Lee Braver’s book does a rare service, and can function as a kind of landmark. He describes continental philosophy as a systematic program of anti-realism, which he traces with great learning from Immanuel Kant through G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, the early and later Martin Heidegger, on up to Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Along the way he adds numerous citations from analytic thinkers occupied with similar anti-realist themes. This makes his book a thorough survey of the history of continental philosophy, and a solid contribution to the current project of bridging the analytic-continental divide (though the introduction and jacket blurbs overstate the analytic component of the book). It is thoroughly researched, highly attuned to the different possible meanings of realism, and often witty. It is the sort of book that everyone working in the continental tradition, and many in the analytic tradition, will want to read. Moreover, I give these compliments as one of the few hardcore realists working in a continental idiom, and hence as someone who is rather appalled by Braver’s anti-realist commitments. Those who are not appalled will like the book even more than I do.

The remarkable unity of the book’s vision is both its greatest virtue and greatest vice. Continentals are not used to thinking of their ideas in such terms as “realism vs. anti-realism”; following Heidegger, they even see this dispute as a shallow pseudo-problem. Yet Braver reminds us that continental philosophy is a heavily anti-realist movement, and that Kant casts the longest of all shadows in this school. Certain problems arise from Braver’s anti-realist enthusiasm. First, his view of philosophy since Kant is at times simplistic. For Braver, the Copernican Revolution was a watershed event that made everything before Kant look naïve. Yet Kant remained moored to lingering realist prejudices that Hegel then bravely amputated. Hegel in turn remained a partial slave to realism in ways that Nietzsche was able to transform. And so on. According to this book, progress in philosophy comes from hunting down ever subtler residues of realism in one’s greatest predecessor, then establishing a more radical anti-realism than ever before. It reminded me of a series of Soviet purges, or of Animal Farm, with Kant, then Hegel, then Nietzsche, then their successors, accused in sequence of bourgeois realist sympathies and forced to abdicate leadership. The danger of self-parody arises: to get beyond Derrida (the book’s final hero), are we supposed to scour his works for even finer grains of realist bias that must then be denounced? Is a Derrida show trial approaching in the next ten or fifteen years? The author makes no predictions as to what comes next, but he credits Derrida with such a thorough fumigation of realism that it is hard to see how he can be topped.

A related problem faces Braver’s less systematic reading of the analytic tradition. It is plausible enough to read continental philosophy as a long anti-realist campaign, since continental realists have been rare—though I think he overlooks the realist dimension of phenomenology’s backlash against Hegel, and generally sees too much continuity between Hegel, Edmund Husserl, and Heidegger. But unlike the continental school, analytic philosophy has always dealt with realism as a genuine option, not merely as a naïve residue to be overcome. One consequence is that metaphysics is an increasingly respectable pursuit among the analytics, but remains an object of scorn among continentals. This difference is crucial, and must not be ignored. Braver generally behaves as though the W. v. O. Quine/Nelson Goodman/Donald Davidson/Richard Rorty anti-realist axis were the only legitimate strain of analytic thought, and this is far from the case. He does acknowledge the deep-fried re-
alisim of G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, but never takes it as a serious problem for his narrative: early analytic realism is explained away as a “reaction” to the idealism of F. H. Bradley, and Russell’s chief role for Braver is to serve as a comic sidekick performing obvious butcheries on the history of philosophy. There is little trace here of Roderick Chisholm, Saul Kripke, David Lewis, George Molnar, Timothy Williamson, or others who might complicate Braver’s model of continentals and analytics conducting parallel demolitions of our naïvely realist past.

The book takes a marvelous long view of continental thinking since Kant, and will spark greater interest in such figures as Goodman and Davidson among mainstream continental philosophy readers. But Braver’s narrative flatters this group too much, not asking them to do anything differently besides reading a bit more analytic philosophy to ease communication across the great divide. It is a classic “Whig history”: continentals are already on the right track, in an inexorable march of anti-realist progress. The oppressive tides of realism continue to recede. Keep up the good work! Realism is portrayed as a reactionary chunk of petrified wood that has nothing to teach us. Finally, the long concluding chapters on Foucault and Derrida suggest an oddly early-1990s conception of the continental avant garde, at a moment when more timely names (such as Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou) are not as easy a fit with Braver’s anti-realist saga.

For me, these are flaws that mar Lee Braver’s vision of the recent history of philosophy. They do not cripple the book qua book, which is wholly admirable for its single-minded focus, its relentless primary and secondary erudition, and its genial, even humble tone. It is so encyclopedic a work that future historians might make a good reconstruction of post-Kantian philosophy from Braver alone if all original sources were lost. The readings of individual philosophers are prudent and unsurprising, though he does take some justifiable risks in presenting such a Heideggerized version of Foucault. Braver’s real strength is his sweeping synoptic vision of continentalism from Kant to Derrida, backed by triple the needed homework to make this vision tangible. The book deserves great success, and Braver ought to become a household name in continental circles. In what follows I will briefly assess his anti-realist history and conclude with the inevitable “critical remarks,” arguing that the anti-realist paradigm has run its course and needs to be dropped.

The Meaning of Realism

Braver is refreshingly aware of all the different things that could be meant by “realism.” A philosopher might seem staunchly realist on one point while drifting toward anti-realism on others. For this reason he begins the book with a matrix of six realist theses (abbreviated as R 1–6) and a parallel matrix containing their six anti-realist counterparts (A 1–6). This handy alphanumeric code enables him to make daunting statements of the following sort: “[For Nietzsche,] A6 Multiple Selves plus A2 Pragmatic Truth leads to A3 Ontological Pluralism and its epistemological counterpart, Multiple Truths: A2 states that truth is what benefits us and A6 claims that we are made up of a variety of aspects.” Taken out of context, this might seem lacking in aesthetic appeal. But the reader masters these abbreviations almost as quickly as the long Russian names in War and Peace—though a detachable laminated card might have helped! The six pairs of theses can be summarized as follows:

- R1/A1. The world is not/is dependent on the mind.
- R2/A2. Truth is/is not correspondence
- R3/A3. There is/is not one true and complete description of how the world is.
- R4/A4. Any statement is/is not necessarily either true or untrue.
- R5/A5. Knowledge is/is not passive with respect to what it knows.
- R6/A6. The human subject does/does not have a fixed character.

