

CHAPTER 6: CRITICAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Heidegger's thinking is a thinking that always remains underway. Its remaining underway is not to be construed as simply a failure to provide answers to certain questions posed at the beginning of Heidegger's way – as though the path were only a bridge spanning the chasm between question and answer, as though it were not necessary entirely to rethink on the path of thinking our usual unquestioning manner of understanding the connection between question and answer.¹

Given the enormous impact of Heidegger's writings in Europe, the English-speaking world and even in Asia², an investigation of his ideas is an important part of any attempt to understand the contemporary philosophical scene. His influence is felt in areas as diverse as psychoanalysis, literary theory, ecology, theology and rhetoric. It is evident from the huge influx of secondary literature that Heidegger has provided us with a valuable key to understand and evaluate the current historical epoch - the age of technology and information. A renewed interrogation of Heidegger's thinking on technology, truth and language will perhaps encourage a more critical attitude towards our present society and alert us to the dangers of the unreflective growth of technology.

Various incisive insights are to be found in Heidegger's thinking, but it has also been heavily criticised. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in his philosophy, on the basis of the preceding chapters.

6.1 Being and the History of Being.

An important issue that I raised in Chapter 1 was whether Heidegger's use of Being does not immerse him in the very tradition he wants to break free from: the ontological tradition, the history of metaphysics. Richard Rorty answers this question in the affirmative, but states that Heidegger '...wants to get free of that tradition not by turning his back on it but by attending to it and redescribing it.'³ Rorty believes that the most important move in this redescription is Heidegger's suggestion that we see the metaphysician's will to truth as a self-concealing form of the poetic urge. In other words, Rorty believes that Heidegger wants us to see metaphysics as an inauthentic form of poetry. For Heidegger, we are nothing save the words we use, nothing but an early stanza of Being's poem. Only a metaphysician would think that we are more.

In a historical sense, metaphysics refers to traditional enquiries into Being, enquiries that have erroneously substituted something (an entity) for nothing (Being). It is this type of metaphysics that Heidegger sets out to destroy and replace with a more authentic perspective on Being. Thus, in a certain sense, I agree with Rorty that Heidegger's works are 'metaphysical' in character, since in its attempt to overcome metaphysics, his fundamental ontology is really a renewal of metaphysics (the Being question), albeit in a thoroughly new way. Heidegger realised that 'Thought cannot overcome (überwinden) metaphysics, it must try to incorporate (verwinden) it'⁴. I believe that it was Heidegger's great insight that 'Metaphysics cannot be 'overcome' by being subjected to the process of grounding, it cannot be done away with by reaching for something higher than metaphysics'⁵.

Rorty also asserts that in *Being and Time* the reader is led to believe that the Greeks enjoyed a special relationship to Being which the moderns have lost, and that the Greeks had less trouble being ontological than modern human being. Modern human being, on the other hand, confuses the ontic and the ontological. Yet, Rorty tells us, in Heidegger's later work, he claims that Descartes and Nietzsche were as adequate expressions of what Being was at their time, as Parmenides was of what Being was at his time. Rorty states that this makes it unclear why Heidegger sees the history of the West as a kind of ladder with the Greeks at the top because of their more authentic understanding of Being, and modern human being at the bottom, the one who has forgotten Being. The tendency to understand history as deterioration, decline and alienation from the origin, and a nostalgia for the pure and original, are undeniably present in Heidegger's work, as Derrida has remarked⁶. In this context, Rorty notes that:

Heidegger cheerfully ignores, or violently reinterprets, lots of Plato and Nietzsche while presenting himself as respectfully listening to the voice of Being as it is heard in their words. But Heidegger knew what he wanted to hear in advance. He wanted to hear something that would make his own historical position decisive, by making his own historical epoch terminal.⁷

Thus, Heidegger is criticised for supplying an ontological metanarrative that should be greeted with incredulity. Caputo also criticises Heidegger on this point:

Heidegger's thought was thereafter⁸ held captive by a sweeping metanarrative, a myth of monogenesis, a monomaniacal preoccupation with a single deep source, with an originary, unitary beginning, which he thought must be kept pure and uncontaminated like a pure spring.⁹

Caputo sees Heidegger's tendency to construct a fantastic portrait of the Greek sources of Western thought and culture as the core of a highly perilous metanarrative – a sweeping myth about Being's fabulous movements through Western history. He believes that Heidegger's view would be strengthened, not weakened, were it disentangled from this 'story' – the great Greco-German metanarrative¹⁰.

Heidegger's insistence that the Being of what-is is to be understood as a happening (as a concealing and a revealing) enables him to take into account a wide variety of phenomena in any age. The human comportment that is counterpart to those phenomena ranges from genuine apprehending to misapprehendings that may vary from time to time. Those apprehendings, carried into play via language, eventuate in any age and among any people. Yet for Heidegger, in each age only one particular mode of apprehending and concomitant doing is truly decisive. Both Rorty and Caputo ask whether Heidegger's history as the history of Being is not possessed of a simplicity that itself masks a complexity that is finally of another order than that which he shows us.

More specifically, the question can be asked whether, in our own age, is it only a 'technological' comportment that has determined and now determines the way in which all that we encounter appears to us as individuals, as well as socially? Surely there have been many occasions in which particular persons and groups of persons have met in genuine openness with other persons and things, and thereby participated in the accomplishment of a fullness of happening and experience far beyond that which any technologically motivated approach to reality could provide.

Caputo believes that for Heidegger, all such events would claim only a secondary place in our modern, technologically governed age. Is it sufficient to see them as thus? Do we not rather need a portrayal of historical reality that will permit us to see the interplay of a plurality of disparate determinings, some small in scope, some happening on a large scale, as human beings variously pursue their ways, and, out of diverse orientations of mind and spirit, constantly meet with and gather forth into some meaningful perspective, whatever it is with which they have to do?

When we think of technology in this regard, it is true that the modern age is permeated by exploitation and challenge, but it is also true that such exploitation is of ancient date. Human being's meetings with nature in other epochs were often governed by just such an attitude of power and exploitation¹¹. Authors like Rorty and Caputo believe that Heidegger's oversimplification of history leaves us no room to ask such questions or adduce such evidence.

Reductivist strategies are indeed out of fashion and so the assumption in philosophy that a single foundation (Being in Heidegger) could be posited which saturates every aspect of life is rejected by Caputo. He states that only:

...with Derrida, finally, we reach home ground. He brings to fruition the overcoming of metaphysics that began with Kierkegaard. Although late Heidegger is devoted to overcoming metaphysics and its commitment to presence, he still finally remains caught up in the nostalgia for presence. In contrast to late Heidegger's reverent, serious, obedient listening to being, Derrida's critique is irreverent, playful, disobedient.¹²

I believe that the above criticisms are based on a misunderstanding of what Heidegger was trying to express in his writings. Throughout his work, Heidegger refers to his ideas as a 'way', one fraught with danger and one that could lead to dead ends¹³. He does not posit his ideas as the final 'truth' on the matter but rather sees his ideas as one path that could be chosen. He considered his work '... a way and not a shelter. Whoever cannot walk should not take refuge in it. A way, not 'the' way, which never exists in philosophy'¹⁴.

