

Enquivering
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Contributions to Philosophy
(*From Enowning*)
by Martin Heidegger
translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly
(Indiana University Press, 369 pp.)

I.

If you are a believer, then Martin Heidegger was an unparalleled modern thinker, whose profound diagnosis of the condition of mankind in the twentieth century rightly dominated large tracts of culture, and directed the finest subsequent work in the humanities. If you are not, then he is a dismal windbag, whose influence has been completely disastrous, and whose affinity with the Nazis merely indicates the vacuum where, in most other philosophers, there would have been a combination of common sense and common decency.

Neither view allows much compromise. But it was not always so. In his early career Heidegger worked on themes in post-Kantian philosophy, such as the relation between psychology and logic, that were common to all European philosophers and that still plague us today. Shortly after *Being and Time* was published in 1927, the level-headed (and later hard-boiled) Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle wrote a long, penetrating, and moderately admiring review of it in the philosophical journal *Mind*. Ryle highlighted the influence of Husserl and Brentano in the work; Husserl especially had developed the technique of "phenomenological analysis," which approached traditional problems of mind and body, perception and knowledge, by concentrating upon states of mind and their objects. Since all human knowledge involves some state of mind, this subject could claim a philosophically fundamental position. The urgent question, for Husserl, concerns the right method for isolating what is essential to states of mind in the first place.

For such a philosophy there is a danger of collapsing the whole world into the world of consciousness--the danger of idealism. The early Heidegger attempted to overcome residual traces of idealism in the work of Husserl by denying any split between consciousness and its objects. This is an orthodox and reputable philosophical project,

though whether it succeeds in avoiding idealism depends entirely on how it is done. Heidegger's approach was certainly original, since eradicating the split, in his view, meant abandoning almost all the vocabulary that anyone might use to talk about the mind or the world. It meant returning to the primeval springs of Meaning and Being, unencumbered by the terminology of philosophy, science, or everyday life, and starting afresh. In Heidegger's vision, we must no longer think in terms of a self, as owner of experiences, with separate and independent things strewn around the self in space and time. We must recover a lost primordial unity in which such divisions did not exist.

In Heidegger's opinion, then, normal consciousness, expressed with the inherited vocabulary of common sense, sees things "only with a squint," as Ryle put it. The primary consciousness, on the other hand, is consciousness of the world in which we live as agents. It is an awareness of what we are about. Thus our primary awareness of objects is as things "to hand," ready to use. In this kind of living, the "scientific" split between mind and body, self and world, utterly vanishes. It is not very clear, in *Being and Time*, how this happens: as Ryle remarked, the result smells a little oddly both of the pragmatism of William James and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart.

In the 1920s, phenomenology was not sharply separated from other philosophy, on the Continent or in the Anglo-American tradition. Husserl was carefully studied by Bertrand Russell. Phenomenological technique demands a serious concentration on the nature of lived experience, which has always been a goal of philosophy. But the same could be said of literature and poetry; and it is no accident that the best-known offspring of the method are the literary works of Sartre or Camus rather than the philosophical work of, say, Merleau-Ponty. Yet Heidegger set out in a very different direction. Ryle noted an alarming tendency toward unintelligibility even in Heidegger's early work, and this is the tendency that blossomed. He drifted away from the connection with phenomenology, just as he repudiated Husserl, in order to develop himself neither as a philosopher nor as a poet, but as an oracle.

Contributions to philosophy (From Enowning) is a translation, into something very remote from English, of philosophical notebooks that Heidegger wrote in the 1920s, in something fairly remote from German. The distance from English is evidently greater than the distance from German, not only because English is more resistant to the encrustations of philosophical German but also because, unfortunately, the translators seem to enjoy trampling on this fact. The title itself illustrates the problem. The German *vom Ereignis* would have translated into English as "from happening," or "on happening." *Ereignis* itself lacks any connotations of "taking possession," which presumably would be what "enown" would suggest were it a word in English, which it is not.

