

Michael Bowler

Heidegger and Aristotle: Philosophy as Praxis.

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Despite its title, Bowler's is not a book on Heidegger and Aristotle. At least, it is no more a book on Heidegger and Aristotle than it is a book on Heidegger and Rickert, or Heidegger and Natorp, or Heidegger and Husserl, or Heidegger and Dilthey. In this way, the old adage not to judge a book by its cover is given new meaning here: even titles aren't to be trusted. For those interested in the probing work Heidegger did on Aristotle, and its relationship to Heidegger's own *oeuvre*, there is not that much here (in terms of quantity) that addresses this issue. One would do better to read William McNeill (*The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory*, SUNY Press 1999) or Walter Brogan (*Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being*, SUNY Press 2005).

But none of this is to say that Bowler's book is not an excellent piece of work. It *is* excellent in many respects, and titles are over-rated in any case. Bowler's meditation on Heidegger's philosophical project—its aim and its origin—is nuanced and interesting, and those intrigued by the philosophical climate of Heidegger's early years will surely find much worthwhile in Bowler's book. Likewise, those new to Heidegger will be relieved to find a relatively jargon-free exposition of the early Heidegger that is neither abstruse nor over-simplified. In this respect, Bowler's book has much to recommend it.

The book's central claim is that Heidegger's project is best construed as an attempt to re-situate philosophical exploration in life, and that what constitutes lived experience is, in effect, *philosophy* (as envisioned by Heidegger, where philosophy is construed as a kind of *praxis* in which possibilities are disclosed). In this respect, as Bowler shows, Heidegger's approach to the relation between philosophy and life is much more radical than that of the *Lebensphilosophie* clan: a philosophy that tries to articulate life is not nearly radical enough. Philosophy *is* life. As Bowler sums up: 'the thrust of Heidegger's critique [is] . . . that previous philosophies *presuppose* life and also the living character of philosophy itself. In essence, their failure to grasp life in and for itself is due to the fact that life is already always present in the background of their philosophy' (4). Heidegger, on the contrary, wants to understand 'how philosophy itself is lived and situated in life' (4). This can be accomplished, Bowler argues, through the re-appropriation of Aristotle. 'Heidegger appropriates from Aristotle the notion of philosophy as the fulfillment of the praxis of life, i.e. an activity whose end or purpose is that very activity itself' (6).

Bowler proceeds by presenting the competing contexts and influences that facilitated Heidegger's highly original conceptualization of the problem of philosophy, as well as its solution in the retrieval of Aristotle. The first four chapters take up the work

of individual philosophers who exerted influence on Heidegger's thinking, as well as on his understanding of the issues of philosophy and the realm of possible solutions to these issues. Bowler offers an analysis of Heidegger's relation to Rickert, Husserl, Natorp, and Dilthey. For these intricate and nuanced analyses alone, the book is worth reading. Bowler shows that the textbook reading of Husserl as missing the social nature of human existence, and of Heidegger as correcting this oversight, simply does not stand up to the available evidence. Not only was Husserl aware of the essential sociality of human beings *before* Heidegger's account of *Dasein*, there is also good reason to suspect that Husserl's reflections on such matters were decisive *for* Heidegger. This, in turn, provides reason to suspect that the disagreement between Husserl and Heidegger lies elsewhere—in the very nature of the philosophical enterprise. Bowler convincingly argues that Heidegger sees the nature of philosophy as a kind of primordial *inquiry*, not an inquiry in a primordial *region*. That is, what marks philosophical activity is not *that after which it inquires*, but rather the manner of its inquiry. Primordial philosophy is primordial, not because it asks about basic things, but because its questioning is originary—a questioning that is essential to the very nature of life. It is this that marks the central disagreement between Husserl and Heidegger.

Bowler's accounts of Rickert, Dilthey, and Natorp are no less convincing. These accounts are, in my view, welcome refinements and corrections of our collective understanding of what it is Heidegger hoped to accomplish, as well as of his relationship to ancient philosophy. In this respect, Bowler's last chapter, where the titular Aristotle finally emerges, is of much interest. By showing how Aristotle's division of sciences corresponds to differing ways in which the world is there for us—to differing ways in which we *live* and engage in *praxis*—Bowler sets the stage for a rich, if not completely developed, account of the Heideggerian project. Philosophical inquiry, Bowler argues, seeks after the most basic level at which the world is given—in which the world is *lived*. It is in this respect that philosophy is more primordial than ontic science (as ontic science of necessity presupposes an ontology). Fundamental philosophy, unlike ontic science, is 'an inquiry into the being of our comportments toward the world' (114). Strikingly, this makes fundamental ontology 'the *praxis of life itself*, which is the source of every other *praxis*' (114).

Bowler contends (as does Heidegger) that Aristotle was interested in exactly this view of fundamental ontology. Because modern philosophy has misunderstood Aristotle's project, however, we have become blind to our own being. Heidegger's aim is thus to retrieve an Aristotelian conception of philosophy in a way that will enable us to move beyond the dead end of Enlightenment ontology. This conception of philosophy is one where philosophy is not merely carried out in linguistic formulations of conceptual insights; it is, rather, a *praxis* in which human agents grasp their own possibilities through living discourse (*logos/Rede*) and *nous*. In this way, Heidegger wants to reformulate what philosophy is, and to do so in a way that reveals that the structure of philosophical inquiry (*logos* and *nous*) mirrors the structure of life itself (*praxis*).

There is obviously much more to the story than can reasonably be covered in a book review. As I have indicated, Bowler does a splendid job of bringing to light the philosophical landscape of Heidegger's early years, and he does this in a way that is both plausible and illuminating. This is not to say that I agree with everything Bowler claims about Heidegger (or Aristotle, or Husserl, or etc). I do not. But completely agreeing with the content of a book is often a mark of failing to be challenged by it. Bowler's book challenges us to re-think Heidegger's project, as well as how it relates to the context that produces and sustains it. It is a fine work of philosophy in its own right, and a welcome contribution to the *praxis* of philosophy. Titles be damned.

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