Though all the “R” and “A” statements mix most easily with those of their own species, Braver shows that they are often scrambled into varied R/A permutations. Though his list is remarkably complete, I can think of at least one other important pair. Let’s call it R7/A7: “The relation of the human subject with the world is not/is a privileged relation for philosophy.” That is to say, most anti-realists do not think philosophy has anything to tell us about

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the collision of two inanimate objects if this collision is not somehow encountered by humans—whereas most realists do. But this position must not be confused with the R1/A1 question as to whether the world exists apart from the mind. For instance, Heidegger is clear that being and Dasein always come as a pair; it makes no sense to ask about what happened in the world before Dasein appeared. But this A7 position does not prevent Heidegger from holding that being withdraws from all attempts to grasp it, which I take to be flat-out R1 realism though Braver sees it as A1 (more on this below). Nietzsche presents an opposite case. Though it is fairly clear that Nietzsche is an A1 denier of a true world, this does not prevent him from often being an R7 defender of the will to power as something belonging not just to humans, but even to non-living matter, as seen in his more “panpsychist” moments. More generally, there are numerous continental thinkers who deny that they reduce the world to appearances, and who do allow for something lying beyond the formatted reality of experience (R1), but do not allow parts of this reality to interact without human mediation (A7). One example is found in the early Emmanuel Levinas with his formless il y a (“there is”), revealed in insomnia but by no means identical with it. A more recent case is Badiou’s “inconsistent multiplicity,” which exceeds all human efforts to count it, but seems to have no internal drama apart from exceeding such human counts. The point is worth mentioning because the R7/A7 rift, omitted by Braver, is actually the best litmus test for distinguishing genuine realists from pretenders.

**Early Analytic Realism**

Metaphysical realism is often conflated with the correspondence theory of truth. Braver is well aware of this, and his R and A matrices give him a subtle tool for avoiding the trap. He gives an example of such conflation in Putnam (15) but also cites the realist Michael Devitt’s opposite claim: “Realism does not entail any doctrine of truth.. Realism is about the nature of reality in general, and what it is like” (16). Braver concedes Devitt’s point, yet he also sees metaphysical realism and correspondence truth as making a good natural fit. Braver has a predictably easy time showing that correspondence truth would fit awkwardly with any denial of external reality. But in making the more important converse claim that realism does not go well with non-correspondence, he gives just one inconclusive citation from Michael Lynch (16). Braver does not return to the issue, and his quick change of subject has consequences later in the book. For two of the key moments in his narrative are Heidegger’s notion of truth as *aletheia*, and the Heidegger/Derrida critique of metaphysics as ontotheology. Now, *aletheia* is obviously not correspondence, since the unveiling never gives us anything in final, naked presence; it is well known that shadow is irremovable for Heidegger. But truth as unveiling is no clear anti-realist victory, and even suggests the opposite: if something is hidden from Dasein, it likely has some independence from Dasein, and this veers toward R1 mind-independent realism. Braver contests this view for reasons considered below, but the pressures of his anti-realist story lead him to find the matter a bit too obvious. As for the second moment, Derrida has a strong tendency to conflate realism with ontotheology, as if any belief in mind-independent reality entailed the ability to make this reality present in privileged, oppressive incarnations. In the beloved “White Mythology,” instance, Derrida slips from Aristotle’s insistence that a word has a proper meaning to an assertion that Aristotle thinks this proper meaning can be univocally pinned down in language (though his praise of poets suggests just the opposite). The latter would be ontotheology, but the former is simply R1 mind-independent realism. Braver is more scrupulous than Derrida in distinguishing the two, but at times he treats the downfall of correspondence (and hence ontotheology) as though it entailed the downfall of realism per se.

“By most accounts,” writes Braver, “analytic philosophy was born from Moore and Russell’s revival of realism in rebellion against the British idealism that dominated their education” (23). Braver agrees, treating this founding realism of analytic thought as just an initial deviation before a combined analytic/continental anti-realist onslaught. Moore and Russell were motivated by rebellion, and did not have much of a cause. They “could not
swallow the notion that the mind is not passive but affects what is known—the very centerpiece of Kant’s Copernican Revolution” (24). They upheld the doctrine of external relations, “i.e., that many properties and relations possessed by an object are contingent and can be changed without fundamentally altering the underlying entity” (24). They are joined by Gottlob Frege, who deplored the mixing of psychology with logic, “rejected what he perceived as Husserl’s view that knowledge changed the object known” (25) and complained in his own words about Husserl’s “confusion of the subjective with the objective, the fact that no clear distinction is ever made between expressions like ‘moon’ and ‘presentation of the Moon’” (26).

But here the borders between analytic realism and continental anti-realism are somewhat blurry. We find a doctrine of external relations not just in Moore and Russell, but also in Deleuze, who is missing from Braver’s continental tableau. The case of Husserl is tricky. He is certainly an idealist who makes no distinction between “real moon” and “presentation of moon,” but this is a different issue from psychologism, which Husserl famously assaulted in the Logical Investigations. While Husserl is doubtless an A1 anti-realist, he is also in some sense an R5 realist of passive knowing, despite the constituting work of the ego—though the moon for Husserl is a purely immanent object, it still has an eidos that requires patient eidetic variation to uncover. The point is that Braver’s lack of sympathy for realism leads him to miss certain undeniable flashes of continental realism (Deleuze on external relations) and to overlook the truly paradoxical status of Husserl, who is credited merely with repeating Hegel’s murder of the noumenal. Husserl might spend weeks unlocking the eidos of the moon or a mailbox, whereas for Hegel this would be pointless. Here Braver shares the widespread continental perplexity about what to do with Husserl, who receives no chapter of his own. Though Husserl is clearly one of the founding heroes of continental thought, most continentals are unable to credit him with any major insights not already found in Kant and Hegel. But while it would be foolish to call Husserl a realist (though his followers sometimes attempt it), there is a realist flavor to his works: unlike Hegel, he makes room for opaque individual objects that push back against the observer and elude adequate presence.