Heidegger's hermeneutic strategy is also important in this regard. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger aims to tap into the operative, pre-theoretical understanding in which we already live. He admits that 'Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought'¹⁵ and yet, he is aware that '... no arbitrary idea of being and reality, no matter how 'self-evident' it is, may be brought to bear on this being in a dogmatically constructed way'¹⁶. Heidegger therefore wants to avoid the wanton positing of just *any* projective framework at all, but he also wants to insist that the fore-structures are not merely something to be tolerated, unavoidable limitations which ideally we could do without¹⁷. If we see Heidegger's interpretation of various authors in this light, Rorty's critique of Heidegger's interpretation of various authors

seems rather facile. Rorty himself admits that even he reads Heidegger by his own lights, and that no reader of anybody can help doing this¹⁸. If we see Heidegger's account of the ancient Greeks as '... a good story, (but) not a sheer fabrication'¹⁹, as Caputo encourages us to do, then perhaps Heidegger's thought can be liberated from the 'enervating nostalgia and new dawn-ism'²⁰ of which it has been accused.

In addition, Heidegger's Being is anything but a stable foundation for our conceptual reductions and reconstructions²¹. As Heidegger understands it, Being remains fundamentally questionable. It is the ultimate deconstructive force. He tells us that the meaning of Being is an 'absence of ground' or 'abyss'²².

Kolb explains that all the epochs in Heidegger's history of the understandings of Being do not lead to one another because of dialectical tensions or deficiencies in the earlier stages.²³ For Heidegger dialectic is simply a particular kind of movement within a prior space untouchable by dialectical gyrations. He tells us that although the sequence of epochs in the destiny of Being is not accidental, 'neither can it be calculated as necessary'²⁴. A dialectical account of modernity misses the essence of our world just as much as a social scientific account and for the same reason - neither is aware of the basic meaning of Being that lets it be what it is.

The process of metaphysical deformation that Heidegger decries in the history of philosophy has not, in any of its aspects, progressed by reason of a dialectical compulsion:

Heidegger repudiates the notion that idea follows idea with Hegelian necessity. The thinking of an age is an outgrowth from that of past epochs, but only as a "free consequence," never as a determined resultant. Although every epoch of thought is a *destiny* of Being, it is not a *fated* destiny.²⁵

Heidegger is often accused of being a determinist or nihilist who is submissive before history. This is, according to Heim, because of a confused distinction between the German *Geschichte* and *Historie*²⁶. In English, the words history and historical seem to be anchored semantically to the totality of facts studied by the historian. In German, *Geschichte* is the series of ongoing events that constitute history, which then become *Historie*, or the object of historical study. Heidegger's concern is not simply with

Geschichte, but with *Urgeschichte*, or the latent history of reality as the background against which everyday history takes place.²⁷

I therefore believe that Heidegger's concern with the historical, i.e. the wide-spread, ongoing, shifting context within which our present milieu belongs and out of which it has arisen, should be seen as a strength of his philosophy. His emphasis on the distinctiveness of peoples, each gathered into a unity by way of language peculiar to itself and characterised by its own ways of thinking and acting, and the distinctiveness of historical epochs wherein various orientations of mind prevail is a valuable insight which Heidegger gives us. I believe that Heim, whom I now quote at length, is correct when he tells us that:

Like Hegel (and Ong), Heidegger takes seriously the epochal changes in cultural commitments. Such changes are of fundamental significance for the philosophical understanding of things. But to this awareness of the historical commitment of human energies Heidegger adds the concept of what I call historical drift and of cultural trade-offs, or gains and losses in reality apprehension. Rather than a developmental series of systematic improvements, epochal transformations can be understood to be sets of finite pathways which develop, lead onward, then trail off when new pathways are opened by considerably different techniques and skills. The pathways opened are finite in that human concerns project new and different directions for development while previous projects are dissolved or taken up in ways that are obscure or transform the original impulses of previous projects. Pathways are also finite in the sense that some larger ways become major throughfares through which alternate routes are opened and can branch out, but remain, as branches, attached and rooted to the larger highways; some choices create a new future but are dependent on a latent set of choices made in the past.²⁸

In other words, the fact that Heidegger identifies the technological comportment as decisive for our age does not mean that he denies that there are other movements within the dominant way of thinking. The fact that the technological comportment is a 'major throughfare' in our time, does not deny the existence of other 'alternate routes'. Heidegger is outlining broad currents of ideas which have flowed through time contingently, which happen to have run together to shape the mainstream of contemporary thought. With regards to his historical commentary:

... Heidegger is not examining the real thought of specific philosophers. Rather he is studying epochal tendencies which he, however, *isolates* and *exemplifies* in the Utterances of representative individuals ... Heidegger's primary concern has been the history of *thought* as such, not the history of thinkers. If Heidegger's oftentimes arbitrary interpretations of the texts of antiquity are considered in this light, they will perhaps prove less disconcerting to critics²⁹.

It is commendable that Heidegger asks us to direct our attention intently towards history, yet, when we look at the way in which he himself carries out his thinking on history, serious questions as to the adequacy of his portrayals emerge. An example of this discrepancy in Heidegger's thought is that no account is taken by Heidegger of the diffusion of the Greek language and Greek influence in the Hellenistic age, and of the concomitant entry into the thinking of the time of influences from various non-Greek peoples whose distinctive way of thinking influenced the late Greek mind.

These omissions evince an inadequacy in Heidegger's thinking that displays what seems to be a striking narrowness of perspective. We do, however, see a few examples in Heidegger's work where he does make reference to far eastern thinking³⁰, which by implication, suggests that Heidegger's perspective was meant to be inclusive of all of non-Western humanity. In fact, Heidegger tells us that the West '...is not thought regionally as the occident in contrast to the Orient, nor merely as Europe, but rather world-historically out of nearness to the source.'³¹

6.2 Heidegger the Mystic?

A mystic is a person who sees language and communication as a hindrance to the unmediated perception of truth³². Heidegger's deprecation of common speech, his celebration of the poetry of silence and his criticism of linguistic pragmatism seems to open him to the charge of mysticism. Yet, his devotion to the shared, worldly nature of language³³ saves him from it. As we have seen, Heidegger tells us that, in speaking, we silently acknowledge our being-with. Being-in-the-world-with-others is unavoidable. Yet, Heidegger has also been accused of mysticism on other grounds - his own writings are said to be permeated by a mystic-poetic nature:

More and more, especially in the later writings, Heidegger's philosophical comportment resembles that of a prophet who views himself as standing in a position of immediate access to Being. Increasingly, his discourse threatens to make its stand beyond the realm of philosophical statements that are capable of being discursively redeemed. In celebrating the ineffability of Being (or, according to Heidegger's quasi-theological answer to the *Seinsfrage* in the 1946 'Letter on Humanism': 'Yet Being-what is Being? It is *It* itself'), Heidegger risks promoting an intellectual method and style whose distinguishing feature is its 'non-falsifiability'.³⁴

Heidegger admits the affinity of his writings to those of the mystics, most notably those of Meister Eckhart³⁵. This affinity is unproblematic if the worldly nature of language and truth is retained. If the attempt to escape the conceptual and representative language results in giving certain words like Being totemistic powers, then the charge of mysticism must be taken seriously. Heidegger did, however, advocate resistance to this enchantment.

His writing of Being as ~~Being~~ was an attempt to reduce the linguistic totemism that threatens to usurp the philosophical effort to speak questioningly³⁶. Thus, I believe that although Heidegger does confront us with language and ideas that are sometimes strange and different, his overturning of our everyday usage of words and ideas serves to accentuate his emphasis on seeing things in a new light. In addition, many of Heidegger's writings, though philosophically challenging, are written in a deceptively simple style and are completely free of philosophical jargon³⁷.

