

BOOK REVIEW

Judith Wolfe: *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 208. £50.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-968051-1.

Since Heidegger's death in 1976, the passing years have witnessed an ever growing trove of sources relating to his life and thought. In the 1990s, materials from the early period of Heidegger's career came to light that sparked off an explosion of scholarly literature on this domain. These developments cast new light on Heidegger's engagement with theological issues and figures in the history of religious thought, which Heidegger himself later described as a series of 'subterranean tremors' that influenced the course of his philosophical development. Judith Wolfe's recent monograph offers a careful, well-executed and rewarding examination of this important dimension of Heidegger's thought that integrates new discussions of familiar material, interesting readings of new material and judicious criticism of her subject.

Wolfe's goal is to evaluate 'Heidegger's continued debt to theological sources after his renunciation of academic theology and his turn towards the a-theistic philosophical method epitomized in *Being and Time*' (1). She aims to accomplish this task by providing a 'biographical-intellectual account' (4) that neither reduces Heidegger's own position to those of his theological sources nor evades the task of critically examining the ideas he develops in the course of appropriating them. While there are several questions that can be posed regarding her arguments, Wolfe succeeds in articulating a richly nuanced position within the ever expanding literature on Heidegger's 'theological debt'.

The book follows Heidegger's trajectory from his student days up through *Being and Time*. Chapter 1 focuses on Heidegger's youth, a period typically left to biographers. Wolfe provides a detailed discussion of Heidegger's contributions to anti-modernist periodicals that goes well beyond the existing literature – including the young Heidegger's strident critiques of Nietzsche (14) and his insistence that 'Intellectual honesty or objectivity is [...] coextensive with personal truthfulness or "*Wahrhaftigkeit*" (authenticity)' (16). Chapter 2 picks up the thread in about 1910, when the Anti-Modernist Oath and the ensuing controversy profoundly impacted Heidegger's thinking about the relationship between scholarly objectivity and religious commitment (24–25). Wolfe describes how, in the years leading up to his *Habilitation* in 1915, Heidegger eagerly sought out ways to develop a theological position more congruent with the 'aboriginal experience' of religiosity (32).

Chapter 3, one of the most rewarding parts of the book, deals with the period between the *Habilitation* and 1919, when Heidegger's growing rift from Roman Catholicism solidified. As Wolfe observes, it is here that most commentators pick up the storyline. She makes the interesting claim that

One of the most consequential results of this foreshortening of Heidegger's religious-intellectual path is the assumption that his interest in religion was secondary from the beginning: that Heidegger never regarded religion as more than one among many fields of phenomenological enquiry. The sources suggest, on the contrary, that Heidegger discovered the phenomenological method, together with Protestantism, in large part as a means to adequately describing religious experience. (43–44)

Indeed, Wolfe accomplishes here a remarkable anchoring of the winter 1920–1921 lecture course on the phenomenology of religion in the personal and intellectual concerns of Heidegger between 1916 and 1919. She shows how poets like Rilke and Hölderlin brought Heidegger a 'growing awareness of the irreducible significance of human existence, with its pain and finitude, for any manifestation of "the Absolute" ...' (57), and that this development, in turn, bore fruit in the 1920–1921 lectures on Paul (63–65).

In Chapter 4, Wolfe tracks the next stage in Heidegger's development, in which he investigated an anti-metaphysical strain within Christianity 'to develop his sense of a constitutive and absolute *rift* between God and man' (67). Heidegger's phenomenology shifts its focus in this period onto the ineradicable 'burden' of existence (77–81). Chapter 5 takes up Heidegger's articulation of an 'a-theistic' approach during his Marburg years (1923–1927). Wolfe frames this chapter with the provocative claim that Heidegger's 'a-theistic' approach was consciously developed in opposition to the burgeoning 'dialectical theology' of Karl Barth and others (91). Wolfe carefully shows how both Heidegger and the circle around Barth eagerly turned to the work of nineteenth-century writers to develop a challenge to the *Kulturchristentum* of liberal theology (96–101). Wolfe demonstrates Heidegger's role in the internal debates within the 'dialectical theology' movement (102–107). Chapter 6 takes up the culminating stage in the account. Here, Wolfe presents her case that the analysis of death in *Being and Time* is an 'eschatology without echaton'. On Wolfe's view, Heidegger's position in *Being and Time* is not merely a formalization or secularization of religious ideas, but rather is a direct challenge to the traditional religious conception of salvation as an escape from finitude.

In the Conclusion to her carefully researched and fascinating book, Wolfe examines the early reception of Heidegger's work by Protestant (138–149) and Roman Catholic (149–158) theologians, and offers her own contemporary response grounded on the reading of Heidegger's development presented in the book. Wolfe helpfully parses the different emphases in Heidegger

reception in each tradition (137). Her discussion of Edith Stein's response to *Being and Time* is particularly interesting. For her part, she suggests a new theological approach to Heidegger that moves away from typically Protestant emphases on sin, turning instead towards Incarnational themes surrounding human participation in the divine life.

Wolfe's book contains much that will be of interest to both Heidegger scholars and theologians interested in Heidegger's often underappreciated legacy. At some points, her discussions, though highly suggestive, fall slightly short of establishing her point. For example, Chapter 4 is partially framed as a resolution to ongoing ambiguities or tensions in the scholarly literature on Heidegger's 'atheism', but is most successful as an articulation of the tensions in Heidegger's own position. Heidegger scholars might also find the account of *Being and Time* in Chapter 6 problematic in that it does not fully reflect ongoing debates about the unity of the work. In the end, however, Wolfe's book is a rich and rewarding discussion that deserves recognition and attention from anyone interested in the religious dimensions of Heidegger's thought.

Benjamin D. Crowe
University of Utah

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