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## HEIDEGGER AND THE MODES OF WORLD-DISCLOSURE

"Every great thinker thinks only a single thought," says Heidegger in *Was Heisst Denken?*<sup>1</sup> This extraordinary assertion may not be true of other thinkers but it is without doubt true of him. The thought of Being (*das Sein*) is Heidegger's one thought: his later philosophy is a sustained examination of the meaning of Being, of its history, of how it has currently abandoned us and of the ways in which we can once again draw near to it. But the thought of Being, as Heidegger thinks it, is a very complex thought indeed. Being, which is to be understood as primordial "event," (*Ereignis*) as the ultimate ground of what happens, takes two forms: there occurs what I shall call a "horizontal" Being-event and a "vertical" Being-event. The *horizontal* Being-event refers to the meaning of what has heretofore happened, to the way in which Being, which is historical "in its essence," has given birth to the epochs of metaphysics. To study the horizontal Being-event is to study Heidegger's philosophy of history which, as we shall see, is the same as his history of philosophy. The *vertical* Being-event, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which *within* any epoch beings (*das Seiende*) come to be the beings they are. The horizontal Being-event refers to the *varieties* of world-disclosure, the vertical Being-event to the *modes* of world-disclosure.

Heidegger's notion of a horizontal Being-event has been the subject of extensive commentary, some of it quite detailed and critical.<sup>2</sup> But the vertical Being-event, regarded as a theory of historical happening itself, has been much neglected by Heidegger commentators. In this paper, I hope to end that neglect. In Part I, I shall offer necessary background to the discussion by offering a short account of what Heidegger means by "Being" and by what I have called the "horizontal" Being-event, i.e., Being in its epochal self-unfolding. In Part II, I shall examine the vertical Being-event. A passage from *Holzwege*, in which Heidegger mentions all the modes of world-disclosure in a single paragraph, will serve as the key to the discussion; in the rather extensive commentary which follows, some of the confusions, limitations, and inadequacies to be found in Heidegger's development of this notion will, it is hoped, begin to rise to the sur-

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was Heisst Denken?* (Tübingen, 1954), p. 20. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., Werner Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition* (Evanston, 1971), Otto Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* (Pfullingen, 1963), and Bernd Magnus, *Heidegger's Metahistory of Philosophy*.

face. Finally, in Part III, I shall subject to direct critical scrutiny the vertical notion of historical happening as a whole.

## I

The great achievement of Heidegger's earlier philosophy, the profound and elaborate analysis of the ontological structure of human existence, of *Dasein*, was undertaken only in order to prepare the way for a more direct approach to the problem of Being. While Heidegger's philosophy after its much discussed "turn" (*Kehre*) differs in many ways from his earlier thought, no feature of the later philosophy is more pronounced than its growing tendency to regard Being (*das Sein*) as an "event" or "occurrence" (*Ereignis*).<sup>3</sup> The Being-event takes place when there occurs an unveiling of beings (*das Seiende*), a disclosure not only of *what* beings there are but of *how* these beings are, i.e., of the manner of their existence and of their relationships to one another. When there occurs unveiling of beings, of what-there-is in its totality, a "world" may be said to have happened.

Heidegger uses the term "world" in at least three different ways: it can refer to an ultimate totalizing horizon, to a concrete life-world or to an historical epoch. Let us examine the first sense of "world." Nothing can *be*, Heidegger insists, unless it belongs to some articulated structure to which other beings also belong. Thus, for example, nothing could be a pencil, i.e., an implement with which to write, unless there were paper or papyrus or some material on which to write, marks to be written, a system of communication wherein these marks derive their meaning and some system of social relations to support the system of communication. All these things form a structure both of being and of meaning and apart from such a structure a thing can neither be nor be understood. Every being-complex belongs to other complexes of being in the way that each item articulated within a being-complex belongs to that complex. The world is the most comprehensive being-complex (and thus meaning-complex) of all: it is the ultimate totalizing horizon, more sensed than comprehended, whose limits determine the nature and scope of what-is.<sup>4</sup> "World," then, in the first sense, is a formal or transcenden-

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen, 1957), p. 85, 97, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen, 1954), p. 99, and *Identität und Differenz*, 2nd ed. (Pfullingen, 1957), p. 28-29. See also William J. Richardson, S.J., *Heidegger, Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague, 1963), p. 614ff. Throughout, I shall translate "*das Sein*" as "Being," "*das Seiende*" or "*Seiendes*" as "beings."

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 7th ed. (Tübingen, 1953), sections 14 and 15.

tal notion in that it refers to the structure of any possible experience of being-in-a-world.

The second sense of "world" is less formal. In the essay "On the Origin of the Art-Work," Heidegger describes the way in which he believes Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes reveals the *Lebenswelt* of the old peasant woman to whom they belong:

From the dark opening of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. On the leather there lies the dampness and saturation of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field.<sup>5</sup>

The painting has revealed a world: "Towering-up-within-itself the work discloses a world and keeps this world-in a ruling position."<sup>6</sup> Here, what the art work reveals is not the form of the peasant woman's experience in the sense in which a transcendental investigation reveals the form of the experience of any life-world whatsoever, but the concrete character of the sphere in which *this* human individual lives, works, and dies.

It is the third sense of "world" which is most important for an understanding of what is meant by the "Being-event." "World" may refer to the occurrence of some certain comprehension of what there is so novel, so fundamental and so wide-ranging in character as to mark the occurrence of an historical epoch. Being, the occurrence of world, is "epochal" in its essence.<sup>7</sup> When an epoch comes to pass, this means that "Being has taken on an essence," that it has bestowed "an essence upon thought and thus upon man . . ."<sup>8</sup> It is clear from this that Being, with its epochal character or essence, is here regarded as the ground of what is ordinarily called history. As the ground of history, Being bears our destiny: "In Being, originally, every destiny of beings is already complete."<sup>9</sup> Heidegger refers frequently to the "*Geschick des Seins*," the fate or destiny of Being and he makes much of the etymological connection between *Geschick* and the verb *schicken*, to send. It is Being which "sends" history and what it sends

<sup>5</sup> *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (New York, 1964), p. 663. Hereafter, PAB.

<sup>6</sup> PAB, p. 671.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt, 1950), p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit, mit einem Brief über den Humanismus* (Bern, 1947), p. 57-58.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* 3rd ed. (Frankfurt, 1954), p. 46.

is our fate or destiny. One commentator, in an attempt to remain faithful to Heidegger's notion of destiny as something "sent," has called the fateful epoch-founding disclosures of what-is the "mittences" of Being.<sup>10</sup>

Heidegger does not view all those periods which are regarded as historical epochs in history books as genuine "mittences" of Being. Genuine historical epochs must be what he calls the "epochs of metaphysics." Each must reveal in its own way some explicit grasp of the nature of what-is, some guiding metaphysical notion which has given form to the contemporary disclosure of Being whose character we shall examine shortly. The identification of "*Seinsgeschichte*" with the epochs of metaphysics issues in a curious provincialism: since in Heidegger's view, metaphysics develops only in the West, history just *is* the history of the West.<sup>11</sup>

The epochs of world-history are marked out clearly in Heidegger's later philosophy and although no explicit claim to that effect is made, the suggestion is very strong that they have all been identified: the world of the Greeks, with its key notions first of *physis*, then of *idea* and *energeia* was such an epoch; the medieval world of *ens creatum* another; while the modern epoch is dominated first by the concept of "representation," and later by the "will to will," the voracious subject for whom Being has become nothing but mere "material" (*Bestand*).

