

## Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics<sup>1</sup>

By Tom Cumming

**K**ant and the Problem of *Metaphysics* represents Martin Heidegger's first attempt at an interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). This text is notable in three senses. First, in its overarching narrative which places Kant's conception of the transcendental imagination at the very heart of his critical philosophy. Second, for the finer details of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant - these are principally edifying to students of Heidegger, rather than



Kant. Third, for its merits as a work of Kant scholarship. Heidegger himself acknowledges his shortcomings in this regard - in his preface to the fourth edition, he states that his interpretation was carried out 'from within the horizon of the manner of questioning set forth in *Being and Time*' but admits that 'Kant's question is foreign to it' (xviii). We should give Heidegger some credit for conceding something to accusations that his interpretation is a "violent" one, but it is possible that he overstates just how "foreign" Kant's philosophy is to his own. Indeed, Heidegger's association of Kant's project with his own is not an implausible interpretive move.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines "being" as 'that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood' (1962: 26). There is a Kantian inflection to this way of conceptualising 'the question of being' (1962: 21). Heidegger is not attempting a metaphysics of entities "in themselves", but attempting to clarify the conditions for our relationship to them - we might say that Heidegger is

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. by Richard Taft, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).



interested in how human *intentionality* is possible, how we have access to entities in the first place. In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, he tends to pursue this question in terms of how representations or images are formed (64). For Heidegger, it is only then that we could attempt anything like a traditional metaphysics or ontological investigation of entities<sup>2</sup>. Heidegger's project of "fundamental ontology" roots an analysis of the "being" of objects in the specific way in which creatures like us ("Dasein") relate to them. This project is then intelligible as a development of Kant's transcendental project, which downgrades epistemology in favour of a very particular version of ontology. In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger first of all attempts to bring their aims closer together. Heidegger identifies the possibility of "synthetic a priori judgments", the driving question of Kant's first Critique, with his own question of 'the possibility of ontological knowledge' (9; see Kant, 1997: B20). Heidegger argues along the same lines as *Being and Time* here, that 'experience of beings is itself always already guided by ontological understanding' (9). Heidegger here is equating Kant's concept of a "transcendental condition" - in this case, a condition for the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements - with his own focus on the conditions of access to objects. This becomes plausible if we view the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements as necessarily entailing an explication of the constitution of the 'general structure of experience', as P.F. Strawson might put it (1966: 15). Later in the text Heidegger defines ontological knowledge as 'the condition for the possibility that in general something like a being can itself stand in opposition to a finite creature' (50). This accords directly with Kant's transcendental language and Strawson's way of interpreting Kant. It is really only Heidegger's insistence on the language of ontology that creates difficulties, as it leads him to reject an understanding of Kant's first Critique based in a theory of experience as well as a theory of knowledge (11). This is somewhat alleviated as Heidegger moves to focus on the possibility of representation, or the formation of an image (64 - 65), which is compatible with these various ways of discussing Kant's project, as "representation" for Kant is something of a blanket term for a constituent content of experience, thought, or intuition.

It seems that Heidegger makes this move in his attempt to further downgrade the status of epistemology in the first Critique, although he continues to use the term "knowledge" in the sense of "ontological knowledge", as he defined it above. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses phenomenological descriptions of everyday life in order to explicate the basic ways in which human beings relate to objects. For Heidegger, the "being" of objects is based in the structure of everyday activity. Intentionality should not be construed as a mental state expressible in judgements or as the exercise of a capacity for knowledge, and accordingly objects should not be conceived as substances

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger may disavow the possibility of any kind of metaphysics, but it follows from his affirmation of the natural sciences that it would be possible to construct an ontology of the objects of natural science - it is just that this ontology would have to be rooted in fundamental ontology.



with properties. Objects are "ready-to-hand" - tools that are grasped intuitively and unreflectively in terms of their use in practical situations (see Heidegger, 1962: 98). Essentially, there is no epistemic intermediary involved. As is well known, Kant's architectonic of reason posits the existence of a faculty of understanding, and a faculty of sensibility. The faculty of sensibility produces *intuitions* from sensations, and the faculty of understanding applies concepts to these intuitions - in this case, pure a priori concepts (see Kant, 1997: B125). In order to usher Kant away from an irreducibly epistemological characterisation of intentionality, Heidegger emphasises the role of intuitions over concepts: 'knowledge is primarily intuition, i.e. a representing that immediately represents the being itself' (19), and that 'any interpretation that attempts to construe knowledge as "judging" violates the decisive sense of the Kantian problem (15-16). Heidegger also speaks about the ability to 'take the being in stride' (63). Heidegger's interpretive moves here serve to redefine a representation as something much closer to Heidegger's picture of the ready-to-hand in *Being and Time*, as something immediate and non-epistemic - i.e. an intentional state that does not involve a judgement.

The first division of *Being and Time* might seem to answer Heidegger's Kantian concern about the very possibility of our intentional access to objects. Part of this story is the positing of objects as tools, grasped in terms of their use. Heidegger goes on to argue that their possible use is determined by their belonging a contextual network of other tools and the tasks which they are used to accomplish, and in turn relate to wider concerns in human life - how human beings understand their own identity and existential purpose. The possible range of tasks, activities and usages are dictated by social norms and their linguistic articulation in "discourse". The first division then serves to explicate the structure of this everyday background upon which objects are first of all intelligible (see Heidegger, 1962: 107). In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger describes this as the object's 'horizon of possible encountering' (63). This is where the important philosophical shift happens. Heidegger is not content with what he has achieved in the first division of *Being and Time*. In the second division he attempts to root the aforementioned structure of everyday life in a primordial conception of temporality, stating that 'the ontological structures of Dasein which we have previously obtained' must be revisited in terms of their 'temporal meaning' (1962: 277). The general idea is that the contextual network that runs from tools, to tasks, to ways of life, to the wider existential concerns of the individual, is essentially temporal in nature. It is rooted in the past and directed toward the future. Therefore, Heidegger's question of being finds a possible answer in a particular conception of temporality. The task of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* is to demonstrate Kant's importance as a original philosopher of temporality.

