

MARTIN HEIDEGGER. PERSPECTIVES ON THE
INTERPRETATION OF HIS THINKING

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To Yuelu Academy,
where the enduring spirit of classical scholarship
engages thoughtfully with the challenges of the present.

Preface

From the perspective of their reception contexts, Heidegger's complete works can be broadly divided into three categories. The first consists of publications and essays formally addressed to the general public. The second includes lecture manuscripts, drafts, and notes prepared for teaching in smaller academic settings. The third comprises highly personal writings, such as his *Black Notebooks*, which take the form of notes and diary-like entries. These three categories of texts occupy distinct positions in terms of their reception history and scholarly value.

The first category—works publicly published during Heidegger's lifetime—has, through nearly a century of intensive study and interpretation, given rise to a relatively mature discursive tradition. While these texts still permit nuanced analysis from various perspectives, the space they offer for generating genuinely new insights has, by and large, narrowed over time. The third category—the private notebooks—due to their highly intimate, fragmentary, and non-systematic character, provides irreplaceable material for grasping the deeper motivations and the genesis of Heidegger's thought. However, their capacity for theoretical construction and systematic interpretation is rather limited; they function more as supplementary and corroborative resources than as foundational texts for philosophical exposition.

In my view, the second category of texts—namely, lecture manuscripts and draft materials—constitutes the core resource and focal direction of Heidegger scholarship. These writings differ both

from polished works intended for public dissemination and from private notes; rather, they occupy a liminal space between the “semi-public” and the “semi-private,” reflecting a generative phase of philosophical thought. They reveal the dynamic character and conceptual experimentation involved in the evolution of Heidegger’s thinking. In a certain sense, these texts embody a form of *esoterische Lehre*—an “esoteric doctrine” within Heidegger’s philosophy—where deeper meanings, often suppressed, simplified, or rendered ambiguous in formal publications, are articulated with greater directness and frankness.

Since the systematic publication of the *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, this second category of lecture-based texts has gradually drawn increasing scholarly attention. Some of these works have even sparked temporary surges of interest or academic “buzz.” However, I contend that their transhistorical philosophical significance remains far from fully explored. The conceptual resources embedded in these texts are not only crucial for reevaluating the internal trajectory of Heidegger’s own philosophical development, but may also offer profound inspiration for the construction of contemporary thought and the advancement of cross-cultural dialogue. Accordingly, one of the key tasks for the next phase of Heidegger studies may well be to liberate these texts from their subordinate status, and to recognize their independent theoretical significance and methodological value.

In existing Heidegger scholarship, research on the second category of texts—lecture manuscripts and drafts—has generally followed two main trajectories. The first approach treats these materials as supplements or annotations to the formally published works, using them as auxiliary sources to trace the genesis of key concepts and the early outlines of systematic theories. This line of inquiry emphasizes the internal coherence among various texts and

seeks to deepen our understanding of the publicly released writings by drawing on the conceptual developments found in the lectures. The second approach takes a more topic-centered strategy, treating the lecture manuscripts as texts with their own philosophical value. Instead of viewing them only as supporting materials, this path tries to explore the lectures' unique questions and ideas. In particular, it pays special attention to Heidegger's conceptual explorations and thought experiments that were never fully developed into systematic writings—giving these aspects of his thinking a level of focus they had not received before.

Beyond these two established approaches, I believe a third and more promising line of research is beginning to emerge. This direction often takes shape in a seemingly “off-topic” manner: while studying Heidegger's lecture manuscripts, scholars are drawn into a deep engagement with the philosophical systems of classical thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, thereby “departing” from Heidegger as their immediate object of study. At first glance, this detour may appear to be a deviation; in reality, it signals a deeper appropriation of Heidegger's methodological legacy. By engaging with these figures in the history of philosophy and then circling back to Heidegger, scholars enact a more faithful realization of the spirit of Heideggerian phenomenological hermeneutics.

