about them, and perhaps this oddness and the asymmetrical relationship between Greek perceptions and our own is to account for them, but still—and this may be a question I am asking particularly *in propria persona*, or *he auto prosopon* as Nietzsche and Heidegger would prefer, although they would want my Greek better—is there a way to have the otherness, oddness without the 'grounding' that so much Philhellenic rhetoric does, as if Greek is made some sort of obligatory cultural *Ursprache* (and Americans now are as or more guilty of this than Germans, or have been) . . . can we have the wildness, the otherness, the uncanniness without the "Greeks are the best" rhetoric . . . also, I take your point about Latinizing tendencies being imperialistic, but I also think of Paul de Man saying in "Literary History and Literary Modernity" that the past always embodies the modernity we think we have, or T.S. Eliot's dictum that we know more than the past, yet the past is what we know—is not the mediation provided by cultural imperialism, even if it is just the temporal imperialism of 'presentism,' part of our perception of the Greeks? Do either Nietzsche or Heidegger show the way here?

BB: I take the distinction you are making and I couldn't agree more. I think however that Nietzsche is supposing, and Heidegger too, that emphasizing otherness (although both Nietzsche and Heidegger will use hierarchical language) can help us here, precisely where one can often use the quite valid points that de Man and Eliot make as an excuse not to be bothered as it were. I am also somewhat influenced by Butterfield's reflections on the danger of reading our present into "our" past (not to lose the points you have made) not as the royal road to history but to prevent us from imposing our politics as much as everything we "know" on the past which, for the most part, we ourselves have written. And of course both Heidegger and Nietzsche (and Hölderlin too) are fairly clear that we are on our way in such an engagement with the past not to the *past* but to *ourselves*—maybe, perhaps, or indeed not even that.

NB: In *Words in Blood*, you talk about what Nietzsche got from the Greeks stylistically as being both "extreme freedom and extreme constraint," and then, presumably with respect to the latter, about his commendation of Sallust in *Twilight of the Idols* . . . could you expand on this a bit?

BB: The image of "dancing in chains" is for Nietzsche emblematic of Greek style and the contrast between Greek restraint and Roman concision is, I think, what stands behind his allusion to Sal-

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

lust, and goes back to his early lectures on Greek rhetoric. There is a metric point here, that is to say, a point of measure and tempo, but I think the difference between the Latin ideal of concision and rhetorical order (which inspires not only Nietzsche but also Kant, as Willi Goetschl shows quite convincingly in his *Constituting Critique*) by contrast with the very different Greek ideal of rigor, is musical. And it is in the dance, literally so because as spoken, Greek is, as Nietzsche says, to be enacted: thus movement (in the meter) is of the essence. Where the Latin stylist composes sometimes (especially in the case of Sallust) *for the eye* (think of the importance of anagrams), the Greek as Nietzsche makes this distinction in his early philological notes (repeating this emphasis in his *Zarathustra*), writes *for the ear*, a coordinate contrast that would include, as Anne Carson has rightly reminded us, the shape of the letters themselves but also and here we have a bit of metonymic synästhesia, their contrasting colors, the back and forth of the dance.

NB: Does parataxis come in here, with dancing in chains and the tempo? You mention parataxis with respect to what Heidegger saw in Parmenides . . .

BB: Heidegger in Parmenides, Adorno in Hölderlin (and obviously, so too: Hölderlin in Sophocles) . . . So yes, I think so. To understand Nietzsche's notion of dancing in chains requires, I think, an understanding of parataxis and hypotaxis and that also means, as we can understand this today, the silences where there are no words. Here Heidegger's emphasis of Hölderlin's caesura will be essential. Adorno, and this is in spite of his antipathy to Heidegger, hears the attention to the Greek voice in Hölderlin's use of paratactic phrasing: thus Hölderlin, in practice, in translating Sophocles, illustrates what Heidegger has claimed (and been mocked for claiming) about the relationship between the German language and the Greek. Reiner Schürmann once remarked in a letter to me that Heidegger's claims, linguistically regarded, are not in error. I like to think that Schürmann's personal reasons for emphasizing this have everything to do with his experience of the very rustic Greece he cultivated for his sojourns there: without electricity and without, this I have only on hearsay, running water. This would be a very physical encounter with the sea, with the earth, with the sky. But I am mixing in my own memories here.

