

Martin Heidegger

The Event.

Trans. Richard Rojcewicz.

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The Event is a translation of volume 71 of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, originally published by Vittorio Klostermann under the title *Das Ereignis*. The decision to translate this key term of Heidegger's thought as 'the event' is contentious, not least since certain commentators resist that particular rendering of the word, and indeed Heidegger himself insisted a number of times that the term '*Ereignis*' should not be thought of as referring to an event. However, the translator explains that this is in keeping with his policy of adhering to the ordinary English equivalent of German terms (used in a unique way by Heidegger) rather than trying to capture the extraordinary sense which those terms carry for Heidegger's readers in German, leaving the task of deciphering Heidegger's precise meaning as something for English readers to undertake for themselves:

My general strategy in translating this book was the same as that employed with regard to *Contributions*: to capture in English the effect the original would have on a native speaker of German. Therefore I made no attempt to resolve the grammatical peculiarities, nor did I impose on Heidegger's terminology the extraordinary sense the ordinary words (such as 'event') do eventually assume. This translation is meant to hold that sense open to readers and to invite them into the task of disclosure, but it is ultimately incumbent on the reader himself or herself to decide what that sense is. (Translator's Introduction, xix)

The Event is an unusual text; it certainly doesn't read like a normal treatise or essay and is, perhaps, even more of a challenge to the reader of Heidegger than the notoriously inscrutable *Beiträge*. While often interesting, this is, nevertheless, an extremely difficult compendium of jottings and half-thoughts; these are the notes of a thinker wrestling with some of his central ideas—ideas which he develops more fully and coherently in his published work. The worry with this kind of publication, as originally 'presented' by the editor of the German edition (Von Hermann), for example, is that it simply offers itself up as yet another stick with which to beat Heidegger and continental philosophy for those who are suspicious of what they see as the more uncritical or undisciplined elements in this tradition. The great misfortune here is that Heidegger himself was a thinker of the first rank and a tireless reader of the Western philosophical tradition. It would be a pity then if texts like *The Event* were read as though they can be treated with the same level of critical engagement as a text such as *Being and Time*. Ultimately, this is a mish-mash of half-thoughts, notes and passages belonging to a phase in Heidegger's intellectual development in which he was trying to find a way to articulate the problems which go to the heart of his thought and which are at the centre of some of his middle and later work, including his infamous, posthumously published masterpiece—*Beiträge Zur Philosophie: Vom Ereignis*.

The editor's afterword, where he explains the context of this particular series of notes, is noteworthy in that it describes the text as a conventional treatise:

This is the sixth in the series of seven great treatises on the history of being to appear out of the literary remains of Martin Heidegger. The series was inaugurated by *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* (GA65). The current text bears the title *The Event* and appears as volume 71 of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* ['Complete Edition']. Between volumes 65 and 71 stand the already published treatises, *Besinnung* [*Meditation*] (GA66), *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik* [*The Overcoming of Metaphysics*] (GA67), *Die Geschichte des Seyns* [*The History of Being*] (GA69), and *Über den Anfang* [*On the Beginning*] (GA70). The seventh treatise, *Die Stege des Anfangs* [*The Paths of the Beginning*] (GA72) is the only one in the series not yet published (297).

The most important thing to note here is that this is *not* in fact a treatise. So there is a certain disingenuity in Von Hermann's claim to the effect that this text belongs to a 'series' of 'treatises' on the history of being as though it were one of a series of carefully planned volumes that form a collective history of being in some kind of premeditated or preconceived fashion. One might be led to suppose then that Heidegger envisaged these treatises on the history of being as belonging together in the same way that Kant characterized the systematicity and completeness of his three critiques. This is terribly misleading since even the most important text in this 'series' itself (the *Beiträge*) could not be less accurately described. It is anything but a treatise, and this is very much by design. The translator of this first English edition, conversely, makes the point well:

As with the other members of the series, the current volume fits within the third division of the *Gesamtausgabe*: 'Unpublished treatises: addresses—ponderings'. The operative words here are 'unpublished' and 'ponderings'. This is not a polished treatise, composed with didactic intent. It is a private pondering, never intended for publication. Thus, with regard to form, the book is replete with the partial sentences and cryptic passages that could be expected when thinkers write for themselves.
(xix)

But what of the work itself? There are many of the familiar Heideggerian 'chestnuts' concerning his idiosyncratic conception of truth as *aletheia*, his readings of the Presocratics and indeed Plato and Aristotle and the ensuing story concerning the history of Western metaphysics. Heidegger toys with notions familiar to his readers concerning a first beginning and the possibility of another beginning and the interplay of revealing and concealing—that is, the role that *aletheia* plays in being coming to have meaning (often written as 'the truth of Being'). As one might expect, we find Heidegger critical of Western metaphysics (a metaphysics of presence) and the myopic obsession with correctness, apprehension, rectitude and so on. There are the familiar criticisms of Modernity and the onset of calculative thinking, technology and machination. All the while, Heidegger is looking to find a way to question after the manner in which being comes to be meaningful and the role that *Dasein* plays in this as the only possible response to the situation in which we find ourselves. This leads to an enormous number of passages and short paragraphs concerning the relationship between *die Kehre*, *Ereignis* and *Dasein* itself.

Ereignis is by this stage the key phrase in Heidegger's thought and he experiments and wrestles with the notion repeatedly in this text. Leaving to one side any reservations we might have over the translation of *Ereignis* as 'event', we nevertheless find some helpful characterizations of the term:

The event—expresses the explicitly self-clearing inceptuality of the beginning. The inaugural truth of being preserves in itself, as inceptual unification, the inaugural unity of the appropriating and the appropriated (127).

The Consignment—it is appropriation in such a way that the event allows the clearing to occur essentially as the in between of time-space so that the ‘there’ eventuates and Da-seyn is as the essential occurrence of the turning (i.e., the truth of beyng as the beyng of truth) (129).

Heidegger dispels a number of longstanding hermeneutic prejudices which have blighted a significant portion of Heidegger scholarship until relatively recently. For one thing, he makes it abundantly clear that the notion of a turn (*die Kehre*) is something that he is trying to describe rather than something that represents a rejection of his earlier thought. He further gives the lie to anyone who insists that he jettisoned the project of *Being and Time* or that he came to look on it as a failed project that needed to be abandoned after this so-called turn. If anything, we find Heidegger repeatedly bemoaning the tendency to misread *Being and Time* in various ways and the failure to see how his early masterpiece was meant to be on the way to what are often considered his later concerns with the notion of the truth of being/beyng, the clearing and *das Ereignis*. (See pages 75, 93/94, 111/112, 131/132).

Overall this is a useful and timely publication. It provides us with further clues as to how exactly Heidegger conceived of his lifelong project and the way the key terms and notions within that project intersected. It is certainly not a text for a general philosophical audience, nor is it a text that should be read as a treatise or essay. Rather, this is an opportunity for specialists to peep over a great thinker’s shoulder as he makes notes and jottings, struggling to articulate some of his central ideas. Great care needs to be exercised therefore with respect to how this text is presented and discussed. Heidegger is not writing with a view to publication or dissemination. This is very much a notebook where he teased out and explored his ideas; many of the passages are rather clipped and as such can seem rather cryptic. That is not to suggest that one should not study this text very carefully. Rather, a certain amount of caution is advised in terms of how one approaches and indeed presents the text.

Mahon O’Brien
University of Sussex