What Heidegger truly teaches us is not a fixed set of doctrines or a closed philosophical system, but rather a capacity for *seeing* (Sehen)—a phenomenological mode of attentive vision, one that is concretely exercised through the close reading and reinterpretation of classical texts. In this sense, Heidegger is not only a phenomenologist but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, a hermeneut. What he repeatedly enacts in his lecture manuscripts is precisely this: how to *see* the basic problems of the history of philosophy in a way that

penetrates beyond surface appearances to their foundational ground. The highest form of interpretation, as Heidegger's structure of *revealing and concealing* (*Offenbarkeit–Verborgenheit*) suggests, may lie in this paradox: that true seeing does not cling to its own visibility, but rather conceals itself in the very act of seeing—so that the thing seen may shine forth on its own.

In this sense, we may say that the most faithful followers of Heidegger are not those who merely repeat his terminology, but rather those scholars who, building on his methodological approach, develop their own independent philosophical work. Through a close study of his lecture manuscripts, we witness one vivid case after another of Heidegger's interpretative engagement with the history of philosophy. His modes of interpretation, processes of concept formation, and pathways of inquiry gradually reveal what might be called a *hermeneutic skill* (*hermeneutisches Können*). It is precisely through this practice that an outline of what we might term a "classical hermeneutics" (*klassische Hermeneutik*) begins to emerge. This encompasses not only interpretable principles and methodological paths but also a wealth of vivid, profound interpretative details and strategic applications.

It is said that Joachim Ritter—one of Heidegger's important successors in the German philosophical circle—once recommended that his own students, who can be regarded as Heidegger's intellectual "grand-disciples," go to Freiburg to attend Heidegger's lectures in person. However, most of these students reportedly felt disappointed after the actual experience. This phenomenon is quite thought-provoking: why did these second-generation disciples of Heidegger develop a sense of estrangement or even disillusionment toward Heidegger's live teaching? I believe the core issue lies in the fact that, by that time, Heidegger had turned toward the mode of

writing characteristic of a so-called “great philosopher,” a direction that was not, in fact, his strongest strength.

The so-called “great philosopher” refers to those figures whose works have themselves become classics, repeatedly interpreted by subsequent generations. In his later period, Heidegger evidently sought to enter this lineage—aiming to move beyond the role of an interpreter and to become an object of interpretation himself. This transformation of identity naturally stemmed from his extensive work in the history of philosophy, which deepened his understanding of what constitutes a “classic.” However, the transition from “interpreting the classics” to “becoming a classic” is not seamless. As an interpreter, Heidegger possessed extraordinary sensitivity and creativity; yet, in his self-fashioning as a “great philosopher,” his style of language and mode of argumentation tended to fall into a form of obscure “self-mystification,” which ultimately limited the effectiveness of his philosophical communication.

Therefore, when those “second-generation Heidegger disciples”—trained by Ritter and equipped with phenomenological and hermeneutical perspectives—entered the Freiburg lecture halls, they did not encounter the passionate interpreter deeply engaging with tradition through his lectures. Instead, they faced a Heidegger who was in the process of constructing his own “cult of genius.” What they saw was no longer the skilled hermeneut dissecting Plato or deconstructing Kant, but a philosopher striving to forge a “second classic” out of his own thought. The changes in expressive style and methodology brought about by this shift failed to spark new philosophical inspiration among this group of “vaccinated” listeners—that is, those well-prepared and thoroughly trained in phenomenology. In other words, while the performative or symbolic aspects of Heidegger’s late philosophical discourse had clearly

intensified, genuine novelty was lacking. For these young scholars, Heidegger's "hand" had long been laid bare; his underlying methods, linguistic habits, and problem constructions were already well known. Consequently, faced with this "mystified repetition," they no longer experienced a sense of awe or shock.

This book is a revised and expanded edition based on the author's first edition published in 2021. The original edition contained ten short essays, mostly reflections and informal writings on Heidegger's thought composed during the author's doctoral research. In this new edition, the original essays have been reorganized and supplemented, with several important essays not included in the first edition newly added. The volume now comprises sixteen essays, divided into three sections, aiming to present the author's sustained and deepened understanding and critical reflection on Heidegger's philosophy in recent years, while maintaining the original intellectual framework.