NB: When you said Kierkegaard was a television evangelist manqué, were you, among other things, saying he was insufficiently paratactic?

BB: That's an amusing way to put it and I think I take your point but I am not demanding parataxis above all . . .

NB: And is parataxis simply a challenge to verbal hierarchy and stratified ordering, or is there some sort of relationship of 'imitative form' between language and thought? Can the two be disarticulated?

BB: I am inclined to think of parataxis as a challenge as you say, although I think that Heidegger, at least in his later writing on language, may have come to the latter suspicion. Your second

Interview

Agonist 38

question is very difficult—and it all depends. Of course there is a relationship of “imitative form” between language and thought but if one adds Heidegger’s emphasis on Parmenides, an understanding of the still point is also needed, the nothing that nothings for Heidegger, infuriating for Carnap and for those of us today who insist on the factive literality, the flat reality of an trivially identifiable referent. But, and once again to speak of Hölderlin’s caesura in connection with Heidegger’s musical sensibilities, this will also take us to Heidegger’s silence.

NB: What about music? Can one speak of parataxis in music? And is Nietzsche’s interest in music—his own compositions and his views on music in general—analogueous to his interest in language?

BB: Yes indeed. I think Adorno would also say that one can speak of parataxis in music though perhaps, as he also emphasized not everyone would ‘like’ such music. This would be, I think, Schoenberg, Webern or Berg but also some Messaien and a good deal of so-called postmodern music works or—better said—*plays* paratactically. So too indeed the very Greek interposition of the spoken word, already musical as it may have been, at least to our ears, with instrumental tonalities. The second question you pose regarding Nietzsche’s interest in music along with his compositions and so on, is very, very important, hugely complex on several levels, and unfortunately today’s studies of Nietzsche and music don’t begin to raise this question and, in my view, this is not merely because of the life-historical and biographical challenge it presents but and to-date simply because Wagner (or for other tastes, Bizet, but this is really the same issue, and other composers work in the same way) can tend to block the issue. I have always thought, though this is by its nature impossible to test and so to refute or to confirm, that it would make no little difference to our understanding of Nietzsche’s take on music to have heard him play, to have heard him perform: be it his own compositions or else his interpretations of the works of others. I think that such active performances or musical interpretations would have to be counted as a great part of Nietzsche’s own relation to music. The musicologist’s idea of performance practice helps us here, but even with this musicological notion one assumes a standard, one-size-fits-all sort of conventionality. Using Nietzsche’s notion of personality, I have always thought of it as varying from one player, as it were, to another, not only varying in different times or cultures, with differing conventions, but also from person to person, with differing sensibilities, or a different ear and so on. Nietzsche was said in his day to have been a remarkable performer and the reports we have consistently emphasize his skills, the uniqueness of the same and so on. How to take that is precisely the question that one has, it seems to me, to leave open and to leave it open means not to forget it or close it off . . .

NB: Also, does Heidegger have much to say about music, and did he have much interest in it?

BB: Heidegger is famous, according to some commentators, for having had little or nothing to say about music. This is, like most things that get repeated in the wake of a commentator’s