Returning briefly to Russell, we read of his disdain for the history of philosophy, and his arrogant claim to clear up two thousand years of philosophical confusion (27). In Russell’s own words, “the study of logic becomes the central study in philosophy” (27), and the history of philosophy is viewed largely as a history of errors. Braver observes that “science, often taken as a model for analytic philosophy, presents its history as one of progress which leaves mistakes behind,” and that “Russell built a resistance to the incorporation of history into epistemology or metaphysics into the DNA of the movement” (28). What is left unclear is whether Braver means to link all this logicism, ahistoricism, scientism, and arrogance with realism, or only with analytic DNA. The former would be unfortunate, since it is not hard to imagine a realist who believes in R1 mind-independent reality while still upholding an A2 or A4 view that reality is only manifested in historical terms, and hence that the history of philosophy is of vital importance.

Kant

Kant is the pivotal figure in Braver’s story: “For our topic of anti-realism, [René] Descartes, for instance, recedes in importance….Instead of the father of modern philosophy, it is Kant who forms the great fault line for realism” (33). This singular focus on Kant’s role is commendable, and Braver is right to call him the central figure of recent philosophy. Yet the book remains ambiguous as to why this is so. Braver quotes Hilary Putnam approvingly: “it is impossible to find a philosopher before Kant who was not a metaphysical realist” (34). Although Braver has already acknowledged that metaphysical realism can mean at least six different things, he shifts too quickly from one to the other in describing Kant’s watershed role. R2 correspondence is Braver’s first target: abandonment of “the unity of thought and being—that is, the claim that what we think cor-
rectly corresponds to what is” (34)—is supposedly an innovation of Kant. But “unity of thought and being” sounds more like a Hegelian slogan than a realist one. Correspondence has nothing to do with a “unity” of thought and being, but is rather the view that thoughts are isomorphic with being, that they can resemble it to a greater or lesser degree. Is Kant really the first to reject this model? Possibly so, given his uniquely insuperable gulf between phenomena and noumena. But if we accept (as Braver and I both do) that R2 correspondence theories of truth are hard to match with A1 denial of a mind-independent world, then it would be difficult to call George Berkeley a correspondence theorist. For Berkeley, there is nothing outside perceptions with which to correspond.

If we take the core of realism to be R1 mind-independent reality instead, then Kant deserves even less to be king of the anti-realists, given the role of the noumena in his philosophy. Braver toys with denying the existence of R1 noumena in Kant, then settles more cautiously on Hegel as the one who got rid of them. But in fact, Berkeley already reaches the A1 stance with his proverbial maxim *esse est percipi* (“to be is to be perceived”). The fact that God perceives the world apart from human awareness hardly leaves Berkeley stranded in R1 realism, since the world is still exhausted by its appearance in God’s mind. And since Braver holds with Putnam that everyone before Kant was a metaphysical realist, Berkeley’s A1 must not have been enough to count him as the watershed figure. Possibly sensing the problem, Braver continues to look elsewhere for Kant’s uniqueness, and another option soon appears: “The center of Kant’s revolution is A5 Active Knower—the thesis that the mind actively organizes and constitutes experience; it is more like a factory than wax or a mirror” (35–36). While this is clearly one of the chief insights of Kant, it can hardly count as “the center of his revolution,” since Braver will eventually claim that the later Heidegger and Foucault reversed A5 in favor of impersonal conceptual schemes outside the control of the human subject. And despite his great admiration for Heidegger and Foucault, Braver’s view is that they followed a new paradigm within Kantian anti-realism, not that they overturned it completely. To summarize, the essence of the Kantian fault line cannot lie in anti-correspondence, mind-dependence, or the subject as active knower.

Now it seems to me that Kant does belong at the heart of Braver’s picture, but not for the reasons he mentions. Instead, what really makes Kant a Kantian is what I have termed A7: the privileged ontological status of the human-world relation over all other relations. This is clearly a Kantian innovation, and still serves as the hidden principle of continental anti-realism today. Notice that whether one reads Kant’s noumena as a full-blown realism or as a halfway house toward anti-realism, both sides of this dispute are obsessed with the same relation between human and world. Neither side demands that we speak of the relations between rocks and windows, or fire and cotton, on the same footing as those between subject and world, since it is taken for granted that science deals with the world and philosophy with human access to the world. As with every deep paradigm in human thought, the prejudice here is so vast that it is hard even to see the alternative. And this prejudice clearly stems from Kant, not from earlier figures. For Descartes and Berkeley, relations are not just between mind and body or mind and idea; above all, it is God who is involved in relations. For Plato, the gap between perfect horse and phenomenal horse is not first generated by human perception of the horse, as would be the case for Kant. And though David Hume might seem to anticipate A7 with his doubts about inferences that lead beyond customary conjunction, Hume’s concern can safely be read as epistemological rather than ontological. What no one can deny is that the first Critique never lets us speak of causal relations between separate noumena. This is Kant’s most dominant innovation, disputed since his time only by such metaphysical writers as Samuel Alexander and Alfred North Whitehead, and by outright materialists. From here on out, continental philosophy orbits the single Kantian rift (or Hegelian non-rift) between human and world. The one possible exception in Braver’s anti-realist pantheon would seem to be Nietzsche, whenever he ascribes the will to power to everything that exists.

There is another important feature to Braver’s reading of Kant. The realist residue for which Kant is most blamed is the one that
Braver terms R6 Realism of the Subject. That is to say, Kant’s categories are permanently fixed for all finite rational beings. He “cannot allow the possibility of divergent conceptual schemes or organizing faculties” (49) and “fervently insists that he has determined the structures of experience once and for all” (50). Although his Paralogisms forbid our believing in a substantial self, the permanence of Kant’s categories yields a frozen R6 Realism of the Subject that his successors will need to undermine.

Hegel, Nietzsche

While Kant established an anti-realist paradigm that revolutionized philosophy, he showed a lingering realist bias in ascribing R1 mind-independence to the noumena and R6 permanent character to the human subject. For Braver, the greatness of Hegel is to obliterate the noumena and establish A1 mind-independent reality. The role of Nietzsche is to get rid of the universal structure of thought and liberate the subject from any stable character (Kant), and even from any necessary sequence of historical shapes (Hegel). Hegel is actually aware of both problems in Kant, and thinks he has put an end to both alike. But on Braver’s reading, Hegel succeeds only in suspending the noumenal realm. His effort to replace Kant’s fixed categories with a dialectic of successive forms still gives this succession a necessary character; he thereby remains entangled in R6 Realism of the Subject, as Derrida also complains (103–04).

