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J. L. Austin: Philosopher and D-Day Intelligence Officer by
M. W. Rowe (review)

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Time (38). In 1935–36, Heidegger offered a different interpretation of Kant, published as *What Is a Thing?* For me, Lambeth too quickly dismisses this book, which turns to Kant's principles of the understanding and mathematical physics (38).

Second, Heidegger's ascription of "anxiety" to Kant seems to require more critical attention. Lambeth denies that this is a psychological claim, because, according to *Being and Time*, "any ontological inquiry provokes anxiety" (32). However, this anxiety is presumably still an affective response, and, given that Kant is said to succumb to it while Heidegger does not, it is difficult to see how it is not somehow a matter of personal fortitude.

Third, when presenting Heidegger's "two-strand" method, Lambeth repeats that the strand that Heidegger chooses (that of the imagination) is the "best," "philosophically superior," even "most exciting" of the two options (27, 33, 35, 39). The burden of proof of these assertions implicitly falls on chapters 2–5. Perhaps because this argument is implicit, I felt that the superiority of Heidegger's line of interpretation is not satisfactorily defended. In chapters 2 and 3, Lambeth uses the Neo-Kantians and German Idealists as foils for Heidegger's readings, thereby implying that in each case there are only two interpretative options and Heidegger's imagination-centric option is the "best." But few Kant scholars would agree that there are only two interpretative options in either case.

In the coda that concludes the book, Lambeth acknowledges the difficulty of writing about Heidegger after the 2014 publication of selections from the so-called "Black Notebooks" that confirmed his Nazism and antisemitism. Lambeth proposes, in future work, to turn Heidegger's hermeneutic method onto him, in order to separate his philosophical insights from his political and racist errors. While this would be welcome, I felt that the approach could already have been taken in the present book—not with regard to Heidegger's antisemitism, but with regard to the viability and value of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant. The crucial questions facing a "violent" interpretation, I suggest, are: How violent is it? How far does it diverge from the text? And is it justified? If so, how? What is gained by violently interpreting the philosopher in this way? I missed stronger answers to these questions in Lambeth's book, which more often presupposes than defends the validity of Heidegger's readings. So, while I appreciate the contribution that the book makes to the menu of methodological options for historians of philosophy, I suspect that more work is needed to persuade historians that the Heideggerian approach is an appealing one.

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M. W. Rowe. *J. L. Austin: Philosopher and D-Day Intelligence Officer*. Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 688. Hardback, \$38.95.

This is a magnificent biography, balanced, comprehensive, and meticulously researched. It reconstructs the life of a scholar whose analyses helped shape mid-twentieth-century British philosophy; and it traces the work of an intelligence officer whose analyses helped save tens of thousands of lives. Interestingly, it draws illuminating connections between Austin's two careers. Rowe argues that the organization of Austin's seminal Saturday Morning discussion group was informed by his experiences as leader of the Advanced Intelligence Section. Problems were broken down into smaller components and assigned to caseworkers, often young tutors, who had to write ever more detailed reports on increasingly specific subjects in the hope that philosophical agreement would eventually be reached (427).

The book is divided into three parts. Part I describes the first thirty years of Austin's life: his middle-class background, his stellar educational record, the All Souls Group, and his early work on Aristotle and Leibniz. Rowe argues that the classicist turned philosopher initially struggled to find his voice. The Magdalen fellow had been one of the most brilliant students of his generation but was outflanked by contemporaries like A. J. Ayer, who had the "chutzpah, networking ability," and "instinct for spotting exciting developments" that Austin

lacked (104). Rowe describes various influences on Austin's intellectual development—Oxford realism, logical positivism, pragmatism, and the later Wittgenstein—but shows that he found it difficult to integrate his diverse scholarly inclinations into a coherent philosophical program.

Part II details Austin's career as an intelligence officer. Rowe and Tim Austin, the philosopher's nephew, have pieced together the scattered shreds of information on his wartime activities and discovered that Austin was one of the "leading British Intelligence officers of the Second World War" (613), heading a section that had "the most complete overview of the entire intelligence picture" and that ultimately "became the hub, the nerve centre, of invasion intelligence" (211). Their reconstructions of Austin's crucial contributions to, among others, the search for German V-1s and the Normandy landings will not just help military historians shed new light on this period, they will also help philosophers better understand his character and intellectual development. Historians of twentieth-century philosophy often write as if their subjects lived in a geopolitical vacuum, but Rowe demonstrates that we cannot understand Austin's trajectory, nor the evolution of Oxford philosophy more generally, if we ignore the two world wars.

The final part of the book reconstructs how Austin became the dominant voice of Oxford philosophy for about a decade, describing how his philosophical wit and painstaking analyses helped him win over a generation of students. Rowe argues that Austin's approach to ordinary language philosophy perfectly mirrored the mood of postwar Britain—cautiously optimistic yet suspicious of grand ideas—and compares him to the poets of "The Movement," who also valued "small-scale forms, rationality, realism, scepticism" and "wry humour" (388). Austin's success was relatively short-lived. By the mid-1950s, Oxford students already started to lose confidence that his approach would actually help them solve philosophical problems, leaving the recently appointed White's Professor of Moral Philosophy "depressed, frustrated, [and] worried" in the final years of his life (593).

Rowe outlines most of Austin's papers and offers a balanced assessment of his work and lasting significance. He rightly hails him as one of the most important philosophers of the period and, perhaps more surprisingly, as "one of the leading Aristotle scholars of his time" (127). But he is also highly critical of some of his most influential works, explaining why his analysis of knowledge is "disappointingly superficial" (405) and why *Sense and Sensibilia* ultimately fails to definitively dispense with sense data (449–54). Nor does he sugarcoat the more unpleasant sides of Austin's character, in particular his ruthlessness in public debates. Rowe plausibly suggests that Austin's behavior was in part the result of the "competitiveness, insecurities, and infighting" that characterized Oxford's intellectual culture (523), but also shows that he struggled to maintain warm relations with people beyond his inner circle throughout his life (499).

Ultimately, Austin felt more at ease in the United States. Rowe cites several philosophers who report that he seemed a different man when he was lecturing at Harvard (in 1955) and Berkeley (1958). The Oxford don was influenced by Williams James and C. I. Lewis, and his best-known work, *How to Do Things with Words*, develops important pragmatist themes. Even his American reception, Rowe argues, was "warmer and more enthusiastic than it had been in Britain," singling out the work of Stanley Cavell, Noam Chomsky, and John Searle to make his case (529–30). Austin could have been an American professor—he was offered a permanent position at Berkeley in 1959—but tragically passed away at age forty-eight before he and his wife Jean, who opposed the move, had made a final decision.

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