The mittences of Being do not unfold dialectically; nor is their sequence in any way necessary. Nevertheless, there is a "logic" to their unfolding. There is played out in the *Seinsgeschick* an ever-worsening concealment of Being, which culminates in an almost total forgetting, the "world-night" of our own era. Every epoch is more removed from the original meaning of Being than the one which preceded it; indeed, the specific character of each epoch of metaphysics is in fact determined by the way in which it has concealed Being. But how is this possible? How can the epochs of world-history which reveal Being also *conceal* it?

For Heidegger, the revelation of a world and the "happening" of truth are identical. In *Holzwege*, he suggests that the original meaning of truth which, like the meaning of Being, has been obscured can best be recovered by remembering and ruminating on the Greek word for truth, "*aletheia*." "*Aletheia*" means the unconcealment of that

<sup>10</sup> Richardson, p. 533ff.

<sup>11</sup> The epochal disclosures of Being occur only to the "historical peoples," among whom Heidegger appears to include only the Greeks, the Jews, and the Germans. For an excellent discussion of the implications of this view, see Alexander Schwan, *Politische Philosophie im Denken Heideggers* (Köln u. Opladen, 1965).

which is, the stepping into the open of that which was heretofore veiled or obscured.<sup>12</sup> When a world happens, that-which-is comes out of concealment: "In the midst of what *is* as a whole an open place is present. A clearing, a lighting is."<sup>13</sup> Truth, like Being, is a disclosure of beings, an unveiling or coming out of concealment.<sup>14</sup> But within the realm of the unconcealed, concealment also prevails. Error and dissimulation are given along with the primordial disclosure so that the occurrence of truth is at the same time an occurrence of untruth: "The essence of truth, i.e., of unconcealment is dominated through-out by a denial."<sup>15</sup> Appearance and reality, so to speak, are given together: the ambiguous, dissembling character of the disclosure of Being itself and not human fallibility is the condition of error and illusion.

When he speaks of a revealing and concealing Being-event, at least in the context of the *Seinsgeschick*, Heidegger is claiming that at the dawn of Western metaphysics, Being disclosed itself in a fundamentally ambiguous way. The pre-Socratic *physis*, "emergence into the open," is, as Heidegger understands it, remarkably similar to his own notion of Being as disclosure. But *physis*, obscure and improperly understood, gives way to the Platonic *idea*; with this, there begins both metaphysics and the long passage of the Western world into the *Irre*. *Idea*, according to Heidegger, is associated originally with the notion of the "look" or "aspect" of something, although the *idea* of a thing is more than its mere visual appearance. *Idea* is something never absent from the thing, its *essence* and it is this essence which allows any entity to appear at all, to present an aspect. The pre-Socratic *aletheia* "goes under the yoke of *idea*"<sup>16</sup> with two fateful consequences: Being per se is "forgotten" in its identification with one feature of the being, here, its standing capacity to hold out an intelligible aspect and truth comes to be understood as the capacity of a human perceiver to grasp an essence. The relation of subject and object has entered philosophy.

<sup>12</sup> PAB, p. 676.

<sup>13</sup> PAB, p. 678.

<sup>14</sup> This conception of the nature of truth is not in competition with other theories of truth, although Heidegger often writes as if it were. The special historical event Heidegger calls "truth" or the "essence of truth" is what makes any conception of truth as this term is ordinarily understood, indeed any conception at all first possible; it is the coming-to-be of the widest and most comprehensive framework which is presupposed by philosophical questioning. See the essay "Aletheia" in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* pp. 257-282, also Ernst Tugendhat, *Die Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger* (Berlin, 1967).

<sup>15</sup> PAB, p. 679.

<sup>16</sup> *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, p. 46.

The history of Western metaphysics is the history of the growing elevation of the subject at the expense of all else. For Descartes and his successors, the truth of beings depends entirely on human "certification" (*sicherstellen*) in intuition.<sup>17</sup> For the idealists, the very existence of things is made to depend on human consciousness. In these systems, the world becomes picture: a subject is conceived to stand before a realm of objects as one stands before a picture. The subject, originally worldless and isolated from the object, somehow leaps out of its domain and is able, through its own intellectual activity, to appropriate, certify or otherwise "master" the object. The unity of the world, of the domain of objects, is made to depend upon the unifying acts of consciousness of the subject. Each great idealist system displays a different subject exercising its unique act of unification, be it the Kantian transcendental unity of apperception, the dialectical unfolding of Hegel's Absolute Spirit or the self-and-other positing Ego of Fichte.

With Nietzsche, the self-assertion of the subject becomes total and with this declaration of mastery, "subjectivist" Western metaphysics reaches its culmination. Being, for Nietzsche, the will-to-power, is nothing but a will-to-will, a will to go on willing i.e., a will that wills its own perpetuation. All things *are* for this will and for this will alone; Being and value are made to depend upon it absolutely. Whatever ontological independence the object may have retained in the systems of Nietzsche's predecessors it has lost; instead, there prevails the perfect sway of subject over object forecast so long ago in the Platonic doctrine of essence. Since the epochs of metaphysics *are* the epochs of world-history, Nietzsche's will-to-will is no mere curiosity of the history of ideas: pure will is embodied in the contemporary technological world-disclosure. Nature becomes a relationship of forces which can be represented as a system of information, an actually or potentially calculable energy supply. This energy supply is *for* a voracious subject; things are nothing but possibilities of transformation in accord with the imperialistic dictates of a pure subjective will.<sup>18</sup> The scientific-technological world-disclosure is the "bad destiny" of Western metaphysics. But Being, for Heidegger, *is* disclosure, "mittence." Other disclosures are possible, indeed, urgent, unless the "world-night" is to close over us all.

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<sup>17</sup> *Holzwege*, p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> This brief summary can in no way do justice to that complex and original reading of the meaning of Western "culture" which Heidegger has worked out in numerous writings over a period of many years. (See above, footnote #2).