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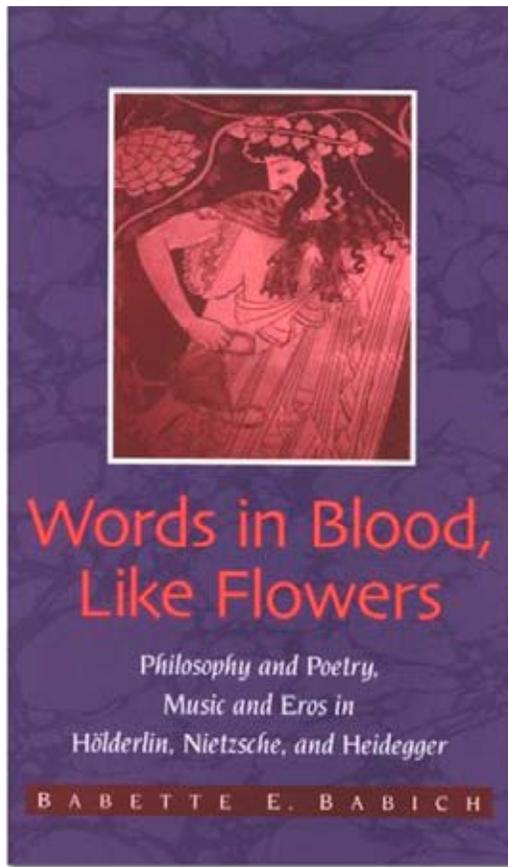
**Nicholas
Birns**

dictum, not entirely true. He invokes music, he offers a famous, perhaps one of his most famous lectures, *Gelassenheit*, translated as “Discourse on Thinking,” in honor of Conradin Kreutzer, a local composer, where Heidegger emphasizes that one best honors a composer not by giving a lecture but by allowing his works “to ring forth” in song and “in opera and in chamber music.” In other words one needs to hear music. I try to take this seriously and read Heidegger’s reference to the ringing forth in sound of Kreutzer’s compositions as of a piece with Heidegger’s reference to ringing stillness, to silence and his invocation of song with respect to language.

Apart from language, where Heidegger’s musical allusions can be esoteric, Heidegger’s more direct references to music are often straightforward and there are dissertations and essays written on Heidegger and music. Bill Richardson invokes

musical metaphors to speak of Heidegger, both at the start of his own book on Heidegger and also his musical parsing of the *Beiträge*. Nor is Richardson the only one to use such metaphors.

Perhaps the most important dimension of music in Heidegger may have to do with his effort to read Hölderlin and, taken as this effort should be with respect to the George Circle, that means, again, that Heidegger speaks of song. But here Heidegger has, as it were, the poet’s word in his mouth and those who are interested in as it were, to speak with Plato (not precisely a friend of music in all its modalities), the song itself, will note that poetry however *melic* is not music. But the metaphors can trip one up and I am not sure that Nietzsche would go in such a direction. Not indeed given Nietzsche’s beautifully doubled reflection on the quantitative or structural analyses of music then nascent and wonderfully graphic in the Chladni sound patterns: to speak of the “music” in music is to ask after the spirit of what would go missing in such a graphic analysis. Indeed, and to return to Heidegger on music, Heidegger is quite careful to emphasize the “heard” dimension or performative dynamic of music just as Nietzsche does, indeed as Schumann was famous for having done, responding to someone who asked him, so I have heard it told, to explain the meaning of a piece he had just performed, by sitting down and playing it again. This is why Heidegger began his *Gelassenheit* lecture as he did, by saying that whatever he might have to say in honor of Kreutzer the composer, the best way to honor a composer is to hearken to the tones themselves: to let them sound.



Interview

NB: So, in other words, it is not just not knowing how Nietzsche would perform music, but a subordination of the entire performative aspect of music to the compositional? (This of course goes back in the Western tradition at least to Boethius). And this is an aspect of post-Platonic, for lack of a better word, “logocentrism”? Are Peter Kingsley’s ideas on the pre-Socratics relevant here?