Hegel’s rejection of the noumena is obvious enough. Compared with Kant’s mixed signals about a mind-independent world, the Hegelian signals are clear. Hegel “[rejects] the coherence of the very idea of noumena. This is the beginning of one of the central threads in the history of philosophy that I will be following out: the erosion of noumena” (79). A central thread indeed! In continental philosophy the noumenal realm has only a handful of defenders. (For disclosure purposes, Braver correctly cites me as one of them, and expresses polite astonishment at my realist reading of Heidegger’s tool-analysis) (532n23). Whereas Kant’s noumena were unknowable, Hegel holds that “the problem comes when [a] goal of inquiry which is not known gets hypostatized into a separately existing thing which cannot be known” (80). In other words, “Hegel considers the Kantian noumenon, the object beyond all access to experience, to be not ultimate reality but rather a confusion” (81). For “we are the ones who make the distinction between the in-itself and the for-us” (83). Hegel famously concludes that “logic therefore coincides with metaphysics” (89) and that “otherness as an intrinsic being vanishes” (91). Braver is pleased to proclaim, in a Hegelian spirit, that “later eras have greater truth without resorting to realist claims to have gotten the world right” (100). Reality is “wholly determined by [the totality of all possible conceptual schemes] without noumenal remainder” (104).

Kant’s noumena have now been destroyed for all later continental philosophy. That leaves us with Kant’s other apparent defect, R6 Realism of the Subject, which Hegel tries but fails to eliminate. “Another flaw in Kant’s system is that even by his own lights Kant owes us an account of the specific table of categories he supplies. To say that our possession of these categories is a brute, inexplicable fact is dogmatic and compromises our autonomy” (60). By contrast, “Hegel adds a major innovation to continental anti-realism in inaugurating a new thesis which I will call A6 Plural Subject, meaning minimally that there is more than one type of subjectivity or set of experience-organizing faculties, which Hegel ties to specific historical periods” (73–74). When Kant draws his table of categories from the known forms of judgment, Hegel calls this “an outrage on Science” (94). The problem for Hegel is not that Kant took them from judgments per se, but the fact that, in Braver’s words, “Kant took these categories from anywhere” (94). Although Kant is credited with seeing that the self is an activity rather than a substance (104), he still sees it as a kind of stability rather than as a movement (74). All of this suggests a radical overcoming by Hegel of Kant’s R6 Realism of the Subject. But not quite, according to Braver. The problem with Hegel is that “[his] famous claim that the true is the whole assumes a closure to the object of true descriptions. Despite the variety he introduces into the subject, he wants to end up with a list of the subject’s ‘categories’ that is as complete and final as Kant’s” (101). And “in this way, [Hegel] is still operat-
ing within the Kantian Paradigm” (101). Braver’s claim that Hegel’s model of the self is insufficiently historical opens the door to further progress by those who find a way to historicize the self even more.

And that brings us to Nietzsche. Braver writes that “A6 Multiple Selves…is Nietzsche’s greatest advance in my narrative of continental anti-realism” (125). While Kant preserves a frozen table of categories, and Hegel totalizes the sum of possible experiences, “Nietzsche plunges the self completely into the physical, empirical world…without closure, law, identity, or reason (A6)…Nietzsche scatters an irreconcilable multiplicity of power-hungry drives” (125). In Nietzsche’s own words, “becoming does not aim at a final state, does not flow into ‘being’” (125). The world is a ceaseless flux of becoming, and our concepts impose fixity only for the interests of survival: this is Braver’s reading of the will to power (126). For Nietzsche the world is made of verbs, not nouns (121); chance, not necessity (127); dynamic quanta, not things (143). If we subtract from a thing’s properties and relations, we are left with nothing (152). In Braver’s reading, those who remain realists in the face of cosmic flux are nothing but various degenerate types: “the ascetic, the Christian, the reactive, weak, herd, slave, and so on. These types…I will group under the umbrella term ‘the weak’” (114). By contrast, “[the strong] are anti-realists” (122).

For Braver, this amounts to an excellent further step toward the end of realism, which he seems to agree with Nietzsche in viewing as the doom of the West (115). But following Braver’s usual pattern, Nietzsche is accused of a lingering realist bias of his own. By viewing chaos and the will to power as real, and by upholding a real kernel of the self, Nietzsche undercuts his own anti-realist breakthroughs. “[Nietzsche] has to claim to have gotten it right about chaos in order to accuse metaphysics, Christianity, and so on of getting it wrong in positing stable things, heaven, and so on” (144). Braver cites an important passage from Beyond Good and Evil in which Nietzsche makes clear that the self has some inner reality, some true nucleus of selfhood that speaks in every event (147). But this means that “Nietzsche’s ethics is grounded in a realist ontology” (147). Instead of taking this as a spur to complicate his narrative of anti-realism triumphing over all adversity, Braver accuses Nietzsche of backsliding into noumenal naiveté of a sort that Hegel had ended, and that even Putnam is praised for transcending (159). For despite Nietzsche’s apparent dissolution of reality into infinite interpretations, “this metaphor of interpretations brings in the idea of the text that gets interpreted, masks [that] imply an original face, and so on” (159). Braver’s verdict is clear: “[Nietzsche’s] Kantian way of framing the issues is strewn with conceptual traps…Another revolution is needed” (159). For Braver that revolution is found in the later Heidegger, with the early Heidegger paving the way.