## II

Now let us turn from the epoch-founding destiny of Being, from the "horizontal" Being-event, to what I have called the "vertical" Being event. The coming to pass of any particular world-epoch is not a single event but a constellation of unique happenings. These happenings belong to several categories or modes of disclosure. Nowhere in the Heideggerian *corpus* are we offered a more complete enumeration of the modes of world-disclosure than in this passage from *Holzwege*:

Lighting of openness and establishment in the Open belong together. They are the selfsame single essence of the happening of truth. This happens, i.e., is historical, in many ways. One essential way in which truth establishes itself in the entity opened up or disclosed by it is the setting-itself-into-work of truth. Another way in which truth exercises its being is the deed that grounds a (political) state. Still another way in which truth comes to shine forth is the nearness of that which is not simply an entity, but the entity that *is* most of all. Still another way in which truth grounds itself is essential sacrifice. Still another way in which truth becomes, is the thinker's questioning which, as thinking of being, names the latter in its question-worthiness. On the other hand, science is not an original happening of truth, but always the extension of a domain of truth already opened . . .<sup>19</sup>

Five types of disclosures have been mentioned in the preceding passage. Let us scrutinize each in turn.

There are entities, we have been told, in which truth establishes itself by "setting-itself-into-work." While several modes of disclosure are "works," the essay in which this citation appears, "*Vom Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*," has been concerned primarily with *art-works*. An entity is a "work" when "its bringing forth expressly brings the openness of what-*is*," a bringing-forth which "first illuminates the openness of the Open in which it comes forth."<sup>20</sup> Truth "does not exist in itself beforehand, somewhere among the stars"; if there is to be a disclosed world at all, there must be some being "in which the openness takes its stand and attains stability."<sup>21</sup> A truth-establishing work then will illuminate the nature of the world in which it is placed. It is worth noting that for Heidegger, the art-work is an illumination of the highest order, while science, a wholly derivative activity, shines by reflected light alone.

Genuine "works" will be revelatory, original, and made. When a work appears, something has emerged "such as never was before and

<sup>19</sup> PAB, p. 685.

<sup>20</sup> PAB, p. 685.

<sup>21</sup> PAB, p. 684.



will afterward never be again."<sup>22</sup> This unique entity has the character of a thing manufactured: ". . . in the word 'work' we hear what is worked."<sup>23</sup> The manufacture of a work, however, need not involve the production of a physical object for, as we shall see, poems and political states are "works" too.

Every art-work, according to Heidegger, has two features which belong to its essence: it reveals a world and it participates in the self-concealment of the "mere thing," of the "earth." Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes, for example, can reveal the *Lebenswelt* of the peasant woman to whom the shoes belong. But the art-work has another function as well. In the artistic medium there is revealed matter, the earth, on which a world (in this sense) is erected. Here, matter is revealed as it is in itself, "undisclosed and unexplained."<sup>24</sup> What Heidegger seems to mean by this is that theoretical accounts of the nature of the physical world fail to do justice to our experience of the brute "thereness" of things, to their essential mysteriousness and impenetrability. "World" and "earth" in the art-work are said to be in a permanent state of strife or struggle, a struggle which allows each element to come into its own proper nature. A sculptor, for example, may wish to use marble to portray folds of cloth. But the medium refuses to vanish into the mere content or "expression" of the work, and, because of this refusal, its own ineradicable nature ("the massiveness and heaviness of stone") first comes into view. Heidegger identifies the basic "strife" in the art-work with what is ordinarily regarded as "artistic form," while the parties to the struggle, "world" and "earth," are identified, somewhat loosely, with the self-revealing and self-concealing features of the Being-event itself.<sup>25</sup>

The second way in which future comes to pass is in the establishment of the *polis*. In *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, the *polis* is referred to specifically as a "work," "the work of the *polis*, the historical abode where all other works are established and preserved . . ." <sup>26</sup> This characterization of the state, in spite of the fact that it appears to occupy of privileged position in regard to other works, is surprisingly empty. What is to distinguish the state from the "world" which is also an historical abode wherein other works are established and preserved? Nowhere in Heidegger's philosophy are we told anything more about the "deed that grounds a political state," and, in view of

<sup>22</sup> PAB, p. 685.

<sup>23</sup> PAB, p. 682.

<sup>24</sup> PAB, p. 673.

<sup>25</sup> For a critical study of Heidegger's aesthetics, see my paper "Heidegger's Philosophy of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, October, 1969, pp. 353-371.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen, 1953), p. 146.

the importance of the subject, this must be regarded as a very serious omission.<sup>27</sup>

Philosophical thinking is another in which "truth sets itself into work." Philosophy is a "work," too, a "work of words," as is poetry. The close resemblance between poetry and philosophy is a favorite Heideggerian theme, and, in this, he approaches the position of modern positivism. Unlike the positivists, however, he assigns to both poetry and philosophy cognitive functions of the highest order. Both reveal the Being of beings in language; both name what is. The primordial saying of thinkers and poets frees and discloses a world, even while continuing to conceal it.<sup>28</sup> Being-disclosure in these modes must be linguistically innovative and creative, for, in order to accomplish a unique and novel saying of what-is, both poet and philosopher must become the forgers of a new language. Throughout his work, Heidegger uses the terms "thinker" and "poet" not in their ordinary sense, but in what might be called an "honorific" sense. No one, in other words, deserves to be regarded as a genuine philosopher or poet whose "word-work" has not announced an original disclosure of Being.

As the uttering of new "names" for Being, genuine thinking is seminal or originative.<sup>29</sup> Even though it may appear that a stringent demand for originality has been laid upon the thinker, the new saying is really occasioned by Being itself. Thinking belongs to Being and it is occasioned by Being; it allows itself to be claimed by Being in order to speak the truth of Being; it is l'engagement par l'Être pour l'Être.<sup>30</sup> Being "essentializes" itself in the thought of originative thinkers and it is in and through the essential thinking of Being that the relation of Being to the human essence is brought to fruition. In the thought of the originative thinker, "Being comes to word" for "language is the house of Being."<sup>31</sup> The thinker not only names what is, he must preserve in his language the primordial saying of other thinkers as well.<sup>32</sup>

But who are the originative thinkers? Heidegger's answer to this

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<sup>27</sup> Alexander Schwan has made a very interesting attempt to piece together a "political philosophy" for Heidegger on the basis of scattered references and allusions. (See above, footnote #11).

<sup>28</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen, 1959), p. 200.

<sup>29</sup> *Was Heisst Denken?* p. 71ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Brief über den Humanismus*, p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> *Brief*, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> *Was Heisst Denken?* p. 71. This preservation is no "objective" storing of another's ideas. Heidegger regards "objective" interpretation as an impossibility, since no interpretation can be independent of one's choice of perspective.

question is not startling. He has paid particular attention to Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. There is every indication that he regards himself as a seminal thinker too. The thought of these thinkers is originative in that their "namings" of Being have initiated epochs in the historical self-essentialization of Being. While Heidegger never offers an exhaustive list of the seminal metaphysical notions of the past or even an indication of the way in which one might go about drawing up such a list, it is clear from his reading of the history of philosophy that the following metaphysical concepts are crucial: *physis*; *idea*; *energeia*; *natura*; *ens creatum*; *ratio*; intuition; representation; Spirit; will.