BB: Peter Kingsley’s work is exciting and enormously interesting. It is regrettable that in his books (following his first book which is the reason one reads his subsequent books) he utterly ignores the many scholars who, of course, initially lent him the insights he develops. Nor does he discuss the work of those who speak on related matters and not even those who have taken up his ideas. Perhaps and given the academic or university culture of contemporary classical philology, there may be no other way than the shaman’s way but it is instructive that Peter himself followed no “Peter Kingsley” to acquire his insights and it is regrettable that he eschews dialogue in favor of cultivating followers. These days, in stark contrast to his first impeccably scholarly research work, Kingsley invokes the mantle of scholarship but fails to cite or engage any. And he brooks not only no disagreement but no new ideas or notions. This was evident at a lecture Professor Peter Manchester organized for him at Stony Brook (where Kingsley stood while speaking but sat down to take questions afterward, with the result that students who came to him to ask questions, knelt down to do so). Given the healing tradition he describes, I asked him about Nietzsche’s Zarathustra (sleeping as if dead, etc., etc.), I note that my question about a possible parallel had been raised during the talk by David Allison as well as Tracy Strong. They wondered too, Kingsley did not. I argued that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra might connect not only Empedocles, whom I hold that Nietzsche reads with Heraclitus, but Parmenides as well. Kingsley who studied what philosophy he did read with analytic teachers, has a very analytic (non-)reading of Nietzsche and consequently refused the question. This compounds the problem for me, as Kingsley’s formation (and the limits of the same) may mean that he does not know what he is saying no to. As a result he may overlook a key connection between his philological work and the work of a similarly maverick philological forbear. But where Nietzsche, I believe, sought companions like himself rather than disciples or followers, Kingsley is rather expressly (in his recent work this has become thetic) on the lookout for acolytes, complete with money offerings to the Kingsley Foundation and so on. I mean this less as a criticism than a reservation and I am happy to say that the Kingsley Foundation is flourishing. For my own part I cite Kingsley’s work and recommend it to my students. I am simply saddened, this is the best word, by Kingsley’s own lack of engagement with current scholarship. The conversation is over before it begins.

NB: Right now, we have a lot of Greek sculpture available to study, but no Greek music. If you would reverse the situation, and have all the sculpture vanish and somehow have copies and performance texts (obviously not recordings) of the music, would this ‘exchange’ be worth it—losing the sculpture, gaining the music?

interviewed by:

**Nicholas
Birns**

BB: There are no extant “performance texts” dating from the time Nietzsche refers to and it is unclear that there are any obvious references in later texts to any such earlier texts. In my reading, Nietzsche’s point of departure is that, and apart from spoken Greek itself, there weren’t any such texts. In other words, and originally, there would have been no “music” per se and hence no “performance texts” if a score and a libretto is what is meant by that. This is I think the heart of Nietzsche’s attention to the literal birth of tragedy out of folk song but this folk tradition, the oral tradition, is not a text tradition. The development of a written language corresponds to the development of the performance text, inasmuch as a dynamic and interactive development with the folk tradition presumes a tradition of practice at the same time as it engenders a tradition of performance texts. The musical texts, this is Nietzsche’s insight but archaeological (the point is there is no historical record) musicologists will support this, only come later and are thus either re-creations or re-constructions of a no-longer living oral tradition. Patently, in a non-literate culture, there are, because there can be, no performance texts—it is the gulf between the oral tradition and the text tradition that intrigues Nietzsche and should continue to intrigue all of us. But to your question, *ceteris paribus*, would I personally trade the sculpture, of which we have in fact scant remnants compared with what all evidence suggests to have been the astonishing profusion of sculpture in so many media and in such a diverse range of sizes—I have a special interest in life-sized bronze sculpture—no, I personally would not. The physicality of the sculpture, even a ruined fragment, “speaks” to us. A score, by contrast, is sheer potential, sheerly to be realized, but to do so presupposes a “tacit” world: this tacit dimension includes the whole tradition of its realizations in the past, so that when one has a score one has, in the absence of that same tradition, very little indeed. On the other hand, I’d love to have a recording, but I think, if I can choose between impossible wishes, I’d prefer, *per impossibile*, a time-travelers’ music-video, given the importance, as Nietzsche emphasizes it, of the dance, that is to say, the importance of one’s legs, the feet, for Greek music, tragedy, poetry.

NB: I want to turn to issues of technology. Heidegger is famous for being very heavily engaged with the issue of technology, although quite antagonistic to it for the most part. Before turning to that issue—what does Nietzsche have to say about technology? Is it an issue for him?