Heidegger Early and Late

Heidegger is the second great watershed of Braver’s history. He radicalizes the chief features of the Kantian Paradigm pursued by Hegel and Nietzsche, though Heidegger never fully reverses Kant, and remains within the anti-realist lineage. The reading of Heidegger is certainly diligent: at nearly 180 pages, it is double the treatment given to anyone else in the book. The early Heidegger was already an anti-realist, but remained trapped in a Kantian vision of “authentic” human Dasein and its constitutive temporal structure. The later Heidegger depersonalized the world with his epochal history of being, which places Dasein in the passive role of a shepherd of being who waits and thanks. But the later Heidegger is eventually purged for the same reason as everyone else in this story: he too harbors a hidden realist bias. By demanding a permanent openness to being, Heidegger turns wonder into a new form of authenticity, a new fixed vision of human reality that Foucault and Derrida will need to subvert. My main objection to this reading is that Braver misses the traces of R1 mind-independent reality in both the early and later Heidegger. This leads him to see nothing but residual, “bad” forms of realism in Heidegger, although Heidegger’s brand of realism is a more productive force designed largely to fight against the Kant/Hegel/Nietzsche tradition of present-at-hand metaphysics.

Braver gives abundant praise to the early Heidegger, whose Being and Time he rightly calls “astonishing” (163). He views this classic

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work as the culmination of the Kantian paradigm, which will be grounds for criticism no less than praise (163). What is most ruinous in Heidegger’s eyes is Vorhandenheit, or presence-at-hand—and Braver jumps the gun by identifying presence with realism (164). There are three supposedly anti-realist points for which the early Heidegger is lauded: the tool-analysis, the dependence of being on Dasein, and truth as unconcealment. First, Braver follows the usual reading for which presence-at-hand means independence from Dasein: “[present-at-hand objects] are independent of us; they do not depend on the encounter with Dasein in order to be” (167). By contrast, ready-to-hand or zuhanden entities, also known as “tools,” gain meaning only as part of the system of worldhood (172). Tools have meaning only in relation to one another and to us, thereby undercutting the independence of present-at-hand objects. Thus, by turning to our pre-theoretical grasp of the world, Heidegger destroys realism (173). This further the glorious downfall of noumena, which Braver finds “incoherent,” (183) since if something is independent of appearance, it must appear as independent—the typical claim of German Idealism and its sympathizers (193). Second, Braver has no doubt that being is dependent on Dasein. “The idea that Being needs Dasein is uncontroversial, even obvious: presencing requires someone to whom or a site in which to be” (186). Elsewhere, Braver goes so far as to say that everyone agrees with this claim: “it is admitted on all sides that Being is Dasein-dependent” (190, emphasis added). Third, Braver judges the doctrine of truth as unconcealment to be the most radical aspect of the early Heidegger. Heidegger drops R2 Correspondence Truth and complains that the tradition has stuck with this model for much too long (199). But Braver takes an additional, more extreme step, reading the end of correspondence as entailing that truth is not different from appearance. “[For Heidegger] Being is what Being presents itself as” (226), and “the key to his advance beyond the Kantian paradigm is that [he] dispenses with the reality-appearance distinction, the key feature of metaphysics for him” (205).

Braver’s main criticism of Being and Time is that it shows a lingering attachment to R6 Realism of the Subject: the early work [of Heidegger] still operates within the Kantian paradigm in important ways, most particularly in that Being and Time is organized around a realist conception of the subject (R6). Though it is inseparable from the world… fundamental moods and the anticipation of death reveal a formal structure of Dasein that is permanent and universal (R6), allowing us to appropriate it to live appropriately. Heidegger also employs a Kantian transcendental idealism [that] posits an ultimate definition of Dasein as temporality. (253)

To summarize, the early Heidegger steers clear of the noumena, makes being and Dasein co-dependent, and gets rid of truth as correctness, but remains enslaved to a permanent structure of temporality and the belief in a true, authentic self that is recoverable in special moods. For Braver, the later Heidegger abandons the bad points while preserving the good ones. The later Heidegger is “one of the turning points, for better or worse, in the history of philosophy as a whole” (341). One achievement of the later Heidegger is to eliminate the fixed temporal structures and true authentic self of Being and Time, replacing them with epochs of being sent in different ways at different times—beyond the control of Dasein, and not occurring for any specific reason. An even more intriguing feature of Braver’s later Heidegger is his apparent rejection of a key anti-realist doctrine. Until now, Braver has always praised the emergence of anti-realist “A” doctrines as a good thing, and denounced their abandonment as a form of regression. But now, for the first time, he applauds the disappearance of an “A” feature: none other than the crucial A1 Mind-Dependence, which had previously been one of the pillars of the continental world-view in Braver’s account. “[The Heideggerian] paradigm transforms A1 Mind-Dependence…Mutual interdependence: man and Being intertwine and can only be understood and exist in relation to each other” (341). Nonetheless, Braver does not bite the bullet and read Heidegger as converting A1 back into R1 Mind-Independence. Instead, he labels the new position as an “Imper-
sonal Conceptual Scheme” (ICS), which he finds both in Heidegger’s epochs of being and Foucault’s epistemes.

Braver realizes that the ICS cannot be a fully anti-realist doctrine, since it strips humans of the power to constitute reality, restoring that power to Being as “first among equals” (278). Braver concedes that being is something “prior” for Heidegger, (328) and rightly labels Gelassenheit as R5 Passive Knower, a direct contradiction of Kant’s vehement A5 Active Knower model (306). Does all this make the later Heidegger a realist, thereby collapsing the Whig history of continental anti-realism? No, says Braver. He insists that even if being is prior, it is nonetheless exhausted by its appearance to humans, holding nothing in reserve. “[For Heidegger,] how things present themselves is how they are; if they present themselves differently at different points in history, then they are in different ways” (266). On the next page, we read that “[Heidegger] considers whatever appears to be the real” (267). And later, “being, which isn’t a being, simply isn’t the kind of thing that could exist apart from its appearings to people throughout history; it is its appearings, which occur historically” (271). In short, any realist tendency awakened by passive Gelassenheit and impersonal historical epochs is blocked from reversing into realism by Braver’s insistence on A1 Mind-Dependence, that being can exist only in correlation with humans. Braver never even toys with the notion that Heidegger might be an R1 realist. His sole disappointment with the later Heidegger concerns symptoms of that old Kantian disease, R6 Realism of the Subject. Despite the A6 intent of Heidegger’s openness to multiple historical epochs, this A6 position slides toward a hidden R6 bias, just as Hegel’s did earlier. For, “however much openness may differ from period to period, man must always be open to Being…simply in order to be human. This reinstates the R6 Realism of the Subject and its concomitant ethics [of authenticity] that [Heidegger] had apparently left behind. Wonder then becomes a new form of authenticity as recapturing or living in accordance with our essence…” (339).