Poetry, like philosophy, is a "work of words." In *Vom Ursprung des Kuntswerkes*, Heidegger distinguishes between poetry (*Dichtung*) in the wider sense and what he calls "poesy" (*Poesie*) or poetry in the narrower sense. "Poesy" refers to what poets write, to actual poems themselves. "Poetry" is the revealing capacity of language itself, the primordial speech which discloses that something *is*; it is "the saga of the unconcealment of what is."<sup>33</sup> As revelatory or primordial language, poetry, in contrast to other, derivative forms of speech, "is not only and not primarily an audible and written expression of something to be communicated . . . but language brings what *is* as something that *is* into the Open for the first time."<sup>34</sup> Since "truth" for Heidegger means the same as "unconcealment," poetry, or language in its primordial disclosing function, is simply "the institution of truth."<sup>35</sup> Poetry in this sense, which Heidegger sometimes calls just "saying," (*Sagen*) is the letting appear in language of those modes of thought and experience which determine the character and reveal the destiny of an "historical" people.

All language of man comes to pass in the saying, and as such it is genuine language in the strict sense of the word, although in each case the nearness to the appropriating event will be different. Each genuine language, because it is assigned to man by the movement of the saying, because it is sent to him, is therefore fateful (*Geschick-lich*).<sup>36</sup>

What all this means is that for Heidegger the essence of language is to manifest the Being-event and this essence he chooses to call "poetry."

Poesy, poetry in the narrower sense, has a privileged position in the domain of the arts. The articulation of world-disclosure, we are

<sup>33</sup> PAB, p. 695-696.

<sup>34</sup> PAB, p. 694-695.

<sup>35</sup> PAB, p. 695.

<sup>36</sup> From *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 264, as translated by Walter Biemel in "Poetry and Language in Heidegger," *Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph Kockelmans, (Evanston, 1972), p. 93.

told, occurs first in the poesy of an historical people. As "the most original form of poetry in the essential sense," poesy is prior not only to "thought" but to all other art forms too. Why does Heidegger believe this to be true? The claim is worth quoting in its entirety:

Language itself is poetry in the essential sense. But since language is the happening in which for man at any time what *is* first discloses itself as being, poesy, or poetry in the narrower sense, is the most original form of poetry in the essential sense.<sup>37</sup>

This passage seems to suggest a necessary connection between the emergence of disclosing language and the creation of particular "poetic" word-works. However, I see no reason at all to assume a *necessary* connection between poetry in the wider sense and poetry in the narrower sense. Instead, we seem to be in the presence of nothing more than a straightforward empirical claim, namely, that poets "in a narrower sense" are the first ones to bring before the consciousness of an "historical" people its characteristic modes of thought and way of grasping Being. Since Heidegger seems not to grant the existence of any "historical" peoples other than Greeks, Jews, and Germans, this empirical claim is seen to be sometimes true and sometimes not in ways which fail to be interesting. It is obviously true that the work of Homer both discloses and helps to form the Greek comprehension of Being and is prior by many centuries to what, at least for us, are other epoch-founding disclosures of the Greek world.<sup>38</sup> But it can hardly be claimed that there is a poet, not even Goethe, who stands in the same relation to the German people as Homer does to the Greeks or the Old Testament writers to the Jews. Indeed, Heidegger's own interpretation of the development of German thought bears this out. In *Der Satz vom Grund*, he traces the contribution of German ontology to the Western comprehension of Being. This ontology is largely the work not of poets but of two thinkers, Leibniz and Kant, and it consists in the transformation of an inherited ontological presupposition, the principle of sufficient reason, first into the concept of *ratio* and then into the concept of Being as object for a human subject, in which form it is decisive for the development of *technik* and the contemporary grasp of Being as the "will to will." The disclosure of Being as the will to will is itself the work of another German thinker, Nietzsche, whom Heidegger regards not as a great poet—even though there might be some warrant for doing so—but as "the last metaphysician."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> PAB, p. 695.

<sup>38</sup> Heidegger discusses the epoch-founding of Homer's poetry in *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 131.

<sup>39</sup> *Holzwege*, p. 200.

We have now considered all the modes of world-disclosure which Heidegger calls "works": works of art; works of words (of which one, poesy is also a work of art) and that work which is the *polis*. Another way in which world-disclosure may occur is through "the nearness of that which is not simply an entity but the entity that *is* most of all." This entity is, of course, God, the being who exists more fully and with more actuality than other beings, the being who is most real of all, the *ens realissimum*. This mode of world-disclosure, the religious mode, is nowhere described as needing a work for its realization or as issuing in a work. This is odd, because whenever Heidegger deals with the religious tradition of the West, he does so almost exclusively in terms of its theology and theology, like metaphysics, is clearly a "work of words."

In a recently published work, *Phänomenologie und Theologie*, Heidegger sets out what he takes to be the central task of theology: it is the conceptual self-interpretation of the believing Christian existence.<sup>40</sup> As the self-clarification of a certain mode of human existence only, theology can furnish us neither with speculative knowledge of the Divine Being nor with a "philosophy of man" in the sense of an ontological analysis of the structure of *Dasein*. The entire content of theology is faith, the human response to what is revealed in faith as well as the content of the religious disclosure to the faithful.

But most Christian theology is hopelessly compromised by its reliance upon philosophical concepts; it "objectifies" its content by making use of conceptual systems wherein Being is reduced to object-for-a-subject, i.e., by making use of metaphysics.

For what Heidegger's remarks point to is a *radical* criticism of almost *all* forms of theology which have been developed on the basis of the paradigm suggested by St. Augustine. Heidegger's criticism of these forms of theology runs parallel to his equally radical criticism of all philosophical views developed in the West from Plato to Nietzsche . . . once one subscribes to both these views, namely that classical metaphysics is to be overcome and that classical metaphysics has been a constitutive part of most theologies, it becomes obvious why almost all forms of theology which have been developed in the past are to be overcome as well.<sup>41</sup>

However, a nonobjectifying theology is at least possible for contemporary theology, insofar as nonobjectifying speech and thinking are possible. Not all thinking requires "representation" and the merely instrumental use of language which this implies, (*vorstellen*), i.e., the transformation of all content into an "object," for if it did, poetry would be impossible. In general, the possibility of a nonobjectifying

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologie und Theologie* (Frankfurt, 1970).

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Kockelmans, "Heidegger on Theology," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. IV, no. 3, p. 106.

