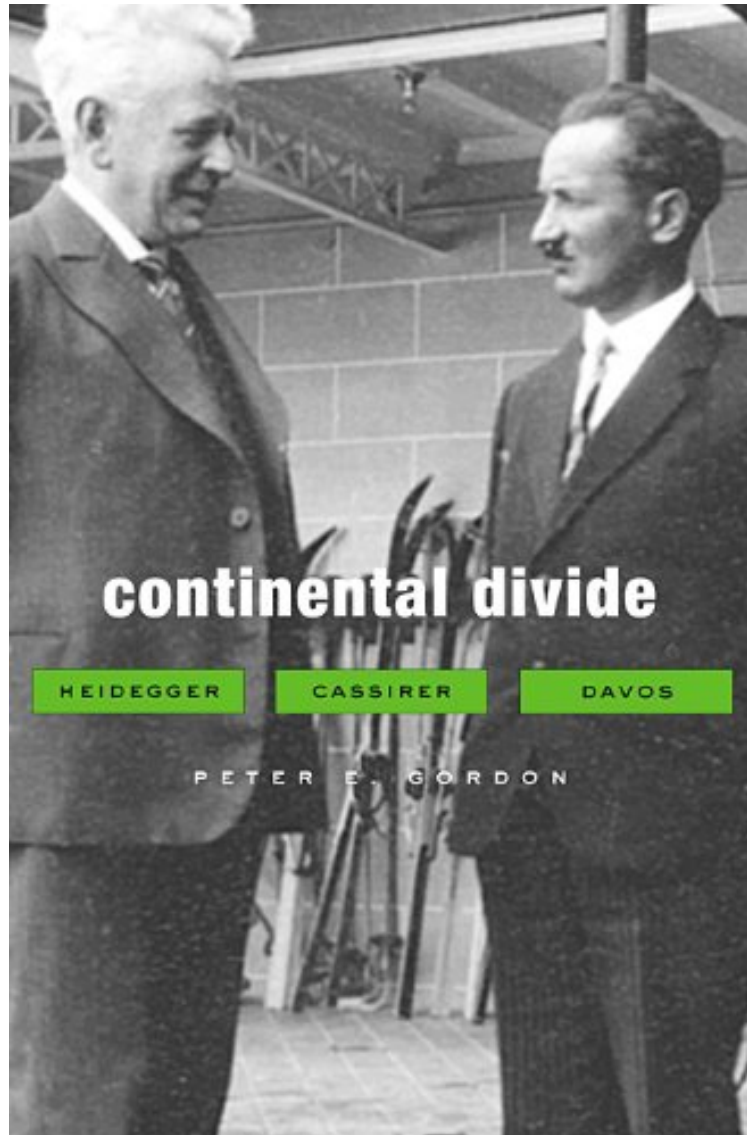


(Library ebook) Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos

## Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos

*Peter E. Gordon*

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**Peter E. Gordon : Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A Stellar DebateBy torontoExtraordinary.This book has many, many virtues:(1) It is a clear exposition of the elements of the Davos debate between Cassirer and Heidegger. From this, you can get a real sense of what it is like for two masters of philosophy to expound and argue. Philosophy students would learn a lot about how to argue.(2) The event throws a powerful light on the tensions in Weimar Culture, and the text

