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Heidegger's Revelation

The End of Enlightenment

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This article treats the philosopher Martin Heidegger as an opponent of a transhistorical ideal of enlightenment—understood as philosophical reflection—and as an advocate for a counter-enlightenment ideal of revealed truth. The author examines Heidegger's treatment of this theme in his early masterwork, *Being and Time*, and in several of his essays of the 1950s. The author concludes that despite the power of Heidegger's assault on enlightenment, his counter-enlightenment project should be resisted.

Keywords: *Heidegger; enlightenment; counter-enlightenment; revelation; philosophy*

Recent scholarship complicates our view of the 18th-century Enlightenment. Where it was once acceptable to refer to a transnational "enlightenment project" to which thinkers in Scotland, England, France, Prussia, and Italy contributed, it is now recognized that writers in these various regions of Europe understood their work to serve a wide range of (often competing and contradictory) theoretical and practical ends. There was, then, no the Enlightenment but rather, a multitude of enlightenments (see Pocock, 1999; Schmidt, 2000).[1]

This article assumes that the old view of a unified enlightenment has perhaps too quickly and easily been abandoned. Not that the diversity to which so much of the new scholarship points can or should be dismissed. But underlying that diversity can be detected a core assumption that was shared by advocates of enlightenment in every cultural and political context. For all of their myriad differences, defenders of enlightenment believed (whether implicitly or explicitly) that truth (regardless of what they held its content to be) could be reached only when received norms, practices, and beliefs were subjected to philosophical-theoretical reflection. Kant (1965) was thus right when he famously pronounced that his was an "age of criticism to which all must submit" (p. 9). This was as true for Locke, Gibbon, Hume, and Smith as it was for Voltaire and Diderot, Mendelssohn, and Beccaria.

Perhaps we have lost sight of this core assumption because we ourselves, as descendents of the Enlightenment, treat reflection and criticism as self-evident goods. This was not the case for defenders of revealed religion in the early modern period, who immediately recognized the threat that reflection posed to the Church, which stands or falls on the unquestioned authority of its claims about revealed truths.[2] And this conflict, in turn, was just the latest of several throughout history, stretching back at least as far as the ancient "counter-enlightenment" backlash against Socratic reflec-

tion in the name of the Athenian gods. Wherever and whenever philosophical reflection has been treated as a human ideal, champions of revelation have sought to depose it (see Lilla, 2003).[3]

In their efforts to suppress reflection, the forces of faith have inevitably found themselves in an extremely difficult position, because to defend particular norms, practices, and beliefs against critical reflection, they must also defend the truth of the particular revelations on which those norms, practices, and beliefs are often based. This challenge has led more sophisticated opponents of the Enlightenment, such as Joseph de Maistre, to bypass the defense of particular revealed truths in favor of an appeal to authority for its own sake, whereas others, such as Carl Schmitt, have embraced a purely formal (contentless) "decision" against reflection.

But what if it were possible to subvert philosophical reflection by defending not the truth of any revelation in particular but instead *revelation as such*? This is the breathtakingly radical ambition of the 20th century's greatest intellectual opponent of philosophical reflection, Martin Heidegger.[4] Throughout his career, Heidegger proposed to treat—and then attempted to think through the implications of treating—truth (in its most fundamental, primordial sense) as something that is disclosed to us prior to any act of philosophical reflection or criticism. Reflection and the philosophical theories it produces stand in a parasitic relation to revealed truth, draining it of the very meaning on which reflection (like all ways of Being-in-the-world) ultimately relies. Heidegger sought nothing less than to awaken us to the derivative and corrosive character of reflection in the hopes that doing so would make it possible for human beings to adopt a more appropriate (reverential) stance toward the revelatory, prereflective disclosure of truth by "Being" itself.

