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Book Note

Heidegger and Jewish Thought: Difficult Others

Elad Lapidot and Micha Brumlik. London, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018. 322pp.

David A. White*

This work is an anthology of fourteen articles on various aspects of Heidegger's relation to the Jews and, more abstractly, what it means to be Jewish. The essays are arranged under three headings—Heidegger Thinks the Jews, Heidegger and Jewish Thinkers, Heidegger and Jewish Thought. The work also includes an introduction by Elad Lapidot and, as an appendix, Thomas Sheehan's bibliography of Heidegger's works (including English translations as of 2017). Lapidot's introduction highlights the stimulus for the anthology, the publication of Heidegger's "so-called Black Notebooks," notes for the years 1931 to 1948. For Lapidot, "about a dozen passages" contain "strong anti-Jewish statements"; the result: "It is not only Heidegger who is on trial now, but his entire heritage, everything that inspired him and that he inspired, an entire intellectual tradition"—in sum, this controversy "manifests a real event of thought" (2).

The contributors discuss Heidegger in conjunction with a number of other philosophers: Marx, Kierkegaard, Levinas, Buber and, to a lesser extent, Gilles Deleuze

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and Hanna Arendt. The articles featuring these figures offer useful synopses of some of their main positions and develop interpretations which typically reveal affinities—and incisive differences—to counterpart or related theoretical fixtures in Heidegger’s extensive corpus. Figures not as well-known at least in English-speaking settings for scrutiny of Heidegger—e.g., Hugo Bergmann, R. Chaim, Günther Anders—are introduced within this framework of comparative analysis.

It may be noted that readers not well-versed in classic Judaic texts—the Torah, Talmud (as well as procedures for interpreting the Talmud), traditions of mysticism, Kabbala, and Hasidism—may require background study in these areas to have a moderately informed awareness of a number of the basic issues and developments derived from Heideggerian inspirations. Contexts of inquiry, which may have immediate appeal for a reader of more general interests, are reflections on technology as well as a treatment of Heidegger’s anti-Americanism (as distillation of a mechanized approach to the “being” of the earth). The status of Zionism in relation to Israel seen as an outgrowth of political ramifications of Heidegger’s affiliation with National Socialism is also discussed.

The authors uniformly work from the premise that Heidegger the man was anti-Semitic; the substantive issue—whether and to what extent this personal flaw affected the structure and content of his philosophizing—is approached according to a continuum of possibility. Some authors feel that Heidegger the thinker cannot be divorced from Heidegger the human being; other contributors are more cautious in envisaging balanced and incisive developments on given questions insofar as they originate from perspectives established in Heidegger’s texts. Greater or lesser sympathy to this range of response depends on basic hermeneutical decisions regarding the interpretation of texts.

The ontological difference between Being and beings is axiomatic for Heidegger’s thought and occupies the attention of several discussions. However, authors who consider this question concentrate on senses in which the “Being question” revolves around the “Jewish question” in that what Heidegger says, or implies, about the Jews becomes an ineluctable feature of what, according to these authors, Heidegger intended to say about Being. Heidegger’s own attempt to articulate Being without concern for beings (*Zur Sachen Des Denkens*, 1962—taken by some students of Heidegger to be a late attempt at providing the unfinished section of *Sein und Zeit*, 1927) is not analyzed in any of these articles. However, the subtitle to *Heidegger and Jewish Thought* is “Difficult Others” and if these “others” incorporate and emphasize strictly Jewish philosophical

concerns, then the diverse array of issues and their modes of discussion presented in this volume make it a creative and useful addition to conversation on the relation between Heidegger's legacy and Judaism.