BB: Nietzsche has a surprisingly large amount to say about technology especially in his early work but also in his later Nachlass notes. His interest in ancient technology is part of the reason I maintain that Jahn had a more substantive influence on his thought than is usually assumed to be the case. Beyond his attention to the mechanical sophistication of the ancients, Nietzsche also associates technology, unremarkably for a man of the 19th century, with science and with modernity and particularly with modern nihilism. He also attributes a certain mind-numbing quality to mechanical technology, which can seem prescient but more likely reflects his generally mandarin and Graecist’s sentiments with regard to banal or mechanical or “real life” work.

Interview

NB: Can one distinguish between a mandarin anti-technology and a more subversive brand? I presume you would put Heidegger in the latter category, but what about somebody like Jacques Ellul?

BB: That is a subtle question. Jacques Ellul meant to be as subversive as he could. He certainly wrote enough books. I am not sure that Heidegger ultimately shared the whole of this concern, or least not for Ellul's reasons, reasons that were also shared, after all by Heidegger's student, Herbert Marcuse. But by saying that I only mean that I see no reason not to take Heidegger at his word when he claims that it is more than technology alone and as such that concerns him. That is: Heidegger's question even with respect to technology was indeed the Being question. On the other hand, Heidegger saw with extraordinary clarity the all-pervasive, world-changing implications of modern technology for our way of being human and of being in the world. Still, what may turn out to matter most is being in the world, and here with the focus on the earth, Heidegger and Nietzsche do come together, if Heidegger found it more useful (i.e., to his own ends) to characterize Nietzsche as one who advocated something other than loyalty to the earth.

NB: So it is not just a 'humanistic' objection to technology? Heidegger is not just deploying technology as one side of a binary? This is one of the aspects I thought was extraordinary about *Words in Blood*, your refusal to sentimentalize nature as either something decisively separated from humanity or something to be appropriated by human design, all the while still being aware of the desperate ecological circumstances we are now in . . . how can we refine a Heideggerian perspective on technology from the Ellulian-Marcusian critique of technology for let us say its one-dimensional expertise?

BB: I wonder if one can? I say that with an appreciation of the nuances you are highlighting. And I am aware, increasingly, that scholars writing on technology from Jean Baudrillard, very ironically to Paul Virilio, very complicatedly, but much more directly such as Gianni Vattimo, Langdon Winner, Slavoj Žižek and Jean-François Lyotard, to emphasize a calculatedly appropriative, instrumentally anthropological approach to technology. But this often means, and Baudrillard and Virilio, like Ellul, Marcuse, and Winner, will be the exceptions here, that the scholar can get to criticize technology while celebrating its liberating potential.

Where Heidegger catches us up in this enthusiasm for taking from the technological condition just what we wish and for finding ourselves in the technological works we have made is, I think, in his reflection on the all-absorbing power of technology. Thus even as academic committees point to the limitations of citation frequency to judge a colleague's credentials, or the raw numerical results of student evaluations, we academics—I mean by that, we who supposedly 'know better'—turn around and do just the same. Consumer reports or reviews of technology work in the same way. And this was Heidegger's remark almost a century ago, namely that the quantitative becomes the qualitative. Heidegger's point is that the distinction is elided while we pretend to

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**Nicholas
Birns**

ourselves that we are merely using the numerical value as a cue without depending on it. Almost all the social sciences have been redesigned to thematize such quantitative, numerical analysis. And why not? If political science and psychology are already there, philosophy too might also be on its way to becoming a quantitative discipline except that it has to borrow from (social) science to get its measures (or results). Thus I have a junior colleague who, deeply impressed by social science methodology, earnestly suggests that philosophical questions be solved by survey: this would be, I imagine, the wiki-approach to philosophy. *All* you would learn however is a range of popular responses to philosophical questions, in other words: one would have generated the basis for an *argumentum ad populum*. My colleague is serious and a great deal of analytic philosophy is factoid-struck in this way. But for Heidegger the questions themselves remain.

NB: My big question on Heidegger and technology is, what would Heidegger have thought of the Internet, would he see it as less objectifying and inimical to truth?

