

Frank Schalow

Heidegger and Kant



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**Das Denken Martin Heideggers  
III 1**

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In order to get into this dimension of philosophizing, which is not a matter for a learned discussion, but rather is a matter about which the individual philosopher does not know and which is a task to which the philosopher has submitted himself, this setting free of Dasein in the human being must be the sole and central [thing] which philosophy as philosophizing must perform.

Um in diese Dimension des Philosophierens hineinzukommen, was keine Sache einer gelehrten Diskussion ist, sondern eine Sache, über die der einzelne Philosoph nichts weiß, und die eine Aufgabe ist, der der Philosoph sich zu beugen hat, muß diese Befreiung des Daseins im Menschen das Einzige und Zentrale sein, was Philosophie als Philosophieren leisten kann.

—Martin Heidegger  
“Davoser Disputation”  
*Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, p. 285



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## § 1 Introduction

Whatever controversies may overshadow Martin Heidegger's thought today, his creative and provocative encounter (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Immanuel Kant's Critical philosophy stands out as one of the greatest philosophical achievements of the past century. Perhaps what is most telling is that Heidegger's dialogue with his German predecessor admits both rebirth and reinvention, suggesting that as a path of thinking (*Denkweg*) it can be re-opened in new and diverse ways, rather than closed-off in finality. Moreover, we find that Heidegger confronts many challenges posed by Critical philosophy at several key junctures over the entire span of his philosophical life. Thus, the Heidegger-Kant dialogue affords us a unique glimpse into the development of philosophy as a historical enterprise and the expanding horizons for re-asking the most perennial of all philosophical questions, i.e., the question of being (*die Seinsfrage*).

In order develop a dialogue or reciprocal rejoinder (*Erwiderung*) with Kant. Heidegger must traverse a historical gulf that both separates the two thinkers and makes the similarities between them a fruitful source of philosophical discussion. That gulf creates a terminological disparity that Heidegger must first overcome in order to address Kant's thinking and otherwise seek to appropriate his insights into a new way. The irony is that Kant was among the first modern philosophy to develop a complex and uniquely technical lexicon. By the same token, Heidegger proceeds to an even deeper level of complexity to develop a groundbreaking vocabulary, which stretches the limits of the German idiom in order to reanimate the most perennial of all philosophical questions from its inception in the Greeks. Yet the terminological differences between the two thinkers cannot simply be resolved semantically, because they also pertain to the thematic issues that shape each philosopher's project and the methodological innovations that mark a sharp break with the status quo of the philosophical tradition. Thus, the controversy that sparks this dialogue is ultimately waged on a methodological as well as a thematic front. While much of the scholarship on this topic centers on the latter, only by addressing the former can we fully appreciate the intricacies of Heidegger's appropriation of Kant's Critical philosophy. Kant's legacy in opening forth a distinctive philosophical epoch hangs in the balance, not because his importance in the history of philosophy is in any way in doubt, but because only by rising to the challenge of deconstructing his philosophy from its deepest roots can Heidegger uncover the directive (*Weisung*) to recast and radicalize his project anew.

The actual design or “architectonic” of Kant’s critical enterprise—not simply his three major works taken alone—may actually have greater importance to unfolding the possibilities of Heidegger’s appropriation of the former’s philosophy than may first appear. That architectonic suggests a linear development in the organization of philosophical themes, that is, in a way that is congruent with a system. Yet, as far back as his 1923 lecture-course, Heidegger draws a sharp division between the development of a system according to a plan of dialectic and a hermeneutics of facticity; he suggests that any blending of the two is similar to mixing “fire and water.”<sup>1</sup> As outlined four years later in *Being and Time*, Heidegger proposes a hermeneutic strategy that expands the horizon of understanding through an inquiry which advances forward by returning to explicate its initial (and guiding) presuppositions. The circular orbit of such a philosophical inquiry, or hermeneutic circle, provides a new linchpin for developing a science of being. We will follow through on the hermeneutic pathway that Heidegger forges, in order to make explicit how this strategy undercuts the formal organization of Kant’s three *Critiques*. The architectonic of Kant’s system is displaced by a circular dynamic that interweaves his three major works into an interpretive whole. In the simplest terms, what initially appears to be an afterthought in Kant’s transcendental inquiry will instead re-emerge as the presupposition of his project. By harboring the nascent concern for language, Kant’s third *Critique* will yield the prototypical point of departure, the guiding precept for his entire project. Through a destructive-retrieval of imagination, the concern for language that is initially hidden in Kant’s account of art in the *Critique of Judgment* will reappear as the linguistic premise on which the self-reflexivity of his “tribunal” of pure reason hinges.