6.3 Truth

Ernst Tugendhat locates Heidegger's revision of the traditional correspondence theory of truth already in *Being and Time*; an idea that is then further accentuated by Heidegger in subsequent writings such as *On the Essence of Truth*. I showed this development of Heidegger's thought on truth in Chapter 3 of this study. In his essay *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, Heidegger identifies the fall of Western metaphysics with Plato's relocation of truth in the supersensuous sphere of 'Ideas'³⁸. For Heidegger, Platonism represents the fatal move away from things themselves, that is, as they naturally reveal themselves, and towards the 'subjectivisation' of the concept of truth –

truth as what can be thought by human being, from which metaphysics up until now has never fully recovered.

For Tugendhat, the central problem with Heidegger's concept of truth stems from its overgeneralization. In seeking to surpass Husserl and correspondence theory, Heidegger extends the concept of truth to *all* uncovering and *every* disclosedness.³⁹ The result is that the difference between a 'true' uncovering of entities from uncovering as such is effaced. Thus, in seeking an ontologically more primordial stratum of truth, Heidegger risks regressing both behind the Greek and phenomenological conceptions of truth. Tugendhat says:

By equating the concepts of uncovering, disclosedness, and unconcealedness as such with truth there results an overall loss, despite the real gain in insight which these concepts contain in and for themselves. This is true not only because in the case of truth as assertion, something that is already known loses its clarity. In addition, the new possibilities for broadening the truth-relation which this standpoint has opened up remain unutilized: instead of broadening the concept of truth itself, Heidegger has given the word truth another meaning.⁴⁰

In the modern Western philosophical tradition, 'reality' is understood as the realm of material objects that exist outside and independently of the human subject. As we have seen, Heidegger aims to overturn this subject-object division. He tells us that the scandal of philosophy is that proofs to demonstrate that reality is 'real' in the sense described above 'are expected and (are) attempted again and again'⁴¹. For Heidegger, this expectation arises from a failure to properly understand the nature of Dasein's relation to his world – being-in-the-world. It is in this context that we should view Heidegger's ideas on truth.

It is true that Heidegger does give truth another, more original meaning, but I believe that he does not intend this meaning to usurp all other meanings of truth. In *On the Essence of Truth*, he explicitly states that:

A statement is invested with its correctness by the openness of comportment; for only through the latter can what is opened up really become the standard for the presentative correspondence. Open comportment must let itself be assigned this standard. This means that it

must take over a pre-given standard for all presenting. This belongs to the openness of comportment. But if the correctness (truth) of statements becomes possible only through this openness of comportment, then what first makes correctness possible must with more original right be taken as the essence of truth.⁴²

In the context of Heidegger's project of overcoming metaphysical thinking, this delving into a more original meaning of truth is essential. Seeing truth as meaning only the correspondence between a statement and 'reality' forces us to remain caught up in a vision of human being and world as subject and object.

6.4 Language

In his prevailing concern with that which is nearest to us, Heidegger focuses our attention on a phenomenon that easily escapes our notice: language. Unlike many philosophical analyses of language that treat it descriptively, Heidegger asks us to acknowledge language as the pivotal phenomenon out of which all our thinking and doing is configured. In our time, various forces have mounted an attack against language as we customarily know it. These forces are overtly technological in character, but a certain type of philosophical thinking also reinforces them. Their goal is to replace 'natural language' with 'information language' that can strip away connotative vagueness and make language an instrument. Computer programming languages exemplify this undertaking in our time. Heidegger's attribution of language to a crucially central role calls us back to look at this element of our existence questioningly.

For Heidegger, language allows the world to be seen as something more than the mere conglomeration of unintelligible particulars, and transforms it into a semantic world where both differences and similarities can be seen, preserved, explored and deepened⁴³. Yet, Heidegger's emphasis on the semantic function of language does not commit him to a *Sprachidealismus*, since he does not view language as imposing a meaning on an indifferent and foreign reality. Rather, Heidegger sees language and reality as mutually illuminating – changes in the world necessitate changes in language, and changes in language affect what we can understand about the world.

It is, however, problematic when Heidegger claims that '... in the Greek language what is said in it is at the same time in an excellent way what it is called ... What is present immediately lies before us. Through the audible Greek word we are directly in the

presence of the thing itself, not first in the presence of a mere word sign'.⁴⁴ It is true that language is always more than mere word signs, but it never completely escapes this role, either in Greek antiquity or the present day. Indeed, language allows the disclosure of difference precisely because it balances between Being and beings without ever reducing itself to the pure invocation of the former or the solely instrumental designation of the latter.

It is also problematic that Heidegger extols the '... special inner kinship between the German language and the language of the Greeks and their thought'.⁴⁵ He would declare German to be, along with the Greek language, one of the most powerful and spiritual languages⁴⁶. To salvage the profound core of Heidegger's insights on language, we must deny him this 'linguistic chauvinism'. Human being, not national being is the shepherd of Being, and this shepherding takes place by way of words that summon ontological, not ethnic difference.

According to Young⁴⁷, although Heidegger does exhibit a persistent tendency to privilege his native language, he does not seem to privilege it over all languages. As evidence, Young notes that in the Nietzsche lectures, for example, Greek, German and Sanskrit are identified as implicitly philosophical and metaphysical and therefore are distinguished above every other language. In addition, Young mentions that in the *Dialogue on Language* between Heidegger and a Japanese visitor, it seems that Heidegger views the Japanese and perhaps also the East Asian languages to be at least equal to any European language in terms of their philosophical capabilities. From this Young concludes that the scope of Heidegger's philosophico-linguistic chauvinism appears to be confined to modern European languages.

I would argue with Young that '... Heidegger's essential thinking excludes linguistic chauvinism'.⁴⁸ Young believes that it is on the basis of the fact that Heidegger regards all languages and all language users to be on the same level, that he can say that language (not the German Language), is the house of Being, and that human being (not the German) is the guardian of Being.

Heidegger's increasing emphasis on the linguisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*) of human being's way of being, and his assertion that Being leads human being and calls him, so that in the end it is not human being, but Being that shows itself are of incalculable significance for theory of understanding. It makes the essence of language its hermeneutical

function of bringing a thing to show itself. It means that the discipline of interpretation becomes more than mere analysis and explanation.

6.5 Technology

Heidegger's insights into the nature of technology are valuable. Technology's incessant gathering of everything into standing reserve, the sciences' refining of everything in accordance with their presuppositions, philosophy's preoccupation with subjectivity as the sole arena within which anything is, the arts' overriding concern with the impact that their offerings will make on the feelings of their audiences – all these Heidegger shows us as exemplary of a single mindset and a single way of dealing with reality. Once we are on the trail of Heidegger's trenchant analyses, we cannot think of the phenomena of our time without considering the rightness of his characterisations. Yet, is it plausible to agree with Heidegger that all human activity is reduced to *Ge-stell* in our time?