BB: This is a big question in many ways. I don't believe that Heidegger could have predicted the internet—even if he does at times lament the transformation of academic publishing (the pitch for the latest, newest material, the tendency to value only what has most recently appeared, neglecting all the rest). And he might have seemed prescient in certain respects as he points to scholars who no longer need libraries and who are always on the move, thus he may have had some sense of where we were headed, just as Benjamin surely did.

If I hear you right, it is popular among today's academics to emphasize the fluidity and flexibility of the internet (I've already referred to Lyotard and this was the spirit of his very modern, post-modern faith in technology: free internet access for all!). But I am less sanguine than Lyotard (or Haraway or Vattimo) and turn rather more to Adorno and to Baudrillard on such questions.

At the same time, I think Heidegger would fear the patent inauthenticity of the inherently **flat**, mono-dimensionality of the medium and its peculiar catering to self-stimulation on almost every level. I also think philosophers should be a bit more engaged with the question of the internet, as the question concerning information technology in general.

Far more than television about which Jerry Mander once wrote [to almost no response from the academic community—Neil Postman was more successful but at the same time more inclined to pull his punches], the internet *is* Plato's cave. Gamers in particular exemplify the voluntary servitude of living life in front of a screen, with reference to a screen even when one is away from it (and mobile technology is already undermining the very idea of being "away" from the internet), tessellating identities, chained by patterns of light and sound, a cartoon-like identification with virtual selves (sometimes these are called avatars, sometimes sims, and other names are doubtless in the coining), as comrades and friends and lovers.

Authenticity of a Heideggerian or even a Sartrean kind is an increasingly empty notion (what

would one be appropriating, what existence would one be making one's own? is there any time at all for boredom for those who have learned to wait longer and longer until one's computer comes to life, until a web page loads, until a text prints, until one finds the little virtual keypad to dial out on the iphone)? I am speaking of the same people who feel compelled to spend every spare and not-so-spare moment typing into their phones. Hence although my students express their reservations and offer sometimes devastating reports about its impact on their own lives at the same time, they simply cannot imagine living without the internet, or without texting, or without talking on the phone in the care, on the subway, the sidewalk, at the beach, etc. The virtual world has become at least for some of them, and perhaps for no group more than the youngest among them, the real world.

In other words, how could the internet, if I may rephrase your question, be any *more* objectifying and inimical to truth than it is? The internet, this is in part wiki-political correctness, in part the predominance of only certain voices, rather than the infinite melodies that one might imagine, tends to show very specific profiles, the cheap correctness that for Heidegger is already a first alarm. Thus one needs a certain savvy, maybe even a certain wisdom to negotiate the internet, but even there, like anything virtual, anything unreal, the internet depends on hype and it depends on faith: that stuff is (really) there, that one *needs* to find it. The internet, a fiction, depends on fictions.



NB: Is there any way out of this half-matrix, half-cave? Does Heidegger suggest a way?

BB: Although I myself have doubts about a personal access to “Being,” I do think Heidegger suggests a way in his complex notion of *Gelassenheit*, provided it is thought, I think, together with his critique of the subject. On the other hand, I am not sure that the issue today is due to an oversight on our parts, as if all problems might be resolved with a certain mindfulness alone. When Heidegger emphasizes in a techno-political context his *Introduction to Metaphysics* that “no one can jump over his own shadow” (shades of both Hans Christian Andersen and Nietzsche’s more Greek

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

image of the soul as a wanderer, here one can also think of Rohde's *Psyche* which includes, as mention of the soul as shadow always does, the resonance of death), Heidegger points to something of this complexity, which I hear along with his reminder in *The Question Concerning Technology* "that there is no such thing as a man who, solely of himself is only man." To my mind, what Heidegger says here has everything to do with the thinking the project of the overman—which is to say the post-human—precisely in the sense in which Nietzsche had suggested that the human being might best be thought as something to be overcome or gotten over rather than to be redeemed or saved, preserved, advanced.