Thus far, I have referred to Kant’s Critical philosophy only in general terms. But to do so only begs the question of the scope of Heidegger’s appropriation of Kant’s thought. For in its barest outline the Critical philosophy includes the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the *Critique of Judgment*. Most of the writings that Heidegger devoted to Kant’s thinking center on the first *Critique*, particularly the portions of the Transcendental Analytic emphasizing Kant’s account of schematism and the temporal ground of imagination. In selecting which of Kant’s texts to address, as well as how to approach them, a decision (*Entscheidung*) is implicitly already in play. This decision is mediated by the historical epoch that Heidegger projects-open

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger, *Ontologie: Hermeneutik die Faktizität*, GA 63 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), p. 42. See Frank Schalow, “The Thread of Imagination in Heidegger’s Retrieval of Kant: The Play of a Double Hermeneutic,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Phenomenology*, ed. Cynthia D. Coe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021): Chapter 23.

through his innovative interpretations, but which also yields further horizons to access what remains unthought (in these texts).<sup>2</sup>

In re-opening Heidegger's dialogue with Kant, we need to consider not only the former's specific writings on the latter's thought, but also what is implied in the overall strategy by which he undertakes a destructive-retrieval of Critical philosophy. Conversely, reassessing that strategy requires that we weigh once again the ramifications of Heidegger's decision to engage Kant in a dialogue, and that involves exploring whether only "marginal" concerns, if not divergences and omissions, can forge a new pathway for extending the *Auseinandersetzung* between these two great thinkers. For example, Heidegger's discussion of practical reason in his monumental work, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929), takes up only four pages.<sup>3</sup> But when coupled with his lecture-course from the Summer Semester of 1930 (*Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*),<sup>4</sup> which is devoted to addressing freedom as the ground of moral praxis, the possibility of a destructive-retrieval of the Kantian ethic enters the forefront of the dialogue.

Another case in point involves Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and its role in providing a linchpin to Kant's other major writings. Despite acknowledging the importance of Kant's treatment of the imagination in that text, Heidegger makes references to this text. Yet, precisely because of its subordinate role, the third *Critique* may mirror the development of Kant's overall project, thereby highlighting themes marginalized in his other major texts (e.g., affectivity and embodiment, language and communicability). Thus, when examined anew according to the strategy that Heidegger implements in his dialogue with Kant, the third *Critique* may very well provide an *alternative inroad* to access what remains unthought in his Critical philosophy.

The architectonic of Kant's philosophy follows three guiding questions—yielding each of the three inquires of the Critical philosophy—that are unified in a fourth:

1. What can I know?
2. What should I do?
3. What may I hope?

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<sup>2</sup> See George Kovacs, "The Unthought at the Limit of Heidegger's Thought." *Existentialia*, 17/5-7 (2007): 337-353.

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, GA 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991), pp. 156-160; *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 109-112.

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit: Einleitung in die Philosophie*, GA 31 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1982), pp. 291-296; *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 198-201.

#### 4. What is the human being?<sup>5</sup>

The fourth question points to the centrality of human finitude as the cornerstone of all metaphysical inquiry. Heidegger, however, transforms this fourth question in terms of the key precepts of his hermeneutic inquiry. He preserves the focus on human finitude, but changes the arc of that inquiry by emphasizing the circular implication between the inquirer (e.g., human existence as Da-sein) and what is inquired into (e.g., being). Heidegger re-opens Kant's concern for metaphysics as a "natural disposition" of human reason<sup>6</sup> within the space of the inquirer's self-questioning of his/her own ek-sistence (*Ek-sistenz*). Heidegger thereby transforms the generic concern for "man" (*Mensch*) into the self-referential enigma of "who (*Wer*) is Da-sein?" With this subtle transposition, Heidegger takes the first step along a lengthy pathway (*Denkweg*), in order to supplant the linear development of Kant's architectonic by the circular unfolding of his hermeneutic project. On Heidegger's side, the challenge lies in outlining a more original and comprehensive horizon of inquiry, which can gather together the separate parts of Kant's philosophy, or each of the three *Critiques*, and establish their relevance for re-enacting the circular implication between the inquiry into human existence and the question of being (*die Seinsfrage*). In this "overthrow" of Kant's architectonic, the sequential ordering of the three *Critiques* may be inverted, allowing the "third" (*Critique*) to re-establish the presuppositions of the "first" and the "second" *Critiques*. This methodological transformation begins to shake the roots of Kant's philosophy, thereby setting in motion Heidegger's task of a destructive-retrieval of what is "unthought" in the Kantian project, most notably, the creative power of imagination.