The Enframing (*Ge-stell*) that for Heidegger holds sway throughout everything in our time, rules as an exploitative happening. Via the purposeful planning and ever-calculative behaviour of human being, the Enframing gathers everything as something to serve some projected end. The impression given by Heidegger is one of the relentless advance of ruthlessly exploitative happening, whose ruling displays itself in a structured complex of relationships and occurrences that follow on one another with unwavering precision. Is this in fact what confronts us in the technological realm? Does the implementing of technologically motivated processes actually move forward with the unswerving directness that Heidegger's depiction seems to suggest? Is the reduction of all human activity to *Gestell* just another form of totalising thinking that does not take into account the plurality of ways and the nuanced character of the contemporary world?

Heidegger does not explicitly consider that technologically motivated behaviour might itself be flawed and less than wholly successful within the technological sphere itself. Human activity, often heedless, inefficient or perverse, constantly contributes intrinsically to the structuring and detailed working out of the accomplishments that are underway. Heidegger does not consider that the technological attitude itself may be flawed by this activity.

Phillip Fandozzi, in *Nihilism and Technology: A Heideggerian Investigation* (1982), confronts Heidegger's position regarding the character of our time with evidence from

literature, philosophy and social science among others. Fandozzi shows that Heidegger's view of the modern period as issuing at once in nihilism and technology is widely traceable and shared. Yet, Fandozzi tells us that Heidegger's thought fails to attend adequately to features of our time that are evident in the work of others – i.e. the attractiveness of technology and the experience of meaninglessness.

I agree with Fandozzi that Heidegger's view of the modern period as being immersed in nihilism and technology is accurate, but the fact that Heidegger identifies the technological compoment as decisive for our age does not imply that he denies all other movements within this dominant way of thinking. As I mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the fact that the technological compoment is a 'major throughfare' in our time, does not deny the existence of other 'alternate routes'. Heidegger is outlining broad currents of ideas which have flowed through time contingently, which happen to have run together to shape the mainstream of contemporary thought.

According to Marsh:

The Heideggerian account of technology as *Ge-stell*, or enframing, confuses in an undifferentiated fashion at least four different realities - two legitimate and two illegitimate. The first, technology, is valid as a form of knowledge and praxis, and the second, technocracy, is an incorrect equating of technology with all knowledge and praxis. The third is a beneficial uncoupling of system from life-world; the emergence of a market economy in the modern era allows for production, distribution, and consumption of goods and commodities that is much more efficient and universal than the old economic mechanisms. The fourth is the colonization of life-world by system; the inappropriate intrusion of economic models and criteria into political, social and cultural spheres is an example of such colonisation.⁴⁹

Marsh defends the first and third senses of technology and criticises and rejects the second and fourth. He believes that Heidegger's account 'flattens out differences' and ascribes the pathology of the modern only to technology, rather than to class or group domination. For Marsh, the pathology of modernity consists in the misuse of technology in the service of class or group domination.

I believe that Marsh's understanding of Heidegger's concept of technology is fundamentally flawed, and that this flawed conception results in his indictment of Heidegger's view as one that denies the fact that technology is misused in the service of class or group domination. Marsh remains mired in viewing technology in the instrumental sense here, rather than in Heidegger's sense of an attitude born out of metaphysics and brought to its culmination within the modern worldview.

The second part of Marsh's criticism is more serious – the idea that Heidegger's view of technology 'flattens out differences' and ascribes the pathology of modernity *only* to technology. Yet, Walter Biemel tells us that to regard Heidegger's explanation of technology as the only possible one is something that Heidegger himself would disallow.⁵⁰ He says:

What matters here is not to acknowledge someone's authority; what does matter is at last to ask in what condition twentieth-century man exists. To preserve one's freedom, to set in motion a questioning that renders our own selves open to question – that is what matters. Nothing is easier than to be intoxicated by the triumphs of technology or simply to condemn technology by pointing out its negative aspects. In Heidegger's inquiry into the nature of technology, what happens is something different, namely, the attempt to give to technology the status that is due to it.⁵¹

6.6 *Gelassenheit*

Releasement towards things (*Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*) is a term that Heidegger borrows from Meister Eckhardt⁵². The problem with this concept as Heidegger uses it is summarised by Ballard:

I shall go no further than to observe that Heidegger points the way from Gestell to *Gelassenheit*, but it is difficult to discern all the steps which must lie along this way. To describe 'releasement' so as to eliminate the unintended overtones of mysticism, perhaps of 'misology', to clarify the movement of transcendence from Gestell to this releasement, and to specify the relation between the use of mind characteristic of Gestell and that characteristic of releasement, these are tasks which require completion if a philosophical point of vantage is fully to be gained from which the

human world may be envisaged and if the danger which lurks in Gestell is to be seen clearly and neutralized.⁵³

In other words, Ballard is looking for a step-by-step 'recipe' which explains how to escape from the grip of the technological attitude into that of *Gelassenheit*. It seems to me that in his criticism of Heidegger on this point, in asking for a 'recipe', Ballard is merely demonstrating that he is still caught up in the technological way of thinking. When we ask how such a thinking characteristic of *Gelassenheit* is possible, we cannot respond with a ready-made set of prescriptions, since this response is characteristic of the technological attitude itself. We may also question whether another kind of thinking is indeed ever possible, since we are dominated by metaphysico-technical thinking? Will this new kind of thinking not be just another form of metaphysico-technical thinking? Heidegger is aware of this problem, and contends that this other thinking can only be prepared, that it can always only remain a task.

For Heidegger, the holding sway of technology is '... never a fate or destiny that compels; for Dasein becomes truly free insofar as it belongs to the realm of mission and thus becomes a listener [*Hörender*], though not one who simply submits [*Höriger*]'⁵⁴. Although it is of great import to perceive the danger of our technological constructions in order that they no longer dominate us, it is unnecessary to forswear them completely. Yet, for Heidegger, the alternative to becoming slaves of our own machines is not simply to become their masters. The goal is to integrate technology within a bounded worldly dwelling no longer structured by possessive mastery. Heidegger describes the comportment required to disengage ourselves from possessive mastery and achieve an appropriate relation to technology: Neither pessimism nor cynicism, nor heroic self-assertion is called for. We can say both 'yes' and 'no' to technology by having an attitude of releasement toward things. Awaiting and receiving, openness and releasement are summoned by recollective thinking. Releasement towards things and openness to the mystery grant us the prospect of dwelling in the world in an entirely different way: a way where the mood of homelessness has been displaced. Until this takes place, our attempts to have power over the products of technology will only perpetuate our subordination to its imperative.

6.7 Technology and Ecology

In order to investigate how helpful the proposal of *Gelassenheit* is in the light of our complex technological situation today, we can ask whether Heidegger's ideas on

technology provide us with the means for a rethinking of action, especially in terms of ecological practice? I contend that this question itself is flawed in the context of Heidegger's thinking on technology, and that in asking it, we are exhibiting a major misunderstanding of his ideas in this regard.

