

Mark Wrathall

Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011.

264 pages

US\$29.99 (cloth ISBN 978-0-521-51816-1);

US\$90.00 (paper ISBN 978-0-521-73912-2)

Heidegger and Unconcealment brings together ten essays written over the course of more than a decade—two of them previously unpublished. In the essays, Mark Wrathall sets out to offer an account of Heidegger's conception of truth as unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*), as well as a wide-ranging exposition of the implications of this account. According to Wrathall, Heidegger's thinking about truth is a fundamental feature of his development before and after *Being and Time*. As he writes, 'The core notion of unconcealment functions as a methodological principle throughout Heidegger's work' (2). Wrathall's exposition of Heidegger's conception of truth lays the foundation for a generally fruitful presentation of his thinking about language and history as it unfolded over the course of his career. It also provides the conceptual touchstone linking pragmatic readings of Heidegger's earlier philosophy to a coherent interpretation of his thought after the 1930s.

Notoriously, Heidegger translates the Greek *ἀλήθεια* as *Unverborgenheit*. Wrathall renders this in English as 'unconcealment'. According to Heidegger, the philosophical preoccupation with truth as the correspondence between thought and reality has covered over a complex web of more primordial phenomena. Unconcealment does not name a relationship between beliefs and objects. Rather, it is intended to direct attention to the conditions under which such a relation might obtain in the first place. To some, the decision to use 'truth' to talk about these conditions will seem a further indication of Heidegger's overall penchant for obscurantism and general conceptual muddle. Wrathall argues convincingly, however, that this use of the word 'truth' is justified. The point of this usage, Wrathall writes, is '[t]o provoke us to reflect on our role in opening up, sheltering, preserving, and stabilizing understandings of beings, entities and thinkable states of affairs in the world' (39). Heidegger's aim in using 'truth' in this way, then, is to develop an account of the interrelated structural features of human existence (*Dasein*) that underlie and give coherence to the ways people relate to things and, thus, make truth as correspondence possible.

In general, unconcealment involves bringing something into the ken of human understanding, thereby making it available for meaningful relations. Unconcealment, according to Heidegger, thus involves the 'uncovering' (*Entdecktheit*) of entities. On Wrathall's reading, an entity is uncovered insofar as it has a relatively stable position within particular social practices such that it can be encountered as salient. Emotions, attitudes, and abilities serve to uncover entities, then, in that they are anchored in and responsive to such practices. The uncovering of entities is only possible, however, on the basis of the 'disclosure' (*Erschlossenheit*) of the world. Entities, activities, and

relationships must be ‘lit up’ as forming a meaningful totality of social practices within which particular practices make sense and are relevant. The disclosure of the world points to the phenomenon of the clearing or ‘lighted realm’ (*Lichtung*) itself. The clearing, as Wrathall reads Heidegger, is the space of fundamental existential possibilities that define a historical world. These fundamental possibilities disclose a world and, thus, allow particular entities to be discovered such that they are available for human dealings. As Wrathall puts it, ‘The clearing makes it possible for a certain understanding of being—particular mode of presence—to prevail among entities’ (34). Overall, according to Wrathall, unconcealment points to this ‘platform’ of interrelated phenomena.

Wrathall’s treatment of unconcealment leads him to a provocative and original interpretation of Heidegger’s philosophy of language. Following other pragmatic readers such as Hubert Dreyfus, Wrathall sees in Heidegger a strong commitment to the importance of social practices in unconcealment. Thus, conversation, as Wrathall reads Heidegger, is only possible because we are ‘conversant’ with broader practical contexts. Unlike other readers of Heidegger who see a major transformation in Heidegger’s thought about language in his later work, Wrathall argues for continuity on these issues. His argument for continuity hinges on an insightful reading of Heidegger’s dictum, ‘Language is the house of being’. Whereas many read Heidegger as urging linguistic idealism, Wrathall argues that ‘language’ and ‘being’ cannot be understood in their familiar senses when reading Heidegger. ‘Language’ in Heidegger’s usage is not a totality of words and concepts; rather it is the ‘gathering’ of entities, activities, and relationships into a world that makes speech in the familiar sense possible; in other words, there is a deep connection between unconcealment and language. Wrathall concludes: ‘“Language is the house of being means, then, that a world is kept and preserved by a consolidation of the relationships that determine a thing as the thing it is’ (152).

Wrathall ends his book with a series of reflections on Heidegger’s conception of the ‘history of being’ (*Seinsgeschichte*) and the relevance of this conception for religious life. For Heidegger, history must be understood in terms of the clearing of worlds in epoch-defining understandings of being. Our contemporary technological understanding of being is revealed most clearly in Nietzsche’s claim that ‘God is dead’. Wrathall devotes several essays to unpacking this development and thinking through the value and orientation of a religious life in our technological age. Particularly compelling among these essays is Wrathall’s penetrating interpretation of Heidegger’s ‘confrontation’ (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Nietzsche.

There is much to recommend *Heidegger and Unconcealment* and readers will certainly profit from the clarity with which Wrathall presents Heidegger’s ideas as well the connections he draws to important figures in analytic philosophy. Unfortunately, missing from the book is any sustained attempt to respond to or engage with continental interpreters of Heidegger. Derrida, for instance, is mentioned only in passing and Gadamer’s name simply does not appear. Perhaps most significantly, the text substantiates a well-known criticism of the pragmatic interpretation of Heidegger: namely, that it fails to incorporate other important aspects of his thought. For example,

Heidegger's analyses of conscience, death, silence in *Being and Time* and elsewhere are cast aside in Wrathall's interpretation of Heidegger's views on truth and language. One cannot help but think that this oversight has important implications for his interpretation of Heidegger's later philosophy. All that said, *Heidegger and Unconcealment* is an important accomplishment, and its two new essays are especially important reading for anyone attempting to think through Heidegger's work on truth and language.

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