But how do we bring this unthought dimension to the forefront without succumbing to arbitrariness in the attempt to follow through on the revolutionary implications of Heidegger's destructive-retrieval of Kant's philosophy? To succeed in this task, we must formulate specific hermeneutic guidelines by which the key motifs of Kant's thinking can be transposed into a new philosophical horizon, and, conversely, the extension and deepening of this new insight (forged on the cusp of the *Auseinandersetzung* between these two great thinkers) reciprocally alter the historical trajectory of Heidegger's own inquiry into being.<sup>7</sup> A hermeneutic guideline brings what is unthought to the forefront of the interpretation, in order to reprioritize the key motifs of Kant's thinking.

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<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Logik*, AA (*Akademie Ausgabe*) 9, p. 42; *Logic*, trans. Robert Hartmann and Wolfgang Schwarz (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1974), p. 46. See GA 3, p. 207; tr. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernuft*, B 22.

<sup>7</sup> See Frank Schalow, "Heidegger and Kant in Conversation: The Search for a Hermeneutic Guideline," *Existentialia*, 22/3-4 (2012): 338-348.

In Chapter 2, I will identify an ambiguity in the title of Heidegger’s seminal work, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, as providing a clue to what is both uncovered and concealed in Kant’s thinking as a crucial epoch in the history of thought. In Chapter 3, I will outline the key elements that shape Heidegger’s dialogue with Kant; I will show how his reinterpretation of the first *Critique* fits into the larger hermeneutic mosaic of his attempt to re-ask *die Seinsfrage* and work out the hidden relation between time and being. In Chapter 4, I will argue that supplanting Kant’s architectonic by hermeneutics harbors a new controversy as to a possible grounding of human praxis (and morality); and, conversely, what has been concealed within the Kantian epoch (e.g., the dependence upon an edifice of metaphysical dualisms) must be uncovered in order to outline a new trajectory of thinking. The retrieval of human praxis on a more original, e.g., temporal basis implies a further deconstruction of the metaphysics of permanent presence.<sup>8</sup> In Chapter 5, I will outline a new hermeneutic context to retrieve the power of imagination, that is, as the key to developing a figurative language to express the margins of aesthetic and religious experience, of which the Kantian portrait of the sublime marks the crossover between the awe of nature and the reverence for the sacred. In Chapter 6, I re-examine Heidegger’s destructive-retrieval of transcendental philosophy through its appearance in such being-historical writings as *Contributions to Philosophy* and *Mindfulness*. We will discover that imagination’s re-emergence as a creative endeavor parallels Kant’s concept of the “genius,” although stripped of its subjective ground. Imagination appears as the creative power by which mortals pay tribute to the gift of unconcealment through their pursuits of building, dwelling, and thinking.

To this “Heidegger and Kant” volume I have assigned the subtitle (if only parenthetically) “On the Way to Imagination.” This subtitle mirrors the being-historical perspective of Heidegger’s *Denkweg*, as well as distinguishes a major theme of his *Auseinandersetzung* with Kant.

\*

At the end of this volume (“References”), the reader will find a list of Heidegger’s works (and their English translations), which are most germane to his dialogue with Kant. An updated list of the volumes comprising Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* can be found at the conclusion of each new volume of *Heidegger Studies*. The literature on Heidegger’s Kant-interpretation is extensive, beginning with Ernst Cassirer’s review of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* in 1931 (originally published in *Kant-Studien*). I have tried to balance a comprehensive list of the numerous books and articles published on

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<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, GA 42 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1988), pp. 15-17.

this topic with those contributions that are most relevant to the inquiry I have undertaken here. That being said, the English scholarship extends over a period of sixty years.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. HC Günther and Dr. Ivo De Gennaro for inviting me to undertake this project, as well as Dr. George Kovacs for his encouragement and support.