NB: Is the Heidegger of the formal writings 'the same' Heidegger as that in the correspondence with Arendt?

BB: That is a very searching question and you touch on so many things by posing the question as you do. The first problem to be noted in addressing it is also a problem that has, in my view, not faded in the current day. Women, even women academics, tend in general not to be taken seriously, not even by good friends, but least of all by their teachers, even when as in the case of Heidegger and Arendt that student-teacher relationship turns to love, and even those still rarer cases where, as in the case of Arendt and Heidegger, that love lasts a lifetime. If the durability of that love says something about both of them, it is significant that it does not mean that Heidegger finds Arendt more of a thinker but sees her, as men often see their lovers, their wives, as adjunct or as complement, as helpers, etc., rather than regarding them as thinkers in their own right. There is an awful story about Einstein's relationship with his first wife, Mileva Marić, whom he met when they were both students. Einstein's own letters to her confess, quite explicitly, his dependence on her mathematical skills and scientific genius and intimate family stories confirm her status vis-à-vis his own scientific powers, emphasizing her importance for his work. In addition, as if this were not enough, it is reported that Einstein's first articles as sent to press arrived bearing both their names, but that his wife's name was immediately elided. This story was suppressed for years, but even after being reported it is hardly the official story. That's why I call it awful. The established scholarly world finds the idea of Einstein needing *anyone*, especially his Serbian, mathematician wife, simply impossible: preposterous. Similar accounts (with similar debates) attest to the influence of de Beauvoir in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. But if all of this, *hinder her*, as the Germans would say, seems irrelevant: the pattern is the same. If, and I am pretty sure of this, Heidegger did not read Arendt's writings, a disregard for her work that would have nothing to do with his appreciation of Arendt herself or his affection for her but would confirm both his own otherwise well-known absorption in himself as well as a perfectly routine scholarly prejudice contra women, Arendt for her own part read Heidegger's works and corresponded with the concerns of these same texts in her own writings. Thus I have argued that some of her footnotes in *The Human Condition* were composed for Heidegger's own benefit. If I am right, there is a certain ironic misapprehension in this very same difference between them. On the other hand,

Interview

if one finds little philosophy in Heidegger's letters to Arendt one does find evidence of affection or love. And this is arguably also the case with Heidegger's letters to Jaspers. And maybe this is what was important to Arendt—if we read their letters as they exchanged them, as we do, we have to remember that the letters are not addressed to us, as readers, as published writings are, nor are they composed with the expectation that posterity will find them of interest.

NB: I want to ask the same question about the Zollikon seminars I did about Arendt—is it 'the same Heidegger' ... given his supposed disdain for the humanistic and anthropological in his later work, why do we find him so concerned with how philosophy operates on the level of the individual and psychology—does he still care about the human after the *Kehre* (did not mean the pun)?

BB: If one reads Heidegger as a philosopher with an ongoing interest in the sciences, it is indeed the same Heidegger. Heidegger speaks to the psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and psychologists, meaning here physicians and other clinical men of "science," on their own terms: that means that he does not assume what he is speaking to those who, like Arendt and like Jaspers, or even like Medard Boss, can be expected to have read his work in great detail. This illustrates Heidegger's often ignored pedagogic sensibility. If Gadamer at the end of his life rightly or correctly reflected that the difference between the two of them was that Heidegger was less dialogical, that Heidegger's thinking, as Gadamer put it, went step by step, and thus tended to cut the steps into finer and finer transitions, rather than in and in terms of the give and take of a conversation or a dialogue, Heidegger as a teacher always retained a rhetorical solicitude for his audience.

Thus speaking to practitioners of psychoanalysis, including *Daseinsanalyse*, and even Lacanians, Heidegger could have something to say to them. It is not so much that Heidegger himself is "concerned" as you have noted "with how philosophy operates on the level of the individual and psychology" but rather that these are the concerns of his interlocutors. Does this attention to the level of interest of his audience mean that his own interests have changed or reverted as it were? I don't think so. But if he retains the Being question throughout his life, if Heidegger was able to surprise and quiet Gadamer by asking him only if Gadamer still held that the essence of language is conversation, Heidegger also remains the one who is able to ask, in one of the last letters he writes, about the nature of the relationship between science and technology. And the men and women who heard his lectures in Zollikon were scientists, as he thought of them. The interest in the question of science and reflection, science and technology, stayed with him, even if he found himself speaking to those whose region of scientific concern operated on the level of the individual, that is: psychology in clinical practice and therapy.