I will now give a brief statement of what is wrong with this reading of Heidegger. We saw that Braver views the early Heidegger as an anti-realist because of the tool-analysis, the dependence of being on Dasein, and the model of truth as unconcealment. He also judges the later Heidegger to be anti-realist for the latter two reasons, despite the admittedly realist overtones of Gelassenheit and its passive shepherding waiting for the next epoch of being. But as I see it, none of Braver’s three points qualify Heidegger as an anti-realist. Let’s go in reverse order for ease of presentation.

First, consider Heidegger’s model of aletheia. Instead of truth as something in the mind corresponding to something in the world, truth is now a matter of unveiling; Dasein is always both in light and in shadow. Braver takes this downfall of R2 Correspondence to lead automatically to the end of R1 Mind-Independence. We have already seen that the inability to correspond with external reality does not entail that there is none. Surprisingly, Braver slips back into this assumption despite his early unmasking of it. He defends this reading of Heidegger with numerous citations, but they are inconclusive, especially when juxtaposed with contrary passages cited by Braver himself. It is by no means the case that veiling implies there is nothing hidden behind the veil. This is an odd claim to make, and really amounts to a strange projection of Hegel onto Heidegger. I mentioned above that Braver is too quick to see basic agreement between Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger in questions of A1 Mind-Dependence. Despite Heidegger’s obvious respect for Hegel, his references to him are overwhelmingly negative, including the key passage early in Being and Time where the Hegelian definition of being as “the indeterminate immediate” is cited as one of the most horrific examples of the forgetting of being in favor of presence-at-hand. Braver also makes no productive use of Heidegger’s jar ring Zen-like statement at the end of Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics that when German Idealism suppressed the things-in-themselves it closed off human finitude. On the whole, I find it impossible to read the collected works of Heidegger and think that he views Hegel as an ally; there is too much evidence to the contrary. This, of course, bears directly on Braver’s reading of Heidegger. For his repeated assertions that things are nothing more than their appearing is a good summary of

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Hegel, but a disastrous reading of Heidegger, the thinker par excellence of veiledness, hiddenness, concealment, sheltering, hinting, signaling, formal indication, and withdrawal from every view. To say that the world is exhausted by its appearance is tantamount to saying that it is exhausted by its presence—the most un-Heideggerian teaching one can imagine.

Second, Braver is fascinated by “the mutual interdependence of man and being.” Although he never has the gall to label this as an outright “A” doctrine, he still contends that it forbids R1 Mind-Independent noumena. But this is simply a case where apple meets orange. For it is not at all “obvious,” as Braver holds, that being is exhausted by its appearance to humans in specific epochs. All that is obvious is that Heidegger believes in a permanent correlation or rapport between man and being, a doctrine that Quentin Meillassoux has aptly termed “correlationism.”

Heidegger’s correlationism is easily proven by his famous discussion of Isaac Newton’s laws: without Dasein, these laws would be neither true nor false. It is clear enough that for Heidegger, being and Dasein (and later, being and man) exist only in company with one another. But this is nothing more than what I have called A7 Privileged Human-World Relation; it does not amount to A1 Mind-Dependence. If two things need each other to exist, it does not follow that their existence is exhausted by their interaction. No matter how much “being needs man,” it is only the presencing of being that is accessible to humans, not being itself. Even if we grant Heidegger’s (rather bizarre) idea that being would disappear without Dasein, it does not follow that being is completely accessible to Dasein within this endless marriage. When Braver claims otherwise, his citations are thin; he seems to be projecting either Hegel or Derrida onto Heidegger in order to make his story flow more smoothly. The key point to remember is this: if being were truly reducible to all its transient historical incarnations, then being would be equivalent to its presence. But by definition, being for Heidegger is that which always withdraws into absence.

This brings us to the Father of Waters in Heidegger studies: the tool-analysis. Braver is far from alone in reading this analysis as a triumph of anti-realism. His reasoning is clear enough: tools belong to world, and world is determined by its for-the-sake-of-which, and this turns out to be human Dasein. Tools are not just slabs of wood or stone that are later invested with human meaning; in true phenomenological style, they are encountered as laden with significance from the start. This apparently supports Braver’s mainstream view that present-at-hand means “independent from Dasein” while ready-to-hand means “linked with Dasein in a relational system.” Elsewhere, I have argued that exactly the opposite is the case. The argument can be stated briefly by considering the several different examples Heidegger gives of presence-at-hand. He does not use the term Vorhandenheit only (or even primarily) for independent physical substances, as Braver and others so often imply. Instead, presence-at-hand also refers to the presence of phenomena in consciousness, as in Husserl’s philosophy, which Heidegger accuses of never raising the question of the being of the phenomena. In fact, presence-at-hand refers more broadly to perceptions, objects of theoretical comportment, broken equipment that suddenly juts into view, and also to physical substance. Now, it is quite obvious that what links all these modes is not “independence from Dasein.” Au contraire, all of them are explicit objects of Dasein’s comportment, and hence all are present to human awareness. This is perfectly obvious in the case of perceptions, Husserlian phenomena, and broken tools, all of which plainly exist only in conjunction with a human observer. Yet the same is true even of Braver’s showcase example of “independent” presence-at-hand: natural physical substance. Heidegger’s point is not that physical substance is independent, but that it seems to be independent: it is mathematized in the Cartesian manner, but this means idealization in terms of present-at-hand properties, which loses the being of the things. In short, there is nothing remotely Dasein-independent in the idealized scientific conception of matter, which for Heidegger is no better than a violent reduction of the world to Vorhandenheit. Contra Braver and many others, true independence belongs only to Zuhandenheit, since tools withdraw from all human awareness—a far more independent place to be than consciousness.