## I The Hermeneutic Interface between Heidegger and Kant

### § 2 Modernity, Metaphysics, and the Ontological Difference

In developing his *hermeneutic* phenomenology, Heidegger addresses “being” (*Sein*) in its tendency to withdraw into concealment, as remaining absent rather than merely coming to presence. A hermeneutic phenomenology heeds the assumption that the phenomena to be addressed may not show themselves, and may instead reappear only along a circular path that is opened up through a destructive-retrieval of the philosophical tradition. In contrast to Edmund Husserl,<sup>9</sup> Heidegger’s thinking depends upon a critical encounter with and appropriation of the greatest philosophers of the Western tradition. Accordingly, he engages in a dialogue (*Zwiesprache*) with such illustrious philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, Heraclitus and Nietzsche. Heidegger does not simply recapitulate what previous thinkers have said. Rather, he explores what remains “unthought” and “unsaid,” or what remains hidden and concealed in their greatest insights. In a “retrospective view” from today, his reading of the history of philosophy shines forth as one of his greatest achievements, i.e., as shaping his legacy. Heidegger’s *Auseinandersetzung* with Kant, however, stands out as providing an entryway to, if not supplying a precedent for, these other conversations. Aware of the elusive character of the question of being, and thus the need to trace a circular path to reformulate that question, Heidegger combines hermeneutics with phenomenology. In this way, he forges a historical pathway, thereby allowing the interlude of history (*Geschichte*) to yield the clearing (*Lichtung*) in which being can reappear and reemerge *as* an open expanse of manifestation.

For Heidegger, philosophical inquiry does not proceed in a linear direction, but instead circles back toward a concealed origin, which is masked in the starts and stops, the twists and turns of the enactment of thinking throughout the tradition. That origin marks a first beginning which, however, is never simply given, but instead reappears only as a transition to and an emissary of another beginning (or the other “onset” of thinking). As George Kovacs states “The main issue in grasping and interpreting Heidegger’s text[s]...is not the triumph of one

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<sup>9</sup> See Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology*, trans. Kenneth Maly (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 138-142.

view (assessment) of his accomplishments (contributions) over another. It is, much rather, the approach to his experience of being [*Seyn*], the way of thinking that becomes saying and articulation...its meditative appropriation...that is, coming to grips with it (*Auseinandersetzung*).<sup>10</sup> Heidegger's dialogue with Kant epitomizes this *Auseinandersetzung*. As Escudero emphasizes, Heidegger's correspondence with Hannah Arendt, Elisabeth Blochmann, and Karl Jaspers during the period of 1925-28 reveals an interest in his newly discovered affinity with the great philosopher from Königsberg.<sup>11</sup>

Heidegger's critical exchange with Kant is a lengthy pathway, which weaves its course throughout several decades. As a historical inquiry, Heidegger's destructive-retrieval of the Kantian project belongs to, and is shaped by, the transformation of hermeneutic phenomenology and its task of re-asking the question of being. Foremost in this transformation is Heidegger's attempt to address and articulate the ontological difference (*ontologische Differenz*), that is, the difference between being and beings.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, the ontological difference, as we shall see, is at the heart of Heidegger's *Auseinandersetzung* with Kant. Yet the critical exchange and "reciprocal rejoinder" (*Erwiderung*) between these two thinkers is broader than any one theme. Rather, Heidegger's destructive-retrieval of the Kantian project unfolds on multiple fronts, which broadens its horizon in the course of *radicalizing the question of being* (*die Seinsfrage*) itself. I will begin (a) this chapter by distinguishing the unique character of Heidegger's unorthodox interpretation of Kant's transcendental philosophy. Then (b) I will show how Heidegger appeals to Kant's thought to establish the link between temporality and the possibility of understanding being. Finally (c), I will consider the methodological shift in Heidegger's interpretation that centers on what is "unsaid" and "unthought" in Kant's transcendental philosophy.

### a) Heidegger's Contrarian Approach

Perhaps more than any other thinker, Kant epitomizes the modern epoch. As a premier thinker of the Enlightenment, he heralds optimism about the advance of natural science, including physics and astronomy; he also clashes with the core

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<sup>10</sup> See George Kovacs, *Thinking and Be-ing in Heidegger's Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2015), p.33.

<sup>11</sup> See J.A. Escudero, *Heidegger and the Emergence of the Question of Being*, trans. J. P. H. Betancur (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 80-81.

<sup>12</sup> See Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. F. Raffoul and A. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 61 (Seminar in Le Thor 1969). Heidegger describes this investigation as a "necessary impasse," which opens up new pathways of inquiry (beyond the period of 1927-1936).

doctrines of Medieval philosophy and the authoritarian structure of the Catholic church. As a philosopher, Kant takes as his foremost challenge an impasse posed by a “crisis in metaphysics”: the seemingly inevitable conflict between the unsubstantiated speculations of rationalism (dogmatism) and their vehement dismissal by empiricism (skepticism). This crisis can be abated, according to Kant, not simply by rejecting metaphysics, but instead by seeking to establish a new grounding for it, and, first of all, taking a preliminary step back to investigate its possibility. Kant stands out from his predecessors by shaking the foundations of philosophy and seeking to pioneer a new methodology for undertaking philosophical inquiry. Before we can address the similarities between Kant’s thinking and Heidegger’s, we must first make this preliminary observation: however Heidegger will redefine the task of metaphysics, the importance of addressing its “intrinsic possibility” and redirecting philosophy by a self-questioning approach, provides the initial impetus for engaging Kant in a dialogue.