(and thus nonsubjectivist) theology is tied to the possibility of overcoming the entire metaphysical tradition of the West as Heidegger conceives it and learning to think "originatively."<sup>42</sup>

This discussion of theology raises a number of perplexing questions. First, we are led to wonder about the status of non-Christian theology. Is it also "objectifying" theology? If not, then what of the nature of *its* disclosure of the divine? Even if non-Western theology is dominated by some sort of subject-object schema, is its content simply to be assimilated to Christian theology? If not, then what does this theology disclose which Western theology does not? In *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Heidegger speaks with some approval of Zen Buddhism on the grounds that its approach to Being avoids "representational" thinking. But he fails to enlighten us concerning the specific religious disclosure which Buddhism's nonobjectifying speech contains. Can we learn anything at all about what a world-disclosure *is* by examining religious disclosures in other traditions? What of nonrepresentational theologies within our own tradition? Meister Eckhart, for example, seems *not* to conceive the divine within the framework of those metaphysical schemas which were known to him. Is what is disclosed in Eckhart's writing then *different* from the something or someone disclosed in the *Summa Theologica*?<sup>43</sup> What are we to make of a religious disclosure—or any disclosure—which is substantially at variance with the sorts of disclosures which are characteristic of, indeed, which *determine* the nature of the world-epoch in which they occur? If an Eckhart or a Kierkegaard were to succeed in producing a nonobjectifying theology, would we be compelled to regard him as a world-historical anomaly? And what of those religious writings which are not ordinarily regarded as theology at all? I refer of course to the great mystic and confessional literature of Christianity, a literature of shuddering and dread, of rapture and ecstasy. The writings of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross record encounters, ravishments, states beyond words, moments of contact between a human I and a divine Thou. Here God is not an object, not even the *ens realissimum*, but an awesome Presence, a Thou with whom one is joined in ecstatic

<sup>42</sup> This question is beyond the scope of this paper. For a critical examination of the subject, see my paper, "Originative Thinking in the Later Philosophy of Heidegger," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, March, 1970, pp. 368-381.

<sup>43</sup> ". . . the *causa sui* . . . philosophy utters this as the appropriate (*sachgerecht*) name for God. To this God, a human being can neither pray nor sacrifice. Before the *causa sui*, one can neither fall on one's knees in fear (Scheu), nor, before this God, can one make music and dance." *Identität und Differenz*, p. 70. Is the God before whom I fall on my knees, then, *different* from the one I call the *causa sui*?

union, a *mysterium tremendum*. In the light of his attack on Christian philosophy, it is odd that Heidegger devotes virtually no attention at all to the literature of Christian experience. Perhaps Heidegger tends to ignore types of disclosure which fall outside the disclosure-scheme of the West as he conceives it, i.e., outside the "horizontal" Being-event of an ever more ravenous subjectivism. At any rate, the question we asked about Eckhart's theology can be repeated: has something or Someone been disclosed in the *Dark Night of the Soul* that was not disclosed in the *Summa*? The real difficulty here has to do with what is to count as a disclosure and how it is possible to distinguish one disclosure from another.

The fifth and final mode of world-disclosure is called "essential sacrifice." No light is shed upon the meaning of this phrase anywhere in the essay. This silence puts our imagination into play. Perhaps "essential sacrifice" refers to the sorts of sacrifices people make, usually in extraordinary situations only, to preserve what they find most worthy of preserving. Might not an "essential sacrifice" then reveal something about the nature of value? Since, taken together, the other modes of world disclosure encompass many of the most vital domains of human activity, can we now expect that Heidegger will give some consideration to ethical revelation as he has done to poetic, philosophical, and religious revelation? Unfortunately however, our imaginative projection from the text ends in a blind alley: nowhere in Heidegger's thought is an independent status granted to the disclosure of what is *right*.

For some clarification of what is meant by "essential sacrifice" we must turn to the Postscript to *What is Metaphysics?* There the theme of sacrifice grows out of a discussion of essential thinking. While Heidegger does not use the precise term "essential sacrifice" in this text, it seems safe to assume that "sacrifice" and "essential sacrifice" are the same:

Sacrifice is rooted in the nature of the event through which Being claims man for the truth of Being. Therefore it is that sacrifice brooks no calculation, for calculation always miscalculates sacrifice in terms of the expedient and the inexpedient, no matter whether the aims are set high or low. Such calculation distorts the nature of sacrifice. The search for a purpose dulls the clarity of the awe, the spirit of sacrifice ready prepared for dread, which takes upon itself kinship with the imperishable.<sup>44</sup>

That dread with which the spirit of sacrifice must be prepared is what we experience in the confrontation with nothingness; it is "the terror of the abyss" which seizes us when we contemplate "nothing."<sup>45</sup> In

<sup>44</sup> From *What is Metaphysics?* as translated by R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock (Chicago, 1949), p. 390.

<sup>45</sup> Hull and Crick, p. 386.

*What is Metaphysics?* Heidegger is careful to distinguish "nothingness" from the merely nugatory, the absolutely nonexistent. An experience of "nothing," of the limit and opposite of what-is has the effect of throwing the totality of what-there-is (i.e., the totality of beings) into relief: it allows us to grasp beings *as such*. This in turn liberates us from our normal, narrowly utilitarian preoccupation with them and it prepares the way for an experience of what is wholly other than beings, of Being itself, "the vastness of that which gives every being the warrant to be."<sup>46</sup> Thus, in order to think Being essentially, we must be "ready for dread," for the suspension of familiar and comforting attitudes towards things and for the experience of uncanniness and fear which accompanies the confrontation with what is other than all-that-is. This is the dread which the spirit of sacrifice must take upon itself.

But why is sacrifice forbidden to search for a purpose? We are told that sacrifice is a "valediction to everything that 'is' on the road to the preservation of the favour of Being."<sup>47</sup> What this means, presumably, is that by making a "valediction" to what Being has disclosed we draw nearer to Being itself. To "sacrifice" is to hold oneself open for the disclosure of Being. But this disclosure is never knowable in advance of its occurrence. Thus, sacrifice has no defined purpose: it involves neither the exchange of some advantage for the sake of an anticipated benefit nor any calculation in terms of what is expedient. Clearly, what Heidegger has in mind is not what we would ordinarily call sacrifice at all; in these passages he is sketching in an impressionistic way a certain posture in regard to what-there-is, an attitude of awe and gratitude, of "hidden thanking which alone does homage to the grace wherewith Being has endowed the nature of man."<sup>48</sup> This "splendid poverty" of the spirit is meant to prepare the way for a new mode of comportment in regard to Being, a conduct which will make possible a *new* disclosure. In our key passage in *Holzwege*, the reference to sacrifice as a way in which truth happens, as a mode of world-disclosure, is odd in the extreme, for it can now be seen that sacrifice is not a mode of world-disclosure at all. While truth may happen *if* we "sacrifice," sacrifice is not *how* truth happens; unlike poetry, philosophy, or religion, sacrifice is not a form taken by the primordial *logos*. That particular human comportment which Heidegger calls "essential sacrifice" may make world-disclosure *possible*, but in and of itself, it is empty and lacking in content. While I do not wish to suggest in any way that what Heidegger calls "the

<sup>46</sup> Hull and Crick, p. 38b.

<sup>47</sup> Hull and Crick, p. 390.

<sup>48</sup> Hull and Crick, p. 389.



spirit of sacrifice" is easy to achieve, I find it difficult to regard "essential sacrifice" as anything more than a reverent waiting.

