

Communication or Confrontation – Heidegger and Philosophical Method

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Abstract

In this essay, we consider the philosophical method of reading and writing, of communication. Normally, we interpret the works of the great philosophers and explain them in papers and presentations. The thinking of Martin Heidegger has given us an indication of an entirely different method of philosophical thinking. In the 1930s, he gave a series of lectures on Nietzsche. In them, he calls his own way of reading and writing a confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Nietzsche. We consider the specific character of confrontation, and in what ways it is different from communication. First, we develop an answer to the question of how Heidegger reads Nietzsche: Does he give a charitable or a violent interpretation of Nietzsche and, if neither, how can his confrontation with Nietzsche be characterized? With this, we obtain an indication of the way we have to read Heidegger, indeed, of philosophical reading and writing as such.

Keywords

communication
 Heidegger
 Nietzsche
 philosophical method
 Will

Introduction

In *Also sprach Zarathustra* Nietzsche writes:

Wille zur Wahrheit heißt ihr's, ihr Weisesten, was euch treibt und brünstig macht? Wille zur Denkbarkeit alles Seienden: also heiße *ich* euren Willen! Alles Seiende wollt ihr erst denkbar *machen*: denn ihr zweifelt mit gutem Mißtrauen, ob es schon denkbar ist.

(KSA 4: 146)

When we 'read' this statement of Nietzsche, then it refers back to our own way of 'reading' it. How do we read Nietzsche and in what way is the will to truth at work in *our* way of reading and thinking?

We 'interpret' the text of Nietzsche and 'communicate' it in a lecture or article. Every communicative interpretation is already surrounded by the *Wille zur Denkbarkeit*, as far as the text is represented for thought. Representation anticipates the representability of the text, which means that the primary unity of interpretation and interpretandum, a principle of 'community', is presupposed. This anticipation is such that either the subject of our reading is subservient to its object, or the object of our reading is subservient to its subject. The former we may call a

philological-reconstructive or historical reading of Nietzsche. The latter a philosophical-progressive or systematic reading – which is to say that our own philosophical question is being raised, in the light of which Nietzsche’s thinking is brought up and evaluated critically. It is along these two modes of thought that the great philosophers are read nowadays and their work is commented upon.

Every communication theory presupposes an answer to a fundamental philosophical question: is the ambition of philosophical thinking to reach a unity or community in communication, or is it searching for ways to dwell upon the unbridgeable gap or difference between the participants of communication? It is our experience that the whole point of our reading and writing is the experience of resistance, i.e. the ‘unapproachability’ of the text. This has some implications for our method of reading and writing. How can our reading and writing remain with the unapproachability of the text, without incorporating this unapproachability in its interpretation and communication? On the basis of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger I will try to make this presupposition of interpretation and communication explicit and bring it up for discussion. In this way, we further our attempt to trace the philosophical determinants of communication theory and to rethink this theory.

In the 1930s, Heidegger gave several lectures on Nietzsche. In these, he rejects the interpretative method of philosophical thinking, because every interpretation presupposes the unity of interpretation and interpretandum, like every communication. By contrast, he calls his own way of philosophical thinking a confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Nietzsche. I will ask what the nature of this confrontation is and what differences exist between confrontation and interpretative communication. First of all, we obtain an answer to the question of how Heidegger reads Nietzsche. Secondly, and more importantly, we obtain an indication to the nature of philosophical reading and writing as such. Philosophy, it will emerge, is a method of thinking which is capable of dwelling upon the difference between mine and thine, upon the unapproachability of the text.

In this article, I will restrict myself mainly to Heidegger’s first lecture on Nietzsche; what is at stake is primarily the specific nature of confrontation as such, which emerges in his reading of Nietzsche. Firstly, I consider the hypothesis that Heidegger gives an interpretation of Nietzsche (1). After refuting this hypothesis, I elaborate three differences between interpretative interpretation and confrontation (2). Next, we elaborate the specific nature of his concept of confrontation on the basis of an example: Heidegger’s confrontation with Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘Will’ (3). Finally, I reconsider Heidegger’s concept of confrontation in a critical evaluation (4).

1. Guiding question (*Leitfrage*) versus grounding question (*Grundfrage*)

In the first lecture about the will to power of 1936/1937, Heidegger calls attention to a vast difference between the so-called guiding question of the metaphysical tradition and his own grounding question

