
Reviewed by Daniel J. Martino, The Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University

“‘To think is above all else to listen’ is Gail Stenstad’s stated epigraph for *Transformations: Thinking after Heidegger*. She gleaned this notion from Heidegger’s later essay ‘The Nature of Language’, and it is indeed emblematic of what she sets out to achieve in the study. For her, the real possibility that meaningful transformations will take place as a result of encounters with Heidegger’s thought necessitates thinking be-ing in the wake of a hearing and heeding what ‘things’ have to show us. To that end she invites readers to join her in thinking with Heidegger in order to think after or beyond him so that the effects of this personal listening encounter may bring about a changed and renewed perspective. This conviction is expressed numerous times when she asserts the slippery slope effect that can result from thinking differently about be-ing and beings, ‘‘Change one thing, and everything changes.’ If that ‘one thing’ is the thought of be-ing, and the next thing is our understanding of ourselves, then everything else begins to follow’ (p. 185).

From this it becomes clear that Stenstad’s intention is to write for a broader audience, while simultaneously issuing a fresh challenge to seasoned Heidegger scholars. For her there is too much at stake in the early 21st century that Heidegger’s thought can meaningfully address, and so it deserves a fair hearing beyond the confines of professional philosophy.

I aim to call the reader, whether inside or outside academia, to engage with me in enacting a dynamic *way*—not a theory, not a method—of thinking that can, quite possibly, transform our destructive and exploitative relationships with nature, our fellow living beings, and one another. (p. xii)

In chapter one, Stenstad shows how Heidegger’s lifelong goading to re-examine the question the meaning of be-ing opened the way for a transformative type thinking able to confront vexing contemporary dilemmas. Please note her particular way of designating ‘be-ing’. It is well known that among Heidegger experts there is a variety of means to express this all important notion, with ‘Being’ as one of the more prevalent uses. Nonetheless, Stenstad opts for the lower case hyphenated variant as the way to contrast the interest in the question of the meaning of ‘being’ that launched the study of metaphysics 2,500 years ago. Her rendering of Heidegger’s *Seyn* as be-ing better emphasizes its dynamic and questionable character (p. 7). Throughout chapter one, she shows how Heidegger’s two main
works—Being and time and Contributions to philosophy (from enowning)—as well as 14 other smaller texts advance the be-ing question from the conclusions of the first metaphysicians. While by her own admission this treatment is “fairly well known to Heidegger scholars” (p. 5), especially the sections on Being and time, she nevertheless portrays Heidegger’s counterpoint to traditional metaphysics in a tone that helps to underscore what is positive and constructive about thinking with and after him.

As the Greeks set out to think “the first beginning” in their study of be-ing, they rested content with static conceptualizations, such as, ultimate ground and constant presence. But Heidegger saw his work as “thinking in the crossing” from these musings on the first beginning to the other beginning, and herein lays the transformational potential inherent in his thinking according to Stenstad. Being and time was preparatory in this transformational approach to be-ing with the later Contributions providing numerous expressions that attempt to better appreciate the depths of its dynamic elusiveness,

This proliferation of names [in Contributions] . . . for be-ing, for the unthought, says, each in its own way, the same, moving away from constant presence as ground into ab-ground, moving-thinking to engage with the retreat and staying away of ground. (p. 26)

It is not just a mere litany of new phrases that marks the advance in thinking the first and other beginning from Being and time to Contributions. Instead, the transformation in thinking that emerges from revisiting the question of the meaning of be-ing engenders a simultaneous transformative approach to language. Thus, Stenstad devotes much of chapter two to the vaunted presuppositions about the nature of language and the relationship we have to language. A careful citation of key passages from Contributions proves instructive, since in this work, “from beginning to end, language itself is a crucial matter for thinking” (p. 43). Moreover, Stenstad taps into a smaller and well traveled Heideggerian text for English readers, “Memorial Address”, to show the symbiotic relationship between thinking and language.

To undergo a transformative experience with language hearkens to Stenstad’s epigraph for the book—“to think is above all else to listen”—and so entails the possibility of being attuned to (and by) an opening for the thinking of be-ing. Two ways to cultivate this attunement include “releasement toward things” and “openness to mystery”. The former calls for a letting go of the rule of method and of the idea that language is some kind of commodity for acquiring information. Openness to mystery, on the other hand, requires a pre-linguistic as well as a linguistic dimension. In the first sense it calls us to be open to the mysterious