The question has been answered in the negative by many theorists: Caputo believes that Heidegger's thought does not provide us with this means: '...Heidegger's hope is too enervating and Being-historical for me, too removed from the actual needs and the real destitution of those who have been deprived of hope'⁵⁵. Otto Pöggeler admits that Heidegger lacks even the 'beginnings of an explicit political analysis of the circumstances as it is created by world civilisation'⁵⁶ and Karsten Harries maintains that Heidegger's view of technology is one-dimensional and only presents a 'caricature' of our world.⁵⁷

The word ecology is derived from the Greek *oikos*, which means house, home or dwelling. Ecological practice is therefore about the care-taking of our earthly dwelling place. Heidegger's ecological credentials have become a frequent topic of discussion amongst philosophers and environmental ethicists⁵⁸, but I believe that one must be wary of simple translations of Heideggerian philosophy into ecological theory. Why? Heidegger insists that human being is to be defined primarily not as the shepherd of beings, but rather as the shepherd of Being. Thus, Heidegger's is an ontological project, not a naturalistic one. I would also agree with Zimmerman who asserts that Heidegger's views are so much more radical than most ecologically minded thinkers, since most continue to see human being as the 'husbander' of nature who has the 'right' to manipulate it.⁵⁹

Heidegger supports a non-anthropocentric approach to the earth, but he does not suggest that we replace anthropocentrism with biocentrism. Intrinsic to most deep ecological perspectives, biocentrism places the human species on the same level as all other organisms. On the contrary, Heidegger firmly maintains human exceptionality. He does this because of his assertion of Dasein's unique disclosive capabilities. Non-human animals cannot engage in philosophical, artistic or political work in which the disclosure of Being in thought, word or deed occurs, because they lack freedom. Our capacity for disclosive freedom is what makes our brief time on earth exceptional. There is a special place reserved for human being in Heidegger's world, because it is in that place that freedom appears.

Heidegger is clear that giving ontological priority to human being in no way suggests that the natural world exists solely for our benefit. Disclosive freedom only appears in the absence of the possessive mastery that underlies such an assumption. Human being is the 'highest' being only to the extent that human being gains release from all self-aggrandising subjectivism.

Herbert Marcuse aims to show how human being can bring about changes in himself through praxis, which will enable the overcoming of technology.⁶⁰ In the end, however, he admits that he can find no effective action that can lead humankind out of its predicament. For Heidegger, only releasement will allow man to dwell within the world, not as its master, but as the being which exists in a relation of openness to Being.

Heidegger observes that we cannot escape from *Das Ge-stell* through pure willfulness. The problem of technology is one of willfulness itself. Technology is symptomatic of a subjectivist and anthropomorphic *Ge-stell* of the world and so the attempt to master *Das Ge-stell* is self-defeating.

The strength of the Heideggerian interpretation of technology, according to Janicaud⁶¹, consists in '... showing its unity, in tracing its metaphysical genealogy, in tearing through the horizon and reaching its immense powers - which have partly come to pass'. Janicaud points out that the weakness of Heidegger's interpretation consists in presupposing that entering this essence will prepare a decisive reversal in an almost Hegelian fashion - as though, after realising that its greatness has been penetrated, technology allowed itself to be tamed, or as though this awareness were dependent on an ontological structure. Janicaud feels that if nothing beckons us but an awaiting possible, perhaps we must admit that the possible is manifested in a plurality of unassuming ways, and that no saving power will ever completely emerge from the danger.

As I have already mentioned in the first section of this chapter, I do not believe that Heidegger's intention was to assert that the history of Being occurs in a determined, Hegelian fashion. With Kolb, I assert that the process of metaphysical deformation that Heidegger decries in the history of philosophy has not, in any of its aspects, progressed by reason of a dialectical compulsion⁶².

Attempts to force Heidegger's ideas into a framework of action forget his intention of escaping the willfulness inherent to the technological attitude. He tells us explicitly that 'Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.'⁶³

It is in this sense that I think that trying to fit Heidegger's work into an 'ecological' framework of action might convert it into the very willing which it is trying to escape. In our time, the world will remain largely and permanently technological, but we can launch an incisive critique of technology that exposes the hegemony of its present reign. From, this, Heidegger believes that the saving power could grow. Admittedly, Heidegger does not give us much in terms of a political programme for change in terms of action, but in view of his definition of technology, this is warranted.

Heidegger wants us to respond to the question 'What shall we think?' rather than 'What shall we do?' Thought must first save us from our typical modes of behaving, namely those oriented towards possessive mastery. Thus, when we now return to the original question posed in this section, we can see that the question itself is inappropriate in terms of Heidegger's ruminations on the technological mindset.

It is understandable that many eco-philosophers and environmentalists have enthusiastically received Heidegger's critiques of technology. Yet,

... few of them appreciate the place that technology has in Heidegger's historical scheme as the final 'abandonment of Being', and even if his critique appeals to few of the concepts – 'sustainable development', 'intrinsic values in nature', and so on – that today's environmentalists, 'shallow' or 'deep', typically employ when complaining of modern technology.⁶⁴

I conclude then that although Heidegger's work on technology is valuable to us, it cannot be simply translated into a theory of action to support the strategies of environmentalists and ecologists.

6.8 Freedom

No theoretical aspect of Heidegger's work has given rise to more controversy and heated debate than his attitude towards freedom. On the one hand, according to Dallmayr⁶⁵, he is reproached for having carried the modern concept of freedom to an absurd point. On the other hand, his writings are claimed to endorse a complete dismantling of human freedom and willing. Accordingly, Heidegger is seldom acknowledged as a philosopher of freedom. Thiele⁶⁶ asserts that there are two reasons for Heidegger's work seldomly being seen as having important implications for our understanding of freedom. The first is Heidegger's own political biography. For many, Heidegger's prerogative to investigate freedom should be irreversibly revoked because of his fervent support of National Socialism while serving as the rector of Freiburg University and his subsequent reluctance to atone for, or even come to terms with the significance of his involvement.

The second reason is that Heidegger articulates freedom in a way that takes us beyond traditional formulations. As such, either his formulations are considered overly idiosyncratic and hence irrelevant to standard debates, or his perspective (particularly of technology) is held to leave little room for liberty of any kind.

During his politically active career as rector of Freiburg University, Heidegger adopted a positive concept of liberty, locating freedom in the mastery of a self that prescribes its own law. At this time, he stated that 'To give law to oneself is the highest freedom.'⁶⁷ Positive liberty is a freedom to - it signifies a freedom to do. Positive liberty does not, however, entail that one can do whatever one desires, but rather what one should desire, unhindered by internal constraints, such as irrational drives or false consciousness. Positive freedom is freedom to be the most one can be.

After his rectorate, Heidegger eventually abandoned his advocacy of a nationalistic positive liberty, yet he did not move in the direction of a negative liberty. Instead, he developed a new understanding of freedom - freedom seen as an event or happening. Freedom, for Heidegger, is proposed as a disclosive letting-be - a freedom that celebrates care-taking, rather than mastery.

The essence of freedom is originally not connected with the will or even with the causality of human willing. Freedom governs the free space in the

sense of the cleared, that is to say, the revealed. To the occurrence of revealing, i.e., of truth, freedom stands in the closest and most intimate kinship ... All revealing comes out of the free, goes into the free, and brings into the free. The freedom of the free consists neither in unfettered arbitrariness nor in the constraint of mere laws.⁶⁸

For Heidegger, every act of freedom is a foreclosing of alternatives and possibilities. Freedom is not absolute liberty in the sense of an unbounded power to do, move and create. Freedom is freedom to reveal what is. Human being, as a bounded circle of disclosure, displays its freedom to the extent that it remains open to the inexhaustible mystery of Being in its bounded disclosing of beings.

Heidegger's conception of freedom can also be seen as fully actualised in the transpiring of human existing in authenticity – freedom is the transpiring of openness as fully accordant with the happening that brings it into play, as that openness is accomplished in conscious awareness, via which alone it can be genuinely carried out.