Perhaps there is a point in inserting the idea of ownership? No, for we are also instructed to strip the word "own" of any connotation of possession, which is not entirely easy to do. And if the waters have risen pretty far by this point, they threaten to drown us altogether when we find that almost any English verb will accept the prefix "en": throughout the text some things are enthought, while others enquirer, enbeckon, ensuffer, and encleave. What seems to be random hyphenation further dislocates, or dis-locates, any sense of being at home, or being-at-home, with the words on the page. Sometimes this results in unintended comedy: Heidegger is fond of saying that things we cannot do anything about are thrown at us, and for some pages this leads to talk of a "free-throw," giving the surprising impression that the subject of this metaphysics is basketball.

The translators do present a defense: "Since no one has the slightest idea how Contributions would have looked had Heidegger smoothed out its syntax, no one has any idea of the measure by which to 'reproach' him for the present shape of this work." And they proceed to quote approvingly another believer who observes that "it is not a question of reproaching Heidegger or of demanding posthumously different ways of behaving. Rather, it is we who come after him who are put to the test because of our access to his Nachlass and to all of his works." Here is faith indeed. I particularly relish the term "reproach," whose slightly droopy moralistic overtones are hardly adequate to describing the more robust reactions of unbelievers.

For the writing in this book is startling, whatever your prior view of Heidegger. Open any page and you are apt to find something like this:

Time-space is the enowned encleavage of the turning trajectories of enowning, of the turning between belongingness and the call, between abandonment by being and enbeckoning (the enquivering of the resonance of be-ing itself!).

"Cleavage," at least, is defined for us:

The cleavage is the inner, incalculable settledness of en-ownment; of the essential swaying of be-ing as the midpoint that is used and that grants belonging--the midpoint that continues to be related to the passing of god and the history of man at the same time.

As we have seen, "en-ownment" might give trouble, but here, too, help is to hand (zuhanden):

The enowning of en-ownment gathers within itself the de-cision (Ent-scheidung): that freedom, as the ground that holds to abground, lets a distress emerge from out of

which, as from out of the overflow of the ground, gods and man come forth into partedness.

Whatever the merits of phenomenology, by the time we get to this they have certainly evaporated. Instead of problems of logic and psychology, or a close focus on the nature of conscious experience, we are given only a misty sense of uplift, with god and history and resonance and Being all floating up alongside us. One need not be a dry empiricist or an unimaginative positivist to recognize that nothing is said in such sentences that could be verified or falsified, or assessed in any dimension as plausible or not. Yet this lack of content may not even be counted as a flaw, for Heidegger actually instructs us at one point: "Making itself intelligible is suicide for philosophy."

The real point of the writing is therefore different. It becomes apparent when we notice the constant repetitions: "How can distress be effected as distress?"

"Enownment always means enowning as en-ownment." "The ground that is the abground and is the ground of gods' lacking the ground." "Be-ing of such essential swaying is itself unique in this essential sway." The truth, then, is that we have here what even Heidegger's respectful biographer, Rudiger Safranski, describes as a series of mantras. The work is a litany or a rosary, or a barrel-organ. As Adorno charged in *The Jargon of Authenticity*, the effect is supposed to be that "one speaks from a depth which would be profaned if it were called content." We have instead an attempt to create a prophetic aura or mood. We have something that aspires to be a religious work. "Being," we are to realize, "is the trembling of Godding." Oh, goody!

II.

To understand what is going on in Heidegger, you need to know a story. Perhaps it is the story, the primal story. It tells of a primordial golden age, when man was united with himself, with his fellow man, and with nature (home, hearth, earth, fatherland, paradise, shelter, innocence, wholeness, integration). Then there was a fall, when primitive innocence and unity were destroyed and replaced by something worse (separation, dissonance, fracture, strife, estrangement, alienation, inauthenticity, anxiety, distress, death, despair, nothing). To cure this condition, a road or journey is needed (pilgrimage, stations, way or Weg, Bildung, action, will, destiny). The way will need a leader, and the leader is the philosopher of Plato's myth, who first ascends from the shadows of the cave to the sunshine above (seer, prophet, poet, hero). There is a crisis, and then a recovery of primordial unity itself (encounter, epiphany, authenticity, transcendence, apocalypse, consummation, marriage, jubilation). This may end the story, back at its beginning, or the path may spiral on upwards, its travelers fortified by the necessary sufferings of the journey.

In the story, the world and life itself need interpretation because they are the unfolding of a historical script, the writing of the world-spirit (tidings, message, hermeneutics). And the whole drama is figured not just in the life of an individual, but in universal history, or at least in the history of the race. The story is a history of Prometheus, or Hyperion, or the Prodigal, or the Pilgrim, or the Artist. It is also a history of the evolution of Man, or of Dasein, or of the Geister.