In what follows, I examine Heidegger's treatment of this central theme in his writings, focusing special attention on its elaboration in his early masterwork of 1927, *Being and Time*, and in several essays of the 1950s. I do so with an eye both to illustrating the potency of his critique of enlightenment as a transhistorical human ideal and to indicating why contemporary defenders of enlightenment should resist it.

The Meanings of Being

Human beings exist in a mathematically quantifiable, three-dimensional space. They are confronted by objects of various measurable quantities, large and small. In one direction there is the planet earth and its solar system, the Milky Way galaxy, and the universe as a whole; for some, there is a God "above" or "outside" of this world, acting as its ground or source. In the other direction are the cells of which all life (including human life) is composed, the chemical elements that are the building blocks of all matter, living and inanimate, and at the deepest level, atoms and subatomic particles, which are themselves the building blocks of the elements. In the middle is humankind itself, observing and contemplating this quantifiable world.

According to Heidegger (1962), this outlook on humankind—one that, thanks to the Enlightenment's efforts to promulgate it, has come to be unquestioningly accepted

as true by everyone from scientists and philosophers to poets and peasants—ultimately derives from the ancient Greeks. Pondering the question for the first time in human history of what it means "to be," the pre-Socratic philosophers responded with a perplexing array of suggestions, none of which could be said to constitute a settled answer to the question. But this changed with Plato and Aristotle, each of whom did provide a definitive answer; for both ancient philosophers, as for all subsequent thinkers in the West, "primordial and genuine truth lies in pure beholding" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 215). In other words, in their essence, humans are "rational animals"—philosophers—who theorize about, reflect on, and contemplate the world. It is on the basis of this assumption that, by modern times, humankind came to conceive of itself as existing within a three-dimensional, quantifiable world.

Heidegger's (1962) goal in his early masterwork, *Being and Time*, is to raise the question of the meaning of Being for the first time since Aristotle—and in doing so, to make possible a revolutionary—even epochal—shift in humanity's conception of itself and the world. For the first time in nearly 2,500 years, people might begin to overthrow the tyranny of philosophy and reflection—or at least (in Heidegger's early work) to radically reconceive the former by disattaching it from the latter.

The "World" as Such

The first half[5] of *Being and Time* consists in large part of a detailed phenomenological description of what Heidegger (1962) called *Being-in-the-world*, the thoroughly practical mode of existence in which humans[6] live "proximally and for the most part," prior to any and all philosophical-theoretical reflection. Even Descartes—the philosopher who arguably more radically than any other sought to divorce his speculations from the quotidian dimension of life—spent his life in the mode of Being-in-the-world. In fact, Heidegger claimed that even the philosopher's own contemplative activity must be reinterpreted in light of Being-in-the-world; theoretical reflection is always derivative from and inextricably rooted in the primordial, emphatically practical world.

This world is the totality of our prereflective pursuits involving "ready-to-hand" (or "tool-like") entities, which we use to pursue practical ends (a "for-the-sake-of-which"). For example, the hammer in my workshop is for nailing, the nailing is for fixing the roof of my house, the roof of my house is for sheltering my family, sheltering my family is for the sake of dwelling with its members and in so doing enacting a way of life (a "totality of involvements") that all of us share. Although Heidegger (1962) chose to describe this prereflective world using examples of a workshop, he claimed that this way of "worlding" is "always already" going on, no matter what activity we are engaged in.[7] The pen is "for writing," the computer is "for checking e-mail," the car is "for going to the store," the television is "for relaxing at the end of a hard day," the sunset is "for setting a romantic mood after dinner"—and all of these "tools" are for the sake of living a particular kind of meaningful life. In this "mode" of worlding, which Heidegger dubbed "average everydayness" (*Alltäglichkeit*), the reflective question of why this or that thing is the way it is—let alone why the world as a whole is the way it is or why I

should live for the sake of this as opposed to another way of life—does not arise. One could say that the answer is so obvious that no one thinks to raise the question.