### III

Since Heidegger regards his own thinking as a pathway, a venture still underway, it may seem unfair to subject this thinking to criticism. But however tentative his conclusions, it is clear that Heidegger asks his readership to follow him, to use his thinking as a springboard into the "problematic" of the history and meaning of Being. Being, in his thinking, is given precisely in the possibility of its occurrence<sup>49</sup> and in the sequence and modes of its occurrence, that is, in the horizontal and vertical Being-events. While no aspect of an ambitious speculative "thinking" such as Heidegger's can be comprehended apart from the whole, it is necessary to approach the whole cautiously and by degrees. Thus, in spite of the sometimes distorting limitations of perspective which follow upon the examination of a part in isolation from the totality to which it belongs, in what follows, I shall undertake a critical examination of the "vertical" or intraepochal Being-event.

First, we wonder whether Heidegger has offered a complete enumeration of the modes of world-disclosure. Might new world-disclosures disclose themselves in totally new forms? Heidegger does not offer a demonstration that his list is complete or a hint as to how we might go about discovering other modes of past world-disclosures, if there are any as yet unnamed. The impression we get from Heidegger's writings, if not from the letter of his teaching, is that all the modes have at least been identified. But is this so? Does the popular culture of an epoch, for example, reveal less about the event of the advent of destiny than the period's fine art or philosophy? Or is popular culture, certainly "world-disclosing" in some important sense, simply to be subsumed under fine art? This would be a mistake, it seems to me, for the revelatory character of popular art lies precisely in the way it differs from fine art. The *scope* and *boundaries* of Heidegger's modes of disclosure are unclear and to this lack of clarity must be added our uncertainty about the completeness of his list.

The absence of anything like an "ethical" revelation seems to be a serious oversight too. What is the reason for this? We know that Heidegger has opposed the bifurcation of the world into a value-free

<sup>49</sup> In *Brief über den Humanismus* (p. 57), Being is called "the quiet power of the possible." Being, properly understood, is the possibility of other disclosures as well as the one it has already "sent."

region of objects for a subject on the one hand and a realm of wholly subjective "values" on the other. According to the phenomenological account of *Being and Time*, we first comprehend the beings which surround us as "ready-to-hand," as things with which to realize our intentions. Our aims and intentions, in a mutually conditioned process, are themselves formed in response to the intrinsic capacity or lack of capacity of things themselves to realize them. In the beginning then, in that commerce with things which precedes the emergence of "objectivity," the uses and values of things are given with the things themselves. Heidegger has held fast to this position through the transition in his philosophy from an analysis of the historical life-world in his earlier work to the later emphasis on the epoch-founding Being-event. The thinker whose thinking is epochal names what-is and in this act, an act which is at once the discovery and the bestowal of meaning, he must, presumably, name what-is-good as well. But is this true? It is often claimed that an epistemology is implied by every ontology and an ontology by every epistemology. Does the same principle apply to axiology? Is there a theory of value implicit in every metaphysics or only in the ones we are to regard as epoch-founding? In fact, what many classical philosophers have had to say on ethical themes, especially in the domain of social ethics has been relatively independent of their metaphysical teaching. Once again, we are plagued by the lack of attention Heidegger has paid to the question of the scope and boundaries of a world-disclosure.

But more than a lack of precision is at stake here. In his failure to say anything specific about the mode of disclosure of such things as rights, duties, and obligations, Heidegger has surely omitted something. His tendency, so it seems, is to ignore those aspects of world-disclosure which have an intrinsic reference to the Other, just as in *Being and Time* too little attention was paid to the sociality of human existence. Certainly, poets in their tragedies and comedies made palpable for the Greeks the dimensions of their own ethical universe. But was this the only mode of the disclosure of these realities? Was it the original mode? What is the counterpart in the modern world to the Promethean value-revealing role played in the ancient world by a Homer, a Hesiod, or a Sophocles?

Are the assignment of rights and duties perhaps a part of the "deed that grounds a political state," the grounding of a world in the establishment of a *polis*? This mode is the sketchiest and least developed of all the genuine modes of disclosure: it is no more than mentioned. We do not know what Heidegger takes a state to be, how precisely it discloses a world, whether the establishment of *any*

political state is revelatory of the meaning of Being or just the establishment of some states, etc. The theme of political disclosure is too ill-defined to allow a determination of how or even whether an ethical disclosure might belong to it.

Curiously enough, Heidegger's treatment of science, which he does not elevate to the status of a full-fledged mode of disclosure, is more satisfactory than his treatment of either ethics or politics. The capacity of the physical sciences to disclose a world is not denied but their revelatory character is said to be derived from a more fundamental ontological disclosure. It is metaphysics which lays open some domain of being capable of exploitation by the special sciences. An original ontological revelation illuminates the "horizon" wherein first appear the kinds of beings which something like science can then examine. Now, it cannot be denied that scientific ideas are born from metaphysical ones: it is well known, to mention one case, that the early Renaissance revival of neo-Platonism in northern Italy was instrumental in the rise of modern mathematical physics. Moreover, many thinkers (e.g., Thomas Kuhn) have shared with Heidegger the belief that scientific investigation is at all times dependent upon a conception of the nature of being which is not itself a *product* of the application of scientific method. But what Heidegger concludes from this is that science is in essence no more disclosive than the metaphysics which gave birth to it. Has he not thereby committed some version of the genetic fallacy? Might not the internal dynamic by which science unfolds lead to a novel disclosure, to a disclosure different in kind from what preceded it and made it possible? Can we not imagine a state of affairs whereby a science, in the course of its own development, takes a qualitative leap and begins to generate what in Heidegger's language would be called "new names" for Being? Is there anything in the conception of a science which makes such a leap impossible? Perhaps a non-Heideggerian reading of the history of science would reveal fundamental alterations in its conception of the Being of the beings it investigates quite independent of any intervening ontological disclosure.

Let us now consider some problems which have to do with the *unity* of the modes of disclosure. Heidegger's view of the vertical Being-event suggests that "world," like the Spenglerian "culture" which it somewhat resembles, is a unitary phenomenon. What this means, presumably, is that within one epoch, one world-disclosure prevails. Are the Trobriand Islanders, then, not in the same "world" as the advanced Western societies? The larger question is this: can there be incompatible disclosures of Being within the same world-epoch?

Are primitive peoples *in our* world only insofar as the planetary domination of technology, of the "will-to-will" is going to engulf them someday? Has Being failed to disclose itself to them directly? If it has not then what is the content of a disclosure outside the epochs of Western metaphysics and what can it teach us about the nature of disclosure in general? But for Heidegger, such questions are unanswerable: Being discloses itself in certain fateful formulations, *simpliciter*. Any attempt to "explain" some disclosure with the help of, let us say, a materialist method would lead us back into at best a specific world-disclosure and away from the rumination on *Being per se*, the ground of *any* disclosure. But are we, Heidegger's readers, content to remain within this circle? And what of thinkers in a single epoch (provided we can determine when one epoch begins and another leaves off) who hold apparently incompatible views? Perhaps one test or criterion of what constitutes an epoch is that all the significant thinking within it, even if apparently discordant is in fact dominated by one seminal conceptual framework. This is neither an unfamiliar nor an implausible view. In *Search for a Method*, for example, Sartre claims that Marxism has defined the boundaries within which all contemporary philosophy must move. The claim that every epoch has its *idée fixe* cannot be pursued here; it is sufficient to point out that Heidegger and his followers are committed to it and may have to defend it one day by a more precise examination of historical texts than has yet been undertaken. This may prove to be difficult.

