Rephrasing Heidegger

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INTRODUCTION

[...] Heidegger's philosophical significance will have to rest on his publications. There is no way of getting around these. Few, if any, second-hand accounts can pave the way to them. Almost all of those now available in English are marred by the mere fact that they are found in the misleading context of accounts of existentialism, which Heidegger repudiates. Most of them fail to realize the development in Heidegger's thinking. And they are even less adequate as introductions to the phenomenological aspects of Heidegger's work. Thus the challenging problem of providing a real introduction to Heidegger's thinking remains unsolved to this hour. In stating this I do not mean to imply that it can be solved, especially at this stage when important evidence is still missing. Yet the attempt ought to be made, if only for the sake of better relations between the main philosophical currents of our time. (Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement. A Historical Introduction. Second edition. Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague/Boston/London, 1978; p. 274.)

The aim of this book is to present the main ideas of Being and Time, Heidegger's most important philosophical work, in a clear and accessible manner. In so doing, the book also strives to correct certain fundamental misconceptions of Heidegger's thought, including the mischaracterization of Heidegger as an "existentialist."
No one could plausibly deny that *Being and Time* is a dense and difficult philosophical treatise. Its stylistic flaws, even in the original German, are too obvious to excuse. Nevertheless it is equally undeniable that *Being and Time* is an original, systematic, and epoch-making philosophical work. Without a doubt it was one of the most influential books of the 20th century, and its influence on contemporary thought is continuing and pervasive. I think it is fair to say that on the whole Heidegger’s own stylistic excesses, as well as those of his imitators and, I fear, his detractors, have tended to produce a nimbus of unintelligibility surrounding what Heidegger actually believed and thought.

The present exposition is devoted to making the conceptual underpinnings of *Being and Time* transparent in order that its philosophical significance may be better understood. The title of this book, *Rephrasing Heidegger*, was chosen in order to emphasize this point. While a certain amount of technical terminology is indispensable to any intellectual work, there are ways of minimizing the burden placed upon the reader’s goodwill. For the sake of intellectual honesty, I have made concessions that Heidegger himself—it must be emphasized—was not prepared to make. An author, like an educator, has an ethical obligation to the audience to be clear and comprehensible. Whether Heidegger’s rejection of this obligation can be philosophically justified is a question that I myself have answered in the negative.

Often it seems as though biography and exposition are confused in outlines of Heidegger’s thought. The impression is sometimes produced that political criticism of Heidegger, as justified as it may be, ebbs over into ad hominem arguments against his philosophy. For this reason, there will be a firm emphasis throughout the whole of the present book on *Being and Time* as a work of philosophy. Other writers have addressed the question of Heidegger’s rather less than laudable political activities at length, and I see no reason to belabour the point here. The present book concentrates on Heidegger’s philosophy as it is expressed in *Being and Time*, and it is left to the reader to form an opinion concerning the connection, if any, between Heidegger’s philosophical beliefs and his political beliefs.
Rephrasing Heidegger is addressed primarily to students, both graduate and undergraduate, encountering Heidegger for the first time, as well as to anyone who is in need of a solid acquaintance with Heidegger's philosophical thought. It is also hoped that the book will be useful as a textbook or companion to seminars on Heidegger, since it was written to fulfill that function for my own seminars.

I was first able to employ and develop the material in this book during my undergraduate seminar on Readings in Contemporary Philosophy at the Dominican University College in Ottawa. During this seminar, which employed the English translation of *Being and Time* by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, I had an opportunity to study the peculiar difficulties which English translations of key terms from *Being and Time* pose for beginners. After reflecting on the matter, I decided that a thorough re-translation of much of Heidegger's technical vocabulary was necessary. The result, I hope, is a controlled, strict, and transparent English philosophical vocabulary that is both relatively easy to learn and reasonably faithful to Heidegger's original vocabulary.

There is a certain precedent for this undertaking in Heidegger scholarship; I have found that many writers on Heidegger substitute their own translations for certain key terms where they find the current translations inexact or clumsy. My enterprise differs from theirs only with respect to its scope. It should also be said that I do not necessarily think my translations to be the last word on the problem of translating Heidegger into English. Ease of use and faithfulness to the German original have been my primary concerns when translating Heidegger's key terms into English. Heidegger scholarship is still, relatively speaking, in its infancy, and as the various facets of Heidegger's thought are more clearly grasped there will be a growing need to revise earlier translations in the light of this deeper understanding.

In addition to the criticisms of Heidegger scholarship mentioned by Spiegelberg in the passages I have cited at the beginning of this introduction—criticisms which, broadly
speaking, are still valid as of the date of this writing—there are other reasons why a book of the present sort is an important contribution to contemporary Heidegger scholarship. The first translation of *Being and Time* by Macquarrie and Robinson, published in 1962, is still the most frequently used, and it is still through this volume that most readers make their initial contact with Heidegger's philosophy. Though an excellent translation for its time, the text also reflects an earlier level of scholarship, and it has, from the point of view of the scholar and educator, two main defects. Firstly, without a detailed line-by-line paraphrase and explanation of the translation, I have found that students are generally unable to make any headway at all reading the book on their own. Secondly, even after having just refreshed one's memory with the original German text, I have found that it is extremely difficult to recognize the corresponding passages in the English translation. One often has to resort to counting the indented paragraphs in order to orient oneself in the translation at all. I think that at this point one can charitably and accurately say that the Macquarrie-Robinson translation is a valiant but fundamentally flawed attempt to render Heidegger into intelligible English.