This is only the template of a story, of course; or to change the metaphor, it is a music that needs different orchestration at different times. It can be given a conventional religious tone, or a purely subjective tone, as with inner-light Protestant mysticism, or for that matter with Shelley or Blake. It can take a nationalistic political setting, or a private and personal setting. The fall may come with knowledge, which involves naming and separating and introducing differences. It can come as it came to ancient Israel, through other lapses, such as the breaking of a covenant, or some may think it came through the invention of capitalism. The hero who leads to the light may be Augustine or Rimbaud, a saint or a decadent.

This music was played loudly more than a century before Heidegger, by Schelling and Schiller, Novalis and Hegel. England took it in through Coleridge and the Romantics; America took it in through Emerson, Whitman, and eventually Hollywood. Even in one artist expressions of the theme can range from the sublime to the ridiculous, from "Tintern Abbey" to what a critic of Wordsworth called the namby-pamby of the Lesser Celandine. It takes genius to play the Romantic music without falsifying it, and perhaps even greater genius to play it with a religious tremolo.

Heidegger's claim to genius was allowed because he grafted onto phenomenology a secular version (or at least a non-Christian and philosophical version) of the primal story. He celebrates the primordial unity, which like many Germans he attributes to the Greeks, and which he locates (for some private reason) in the pre-Socratic philosophers. He laments the fall that has plagued philosophy, science, and everyday life ever since. And he promises the ecstatic recovery that sets eternity into time, the mystical moment in which, as his favorite poet, Holderlin, said, "the imperishable is present within us."

In the end the romantic epiphany is consummated, the false categorizations of fallen nature are lifted, and the seer wordlessly confronts the underlying realities of Being. But, heavens, the dangers on the way! For Heidegger is clear that there are risks and dangers in attempting to eyeball Being. Wrestling, venturing, confronting, colliding, seized, and always alone, what a hero he is, this fearless Wanderer above the Mist!

To the agnostic eye, the first curiosity in all this is that the execution of the phenomenological method falls considerably short of the promise. For just one

example--and from Heidegger's earlier and less messianic period--consider once more our relationship to things around us. He alleges that primordial artisans treat things around them as things to use, whereas scientific thought treats things as objects in space-time. To-handedness (the artisan's concept) is close to conscious human life, or Dasein, whereas present-at-handedness (things as thought of scientifically) is distant from it. So the first, Zuhandensein, can be announced as "primary form of being" compared to the second, superficial, merely scientific Vorhandensein. The first is primordial; the second is derivative and falsifying, suitable only for rude mechanicals such as Newton.

Some have speculated that this captures an essential insight of pragmatism, though Heidegger's distaste for all things scientific sits uneasily with such a reading. In any event, the vital point is that the jargon only conceals a shocking lack of focus in the original thought. For is it not obvious that an artisan who is at work on a piece of carpentry does not see a hammer as a tool as opposed to seeing it as an item in space and time? It is only because he sees it as an enduring object with a location and a shape, inelastic and massive, that he sees it as zuhanden at all. Things not seen as having these desirable properties cannot be seen as usable for driving nails.

This is a trivial example of a fuzziness or a vacuity that exists even in the earlier work, and balloons in Contributions. Karl Jaspers wrote about Heidegger that he was "among contemporaries the most exciting thinker, masterful, compelling, mysterious--but then leaving you empty-handed." Heidegger's mantras are not expressions of some achieved vision or experience or emotion. They are instructions to work one up. They are not the records of a pilgrimage, but a prospectus into which you can inscribe your own detail. The orchestra is only tuning up. So, in the last part of Contributions, when Heidegger presents himself as a prophet out of his time, yet prefiguring the Way for the Ones Who Are To Come, few unbelievers will be reminded of Blake, or even Nietzsche. He sounds utterly trite, like Obi-Wan Kenobi in Star Wars.

III.

Heidegger's faithful may not mind the charge that he leaves us empty-handed, just as he himself heads off complaints about intelligibility. Safranski relates that the physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsacker told Heidegger the story about a man who spent all his days in a tavern. Asked why, he replied that it was his wife: she talks and talks and talks. "What does she talk about?" "Ah, that she doesn't say." Heidegger is supposed to have replied, "Yes, that is how it is."

