
Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics makes the claim that, in matters of interpretation, temporal distance is not necessarily something to be overcome, but on the contrary, serves to bring into play those possibilities of the event that remain hidden from being too close. We are able, in other words, to filter out those elements by which we misunderstand.\(^1\) The recent publications of Heidegger's Existential Analytic and The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, Contemporary Approaches to His Philosophy support such a hermeneutic principle. The Sartre volume seeks to interpret Sartre's philosophy at the "turn of another decade," in which we can more readily grasp the development of Sartre's philosophy from the early work of the nineteen-thirties to his most recent work of the seventies. The Heidegger volume wants to confront the uneven character of the material dealing with the "basic concepts and methodology of existential philosophy." Taken together, these two volumes bring about a decisive engagement in the effort to rethink certain issues and problems within the phenomenological movement. Such a rethinking implies that we think both with and against these seminal thinkers. The Heidegger and Sartre volumes serve such a task well; both are exegetical and critical and thus enhance the effort of rethinking, and ultimately, understanding.

Taken together, these volumes have several noteworthy features in common. Most of the articles were written especially for their respective
volume; this not only avoids the redundancy that occurs from a compilation of articles that have appeared elsewhere, but also serves to provide each volume with a certain unity that other collections of articles quite often lack. None of the articles in the Sartre volume has been previously published; the interview with Sartre at the end of the volume only recently appeared in Dutch. The Heidegger volume has a similar originality; all but two of the fourteen articles were written especially for the volume. Jean Beaufret’s article, which was translated by Elliston, originally appeared under the title ‘Martin Heidegger et la Problème de la Vérité’ in Fontaine 63 (1947), pp. 146–74. Both volumes also provide a valuable bibliography. The thirty-three page bibliography in the Sartre volume has a chronological list of Sartre’s writings along with events in Sartre’s life, a list of interviews with Sartre, as well as extensive listings under “Existential Phenomenological Themes,” which emphasizes his early work, and “Philosophical Problems,” which emphasizes the whole course of Sartre’s thought. The thirteen-page bibliography in the Heidegger volume provides an extensive listing of works in English that deal solely with Heidegger’s early philosophy.

Taken by itself, Heidegger’s Existential Analytic is truly a unique undertaking. As the title indicates, this volume deals exclusively with the Heidegger of Being and Time. There is sufficient justification for taking a passage from Walter Biemel’s essay (pp. 111–32) as expressive of the theme of the book as a whole.

In order to approach a thinker we must try to deepen one of his fundamental concepts. A light necessarily gets thrown onto his other essential concepts as well, just as penetrating into another essential concept again casts light on and illuminates the first. Proceeding slowly and cautiously in this way, perhaps one day we can experience what is unique to the thinker in question. All precipitous (sic) condemnations and criticisms do not advance us; quite the contrary, they block the way. Certainly the way chosen is difficult. But it alone offers the possibility of saying something about the thinker which is not fictitious and imaginary. Rather it allows us to be addressed by his thinking itself. It is the only way possible with a thinker like Heidegger—against whom the most implausible reproaches were directed, from atheism and nihilism to pessimism, subjectivism and idealism—without the person directing these reproaches having understood his thought in the least. (p. 111).