The 1996 translation by Joan Stambaugh does go a long way towards eliminating these difficulties, at least to the extent permitted by such a dense and elaborate original as *Being and Time*. Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to streamline the translation of Heidegger's technical terms to a still greater extent. Since I can expect virtually all of my readers to be acquainted with Macquarrie and Robinson's translation, my technical discussions tend to focus primarily upon their work. While I would have liked to discuss Stambaugh's translations at length, any more extensive discussion would have led to immoderately large appendices and so reduced, rather than increased, their usefulness to the reader. In any event, I have significantly more praise than criticism of Stambaugh's work.

The German, French, and Anglo-American Heidegger scholarship seem to have developed more or less independently
even during Heidegger's own lifetime. One reason for this is, no doubt, the wildly divergent renditions of Heidegger's terminology into other languages. Another important factor in this development was the political climate of the time, which played a decisive role in the reception of Heidegger's philosophy. Although to a great extent the responsibility for his unfavourable reputation rests squarely with Heidegger, the debris of 20th century politics also played a certain role in the Anglo-American attitude to German and French thought. The excesses of early Heidegger scholarship, both pro and contra, are too well known to require explicit mention. Against this background, an attempt to present Heidegger's thought in a simple, unambiguous, and unprejudiced manner clearly faces an uphill battle.

There is, I think, a clear need not only for a beginners' guide to Heidegger but also for a volume that presents an accessible yet nuanced summary of the truly essential features of his core philosophical position in Being and Time. Such a guide would also be of use to those who are not beginners, but who are seeking a solid orientation in their journey along the many valleys and peaks in the landscape of Heideggerian thinking. The present work is an attempt to meet these requirements. It aspires to be a comprehensive presentation of Heidegger's philosophy that is still an accurate reflection of the original. It is my personal conviction that this is how Heidegger himself would have preferred to be read and understood.

In this book I have adopted a number of approaches towards simplifying and summarizing the original source material. In the course of my expositions, I will develop and maintain a small and strictly controlled technical vocabulary. I will introduce translations of key Heideggerian terms as they become necessary and only when necessary. When a new term is introduced, I will always provide the reader with a clear definition of the term in question. I will not hesitate to translate technical terms differently than the current consensus among Heidegger scholars indicates, should I feel this to be necessary. Finally, I will both simplify the original vocabulary Heidegger uses and restate his ideas in
plain English, though with qualifying remarks where they are appropriate.

I have also not hesitated to depart from the order in which Heidegger himself introduces particular concepts or analyses when it seems to best serve the reader's purpose. Many of Heidegger's works show clear signs of having been written in haste and without adequate revision. This is particularly true of Being and Time, which was probably written with a clear conception of its structure and purpose but without a definite notion of what was to be said in individual sections. This results in a particularly annoying voyage for the reader: one frequently discovers indispensable information, absolutely essential to the understanding of earlier sections, remarked in passing in later sections. In my own revision of the material I will remedy such defects by discussing all relevant information in one place.

One example of this approach will be in Section 2.4, "Heidegger's Concept of Phenomenology," where I pull together Heidegger's scattered remarks on methodology from §§ 7, 18, 32, 44, and 63 of Being and Time. All of this material is vitally important to understanding what phenomenology means for Heidegger, and it is fair to say that when it is not read together no adequate comprehension of Heidegger's phenomenology is possible. I will argue, based on this material, that the frequently encountered characterization of Heidegger's phenomenology as a purely descriptive method is incorrect. Heidegger's approach is a hermeneutic phenomenology, that is, a phenomenology that does seek an adequate description but as a basis for further interpretation, as these passages make clear.

Another significant example of the necessity to restructure Heidegger's manner of presentation can be found in Section 2.1, "Understanding versus Perception," where I introduce the basic concepts of Heidegger's analysis of the world with no Heideggerian terminology. It is a peculiar feature of Being and Time that the initial sections of the book presuppose an acquaintance with the results of Heidegger's analysis of the "worldliness," or underlying structure, of the world. Without
an understanding of this analysis the initial sections of *Being and Time* are incomprehensible. Most beginning readers are so frustrated by the initial sections that the later sections containing the world analysis will either never be read or not be understood even if they are. I will circumvent this difficulty by presenting a streamlined account of Heidegger's model in Section 2.1 and by translating it back into the controlled technical Heideggerian vocabulary I develop in the course of the later sections of the work. Test-runs with students have shown this to be an essential and, thus far, invariably successful approach to introducing newcomers to *Being and Time*.