If this was a moment of self-knowledge, it cannot have lasted long. In the jargon of authenticity, saying nothing means saying Nothing, and this has a much better ring to it. Saying Nothing requires confronting the very source of care (Sorge) itself. It means

battling the mechanical age for what it is, and gazing at death, and (en)quivering with the resonances of the void. It takes the poet-philosopher-hero to do it. Only the inauthentic, the dwellers in the shadows, could find that saying Nothing is a disappointment. And this cannot even count as a criticism, since dis-appointment is just what you should expect when your appointment with Being is not yet due.

No, the knowledge of the philosopher-poet-hero is different:

This knowing can never be communicated and disseminated like the knowledge of what is extant. Those who bring it to one another must already go in the crossing in that they, intimating decisions, come unto one another and yet do not meet.

Note the Biblical resonances of this description. The dwellers in the shadows, by contrast,

drag what is ownmost down into what is intelligible and, by such dragging, shove it into what is merely still tolerated and humored.

You have to be good at priest-craft to get away with such an elitist posture, and Heidegger undoubtedly was good at it. There is ample evidence of the charisma that Heidegger could exercise, through sublime self-confidence and messianic self-presentation. The effect was beautifully dissected in a remarkable paper in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1938, in which Marjorie Glicksman, who attended Heidegger's lectures in the 1930s, records his procedure. She describes the vituperative denunciations of previous philosophers, and Heidegger's own repeated claims to uniqueness and greatness. Above all, she describes the aristocratic immunity of those on the summits to criticism from the dwellers in the shadows below, who include any spokesmen for science, history, logic, or common sense:

It should be added, perhaps, that the forcefulness of Heidegger's "aristocratic" arguments depends in large part on the personality of the lecturer. One is caught as in a political rally by the slow intensity of his speech. The contemptuous epigrams with which he dismisses the protests of logic or good sense sting the listener's ears with their acidity; and his prophetic solemnity when he invokes the quest for being ties one as spellbound as if one were taking his first step into the rituals of the Eleusinian mysteries.

When Heidegger deigns to put his head back in the cave, the results of the wrestling matches and collisions with Being turn out to be a little disappointing. Here is his own version of unity with nature, in a passage quoted by Adorno:

Recently I got a second invitation to the University of Berlin. On such an occasion I leave the city and go back to my cabin. I hear what the mountains and woods and farmyards say. On the way I drop in on my old friend, a seventy-five-year-old farmer. He has read in the newspaper about the Berlin invitation. What will he say? He slowly presses the sure glance of his clear eyes against mine, holds his mouth tightly closed, lays his faithful and cautious hand on my shoulder--and almost imperceptibly shakes his head. That means: absolutely No!

Surely we must all admire this true man of the Volk, so closely resembling Adam Lambsbreath in Cold Comfort Farm, "linked to all dumb brutes by a chain forged in soil and sweat": the Swabian peasant as golden retriever. Mind you, gnarly old dog though he be, he still reads university tittle-tattle in the newspapers. They didn't do that around Grasmere.

IV.

Much has been written about the relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and his support for the Third Reich in the 1930s. Hans Sluga has shown that there was nothing unusual about Heidegger's politics at the time. Many philosophers in Germany in that period subscribed to a quartet of doctrines that made them sympathetic to the National Socialists. They believed that theirs was a time of moral crisis, that the crisis was particular to Germany and needed to be solved in Germany, that the solution called for acts of will directed by a great leader, and that the result would be order--a new order that would last a thousand years.

None of these could be called implications of Heidegger's philosophy, for where there is no certain meaning there are no certain implications. But they make up one way of inscribing detail into the Romantic prospectus. Many of the words that I picked out as thematic in Romanticism fit naturally into this quartet. There is the lost unity, the need for a redemptive journey, the visionary leader, and the goal of a vague and unspecified recovery of what has been lost. National Socialism was one way of orchestrating the primal melody.