The attempt to grasp the unity of the modes of disclosures brings with it still another problem. When there occurs a "mittence" of Being, according to Heidegger, profound changes take place in certain significant domains of human activity. Now a mittence, or world, is *one*, while the modes of its disclosure are *many*. Further, insofar as a world has a singular character, its modes of disclosure must somehow display the same content. But what are we to make of the claim that the plastic art of an epoch, its music and dance, its poetry, religion, and metaphysics are all disclosures of the *same* mittence of Being? To make good such a claim, would it not be necessary to utter, to point, or somehow to refer to that mittence of Being which all genuine disclosures in any epoch are disclosures *of*? And in order to do this, would it not be necessary to translate what some modes of disclosure disclose into other modes of disclosure? Heidegger has not wrestled with the problem of shared content. When he wished to characterize the relationship to Being which has put its mark upon an epoch, his usual way is to make reference to the way in which its thinkers have "named" Being. But is it possible to translate what a poem or pain-

ting discloses into the language of a metaphysical theory? Is a translation in the other direction any easier, i.e., a translation from the language of metaphysics into the "language" of music or gesture? Heidegger seems to be unaware of the enormous, perhaps insuperable difficulties involved in such projects of translation. He seems equally unaware that the notion of a vertical Being-event as he has developed it is tacitly committed to the intertranslatability of all world-revealing modes of disclosure.

Even if we could somehow characterize the one mittence which all modes of disclosure within a world-epoch disclose, it remains unexplained why there ought to be a *variety* of modes of world-disclosure at all. In order to see what this difficulty is, we shall have to backtrack a bit. We know that for the later Heidegger, Being takes the initiative in the coming-to-pass of the Being event.

If in SZ (*Sein und Zeit*) it could be said that "only insofar as There-being (*Dasein*) is, is there Being," this must be understood in the sense that only insofar as the lighting-process comes-to-pass in a There does it come-to-pass at all. *That* it comes-to-pass, however, does not depend on the There but on the spontaneity of Being which thus e-mits itself among beings. The There is "thrown," and it is Being that does the "throwing." We understand this in no ontic sense, of course, but only as an insistence on the fact that Being maintains the primacy in an event that *de facto* takes place.<sup>50</sup>

Even though *that* a mittence of Being comes-to-pass does not depend upon *Dasein*, we know that *how* *Dasein* comports itself has much to do with the nature of the disclosure. If this is true, then, perhaps the different modes of existence chosen by *Dasein* are responsible for the variety in the modes of disclosure. Perhaps what happens is simply this: Being discloses itself poetically in the "saying" of poets, metaphysically in the "saying" of metaphysicians, etc. Elementary as such an explanation may appear however, it will not do at all, for it is just in the commerce with Being that one *becomes* a poet or metaphysician; the poets do not exist first in order later to deliver themselves of the meaning of Being in poetic disclosures. Art and philosophy, when they are genuine, *are themselves occurrences of Being*.

Problems about the unity of the Being-event are thrown more sharply into focus if we compare Heidegger's later philosophy with that of Hegel which, at least in scope and grandeur, it resembles. For Hegel, the Being-event is the progressive growth in self-awareness of the Absolute Spirit. This Spirit and its activity we are able to com-

<sup>50</sup> Richardson, p. 532. I have added material in brackets. See *Brief über den Humanismus*, p. 75ff.

prehend somewhat in analogy to the sort of consciousness we ourselves possess. The Absolute is like a great genius, a restless genius like Leonardo da Vinci, who struggles to realize himself now in one form, now in another. Overflowing with energy, his substance is not exhausted in the mastering of painting: he is impelled to move on to architecture, to natural science, even to military science. Since all his activities are modes of self-expression, the content which discloses itself in any of his activities as well as the *unity* of content disclosed in all the activities he undertakes in any particular period of his life are determined by the degree of self-realization he has achieved in that period. As his self-understanding becomes more profound, the content of his modes of self-expression changes. The sequence of his modes of expression is obedient to the principle of growth in his consciousness of self, a principle which is responsible too for the coordination among these modes in any particular epoch.

But such a way of grasping the unity of the historical process is impossible for Heidegger. Being is not a single consciousness nor are the various modes of world-disclosure ways in which this consciousness comes to an understanding of itself. The vertical Being-event cannot be understood in analogy to the operation of human consciousness or to the history of its development. The unity of the modes of world-disclosure remains a mystery because unlike Hegel's forms of Objective Spirit, these modes are not expressions of a single principle at work in the historical process, a principle which retains its self-identical character independent of the variety of its manifestations. Being, for Heidegger, is not God, not a thing or a substance, not a subject, consciousness or spirit. It is not a telos-driven process nor is it a *noumenon* whose phenomenal appearance is the historical process itself. Heidegger's radical "historization" of the philosophy of history has removed from it everything suprahistorical,<sup>51</sup> but with this removal has he not perhaps removed the possibility of discovering the origin of the unity-in-multiplicity of the Being-event? The primordial "event" is nothing but the disclosures which have occurred, disclosures already made of what-there-is and of how-it-is and, in addition to these, the possibility of some future transforming disclosure which will save the human "essence" from extinction. "Being" is nothing but what has been and what might be, but in this "nothing but" is expressed not only the gratuitousness of the unity and variety of its occurrences but the utter gratuitousness of its occurrence at all.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger regards Hegel's Absolute Spirit as just such an ahistorical remnant. Hegel is still under the sway of an ontology of substance: the Absolute, the Being of beings, is a subject, a being (*ein Seiendes*). Thus, Hegel is accused of having forgotten the "ontological difference" between Being and beings. See "Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung" in *Holzwege*.

How does it stand with the modes of world-disclosure? Of the five modes mentioned in our key citation from *Holzwege*, one, essential sacrifice, has turned out not to be a mode of disclosure at all. Another, the *polis*, is little more than merely mentioned. The religious mode of disclosure undergoes throughout the Heideggerian *corpus* a virtual reduction to theology which, he holds, has in our tradition drawn its sustenance from metaphysics, even though in so doing, it misunderstands its own proper task. If theology is so heavily in debt to metaphysical thinking, we are, in effect, left with two modes of world disclosure: art and "thinking." As we have seen, poetry (*Poesie*) is said to take precedence over the other arts, both because it is the first to emerge and because of its nearness to the original disclosive capacity of language itself. But how well has Heidegger succeeded in distinguishing between poetry and thinking?