For Heidegger, freedom is then fundamentally an openness, as well as a letting-be. By attending to technology as enframing, Heidegger tells us that we are:

...already sojourning within the free space of destining, a destining that in no way confines us to a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology or, what comes to the same, to rebel helplessly against it and curse it as the work of the devil. Quite to the contrary, when we once open ourselves expressly to the *essence* of technology we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim.⁶⁹

Heidegger's 'freedom' does not include a human capacity for independently undertaken choice and what we might call self-disposal, i.e. it does not include a capacity not to accord with the happening of Being. The fact that human beings can do nothing other than serve the ruling of Being limits the meaning of freedom as Heidegger understands it. Every individual's pursuing of his way is determined immediately from out of Being. As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, however, this does not imply a determinism. Being, for Heidegger, is the 'abyss' – anything but a stable foundation for our conceptual reductions and reconstructions.

A Cartesian orientation that objectifies the world fuses our identity and behaviour in a specific way. The world becomes raw material for representation, acquisition, domination and control by the subject. The dangerous self-confidence expressed in humanity's unsustainable exploitation of the earth is the product of this equation of freedom and sovereign power. Humanity is now threatened by the ecological limits of a world it has unceasingly sought to possess and master. If, on the other hand, we discover our dignity in a freedom that is not equated with acquisitive control, I believe that our politics and lives will be transformed accordingly.

We are not free because we mentally or physically master our fate by either submitting to or exploiting its decrees. Rather, we are free when we release ourselves from the will to master the world, and thus open ourselves to its mystery. One may suspect that Heidegger has simply redefined 'freedom', using verbal gymnastics to address a concrete problem. Yet, Heidegger is not proposing a solution by linguistic fiat. A change in the meaning of freedom follows only from changes in the actual experience of freedom. What threatens the earth's ecological well-being is not so much the variety of our technological capacities as the uniformity of our technological drive. This drive has its limits left undefined because of our identification of freedom with possessive mastery. Heidegger describes our freedom as dependent on, rather than limited by our worldly boundaries. Once the boundaries of human being are experienced neither as a threat to human freedom nor an affront to human dignity, the disastrous effort to conquer the earth might end.

The Heideggerian alternative seems to be all too passive to his critics. Does disclosive freedom not reduce us to impotent observers of fate? Is disclosive freedom not a recipe for existential lassitude? Does it not mark the end of humanity's creativity and ingenuity? Heidegger suggests otherwise.

Just as freedom in resoluteness is not arbitrary willfulness, so freedom in letting-be is *not a doing nothing*. Disclosive freedom is always the freedom resolutely to will openness to Being and releasement to beings. Openness and releasement invite activity and thought, and letting-be entails the formation of worldly relationships made all the more dynamic because they are no longer constrained by the habits of possessive mastery. Heidegger tells us that: 'Releasement towards things and openness to the mystery never happen of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking.'⁷⁰

From its inception, freedom in the Western world has remained predominantly in the service of possessive mastery. Disclosive freedom no doubt has its own susceptibilities and pathologies. Openness to the mystery of Being might degenerate into fatalism, and releasement towards things might deteriorate into passivity. Perhaps disclosive freedom can be seen as an invitation to expand horizons, a supplement to the freedoms already won today. Disclosive freedom, properly cultivated, can offer us dignity and stamina in the political struggle against the irresistible power of a technologically driven way of life.

My discussion on Heidegger's conception of freedom opens the way to investigate criticisms launched against him in terms of its correlate – the notion of responsibility. This has been identified by many critics as one of the most important inadequacies of Heidegger's thinking – the consideration of human conduct from what we could call a moral or ethical point of view.

6.9 Ethics in the thought of Martin Heidegger

One of the most striking claims made by many readers of Heidegger's work today is that there is no place for ethics in his philosophy. Heidegger very seldomly uses the word 'ethics' in his work, and when he does, it is mostly to reveal the term's inability to disclose the basic truth of Being. Theodore Kisiel notes that:

The absence of an outspoken ethics is made all the more acute for us now, as we learn more and more about both the 'ontic' and 'ontological' career of this prominent native son of a Germany caught in the thick of the world-historical events of our century.⁷¹

Emmanuel Levinas argues that Heidegger is so preoccupied with giving Being its due, that he fails to do justice to human being who is my neighbour. It is arguable that Levinas is so preoccupied with doing justice to human being that he fails to do justice to non-human being, despite his rare references to our responsibility for 'everything'.

The question I wish to concentrate on here is whether Heidegger's preoccupation with giving Being its due allows human and non-human beings to be given their due. John Llewelyn⁷² concludes that Heidegger's philosophy does leave room for direct proto-ethical responsibility to human and non-human beings, unlike that of Levinas, which only leaves room for human beings. For Llewelyn, proto-ethical responsibility is a

responsiveness which is a responsibility because it is a response to another's need, whether or not that other is a human being or not. It is proto-ethical because that responsibility is inevitably mine. Llewelyn, I think, correctly notes that it is important to remember that Heidegger does insist that the thinking of Being must not be mistaken for ethics in the traditional sense. Llewelyn discusses Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit* in this regard, and notes that *Gelassenheit* prohibits anthropomorphism. It requires that no beings be treated only as objects requisitioned in order to calculate and as far as possible totalise the satisfaction of human need and greed.

In this context, Jean Grondin⁷³ demonstrates that a presuppositionally attuned ontology of Dasein is in fact the overt rehabilitation of the radically ethical and practical from the start. Grondin notes that the events of 1933 have led some to believe that the political error had something to do with a certain typical ontological blindness towards the ethical dimension. Grondin asserts that it appears doubtful that this engagement can be attributed to any absence of an 'ethics' in Heidegger.

For Grondin, the futurally conative 'to-be' of care is ethically even more formal than Kant's *Sollen* (ought), and the tendency to fall from self-determination is akin to the young Hegelian 'self-alienation'. For Grondin, the ultimate ethical thrust of all of Heidegger's formal indications is in their indexical exhortation to individual appropriation and self-actualisation in accord with our differing situations. The absence of a specific ethics in Heidegger's work is a reaction against the traditionally sharp division and fragmentation of disciplines in a philosophy that must always return such divisions to the whole of experience. Thus, the ethical motive in Heidegger expresses itself in the larger concern of preparing a transformed dwelling place on this earth for the human being subject to the epochal destiny of technological nihilism. Grondin asserts that:

If Heidegger did not develop any specific 'ethics', it is only because his entire project, founded as it is on the self-preoccupation of Dasein, which is also 'there' collectively, was ethical from the ground up.⁷⁴

Grondin concludes that Heidegger entered the political arena in the hope that he could direct what he took to be a promising revolution in the direction that was appropriate, because he believed that Dasein must carry responsibility for his situatedness and his community. It is Grondin's contention that Heidegger jumped into the fray in 1933 because he felt he could not remain indifferent to the requirements of his time, thus

putting into practice his own idea of resolute existence. Here, I support Caputo's view when he says that:

On the view I am defending ethics is always already in place, is factually there as soon as there is Dasein, as soon as there is a world. Ethics is not something to be fitted into a world that is somehow constituted prior to it. Ethics constitutes the world in the first place; ethics, as Levinas would insist, is 'first' philosophy⁷⁵.

