Booknotes

Art is one subject on which Heidegger seems to have interesting things to say. The trouble is that most of those things are expressed in what is, even for Heidegger, a more than usually opaque and allusive style. Is there anything beneath the windbaggery? Might any of it be true?

Julian Young's *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) is thus to be welcomed. It hardly allows a definitive answer to our questions, but it does provide a great deal of thicket clearing. Heidegger's views on art stem from his basic philosophical standpoint; that is to say, the way we perceive and experience the world is only one of a number of possible outlooks or, in Heidegger's own terms, possible disclosures. Usually Heidegger thinks of modes of disclosure as being based in a particular community, with its own particular language and forms of life. What Heidegger calls the world (or, possibly 'world') is the 'usually unnoticed understanding which determines for members of an historical culture what, for them, fundamentally, there *is*.' (Young's words)

Sometimes Heidegger speaks of works of art as if they are Greek temples, sacred objects set in the landscapes from which their own stones are hewn, and which in some way 'first give to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves'. This view of Greek temples has in fact been interestingly explored by Vincent Scully in *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods* (Yale, 1962) without, as far as I can see, any reference to Heidegger. But then Scully did not think that he was giving an account of art, and he certainly did not believe that every work of art was either a temple or a would be work of people creation like *Ma Vlast* or *Die Meistersinger*.

Nor indeed did Heidegger. Works of art can also bring us to realize the creative aspects of our perception, a task not necessarily consistent with their Volkisch aspects: they can 'purge from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being ... (creating) anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrent impressions of blunted familiarity.' Well, that is a view; in fact it is Shelley's view of poetry, referred to by Young. In its pellucid expression it certainly throws light on some of Heidegger's darker utterances. It also chimes in well both with a vein of romanticism and with the typically early modernist idea that the ideal work of art should have a revelatory aspect in which we come to see how what is being depicted somehow emerges before our eyes from the material in which it is encased. So it may not be surprising that Heidegger, a child of romanticism and of early modernism should have been attracted to it. Art, then, makes us aware of the creative aspects of our perception.

But, without some criterion of authentic creation—which Heidegger supplies neither in the case of art nor in that of philosophy more generally—the view is both too restrictive and too permissive. It is too restrictive because it is hard to see how it throws much light on, say, the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819101000328 Published online by Cambridge University Press

historical paintings of Veronese or Virgil's *Aeneid* or Brahms' late piano works. It is too permissive because there is no doubt that Sir Nicholas Serota's creatures would all be justified by him in those terms. Strange to think of Heidegger and Tracey Erain as ideological bed-fellows.

It would be wrong to think of Peter Singer as the Serota of applied ethics. After all, Singer has written seminal works in the subject, and certainly lets us know what he thinks on such matters as infanticide and the quality of life of the handicapped, whereas Serota has managed to get where he is to-day without ever letting us know precisely what his own view is on pretty well anything. Nevertheless, just as the figure of Serota broods over the art world, so does that of Singer over the world of applied ethics.

So it is at least refreshing to find a book, or rather two books, which take a robustly anti-Singer line on pretty well everything; refreshing not just because a diet of relentless utilitarianism is unappetising, but also because many ordinary people are profoundly shocked by things Singer says, yet find it hard to know how to counter them. David Oderberg has divided his anti-Singer crusade into *Moral Theory* and *Applied Ethics,* both published by Blackwell in 2000. So as to make each part self-standing, there is a certain amount of overlap between the two. Another slight worry might be that the works are too centred on the writings of Singer, and so may contribute to the very phenomenon the author deplores.

Nevertheless in Oderberg's books one finds robust and well-argued expositions of many traditional moral positions. He defends the doctrine of the sanctity of life, the principle of double effect, the act-omissions distinction, and the importance of intention and of virtuous character. There are attacks on the morality of abortion and euthanasia; war and capital punishment, in certain circumstances are defended; and animals put in their place. Not everyone will agree with all of this (or, in the case of many applied ethicists, any of it); but they will not be able to dismiss Oderberg out of hand, for one of the virtues of his treatment is the detailed attention he gives to individual cases, and to one's possible intuitions to them. Oderberg would not, one imagines, want to claim originality for much of what he says—he is, after all, defending traditional morality, and he draws on the considerable resources that morality has over the centuries built up. Nevertheless he is very interesting m analysing the way a particular and contrived concept of the person forms the basis of many of the assaults on human beings from Singer and other contemporary moral philosophers.

It was nearly half a century ago that in this journal Elizabeth Anscombe asked whether it is profitable to do moral philosophy in the absence of 'an adequate philosophy of psychology'. According to her, ethics should have been stopped in 1958 pending what has still not happened; one hardly supposes that her view in the year 2001 would have been any different. Her death, earlier this year, will have saddened many readers of *Philosophy;* a small consolation might be that shortly before she died, she was presented with *Logic, Cause and Action,* a book of essays in her honour, edited by Roger Teichmann. (Cambridge University Press, 2000). Teichmann him-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819101000328 Published online by Cambridge University Press

self considers where we currently stand in relation to ethics, and, like Oderberg, deplores the use to which Singer and other contemporary moralist put their idiosyncratic concept of person (basically, 'to throw doubt on the claims upon us of various human beings', those who in their abilities are most distant from the 'healthy, well-functioning adult'). Other essays are by Anscombe herself (a hitherto unpublished piece on 'Making True'), and also by Michael Dummett, Nancy Cartwright, Peter Geach, Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Edward Harcourt, Stephen Makin and Nicholas Denyer—a small tribute to Anscombe's range and the esteem in which she was held.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819101000328 Published online by Cambridge University Press