covers them in exemplary fashion.(3) The erudition of both philosophers shines through: the whole debate centers around the interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, which both men have at their fingertips.(4) Gordon makes very clear what is at stake between the two interpretations and the world views of Cassirer and Heidegger. He is very, very judicious between the two. It is not a hatchet job on either man: rather the reader comes away deeply impressed by both figures and their commitments.(5) Gordon is an excellent writer. I am in awe of his capacity to navigate through both the narrative and the philosophical arguments.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Clear philosophy!By IkeyI'm an English prof and novelist who's been led into philosophy by my irritation with postmodernism in the humanities. I found this to be an exemplary book. The philosophy was at the penumbra of my understanding, but Gordon's prose is so clear that ultimately he makes the murkiest, most recherche points understandable. I think this book is important for anyone interested in modern thought and its relationship to human nature and politics.14 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Heidegger and Cassirer at DavosBy Robin FriedmanIn March 1929, philosophers Martin Heidegger (1889 -- 1976) and Ernst Cassirer (1874 -- 1945) met in Davos, Switzerland for a public series of individual lectures and for a discussion and debate. The Davos meeting has assumed an important, near legendary, stature in the history of Continental philosophy. In his book "Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos" (2010) Peter Gordon gives an account of the the two philosophical protagonists, their Davos meeting, and of what proceeded and followed the Davos meeting. Most importantly, Gordon discusses what was and what was not at stake in the discussion between Cassirer and Heidegger. The book displays a rare combination of historical and philosophical insight. Gordon is Amabel B. James Professor of History and Harvard College Professor, Harvard University. Recently issued in paperback, his book won the Jacques Barzun Prize of the American Philosophical Society.At the time of their Davos meeting, Cassirer and Heidegger were renowned. The older philosopher, Cassirer, was an urbane German-Jewish philosopher and a neo-Kantian who had written extensively on the history of philosophy, including a three-volume statement of his own philosophical approach, "The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms". Heidegger was born in rural Germany to a family of modest means and saw himself as an outsider. Before the Davos debate, Heidegger and published only one book, but it was extraordinary and made him famous. The book, "Being and Time" (1927) has become a classic of philosophical literature. In their Davos debate, Cassirer and Heidegger explored the issues that divided them and also tried to see the extent to which they shared common ground.As did contemporaries to the debate, Gordon compares the discussion to the conversations between Naptha and Settembrini for the heart of Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann's novel, "The Magic Mountain". Mann's philosophical novel also was set in Davos. Gordon sees the debate as revolving broadly around a question posed by Kant: "what is man?". Gordon finds the debate between Cassirer and Heidegger turned on what he termed two competing "images of humanity" each of which derived in part from Kant. Cassirer's position derived from what Gordon terms "spontaneity" the ability of the human mind to shape reality and to create meaning in science, culture, ethics and other forms of endeavor. Heidegger's thought turned on what the philosopher termed "thrownness" or receptivity. It described man as a finite recipient of the world and of conditions which human beings do not control Human being in the world is historical with no philosophical "grounding". Heidegger's thought began with religious questions although it abandoned religion. Cassirer's began with science and proceeded outward, particularly to ethics. Gordon's book explores and develops these complex, difficult themes in the Davos debate and in what proceeded and followed the debate.The heart of the book is in the third and fourth chapters. In the former chapter, Gordon discusses the individual lectures that Cassirer and Heidegger presented at Davos. Somewhat paradoxically, Cassirer lectured on "philosophical anthropology", a subject with some ties to Heidegger, while Heidegger lectured on Kant, Cassirer's specialty, and offered a tortured reading of Kant's thought (which Heidegger himself ultimately abandoned.) In the pivotal fourth chapter, Gordon gives the text of the debate between Cassirer and Heidegger together with Gordon's own extended commentary and analysis of virtually every passage.Gordon's book shows great erudition about German philosophy in the years before WW II. He sets the stage for the discussion by giving the broad philosophical background that produced it. He discusses the thought of Cassirer and Heidegger in the years that led up to the debate, and their writings in the years which followed. He discusses the impact on the debate on other philosophers including Leo Strauss, Jurgen Habermas, and Emmanuel Levinas.The debate took place in 1929, on the cusp of Nazism. In 1933, Heidegger infamously declared his allegiance to Nazism and became the rector at Freiburg. Cassirer was forced to leave Germany and ultimately settled in the United States, Inevitably, the debate at Davos became politicized in philosophical memory. A major aim of Gordon's study is to depoliticize the debate and to try to understand the disagreements between Cassirer and Heidegger in philosophical terms. Gordon argues that philosophical disagreements have meaning in their own right and are not mere metaphors or fronts for politics. This is an important conclusion, philosophically and historically.Gordon's primary aim is for an exposition of the philosophical positions at stake, coupled with analysis to help clarify the positions, including their broad divergencies and their limited commonalities. Gordon states that he began the study with a qualified partial admiration for Heidegger but became increasingly sympathetic towards Cassirer as the study proceeded. Gordon declines to decide which protagonist was more nearly correct in his position or who "won" the debate at Davos. The issues and positions of both philosophers continue to be discussed. In his conclusion, Gordon writes: "one is tempted to ask whether a true resolution of this

conflict is at all likely or even possible. For in fact these two philosophical principles, thrownness and spontaneity, mark the opposing facets of a conceptual divide, the very persistence of which might be understood as the historical predicament of philosophy itself. .... To force its resolution, or to foreclose prematurely upon its continued debate, would be to deny what may very well be an essential tension of the human condition."Gordon has written a difficult, thoughtful work of philosophy in its own right. The book will be of most benefit to readers steeped in philosophy and with an interest in philosophical questions, particularly as derived from Kant.Robin Friedman