Contributions to Philosophy was written between 1936 and 1938, when Heidegger had ended his active engagement in politics. If, in his earlier rectoral address to the University of Freiburg, he (in Safranski's words) "pull[ed] out all the stops of his penny-dreadful romanticism to lend events an unsuspected profundity," here the tone is different. The philosophical fantasies are detached from National Socialist politics. Heidegger no longer marches his SS-uniformed students out from Freiburg to evangelical camps where they can commune with the hills and the meadows, and the doggy peasants, of the Fatherland. Instead, he "inscribes himself in the history of Being as a herald who arrived too early, and is therefore in danger of being crushed

and rejected by his time." National Socialism is no longer seen as the way to reunite Germany with the world of the pre-Socratics. There is too much science and engineering, too little communion with the sources of Being.

But the beast was only sleeping. Jaspers had a Jewish wife, and his relations with Heidegger after the war were naturally wary. Yet Heidegger, astonishingly, wrote to Jaspers in 1952 that the cause of evil was not yet at an end, and that in such a state of homelessness an "advent" was to be expected "whose further hints we may perhaps still experience..." Even the worshipful Jaspers, himself adept at vague religiosity, recoiled from this crassness:

does not a philosophy that surmizes and poetizes in such phrases in your letter, a philosophy that aroused the vision of the monstrous, once more prepare the ground for the victory of totalitarianism by severing itself from reality?

He was absolutely right to ask the question, and he never got an answer.

So why is Heidegger still an influence, when, say, the infinitely more readable Sartre is not? We should be careful here, for outside a very few pockets Heidegger is not really an influence in Anglo-American professional philosophy. He is at best mentioned as a kind of honorary pragmatist, or an honorary precursor of attacks on the dualism of mind and world. In this part of the academy, the view that it is suicide for philosophy to be intelligible is not popular. His influence is mainly felt in the more debilitated areas of the humanities. The legacy is nicely exhibited on the web at www.elsewhere.org/cgi-bin/postmodern. Here you can read an original essay, every visit, written by The Postmodernist Generator, a program developed by a student in the Monash University Department of Computer Science and "modified slightly by Pope Dubious Provenance XI using the Dada Engine, a system for generating random text from recursive grammars." The Dada Engine is not quite calibrated to 1930s Heidegger--its lexicon is proper English, for example--but one senses how easily it could be.

Still, there is the question of how it happened and goes on happening. Perhaps the primal story is so potent that just using one of the words that suggest it turns lead to gold. Whenever the modern world looks bad, we hear the lost music, and mourn what might have been. At the faintest sound of the melody, people drop their everyday way of being and dance to the enchantment. It is, as I have suggested, an enchantment into which you can inscribe almost anything. Heidegger can be an icon for the Nazi, the priest, the environmentalist, or the hippie. He may be a defender of the faith, a poet-philosopher for the Society of Jesus, or the naysayer whose rejection of modern mechanical life is a timely, authentic update of that of Carlyle or Ruskin. He can be a pragmatist, or the enemy of dreary technology. All you have to do is accept the

prospectus, and inscribe your own fantasy. You must not mind drowning (think of it as the oceanic feeling), and you may need to leave behind any tinge of common sense, science, logic, history, or reason--but these are easy burdens to shed in difficult times. In any event, like any good salvationist, the master has already instructed you to do it, by precept and by example.

Analytical philosophy is sometimes contrasted unfavorably with "Continental" philosophy, because of its supposed lack of political and moral weight. If this charge was ever just, it has long ceased to be so. Indeed, to critics such as Richard Posner, modern Anglo-American philosophy is at fault for being too moralistic, disrespectfully trespassing on the domain of economists and judges. What I think is true is that analytical philosophy is profoundly mistrustful of sustaining myths, including the primal story. We resist the pipes of Pan, because we care about truth. And intelligibility is a precondition of truth. If you cannot tell whether a string of words says anything, you cannot tell whether it says anything true.

This is not a parochial or superficial matter. The love of truth above fog is a commitment that anybody who deserves to be called a philosopher has to make, though it will set him or her at odds with a politics, from the left or the right, that can flourish only in a fog. Fortunately, even in Heidegger's perturbed times there were those who saw this. We may recall the contemporary words of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce:

I have now at last read the whole of Heidegger's address, which is stupid and servile at the same time. I am not surprised at the success his philosophizing will have for some time--the vacuous and general is always successful. But it produces nothing. I too believe that he will have no effect on politics, but he dishonors philosophy, and that is a pity also for politics, especially future politics.

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