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Braver would probably make the understandable objection that tools belong to world, that world is a holistic system, and that this system only gains meaning from human Dasein, thereby making tools utterly Dasein-dependent. But this view is subverted by the crucial fact that tools break for Heidegger. If ready-to-hand items were really exhausted by their current system of references, with nothing held in reserve, then there would be no surplus in them able to break down or malfunction. What breaks in the tool cannot be something already at work, but must be something withdrawn or sequestered that suddenly breaks forth. Hence, the best path to follow is simply to admit that tools are not definable as a system of relations. The relational system certainly explains the status of tools for Dasein in any given moment, but broken tools show that Dasein is always partly wrong in how it grasps them. The tool holds surprises in store—surprises not currently expressed in the system of worldhood. The tools themselves are absent from view, independent from Dasein, which is precisely not the case for presence-at-hand. Among other virtues, this reading of tool-being makes immediate sense of Heidegger's remark that readiness-to-hand is the way things are "in themselves," a claim that puzzles Braver and pushes him to complicated explanatory efforts.

Braver's view that Heidegger removes R1 Mind-Independent Reality from the picture converts Heidegger into an idealist. Yet recall that the first impetus to Heidegger's career came from his objection to the idealist side of Husserl, who brackets the world and reduces things to their appearance in consciousness. The young Heidegger insisted that things are not primarily observed as phenomena in consciousness. The tools are independent things, withdrawing into shadow no less than being itself. In the later Heidegger this tendency is equally strong (but no stronger). Hence it is somewhat alarming that Braver pays so little attention to Heidegger's 1949 reflection on "the thing," in which the jug is given powerful independence from the potter who makes it. And we have already seen that Braver concedes other realist points in the later Heidegger, especially Gelassenheit as a version of R5 Passive Knower. The more that evidence mounts, the more it seems that Heidegger is the opposite of what Braver claims. He is more like an anti-Kant, sparking a realist revolution of concealed, withdrawn things, and merely lapsing into a bit of old-fashioned anti-realist bias: namely, A7 Mutual Interdependence of human and world. But if Heidegger is not an anti-realist, then the basic conception of Braver's narrative is in danger.

**Foucault, Derrida**

Braver does a fine job of showing Heidegger's underrated influence on Foucault's philosophy: "I have tried to show in this chapter that Foucault is best read as a disciple of Heidegger, and that the later Heidegger's influence on him is more general and more illuminating than, for example, Nietzsche's" (427). Foucault furthers the later Heidegger's model of impersonal conceptual schemes, or epistemes, in which the subject is not a fixed root as in Kant, but is produced by a conflux of forces. Yet Foucault differs from Heidegger in several ways. Instead of Heidegger’s “Great Books” approach to history, Foucault digs into the archive of “minor” documents such as prison registers, giving him more empirical weight than Heidegger. And though Foucault’s archaeological period adopted “[the later] Heidegger’s monolithic conception of a single dominant understanding for each Epoch,” he later “insists that some elements can be carried over to another period, [and] take on new significance in this new holistic context, altered by the fact that other elements change drastically” (412). Even more importantly, while the later Heidegger’s permanent openness to being flirts with an R6 Realism of the Subject, it is Foucault who “makes the essence of human nature an anti- or counter-essence, the ability to transgress anything prescribed as our necessary or true identity” (424). Yet the merciless Braver charges even Foucault with a hidden realist bias. For Foucault “takes the traditional form of authenticity—uncover your true self [so] that you may live in accord with it. He has determined human nature to be the inability ever to be determined once and for all by any specific nature. Although this is as distant as one can get from a traditional realist essence, it is still what we really are, which in turn determines what
kind of behavior is appropriate to this anti-identical identity” (426). On Foucault’s model a cannabis-using, transgendered environmental activist will surely be privileged over a dull yuppie businessman, as somehow closer to the transgressive anti-essence of the subject. Braver would see it as a lingering form of realism if the activist were called closer to “true” human reality than the yuppie.

Derrida is awarded first place by Braver for philosophical brilliance in the post-Heideggerian era, surpassing even Foucault (342). Though Braver humbly admits to less certainty about Derrida than the other figures covered in his book, he does a fine job of integrating him into his narrative. Derrida “defines [the] history [of philosophy] as the era of the metaphysics of presence because its ‘matrix...is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of this word.’ Those who have read my book to this point will not be surprised that I interpret this metaphysics of presence as a form of realism” (434). Here is Braver’s final grave accusation against realism, which was already blamed for the ressentiment of Nietzsche’s weaklings, and for the general ruin of the West in Heidegger’s account. But I have already suggested that under no circumstances should the metaphysics of presence be confused with realism. Stated in Braver’s terminology, basic realism can be described primarily as an R1 doctrine of Mind-Independent Reality. By contrast, the metaphysics of presence (a.k.a. “ontotheology”) is a thoroughly R2 Correspondence Truth doctrine, which holds that certain present-at-hand beings can embody the presence of being as a whole. But we have seen repeatedly that R1 mind-independent realism is in no way committed to R2 correspondence, despite Braver’s tendency to treat them as a package. In fact, Heidegger provides a fine example of a philosopher with realist traits who renounces ontotheology utterly (though Derrida has a special talent for finding the places where Heidegger lapses into it despite himself).

In describing how Derrida surpasses Heidegger and Foucault, Braver shows witty self-awareness: “The overall pattern traced by the history of continental anti-realism that I have been describing is that of the progressive erosion of realism...According to the inertia of this narrative up to this point, Derrida should move ahead by attacking the most realist element of the Heideggerian Paradigm” (472–73). Derrida’s central target, according to Braver, are the impersonal conceptual schemes (ICS) that we find in Heidegger’s epochs of being and Foucault’s epistemes. Braver argues that “ICS is in many ways the linchpin of the Heideggerian Paradigm,” (473) since it strips power from Kant’s A5 Active Knower even while keeping reality dependent on its accessibility to humans (A1). “Derrida’s objection (put into my terms) is that these Impersonal Conceptual Schemes still partake too much of R3 Uniqueness. Although they are multiple and change over the course of history (A3), each one monolithically determines the characteristics of virtually everything that is during its reign” (473). In Derrida’s eyes, transferring the schemes from individual Dasein (in the early Heidegger) to impersonal schemes (in the later Heidegger), is no great help. “It is the very idea of conceptual schemes that bothers Derrida, so Heidegger’s moves of transferring them from A5 subject to impersonal Being, changing them from apparently one permanent set (R3) to an indefinitely open succession (A3), rendering them abyssal by giving up any attempt to account for them, are all secondary issues” (474).

