

Essential Readings in Heidegger

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Basic Writings, ed., David Farrell Krell.

New York: Harper and Row publishers, 1977. 397 pages.

Professor David Farrell Krell, currently teaching at the University of Mannheim, West Germany, and already well known both for his scholarly articles and for his co-editorship and co-translation of Heidegger's *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), has done a great service by gathering together in this essential anthology five new translations, and by reprinting in whole or part five already published translations, of Martin Heidegger's works. The result is an exceedingly fine and polished piece of work which not only replaces earlier and inadequate translations but also offers for the first time in English a set of readings which at once spans the whole of Heidegger's professional life and delves into most of the major areas of his thought.

The new translations in this volume are the following: (1) The Introduction to *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray and David Farrell Krell. This is the first installment of Professor Stambaugh's completely new translation of the whole of *Being and Time* which will appear shortly from Harper and Row and replace the current rendering by Macquarrie and Robinson, published in 1962. (2) "What is Metaphysics?" translated by David Farrell Krell, which replaces the older translation by R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick, which appeared in 1949 in *Existence and Being*, pp. 325-349. (3) "On

the Essence of Truth," translated by John Sallis, replacing the former translation, also by Hull and Crick, *ibid.*, pp. 292-324. (4) "Letter on Humanism" translated by Frank A. Capuzzi in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray and David Farrell Krell. This replaces the much anthologized rendering made by Edgar Lohner in the early 'sixties. (5) "The Question Concerning Technology" translated by William Lovitt. This text, not previously translated into English, also appears, with slight orthographical changes, in another and contemporaneous Heidegger volume, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, edited and translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

Reprinted with slight emendations in translation are: (1) "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (whole), done by Joan Stambaugh; (2) "Building Dwelling Thinking" (whole), done by Albert Hofstadter; (3) "The Origin of the Work of Art" (in substantial part), also by Albert Hofstadter; (4) a selection from *What is a Thing?* (pp. 66-108) by W. B. Barton, Jr., and Vera Deutsch; and (5) selections from *What Calls for Thinking?* (pp. 1-8, 48-52, and 79-86).

Professor Krell discussed the selection of texts for this volume with Martin Heidegger during 1974-75, even though, as he writes, "the plan adopted here cannot be called an 'authorized' one" (p. xiii). The principles governing Krell's selection of these essays were, first, that the entire collection should offer an insight into the whole of Heidegger's thought from his *magnum opus* of 1927 through his latest writings; and, secondly, that each reading should be autonomous, accessible, and focused on issues of special significance.

The selection is important from a number of viewpoints, one of which is pedagogical. In the past, teaching Heidegger was rendered even more difficult than one might reasonably expect, due to the lack of such a comprehensive and reliable volume as this. (An earlier project for such a collection by William J. Richardson, S.J. in the late 'sixties unfortunately did not come to fruition). But with the present work teachers have at their disposal a book which is priced within the student's range, is professionally respectable in its translations, and includes selections that range from Heidegger's early overview of his project in 1927, through the essential opuscula on Nothing and on truth, through essays, almost monographs in themselves, on art and humanism, into the issues of science and the mathematical, technology and the fourfold, and the essence and task of thinking in the age of the end of philosophy.

Lack of space, of course, prevented the inclusion of Heidegger's many studies on thinkers in the history of philosophy. It is to be hoped that, on the basis of his excellent work in this anthology, Professor Krell, who is now finishing his translation of the Nietzsche volumes, will see his way clear to a second collection, this time on Heidegger's interpretations of the history of Being.

The volume opens with David Krell's lucid and informative general introduction under the title, "The Question of Being," in which he first lays out information on the development of this question prior to *Being and Time*, then sketches the structure and significance of that work itself, and finally shows briefly how the later essays advance the project begun in that early attempt. The essay is based in part on Krell's frequent and fruitful conversations with Martin Heidegger at the latter's home in Zähringen. These discussions yielded some previously unknown information such as the fact that the Introduction to *Being and Time* was composed only *after* Heidegger had completed the treatise up through Part One, Division Two (p. 38); and Heidegger's self-criticism of the work for "the failure of the Second Division to repeat in a detailed fashion the analyses of section 44 on truth from the standpoint of temporality" (p. 33). His shorter prefaces to the individual readings are pointed and precise, his own translation of "What is Metaphysics?" is a fine piece of English prose, and his bibliography of English translations of Heidegger's books, provided at the end of the volume, is very useful.

On simple comparison with the previous translations that have circulated over the last thirty years, the new renderings in this book mark an immense improvement. There are corrections of previously mangled sentences, for example from "What is Metaphysics": *Hull and Crick*: "Why is there any Being at all—why not far rather Nothing?" (*Existence and Being*, p. 349); vs. *Krell*: "Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?" (*Basic Writings*, p. 112). Or compare, on the levels of both translation and English style, this passage from "On the Essence of Truth": *Hull and Crick*: "To let what-is *be* what it is means participating in something overt and its overtness, in which everything that 'is' takes up its position and which entails such overtness" (*Existence and Being*, p. 306); vs. *Sallis*: "To let be—that is, to let beings be as the beings which they are—means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness, as it were, along with itself" (*Basic Writings*, p. 127). Examples could be multiplied from, for example, "Letter on Humanism" as well as other entries. Likewise, in translations which had been previously published and are reprinted here, the editor which had been

respective translators has seen to the revision of some former errors or infelicities.

To be sure, purists and translators of the strict observance may be able to find sentences with which to quibble. But there are, by definition, no "perfect" translations, only better or worse ones; and even there one must recognize that a lot of translation is *de gustibus*, about which *non est disputandum*. In the face of the tremendous advance which the present volume represents over previous attempts at rendering these essays, nit-picking or translation dogmatism, of which the present writer has not always been innocent, have no place.

The final touches were put on this book only a short while after Martin Heidegger died on May 26, 1976. And it was published only a few short months before the sudden and unexpected death of the man who was the general editor both of this work and of the whole Heidegger series with Harper and Row, J. Glenn Gray. In that sense, *Basic Writings* is a kind of *Wegmark* along the path which Heidegger himself began and which Professor Gray helped open up to English readers. David Krell, who follows ably in those footsteps, deserves many thanks for his service rendered to English and American readers.

Thomas Sheehan
Loyola University of Chicago