Heidegger and Kant both hold the common premise that philosophy is a matter of self-engagement and questioning, rather than academic exercise seeking to impose an external doctrine. In his lectures comprising the *Logic*, Kant states: “The true philosopher, as self-thinker, thus must make free...the use of his reason.”<sup>13</sup> In his lecture-course from the Summer Semester of 1929, Heidegger points to how philosophy emancipates or frees human beings to confront “the finitude of Dasein as the basic happening of metaphysics” (*Endlichkeit des Daseins als Grundgeschehen der Metaphysik*).<sup>14</sup> Peeking Heidegger’s interest is the way in which Kant shifts the focus of inquiry away from an explicit concern for the supposed objects of metaphysics, which in its rationalistic form involves God’s existence, the immortality of the soul, and freedom of will. A new fulcrum of orientation is in order that does not presume those or any other objects, but instead seeks in a preliminary way to address the appearing or manifesting from the perspective of human finitude. Taking human finitude as the focus of philosophical inquiry, Kant privileges such appearing over what appears and ultimately comes to be constituted as an object. He makes a fundamental distinction that precedes metaphysics, but ultimately will provide the seed for its possibility. To be sure, the appearing may not explicitly comprise a phenomenon in a Husserlian sense, for Kant still seeks to re-establish the field of physical objects within the purview of natural science; nor does the implicit suspension of an object-field amounts to “bracketing” of existence or a phenomenological reduction in Husserl’s sense. Nevertheless, Kant designates a

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<sup>13</sup> AA 9, p. 26; *Logic*, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Der deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart*, GA 28 (Frankfurt am Main Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), p. 47.

new approach vis-à-vis a “transcendental” turn, which will explicitly subordinate the object that appears to the preconditions for its appearance.

Kant has not simply made a new discovery under the rubric of a “theory of knowledge.” Instead, Heidegger claims that Kant has revived a concern that has remained dormant throughout the past centuries of the history of philosophy. He brings to light a distinction that resides at the origin of metaphysics, even he does not give it formal expression nor link it explicitly to the query that had preoccupies the ancient Greeks, namely, the question of being. Heidegger characterizes this distinction, which will redefine the “problem of metaphysics” and makes its perennial question question-worthy again, the “ontological difference.” In simplest terms, the ontological difference establishes the contrast between being and beings, the dynamic of manifestation and what becomes manifest, and hence yields a clue to how time can provide the horizon (*Horizont*) for any possible understanding of being.

In terms of formulating his project of “being and time,” Heidegger points to the path (*Denkweg*) cleared by his *Auseinandersetzung* with Kant. Toward the close of his lecture-course from the Winter Semester of 1925/26,<sup>15</sup> Heidegger abruptly changed the outline of his seminar to include an account of the temporal configuration of human standing and the (schematizing) pattern provided in Kant’s transcendental philosophy.<sup>16</sup> At the conclusion to his lecture-course at Marburg during the Winter Semester of 1927-28, Heidegger recounts the importance of the breakthrough precipitated through his “turn” to Kant:

When some years ago I studied the *Critique of Pure Reason* anew and read it, as it were, against the background of Husserl’s phenomenology, it opened my eyes; and Kant became for me a crucial confirmation of the accuracy of the path which I took in my search. Certainly an authority as such is never a justification, and something is not true just because Kant has said it. Nevertheless Kant has the immense significance in education for scientific, philosophical work, and one can trust him fully. In Kant as in no other thinker one has the immediate certainty that he does not cheat. And the most monstrous danger in philosophy consists in cheating, because all efforts do not have the massive character of a natural scientific experiment or that of a historical source. But where the greatest danger of cheating is, there is also the ultimate possibility for the genuineness of thinking and questioning. The meaning of doing philosophy consists in awakening the need for this genuineness and in keeping it awake.<sup>17</sup>

Harking back to Kant’s preliminary observation in the “Preface to the First Edition” to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a crisis has broken out in the struggle between dogmatism and skepticism. “The [central] battlefield of these endless

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<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*, GA 21 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), pp. 409-411.

<sup>16</sup> See Frank Schalow: *The Renewal of the Heidegger-Kant Dialogue: Action, Thought, and Responsibility* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> GA 25, p. 431; tr. 292-293.