The overarching argument of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* is to emphasise the role of the "schematism" in Kant's philosophy. Kant conceives of the schematism in



order to close a problematic philosophical gap between concepts and intuitions, which need to combine to make synthetic a priori judgements possible. The question is, where do pure concepts of the understanding, which are universals, get their rules for application to intuitions, which are particulars?

Pure concepts of the understanding are entirely heterogeneous from empirical intuitions (and, indeed, from sensible intuitions in general), and can never be met with in any intuition. How, then, can the intuition be subsumed under the concept, or how can the categories be applied to appearances?' (Kant, 2007: A137)

Kant argues, therefore, that there must be representations that mediate between pure concepts and sensible intuitions, and that these are rooted in the mediating faculty of the transcendental imagination; 'this representation of a general procedure of the imagination by which a concept receives its image, I call the schema of this concept' (Kant, 2007: B180). Each pure concept has schema, and these schemata are '*a priori* determinations of time according to rules' (Kant, 2007: B184 - 185). The thought here is that universal concepts have temporal properties which correspond to the particular temporal properties of intuitions. The important thing for Heidegger is that Kant seems to have designated *time* as the root of the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements, or "ontological knowledge", just as Heidegger does in *Being and Time*. Heidegger therefore states that 'the transcendental schematism is consequently the ground for the inner possibility of ontological knowledge ... thus it is time, as given a priori, which in advance bestows upon the horizon of transcendence the character of the perceivable offer (74). Putting this into the language of *Being and Time*, the background structure of our everyday intentional access to objects (the horizon of transcendence) is available only on the basis of temporality, which is rooted in the transcendental imagination, which unites the faculties of understanding and sensibility. For Heidegger, Kant is the only philosopher before himself that saw the crucial philosophical role of temporality, but failed in his inability to 'say any more about this' (140); for Kant, the schematism is 'an art hidden in the depths of the human soul' (Kant, 2007: B180). The "violence" of Heidegger's interpretation comes in his intention to 'bring out what Kant "had wanted to say"' in the wake of his pronouncement of Kant's failure (141). How we assess this is difficult, for a lot rests on how plausible one finds the philosophical jump from the first division of *Being and Time* to the second division; whether it is in the end possible to isolate what look like metaphysical conditions for human intentionality from the causal conditions which both Heidegger and Kant are pitted against, and the normative conditions which both are committed to. In a sense, Heidegger goes in the opposite direction of Strawson - Strawson wants to discuss 'the limits of experience', where Heidegger wants to delve ever deeper into the ground of these limits, even where Kant has declared these



explanations to come to an end at the human soul (Strawson, 1966: 17). The analytic reception of Heidegger has overwhelmingly focused on division one of *Being and Time* for the very reason that it seems to find a ground for intentionality in practical activity and social norms, before Heidegger obscures this in the metaphysical language of temporality.

This may be why *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* is an overlooked work in the analytic reception of Heidegger, because the story that Heidegger tells about temporality and the transcendental imagination eclipses other edifying aspects of Heidegger's work on Kant. Heidegger's encounter with a Kantian vocabulary of concepts and intuitions results in some points of interest for an interpretation of Heidegger. I used the terms "unreflective", "immediate", and "intuitive" to characterise how Heidegger conceives the primary mode of human intentionality. Heidegger's hostility to an epistemic characterisation of a phenomenology of everyday practical activity, which he describes in terms of "unthematized" encounters with objects, has been used to construe him as a non-conceptualist, or somebody who opposes the view that the content of perception must be expressible in propositions (see Schear, 2013 for an overview of the principle debate as it relates to Heidegger). This has been a longstanding interpretation of Heidegger in the context of Anglo-American analytic philosophy. A non-conceptualist interpretation of Heidegger therefore must be able to explain certain statements that Heidegger makes in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. For example, Heidegger says that 'the intuited is only a known being if everyone can make it understandable to oneself and can thereby communicate it' (19), implying that propositional articulation of intentional content is a necessary possibility. He later emphatically states that 'all finite knowing ... as thinking intuiting, is necessarily conceptual' giving a concrete example; 'thus, in the immediate perception of something at hand, this house for example, the schematizing premonition of something like a house in general is of necessity already to be found' (71). The drawback of reading *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* as a work that will tell us something substantive about Heidegger's own philosophical positions is that while he does put words in Kant's mouth, it is never absolutely clear whether he himself would endorse them. My own view is that Heidegger does want to endorse the above statements; he has not shied away from altering or clarifying Kant's vocabulary to suit his own purposes, and I do not believe he would use the words "necessarily" and "necessity" so casually if the role of conceptuality was opposed to his philosophical position. I should mention Sacha Golob's *Heidegger on Concepts, Freedom and Normativity* (2013) for a serious consideration of these issues. Golob attempts to redraw the traditional lines of analytic Heidegger interpretation, including recasting him as a conceptualist, with reference to Heidegger's work on Kant. I find much of the value of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* not in Heidegger's focus on the transcendental imagination and the schematism, but in forcing Heidegger to fit his philosophical vocabulary to far more amenable to contemporary research around intentionality and perception.



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