Chapter 1, entitled "The Origins of Phenomenology," begins with the history of the term "phenomenology" and goes on to identify the historical influences leading to the creation of a phenomenological approach to philosophy by Edmund Husserl. Those with no acquaintance with phenomenological method should study this section in particular. I will discuss how the collapse of the 19th century scientific and philosophical world view was the "crisis" to which the two main streams of 20th century philosophy, phenomenology and Analytic philosophy, are a direct response. The reasons why Husserl thought a descriptive approach could resolve the "crisis of European science," as he was to call it, will be clarified. In short, Husserl believes that the problems facing the logic, mathematics, and physics of his day are due to an insufficient grasp of the acts of consciousness through which we experience the concrete facts of our world. Section 1.4 focusses on Heidegger's attempt to modify Husserl's phenomenological method by melding it with what was then popularly called "life philosophy" or *Lebensphilosophie*. It is precisely the attempt to phenomenologically identify the experiential basis of human activity that permits Heidegger to combine influences from Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Dilthey, Bergson, Scheler, Jaspers, and hermeneutics. Despite his concern with the main themes of *Lebensphilosophie*, there is a subtle but essential nuance giving Heidegger's theoretical approach a greater affinity with the later Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle
than with the "existentialism" of Jean-Paul Sartre. Although this topic cannot be discussed at length within the framework of the present book, I have given numerous indications as to how this connection can be made.

Chapter 2 contains the detailed discussion of *Being and Time* up to and including §44. In addition to a simplified introductory presentation of Heidegger's interpretation of the world-phenomenon, I will discuss Heidegger's concept of phenomenological methodology as presented in *Being and Time*, what the question of Being is and why Heidegger thinks it is important, and the structure of *Being and Time*, which, in its present form, is in fact only the first part of the complete book Heidegger originally intended to write. New readers are advised to concentrate on Sections 2.1 to 2.6, and 2.10. These sections give a general overview of the essential theoretical perspective of *Being and Time* without entering into questions of detail. A good knowledge of these sections is necessary for an adequate comprehension of Chapter 3, which addresses Heidegger's more difficult conception of time. Further sections address Heidegger's analysis of the everyday world and our relation to it, the characteristic structural features of human beings or "Dasein," the fundamental structures of sensibility, understanding, and talk, and the authentic and inauthentic modes of these structures. Of particular interest are Heidegger's interpretation of the primeval structure of Dasein as "concern," his conceptions of reality and truth, and his interpretation of the sensibility of angst.

Chapter 3 discusses the remaining sections of *Being and Time*. Here it is shown that for Heidegger angst, death, and the conscience, as authentic modes of Dasein's relation to the world, characterize Dasein's authenticity as decidedness. Finally, Heidegger's interpretation of the structure of concern as timeliness, or the primeval temporal state of Dasein, is explained with reference to the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity, historicity, and the everyday concept of time. These sections contain more difficult material and more detailed analyses, and the reader is advised to ensure that the material in Chapter 2 has been adequately understood before going on. Here I address
issues that are often simplified or blurred in other presentations, and my aim is to present the full detail of Heidegger's original text without overburdening the reader. In this chapter I have generally chosen depth over simplicity of presentation precisely because this is not usually done.

For those who wish to inquire further into the original German terms used by Heidegger as well as for those who will be using the present book to work with existing Heidegger translations and Heidegger scholarship, Appendix A contains a glossary of technical terms with an explanation of their meaning, the original German, and a commentary on problems facing the translator. Appendix B is a German-English lexicon in which Heidegger's original German terms are cross-referenced with my translations, Macquarrie and Robinson's, and Stambaugh's. For the convenience of the reader, Appendix C contains a number of tables clarifying the relations between important concepts in *Being and Time*. Since this book is intended primarily as a beginners' manual, I have generally tried to avoid long footnotes and burdensome discussions of the secondary literature. Following the appendices, however, a selective bibliography lists reference works in the case of which an exception to this rule seemed advisable along with other primary and secondary literature. It also lists some available English translations of German primary sources.

Throughout this work I cite German primary sources by their original German titles when quoting directly from them. All translations from the German are my own.

For this attempt at a simplified presentation of an essentially complex body of thought, my model has been Anthony Kenny's peerless book *Wittgenstein*, and it is my hope to be of as much service to the non-specialist as Kenny has been. I have also been inspired by Nicholas Rescher's *Leibniz*, a masterpiece of philosophical exposition and condensation. Gilbert Ryle has been my stylistic model of lively and clear philosophical English, though I am all too conscious of the difficulty of living up to such a lofty ideal.
The purpose of this work will have been achieved if it contributes meaningfully towards the elimination of much of the unnecessary confusion and frustration a first contact with Heidegger normally involves. In the case of more advanced scholars I also have the secondary ambition of awakening a new appreciation of Heidegger as a truly systematic thinker. The main philosophical currents of our time being what they are, that this book might contribute towards establishing better relations between them is probably too much to hope for.