The first section is titled *A General Overview of Heidegger's Philosophy* and consists of five essays identical to those in the first edition, forming the foundational domain of the author's understanding of Heidegger's philosophy. These essays serve both as an introduction to Heidegger's intellectual world and as the theoretical tone of the book. The second section, titled *Returning to the Locus of Heidegger's Thought*, includes six essays that focus primarily on close examinations of Heidegger's specific texts and core concepts. This section also features evaluations of Heidegger's readings of Aristotle, Plato, Nietzsche, and others. The third section, titled *The Echo of Heidegger*, comprises five essays. Except for the first essay, which is carried over from the first edition, the remaining essays are newly written for this edition. This section addresses the reception of Heidegger's thought in contemporary contexts and reflects the

author's reflections on how to continue and develop Heidegger's philosophy.

It is important to note that most of the essays in the first edition were written between 2016 and 2020, during the author's doctoral studies, as extended explorations centered around core topics. The additional essays in this expanded edition were primarily composed between 2022 and 2025, after the author began teaching at Yuelu Academy, Hunan University. These later writings emerged gradually through the author's teaching and research activities, taking the form of philosophical essays that may differ somewhat in style but remain intellectually continuous with the first edition. The specific contexts, occasions, and related academic exchanges for each essay are detailed individually in the introductory notes. Here, the author expresses sincere gratitude to all scholars and colleagues who offered invitations, guidance, commentary, and inspiration. It is precisely these intellectual interactions and academic exchanges that have allowed many of the chapters in this book to take shape and deepen over time.

Finally, the author dedicates this book to Yuelu Academy. Although no longer affiliated with the institution, the six years spent there—marked by rigorous intellectual engagement and scholarly cultivation—will continue to influence the author's understanding and practice of Heidegger's philosophy, and will remain integral to future writing and reflection.

August 2025
Qiushi-Cun, Hangzhou

Preface to the First Edition (2021)

This book collects the author's academic essays on Heidegger in the past few years. Most of these essays were published in the *Chinese Social Science Journal* and constitute an interpretation of Heidegger's philosophical thought and related texts from different perspectives. The earliest of these essays was published in 2016, while the latest was published in 2020. It can be said that these texts also record my journey in studying and following Heidegger.

This book is positioned to professional scholars specializing in Heidegger, but it is not limited to that. It has at least two other readerships. One is the general philosophical researcher, who can find in it Heidegger's insights on topics of interest to them, such as philosophy of life, practical philosophy, nihilism, etc. In addition, the book is also intended for a general audience, which can also gain some insights into the wisdom of life from the book. For a deeper understanding of the academic background, the reader can turn to my last book *Ontologie der Praxis bei Martin Heidegger*.

My reconstructions and readings of Heidegger have been based on the scholarly conviction that it is important to bring Heidegger to life and to reveal what Heidegger means for the history of thought and even for our modern life. The danger of doing so is that it may deviate from Heidegger's original philosophical creation, especially his obscure and self-created terms. But I see this danger as an opportunity for us interpreters. To understand Heidegger, we must reveal the questions to which Heidegger's philosophical creations

respond, questions that are universal, unchanging and penetrating.

I am grateful to my current workplace, Yuelu Academy, Hunan University, which has provided me with a free and favorable research environment, as well as ample research funding, allowing me to launch my creative work. I am also grateful to Professor Mo, the former editor of the *Chinese Social Science Journal*, who accepted my first article and initiated my years-long plowing in that newspaper. Thanks to my friends who studied and discussed Heidegger with me, without whom the completion of this book would not have been possible. Finally, I am grateful to the city of Freiburg, where most of the essays in this book were written and where I have fond academic and life memories. I dedicate this book to my parents, who, as Chinese parents, have always quietly given their time.

February 6, 2021

Changsha