In conclusion, Braver observes that “[for Derrida] there is nothing outside the text because our experience is always linguistically mediated...Meaning gets generated by elements differing from each other [différance], a process that creates meaning while permanently deferring the full presence of referents that would constitute ultimate meaning” (495). Unlike for Heidegger and Foucault, “the system has no stable identity in the first place to change; each system is simultaneously many things at once” (496). In this way, “Derrida’s reformation of the [Kantian] notion [of conceptual schemes] is far deeper than the Heideggerian Paradigm’s changes, giving it a strange new shape that more successfully escapes the lingering vestiges of realism,” an escape that Braver regards as the very mission of philosophy (496).

But once again, the notion that there is nothing outside the text, nothing outside the play of différance, is a better fit with Hegel’s position than with Heidegger’s. If Hegel had been a bit

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flashier, he might easily have written the following words of Derrida: “The exit from the book, the other and the threshold, are all articulated within the book.” Hegel might also have written these words of Lee Braver: “a transcendental signified or the notion of something ‘outside the text’—that is, wholly untouched by human thought or description—is itself part of the text—that is, an idea, a description, a posite, or a characterization” (445). Such words go easily with Hegel’s demolition of the noumena. But they do great violence to Heidegger’s philosophy of a Being withdrawn from all access, a jug that can only be produced because it is and not the reverse, and tools that break precisely because they are more than their current efficient functioning.

After all, it is not Heidegger’s critique of Husserl that the signified is nothing apart from the infinite dispersal of its signs. Heidegger’s critique is the opposite: Husserl makes the things too shallow, not too falsely deep. Husserl lets the phenomena be exhausted by their accessibility to us. Heidegger would never say that “whatever is outside the text is accessible only within the text.” This notion is purely Hegelo-Derridean, and Hegel in Heidegger’s eyes is among the worst of all felons in the reduction of being to presence-at-hand. Despite Braver’s assertions that presence-at-hand means independence, Hegel’s thoroughgoing doctrine of mediated dependence is seen by Heidegger as one of the most flagrant cases of a metaphysics of presence. Relational contexts are precisely what Heidegger cannot accept as a model of being. His rejection of R2 correspondence is not a rejection of R1 Mind-Independence, but the opposite: it is only because being is so inexhaustible that correspondence fails.

Concluding Remarks

As I see it, Heidegger is the Trojan horse in Braver’s narrative, the first of his heroes since Kant to defend R1 noumena (aside from Nietzsche’s flirtation with will to power in the inanimate realm). Even those who reject my ascription of R1 noumena to Heidegger will probably concede that they are defended by Kant. What this means is that all six realist doctrines in Braver’s matrix have been upheld by at least one of his anti-realist heroes. Hence, there would seem to be no central anti-realist thread in his story. This is why I proposed an additional A7 doctrine of Privileged Human-World relation; surely A7 is the one common thread leading through continental anti-realism from Kant to Derrida. Notice that even Kant makes no effort in the Critical Period to deal with the relations between two inanimate things. His constant focus is on the single gap between phenomena and noumena, never between two noumena. And though I myself read Heidegger as an R1 realist, there is no place in Heidegger where two things are allowed to relate apart from any human access to them. Heidegger’s jug recedes from all human contact, but is never described as withdrawing from the wine or the environing air. (Once again Nietzsche is the possible odd man out, given his frequent granting of the will to power to non-human entities; indeed, I believe this is sufficient grounds for placing him outside the Kantian lineage).

To find a major post-Kantian philosopher who puts the relation between wind and clouds on the same footing as that between humans and clouds, we have to go to Whitehead (or to any materialist), and hence outside the continental tradition. The A7 privilege of human-world interplay, whether it be defined as gap or as marriage, is the central unspoken dogma of continental philosophy, even more than A1 mind-dependence. And I do mean “unspoken”! A7 is missing even from Braver’s uncommonly thorough catalogue of anti-realist variants, and I have never heard it mentioned as a basic principle by any continental thinker. Only when first reading Whitehead’s bluntly anti-Kantian Process and Reality did it even occur to me to question this privilege of the human-world pairing. Now, there are two possible reactions to the discovery of this A7 principle. One is to praise it for being so sensible—for how could we talk about relations to which we have no access? But the other possibility is to view A7 as dogmatic baggage preventing anti-realists from sailing for new seas. How might continental philosophy look if we endorsed an R1 noumenal reading of Heidegger, and enriched it with an R7 view that any two realities will relate in the same basic manner as Dasein and being or Dasein and beings? We would then have a strange model in which entities withdraw not

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just from Dasein, but from each other as well: veiling and unveiling all the way down, even in the brute sphere of inanimate causation. But this is a story for another time.

To summarize, Braver’s frank statement of the continental anti-realist credo was long overdue. It would be hard to ask for a more thoroughly researched work on the topic, or for one more honest or more technically precise. The main flaw of the book is its Whig history of realism progressively demolished by a radical train of anti-realists (with little room for improvement after Derrida), and its news blackout of realist uprisings on the analytic side of the river. My suspicion, and my hope, is that the book will be a landmark for reasons quite the opposite of Braver’s aspirations. By announcing the anti-realist trend of continental thought from Kant to Derrida, the author wants to focus and amplify the A1 destruction of noumena. But I prefer to interpret his book according to the old Hegelian maxim that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk. The introduction states that “[continental anti-realism] is still close to us, still alive, which makes its structure difficult to discern; anatomy is easier to make out during an autopsy than a surgery” (7). And yet, there are only minor problems with Braver’s excellent anatomy lesson. This leads us to a ghoulish conclusion worthy of a tale by Poe: the book is not surgery, but an autopsy of continental anti-realism. The surgeon is a master, but does not realize that he is operating on a dead body.

ENDNOTES

1 Lee Braver, A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism (Northwestern University Press, 2007).
2 On this topic see David Skrbina, Panpsychism in the West (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 137–39.
4 Manuel DeLanda’s influential Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy (London: Continuum, 2002) even argues that Deleuze and Félix Guattari are realists to the core. Of continental thinkers born prior to 1960, DeLanda is the only one known to me who openly proclaims realism. Bruno Latour’s claim to realism in Pandora’s Hope (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999) is more ambiguous.

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