In his *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger answers Jean Beaufret's question on the relationship between ontology and a possible ethics as follows:

If the name 'ethics', in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that 'ethics' ponders the abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who ek-sists, is in itself the original ethics.⁷⁶

This identification of fundamental thinking and original ethics does not leave any room for ethics in the sense that philosophers before Heidegger conceived of it. I believe that Heidegger's examination of Dasein is a description of human existence immersed in history, but faced with choices concerning self-identity. Yet, Dasein is always tempted to forget history and choice, and remain trapped in present tasks and narrowly defined social roles. Thus, there is little doubt that in his description of Dasein, Heidegger is indeed offering us an ethics. He urges us to be authentic, to see ourselves as part of history, to avoid falling into the traps of the moment and to avoid falling prey to the vision of human being that is represented by traditional metaphysics. Since authenticity and inauthenticity, facticity and fallenness are possibilities for all of us, Heidegger clearly has an ethics. 'Care may be an existential structure of Dasein, but it is also a virtue that has been forgotten by generations of philosophers too concerned with the problems of knowledge'⁷⁷.

Heidegger moves beyond traditional conceptions and offers us a new vision of human being:

Ethics as an ontic technique remains ineffective unless it is put at the service of the ontological inspiration of primordial Being. Ethics as mere doctrine and exhortation of the *homo animalis* remains powerless unless it

has already been rooted in the true ethos, in the original dwellingplace of the homo humanus. And finally, ethics and metaphysics are together in this: that they leave Being unthought⁷⁸.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger destroys the traditional subject-object set of problems, and a new manner of understanding of human being is inaugurated with the concept of *Dasein*. Heidegger, contrary to philosophical attempts to explicate reality from Plato onwards, calls upon us from the beginning to assume a unity among elements and to discover ways in which the elements are related to each other. In this respect, Heidegger's concept of man's being-in-the world comes to mind. Heidegger's philosophy, therefore, is another attempt to dethrone human being as the 'measure' of all things. Similar to the work of Freud, Darwin, Nietzsche and others, Heidegger's vision places human being and his relation to others in a new light.

6.10 Truth and Language in Heidegger's Critique of Technology

According to Heidegger, after Plato, the fundamental attitude of the Western spirit was one in which the subject-object dichotomy came to reign supreme. The climax of this development came with Descartes. Thinking was relegated to the arena of a subjective consciousness, while Being became an object of rational analysis. The act of knowing became a matter of properly ordering and mastering various objective phenomena. Truth came to be measured by the accuracy with which an object measured up to an unattainable idea: an *adequatio rei et intellectus*. Thus:

The relationship drawn by Heidegger between technology, language and truth is so intimate that the indictment of technology automatically casts suspicion on the possibility of a truth-telling discourse. Clearly, this then also has profound implications for all endeavours that are tied to language.⁷⁹

According to Heim:

These three aspects of Heidegger's philosophy fit together. The existential notion of a world implies a criticism of the cumulative truth of history; the critique of cumulative history implies a self-forgetfulness and erosion of responsiveness induced by technology; and the analysis of an all-

enframing technology is one which points to the reduction of the metaphorical powers of language to a single aspect of information management.⁸⁰

I believe that the intimate connection Heidegger draws between the technological compartment, truth and language is most fruitful. It is a strength of his work that he explores the ramifications of the technological attitude with regards to language and our understanding of truth, since it is in these arenas where we most clearly can see the effects of technology. Other philosophers have taken up Heidegger's critique, most notably Hans-Georg Gadamer in his philosophic hermeneutics and Jacques Derrida in his project of deconstruction. Although both philosophers draw on the work of Heidegger, they have pursued widely divergent courses in their treatment of the effect of technology upon the relationship between language and truth.

In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, he develops the themes of truth, language and being as Heidegger set them out. Gadamer's major philosophical concern is the problem of understanding, and his views on the 'scientificity' of thinking and on the relationship between truth and language are stated in the context of this issue. In *Truth and Method*, he decries the virtual identification of understanding in the so-called human sciences with quasi-scientific methods of interpretation⁸¹. Quasi-scientific methods such as those of Schleiermacher and Dilthey replaced the role of humanist ideals, especially in understanding the literary monuments in Western culture. The task of philosophical hermeneutics is to overcome the epistemological truncation by which the traditional science of hermeneutics has been absorbed into the idea of modern science.⁸²

Whereas Heidegger's criticism of technology hinged on the distinction between *technē* and *episteme* in abstraction from *poiesis*, Gadamer's criticism of technological thinking follows from his criticism of scientism in the humanities. In *Truth and Method* he contrasts *technē* with *phronesis*, or moral knowledge. Gadamer notes that despite the similarities that can be drawn between these two kinds of knowing, there are several differences, most notably that we do not learn moral knowledge in the same way that we learn a skill. Also, the instrumental ends of technical knowledge cannot be confused with the moral ends of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* for Gadamer is that 'knowing in the widest sense' which Heidegger attributed to the original meaning of *technē* before it took on exclusively instrumental connotations. *Phronesis* is the alternative ideal for

understanding in a world where thinking has been reduced to the technical mastery of linguistic instruments.

Gadamer echoes Heidegger when he holds that the crisis in our current technological situation is that *technē* has been given over to a calculative mode of thought. Even moral knowledge has been reduced to a calculative mode of thinking. Gadamer tells us:

Not that our society has been completely determined by social technologists, but a novel expectation has become pervasive in our awareness: whether a more rationalised organisation of society, or briefly, a mastery of society by reason and by more rational social relationships may not be brought about by intentional planning. This is the ideal of a technocratic society, in which one has recourse to the expert and looks to him for the discharging of the practical, political and economic decisions one needs to make. Now the expert is an indispensable figure in the technical mastery of processes. He has replaced the old-time craftsman. But this expert is also supposed to substitute for practical and political experience.⁸³

When thinking - both practical and theoretical - is reduced to the sorting of factual information, there follows an increase in information, but not necessarily any strengthening of social reasoning. When one becomes lost in a sea of signs and incoherent bits of information, 'truth' is reduced to technically correct and manipulable information. The difference between truth and falsehood becomes the difference between verifiably correct and erroneous information, and the grounds of meaning disappear.

Gadamer tells us that the only possible response to this crisis is a return to the question of the essence of the human being, to an analysis of human existence based on the a priori assumption that human being is a thinking, knowing being, that coherent fields of meaning can potentially be specified, and that the notion of truth is not merely the stepchild of an outmoded metaphysics. Instead, truth emerges to the degree that understanding takes place within language. Language, according to Gadamer, '...is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all embracing form of the constitution of the world.'⁸⁴ Language is more than the secondary objectification of things signified – it is the medium by which Dasein exists. There can be no historical experience apart from language. We exist as linguistic beings.

Throughout his writing, Gadamer modestly presents his own work as an attempt to develop some of the basic insights that Heidegger had put forward. Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, seems to turn both toward and away from Heidegger.

In Derrida's view, the re-evaluation of the metaphysical tradition, which was initiated by Heidegger, is accelerated to the point where the very possibility of truth-telling discourse is rejected. Derrida's central preoccupation involves dismantling the metaphysical presuppositions of truth and meaning that Western thought has assumed since Plato. In this sense, his project is very similar to Heidegger's. Yet, we do find that Derrida is hostile to the association of Heideggerian thinking with deconstruction in some passages in his texts. In *The Postcard*, for example, Derrida criticises French translators who have identified Heidegger's idea of 'destruction' with Derrida's formulation of the concept of 'deconstruction':

Abbauen: the word that certain French Heideggerians recently have translated as 'to deconstruct', as if all were in all, and always ahead of the caravan. It is true that this translation is not simply illegitimate once it has been envisaged (rather recently). Unless one manipulates an aftereffect precisely in order to assimilate and in order to reconstruct that which is difficult to assimilate⁸⁵.