Both poet and thinker are workers of words. Both dwell in the "house of Being" in that both disclose a world by the uttering of new "names" for what-there-is. How then do they differ? Heidegger does not attempt to distinguish poetry from philosophy by assigning to each its own peculiar mode of disclosure, its own matter or its own method. In *Was Heisst Denken?* he does assign to poetry its own truth which is called "beauty." Beauty is one fate of the essence of truth, the disclosure of that which eternally does not appear (*das ewig Unscheinbare*) and is therefore invisible in its most radiant manifestation (*das erscheinendste Scheinen*).<sup>52</sup> But what can "that which eternally does not appear" be but Being itself, Being which does not appear wholly or *in toto* and which, when it does appear, tends toward self-concealment? Beauty is one way in which Being or truth happens, the most "radiant" way. But we are not told what "radiant" means or why a philosophical system cannot be an "*erscheinendste Scheinen*." For Heidegger, as for Keats, truth is beauty and beauty truth; the *differentia* of beauty are never given.<sup>53</sup>

Philosophy and poetry are regarded not only as distinct modes of disclosure but also as separated from one another "by an abyss":

That which is extraordinary (*das Ungewöhnliche*) reveals itself (*öffnet sich*) and reveals that which is manifest (*das Offene*) only in poetry (or, in its own time and in a manner separated (from poetry) by an abyss (*abgründig davon verschieden*) in 'thinking' . . .<sup>54</sup>

The same point is made again in the Postscript to *Was ist Metaphysik?*

<sup>52</sup> *Was Heisst Denken?* p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Compare the similarly vague and unsatisfactory treatment of beauty in PAB, p. 680-681.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (Frankfurt, 1951), p. 97.

Obedient to the voice of Being, thought seeks the Word through which the truth of Being may be expressed. Only when the language of historical man is born of the Word does it ring true. But if it does ring true, then the testimony of the soundless voice of hidden springs lures it ever on. The thought of Being guards the Word and fulfills its function in such guardianship, namely care for the use of language. Out of long guarded speechlessness and the careful clarification of the field thus cleared, comes the utterance of the thinker. Of like origin is the naming of the poet. But since like is only like insofar as difference allows, and since poetry and thinking are most purely alike in their care of the word, the two things are at the same time at opposite poles in their essence. The thinker utters Being. The poet names what is holy.<sup>55</sup>

Philosophy and poetry do not differ merely in style and approach but are seen as two enterprises "at opposite poles in their essence," even though both projects require an identical comportment in the face of Being—"care for the use of language"; "long guarded speechlessness," etc. The thinker "utters Being," while the poet "names what is holy." Is this then the difference?

The notion that the poet's function is to name the holy is taken directly from Hölderlin. In "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Heidegger quotes directly from one of Hölderlin's unfinished poems: "Much has man learnt. Many of the heavenly ones has he named."<sup>56</sup> It is clear from the balance of the essay that the "naming" of the "heavenly ones" stands for and comes to symbolize the naming of other beings too, the naming, in short, of a world. We are told specifically that "since language really became actual as conversation, gods have acquired names *and a world has appeared . . .*" and that ". . . it is precisely in the naming of the gods and in the transmutation of the world into word, that the real conversation, which we ourselves are, consists."<sup>57</sup> Later in the essay we read that ". . . when the gods are named originally and the essence of things receives a name, so that things for the first time shine out, human existence is brought into a firm relation and given a basis."<sup>58</sup> But surely, the naming of the essence of things and the transmutation of the world into word are just the sort of seminal linguistic events which issue from the thinker who also names what is. Where then is the "abyss" which separates them?

In *Heidegger, Through Phenomenology to Thought*, Fr. Richardson too admits to difficulties in distinguishing Heidegger's ac-

<sup>55</sup> Hull and Crick, p. 391.

<sup>56</sup> "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," as translated by Douglas Scott in *Existence and Being*, p. 300.

<sup>57</sup> Scott, p. 303. Italics are mine.

<sup>58</sup> Scott, p. 305.



count of poetry from his account of thinking. Fr. Richardson speculates about the meaning of the passage we have cited in which Heidegger sets the "uttering of Being" against the "naming of the holy": ". . . in poetry, Being is uttered—but not *as* Being; in thought Being is uttered as such . . . ."<sup>59</sup> If I understand this suggestion correctly, the poet would "name" beings without understanding his project as a deliberate and self-conscious effort to give an account of the nature of Being and, in all likelihood, without a concept of the meaning of Being at all. The philosophical thinker, on the other hand, no matter how inadequate his understanding of the meaning of Being, no matter the extent to which he has overlooked its "mystery," would have, in spite of this, some *explicit* grasp of what Being means and a distinct comprehension of his own project as an attempt to answer the question about the nature and extent of what-there-is.

Fr. Richardson's suggestion has the merit of recognizing what we feel intuitively to be one difference between most philosophers and most poets, (though not of metaphysician-poets like Parmenides or Lucretius) namely, that, while poets may disclose the nature of the real, they do this most often with neither a formal nor a critical grasp of the meaning of "real" and often in the course of trying to do something else entirely. If the philosopher grasps Being explicitly and the poet implicitly, then the distinction between these two activities would lie in their respective intentions: the philosopher would intend to do what the poet does unintentionally, or perhaps inadvertently. Now this may very well be true, but are the two thereby sufficiently *distinguished*? If I convey a certain meaning to you implicitly and then I convey that meaning explicitly, it can be argued that I have done the *same thing* only in a different way. If this is the only difference we can make out between the uttering of Being but not *as* being and the uttering of Being *as such*, it appears once again that we have not found the "abyss" which is said to separate the two.<sup>60</sup>

What should be clear from this discussion is that although Heidegger's later philosophy is more systematic than his detractors allow, containing a doctrine of the vertical as well as the horizontal Being-event, his development of the notion of a vertical Being-event

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<sup>59</sup> Richardson, p. 637.

<sup>60</sup> Perhaps, if Heidegger is right, the *consequences* of metaphysical disclosures of Being in the West are fateful in a way those of poetry are not, leading as they are said to lead, to a nihilistic and voracious subjectivism. If this is true and if we can find no other salient differences between metaphysics and poetry, then a curious view of poetry emerges, one quite incompatible with the high value Heidegger has placed upon it: poetry is now seen to be a sort of shadow-disclosure, trailing along after metaphysics and lacking any historical efficacy.

is flawed in several important ways. The doctrine of a vertical Being-event is beset by a variety of conceptual difficulties having to do with the *unity* of the modes of disclosure and the *criteria* by which we distinguish what is disclosive from what is not. Further, upon close inspection, the five modes of disclosure which Heidegger mentions in *Holzwege* collapse to only two, themselves difficult to separate from one another. The whole notion of a vertical Being-event, however grandiose, is too fragmentary and impressionistic to point the way beyond this final epoch of metaphysics which Heidegger himself wished so earnestly to surpass.

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