NB: Are you interested in Gadamer at all? Is he an heir of 'your' Heidegger? Is 'your' Heidegger a hermeneutician?

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

BB: I am very interested in Gadamer—he was not only my teacher, he was the reason, *sine qua non*, that led me to take a PhD from Boston College in the first place. Gadamer is an heir to Heidegger, in my view, just as Gadamer is also to be seen in the lineage of Nietzsche’s influence. At the same time, Gadamer follows his own star and. And yes, ‘my’ Heidegger is decidedly a hermeneutician—why would he otherwise have the concern with questioning that he has or how could he express the meaning of translation in terms of interpretation, almost but not quite as Nietzsche speaks of interpretation?

NB: Who else do you feel is exciting writing about Heidegger today?

BB: I try to read broadly and I try to cite those I read but I am still trying to deepen my reading of Reiner Schürmann and Dominique Janicaud along with Giorgio Agamben and Gianni Vattimo and Slavoj Žižek but, for me, at least, also and very much those who repudiated Heidegger like Adorno and those who do not focus on him like Ellul and Baudrillard and de Certeau. We do tend, as scholars, to get caught up in the latest thing, reading (only) the latest person that every one else is reading, and that tendency is something Heidegger rightly warns us against. In addition, I have to say that the turn to cognitive science has sharply diminished, at least for me, the level of excitement in much recent work on Heidegger.

NB: And about Nietzsche?

BB: I am a fan of David Allison and the whole array of “new” Nietzscheans (I include Bataille and Klossowski and especially Jean Granier, whose work should be better known) but also Gary Shapiro and so on and I am enthusiastic about anyone who writes on Nietzsche without feeling compelled to use language Nietzsche never used to refer to philosophical concerns Nietzsche never had. I mean words like cognitive or naturalist, or realist, etc.

NB: Will these philosophers ever become more ‘popular’ than they are today?

BB: If you mean the new Nietzscheans, this I doubt. If you mean Heidegger and Nietzsche themselves, the answer depends what you mean by ‘popular.’ In a sense Nietzsche could hardly be more popular than he is and although Heidegger can be popularized, the result is lamentable.

NB: Should they be?

BB: I am philosophical enough to think not.

NB: And, finally, when it comes down to it, if you absolutely and unalterably had to choose in a binary, mechanistic way, how would you classify Nietzsche: as a philosopher or as a literary artist?

BB: I can only begin to answer that ‘binary’ question *because* I read Nietzsche as a consummate-

ly, radically, epistemological thinker. Thus I cannot but classify him as a philosopher. However it does not do to forget that he is also a literary artist who always uses his extraordinary artistic gifts for very philosophical ends. Nietzsche is thus a kind of bastard or monstrosity, a centaur, as he himself seems to have imagined himself with his talk of the labyrinth. But Nietzsche is always and also a philosopher, hence he chides those who would say that he is a *Schriftsteller*, an “author” and there is a self-teasing turn in the refrain we read, *Nur Narr, nur Dichter*, “Only a fool, only a poet.” Nietzsche was a thinker, a philosopher. By contrast, literary artists such as Wallace Stevens or Rainer Maria Rilke or Friedrich Hölderlin, just to keep to conspicuously philosophical poets here, do not bother with philosophy just to the degree that their genius serves their literary artistry. As philosophers, we can tease all the philosophy we like out of their work. Thus Heidegger reads Hölderlin but this does not reduce Hölderlin’s word to Heidegger’s reading. In the case of the poet, it is that excess that permits a philosophical reading. Given a contest between philosophy and poetry, the poet has the advantage from beginning to end.

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