Derrida insists that deconstruction is different from Heideggerian philosophising, even though he does admit the Heideggerian lineage for deconstructive thought⁸⁶

Derrida attacks the 'privileging' of writing in order to launch a criticism of the metaphysical tradition that places *logos* at the centre of language and thought. In the traditional ordering of things, *logos* stands at the centre of a cosmos, surrounded concentrically by concepts, words, sounds and finally, by the technique of writing.⁸⁷ Within this 'logocentric' cosmos, the origin of writing is closely tied to the emergence of a controlling metaphysical mentality that insists upon a difference between signifier and signified, and upon an ontological priority granted to the latter. The signifier is the technical device by which the signified becomes epistemically present. Writing itself becomes an instrument of calculated control.

In challenging the logocentric metaphysics that writing as inscription presupposes, Derrida challenges the conventional technological ordering of modern society and in his

criticism of technology shares much with Heidegger. Derrida does, however, launch an incisive critique of the 'early' Heidegger in that he asserts that Heidegger remains tied to the notion of a transcendental signified in his analysis of Dasein, and thus to the metaphysical tradition from which he wants to break free. The problem for Derrida is that Heidegger 'would reinstate rather than destroy' Being⁸⁸.

In asking 'What is Being?', the Heidegger of *Being and Time* establishes an 'ontological difference' between Being and beings. In order to speak of the Being of beings, Heidegger must assume Being in the first place, yet this is precisely what he has set out to question. Heidegger becomes caught up in a circular argument – in assuming the very matter he sets out to question, he must use the signifier 'Being' to represent it. Yet, Heidegger constantly reminds us that Being is neither the word nor the concept of Being, and therefore the word 'Being' would seem to assume a hidden signified, Being itself, of which beings are the signifiers. Derrida rejects this line of thinking, and faults Heidegger for maintaining Being in the radically central position it has enjoyed in the history of metaphysics as the entity of entities. Derrida's deconstruction of the remnant of metaphysics in Heidegger is indicated by his adoption of Heidegger's own device – the cancellation of the word Being in the very course of using it (Heidegger indicated this by drawing crossed lines through the word Being). Heidegger explains:

The drawing of these crossed lines [through 'Being'] at first only repels, especially the almost ineradicable habit of conceiving 'Being' as something standing by itself and only coming at times face to face with man.⁸⁹

But for Heidegger, this device need not indicate the exclusion of Being from the essence of the human being:

Man in his essence is the memory of Being...This means that the essence of man is a part of that which in the crossed intersected lines of Being puts thinking under the claim of an earlier demand.⁹⁰

Derrida goes even further, rejecting even this remnant of 'onto-theology'. The metaphysics of presence is rejected. There remains only the 'trace', not meant to be the master word for Derrida that Being was for Heidegger, but the mark of the 'absence of a presence'⁹¹.

Derrida's concern is the metaphysics of presence of Being that even Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche could not overthrow. Heidegger presupposes this metaphysics of presence in his understanding of *technē* as a calling forth into being of that which lies hidden, through meditative thinking. As a result of Derrida's deconstruction of the Heideggerian text, such notions are subverted, and with them, the notion of truth as *aletheia*, or the revealing of Being. The metaphysical conditions for the possibility of expressing truth are rejected by Derrida, for the denial of a coherent unity of meaning is in effect the denial of a truth that can be expressed in language. Instead, any number of arbitrarily assigned ideological slogans stands ready to fill the void. Ultimately, it would seem that the tyranny of technology over language prevails, even after the deconstruction of the foundations of both. Heidegger ends up with a poetic mystagogy, which Derrida finds insufficient, but Derrida ends up with a play of inscriptions, which also seems strangely deficient, but perhaps more convincingly anti-metaphysical.

6.11 Conclusions

No one has been bolder than Heidegger in the endeavour to penetrate the highest and most abstract matters of Being, time and thought. But, Heidegger was always an explorer. He never simply put the language of Being through its rhetorical paces. Many of his explorations ended in dead ends, no doubt, and moreover, the whole enterprise remained for him questionable. Heidegger provides us with no answers, only better ways of posing questions.

Heidegger's path of thought, is, according to Ijsseling, a matter of transgressing the limit, a transgression that, in general, is immediately reprovved or neutralised by the dominant thinking.

A transgression with respect to which a limit, or end, must first be established and with respect to which, finally, a question has to be asked with regard to the determination of this limit, this end. For Heidegger, a limit is never the place where something comes to an end, but, on the contrary, where it begins ... The establishment of a limit, its transgression and the question concerning the determination of the limit, belongs to the problematic at the end of philosophy.⁹²

In our jaded contemporary world, we have become shockproof. To use Heideggerian language: the call of Being has become muted. Heidegger calls on human being to

safeguard the invisibility in the visible, to shepherd Being in the permanent everywhere, to dwell in an age of increasing homelessness, to care for the earth and to restrain technology in an age of possessive mastery⁹³. We live 'dummy-lives'⁹⁴, where human possession and mastery is endlessly creating empty indifferent things – pseudo-things. The dummy-life is seductive, replete with comfort and the enchantments of hyperproductivity. It is also replete with 'liberation' – freedom is everywhere sought and everywhere supplied.

I agree with Thiele when he asserts that many post-modern theorists fail to address the threat of euphoric disengagement and the dummy-lives that many are living⁹⁵. Conformism with socio-economic and cultural conventions are made palatable by the 'spectacular PR maneuver' of postmodern theory⁹⁶. It has 'succeeded in repackaging and marketing ... what had been previously bemoaned as ontological Angst into playfulness and joy: transcendental homelessness for the me-generation'⁹⁷. A turning back to Heidegger may, in my opinion, give us a new way of thinking about the emptiness we face in contemporary times.

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- ¹ J. Sallis (ed.), *Heidegger and the Path of Thinking* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1970), p. 1.
- ² I have not discussed this impact in detail during the preceding chapters. It is, however, interesting to note the affinities between Heidegger's work and Zen Buddhism, for example. See F. Dallmayr, Heidegger and Zen Buddhism: A Salute to Keiji Nishitani in *The Other Heidegger* (London, Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 200.
- ³ R. Rorty, Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism in H. Dreyfus, & H. Hall, *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge/Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 215.
- ⁴ O. Pöggeler. Metaphysics and Topology of Being in Heidegger in Kockelmans, J.J. (ed.), *A Companion to Martin Heidegger's 'Being and Time'* (U.S.A., University Press of America, 1986), p. 244. The use of 'incorporate' as a translation for *verwinden* in this quotation does not completely express the meaning of the German word. I suggest that one should remember that that *verwinden* carries the connotation of 'unsettling' or 'disruption', which the use of the word 'incorporate' does not.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ S. Ijsseling. *Mimesis. Over Schijn en Zijn*. (Baarn, Ambo, 1990), p. 48.
- ⁷ R. Rorty, Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism in H. Dreyfus, & H. Hall, *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge/Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 225.
- ⁸ After Heidegger's active political engagement with National Socialism had ended.
- ⁹ J.D. Caputo, *Demythologising Heidegger* (Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 4.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
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