In the spring of 1929, Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer met for a public conversation in Davos, Switzerland. They were arguably the most important thinkers in Europe, and their exchange touched upon the most urgent questions in the history of philosophy: What is human finitude? What is objectivity? What is culture? What is truth? Over the last eighty years the Davos encounter has acquired an allegorical significance, as if it marked an ultimate and irreparable rupture in twentieth-century Continental thought. Here, in a reconstruction at once historical and philosophical, Peter Gordon reexamines the conversation, its origins and its aftermath, resuscitating an event that has become entombed in its own mythology. Through a close and painstaking analysis, Gordon dissects the exchange itself to reveal that it was at core a philosophical disagreement over what it means to be human. But Gordon also shows how the life and work of these two philosophers remained closely intertwined. Their disagreement can be understood only if we appreciate their common point of departure as thinkers of the German interwar crisis, an era of rebellion that touched all of the major philosophical movements of the daylife-philosophy, philosophical anthropology, neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and existentialism. As Gordon explains, the Davos debate would continue to both inspire and provoke well after the two men had gone their separate ways. It remains, even today, a touchstone of philosophical memory.This clear, riveting book will be of great interest not only to philosophers and to historians of philosophy but also to anyone interested in the great intellectual ferment of Europe's interwar years.

When they met at Davos in 1929, Cassirer and Heidegger sent tremors through the world of continental philosophy that radically transformed the terrain of European thought. With the hermeneutic skill of a master seismologist, Peter E. Gordon identifies the forces that produced their explosive meeting and traces the aftershocks that continue to reverberate to this day. (Martin Jay, University of California, Berkeley)Continental Divide conjugates an even-handed reconstruction of the debate and its lasting significance with an astute analysis of how philosophy revisits its own past in order to define its present circumstances. Of interest to both specialists and generalists, this study sets the benchmark for all future discussions of the relation of Heidegger and Cassirer. (Thomas Sheehan, Stanford University)A paradigm of philosophically informed intellectual history, this fascinating, wide-ranging book provides a comprehensive account of an epic intellectual confrontation, and uses it as a lens through which to focus on the ideas, forces, characters, and personalities that shaped the debate at a crucial cusp of European thought. (Robert B. Brandom, University of Pittsburgh)In Rosenzweig and Heidegger, Gordon concludes with a reading of the 1929 debate between Heidegger and Cassirer at a philosophical conference at Davos, Switzerland...Gordon here returns to this primal scene and reconstructs the event with extraordinarily thoughtful and scrupulous precision. This debate has achieved legendary status in the history of contemporary thought and is regarded as opening an abyss between those who base philosophy on scientific reason, and the human power of reflection, and those who are haunted by the unthinkable, the unsaid, and the unsayable...By judiciously reconstructing Cassirer's and Heidegger's arguments, Gordon definitively unveils the subtle refinement of Heidegger's positions and shows with new clarity that this struggle over Kant's legacy has relentlessly unfolded over the 20th century. A work of exceptional significance. (N. Lukacher Choice 2010-11-01)[An] extraordinary book...Each of its pages of sustained philosophical explication excites and astonishes, and in the process teaches us new ways of thinking about the history of ideas...After [Gordon's] brilliant reading, we can no longer simply ascribe Heidegger's and Cassirer's differences to inimical philosophies...Gordon's manifesto will resonate with historians of my generation. (David Nirenberg New Republic 2011-02-03)Continental Divide provides the definitive narrative and analysis of the Davos incident, its background, its context and its aftermath. Gordon neither abstracts the philosophical debate from its contemporary setting, nor reduces it to its extraphilosophical ramifications. He has a masterly understanding of the philosophy, but insists that abstract ideas, too, very often wear layers of historical clothing...He sees that the hermeneutic disagreement was genuine and that real philosophical issues were at stake in the collision of Cassirer's celebration of rational spontaneity with Heidegger's concept of thrownness--the collision, that is, of idealism with existentialism. Gordon refuses to boil those ideas off in either uncritical historicism or easy political editorializing. He is not afraid to get his hands dirty, and his narrative never ascends to such a lofty historical perspective that the philosophical air becomes too thin to breathe. (Taylor Carman Times Literary Supplement 2011-11-04)About the AuthorPeter E. Gordon is Amabel B. James Professor of History and Harvard College Professor, Harvard University. He is also a faculty affiliate at the Center for European Studies and co-chair of the Harvard Colloquium for Intellectual History.