

Book Review: Heidegger: Thinking of Being by Lee Braver

In *Heidegger: Thinking of Being*, Lee Braver aims to offer readers an accessible overview of Heidegger's entire career, covering early masterpieces through to the key themes of his later writing, including technology, subjectivity, history, nihilism, agency, and the nature of thought itself. This is a very well written introduction to "Heideggerese", writes **Mersiye Bora**, and is suitable for philosophy students who seek an engaging understanding of the main discussions and for philosophy tutors who are searching for inspiration for narrating complexities.

Heidegger: Thinking of Being. Lee Braver. Polity Press. March 2014.

Find this book:

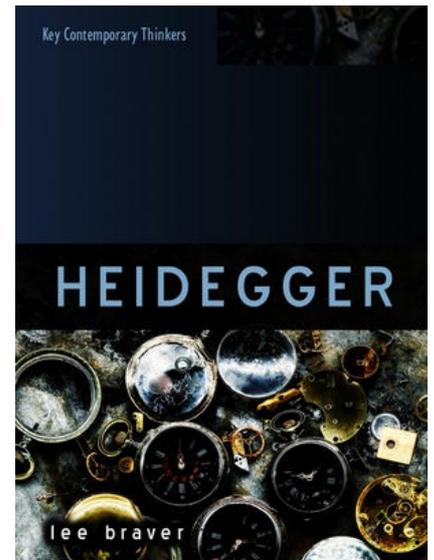
The legacy of Heidegger's philosophy has been hotly discussed since Jonathan Derbyshire's [article](#) on the recently published Black Notebooks. At the end of the last year Derbyshire announced that some scholars agreed Heidegger's philosophical diaries reveal the anti-Semitism at the core of his philosophy. As a response, Jonathan Rée released an article "[In Defence of Heidegger](#)" dated March 12. Hence *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* is timely. The book discusses the problem under the title of "Greatest Stupidity of My Life": Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis' and highlights the indispensability of Heidegger's philosophy in order to understand 20th and 21st century philosophies.

Lee Braver begins the book by asserting that the philosophy of Heidegger is elaborated with terminological neologism and conceptual originality.

Therefore, reading Heidegger requires terminological and conceptual "adjustment". Heidegger's notoriously difficult written language and novelty of using some notions could give philosophy students a hard time similar to the experience that Plato's cave dweller has when he sees the sun for the first time (p.2). For philosophy students who are interested in embarking on a journey through Heidegger's unsystematically constructed holistic philosophy, *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* provides the perfect tool to guide readers through this challenging territory. Much like a pair of sunglasses, it allows you to view the world clearly whilst others are blinded by the brilliant light.

Heidegger: Thinking of Being is divided into two sections. The first part is devoted to Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time*, and the second compiles selections of relatively short late writings of Heidegger. These include Heidegger's dealings with a wide range of topics such as history, Nazism, art, technology, and language, etc. The book corresponds to the division of Heidegger's career into two by the "turn", *die Kehre*. Even though the turn, claimed to have happened after the 1930s, has been a debatable issue between Heidegger scholars, Braver writes in favour of its effectiveness. It must be noted that the presence of the turn does not mean that Heidegger changed the main concern of his philosophy; the question of the meaning of being remained the centre of his philosophy throughout his long career.

In 'Introduction to *Being and Time*' Braver explains the ontological difference between being (also translated as Being or be-ing) and entities (beings), furnishing the reader with the basis for further understanding. He subsequently demonstrates the differences between traditional western philosophy, roots in Cartesian ontology, and Heidegger's anti-Cartesian holistic pre-ontology. In terms of analysing human beings, traditional western philosophy attempts to filter mundane things out of the realm of questioning. In contrast, Heidegger claims that as we are dealing with mundane things most of our time, we should concentrate on our average everydayness in order to understand ourselves.



kindle edition

amazon



Martin Heidegger 14.3.1959. Credit: [Rene Spitz](#) CC BY-ND 2.0

In the chapter 'History, Nazism, the History of Being and its Forgetting' Braver argues that Heidegger, in his later writings, emphasizes the history of being rather than pursuing explication of existential phenomenology. He provides a short history of being, divided into four separate parts: pre-Socratics, Platonic, medieval, and modernity, with each area having its own unique understanding of being. Accordingly, human beings' way of being alters throughout history, due to an ontological understanding of being that shapes a culture's entire way of acting and thinking. Braver, in [Groundless Grounds](#) (2012, p.117), wrote that "Only Greeks can be tragic heroes, only Medievals pure-hearted saints, and only moderns comfort-seeking gadget-users". He pursues this idea in the book while claiming "And our way of being changes with them so that a Greek citizen, a medieval monk, an early modern gentleman-scientist, and a modern iPhone user are different kinds of subjects" (p.145).

The periods mentioned above could also be read as paradigms in a way that Kuhn used in his [The Copernican Revolution](#) in order to show incommensurability between scientific theories of different epochs. The term paradigm which belongs to analytic tradition is apt to explain the notion of history of being for those who are more familiar to systematic philosophy.

In the section "'Greatest Stupidity of my Life': Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis', Braver briefly mentions Rorty and Löwith's extremely opposite ideas before providing a "balanced account of the topic". He argues that Heidegger was an anti-Semite, but he was also against anti-Semitism. Even though Heidegger equates the Holocaust, displacement, and industrialized agriculture in his later writings (p.147), what he meant to say was that the same mind-set caused them to happen. Inferring from Braver's moderate attitude, it might be said that *Being and Time* is not sympathetic to fascist ideology considering the authenticity of Dasein. On the other hand, Heidegger's later work focused on the ontological suffering of being rather than the suffering of human beings. Referring to different angles about the relation between philosophy of Heidegger and anti-Semitism, Braver provides readers with a broad perspective to evaluate the situation in their own minds.

Overall, Braver's book is a very well written introduction to "Heideggerese" (p.2). The simplicity of the language used and the author's ingenuity of using analogies provides an insightful understanding of difficult concepts. However, although some analogies are understood at first glance, some of them require intense contemplations. Also, Braver's warnings facilitate reading primary texts of Heidegger as he identifies the most difficult aspects and warns us of their presence. *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* is suitable for philosophy students who seek an engaging understanding of the main discussions. I would also recommend this text to Heidegger teachers who are searching for inspiration for narrating complexities.

Mersiye Bora is a PhD Candidate in Philosophy at [Royal Holloway, University of London](#). Her areas of interest are continental philosophy and philosophy of art. Her research addresses the philosophical understanding of exclusion in terms of displacement based on Heidegger's ontology. She holds a BA in Philosophy from Middle East Technical University and MA in Continental Philosophy from University of Warwick. [Read more reviews by Mersiye.](#)

Related

[Book Review: Heidegger Reframed by Barbara Bolt](#) In "Arts and Literature book reviews"

[The books that inspired Babette Babich: "the book that made me who I am as a scholar was Kant's Critique of Pure Reason"](#) In "Philosophers"

[Book Review: Hitler's Philosophers by Yvonne Sherratt](#) In "Ignas Kalpokas"

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books