As Division I of Heidegger's (1962) *Being and Time* continues, we learn that humans are "thrown" into a particular world at birth and face at nearly every moment the prospect of having to choose among a range of concrete "outstanding possibilities" for existence. There are many such possibilities within each world—as various and variable as the worlds themselves. A 21st-century American has the possibility of becoming an "entrepreneur," a "burger flipper," a "homemaker," an "antiglobalization protester," a "serial killer," a "good husband," a "computer technician," an "angry White male," a "deadbeat dad," a "loser," a "feminist," an "environmental lobbyist," and so forth. Becoming a "samurai warrior," however, is not a possibility. Even if a particular American trains to be a samurai, learns everything about samurai, and moves to Japan, that person will fail to become a samurai—because the world in which being a samurai was a possibility no longer exists. Samurai themselves still "are"—but only as an object of scholarly curiosity and (in the case of our hypothetical 21st-century American) romantic nostalgia.

Reflection as "Privation"

Heidegger (1962) was especially interested in examining two outstanding human possibilities in particular, each of which is a permanent feature of all worlds. One is the fundamental ontological shift in outlook that occurs with the emergence of philosophy from average everydayness. According to Heidegger, human beings find their way around the world using a special kind of "sight" that he called "circumspective concern." In its light, every tool has its purpose, its place, and its suitability, which it acquires from the "equipment context" as a whole. The pen is "in the drawer"; the hammer is "too heavy for the task"; the screwdriver "has the wrong head for the screw"; the sports car is "just what I needed to soothe my midlife crisis"; and so forth. It is this special "vision" that defines and governs prereflective human life.

But there are times when this vision falters. When a tool breaks, when it gets lost, or when something is left out of place or undone, the equipment context shatters.[8] Suddenly the tool becomes "present" in a way it never was before. When it breaks, I must treat it as an object to be examined; instead of being too-heavy-for-the-task, it is now 2.3-pounds-with-an-iron-head-glued-to-a-wooden-handle (cf. Heidegger, 1962, p. 412). In a similar manner, when the hammer is lost, I set out to look for it, and in doing so the equipment context shows up in a new way: I begin to notice the spatial locations of the various tools in the workshop—or rather, the workshop "appears" for the first time as a place containing objects with various spatial locations. The same kind of shift occurs when a tool is out of place; suddenly I begin to gaze on the equipment context as something obtrusive, that stands out, drawing attention to itself. In all three cases, the circumspective concern that lights up the prereflective world gets "dimmed down" and a particular entity within that world gets decontextualized and de-worlded—for the first time, that entity becomes an object of possible theoretical reflection. The ready-to-hand object now reveals itself as something "present-at-hand."

At first, this ontological shift is temporary and it serves practical ends (*praxis*); we gaze on the tool objectively to fix it, find it, or put it back in its place—and we do that to set it back to work within the equipment context. In most cases, searching for a misplaced car key does not inspire me to reflect on the character of keys as such, or the chemical composition of the missing key, or role that keys or cars play in our lives more generally; on the contrary, I simply want to find my car key so that I can drive to work to earn my paycheck to support my family and so forth. As soon as the reason for the momentary diversion from the totality of ready-to-hand equipment has been removed, the key ceases to be present and reverts back to its proper place in my world.

Yet as the history of the West since the Enlightenment so vividly shows, it is also possible for human beings to treat the achievement of a present-at-hand standpoint on objects as an end in itself—as the for-the-sake-of-which toward which all worldly involvements are aimed. Of course, the philosophers and scientists who do so continue to live for the most part, like everyone else, within a prereflective equipment context. This is true even in the very act of philosophic and scientific reflection, when philosophers and scientists employ ideas and experimental devices as tools that enable them to strive for their goal of worldless detachment. But the fact that the philosophic or scientific outlook uses a totality of ready-to-hand equipment for the sake of achieving a state of detached "gazing on" that normally prevails only when the equipment context breaks down, means that as a mode of Being-in-the-world, this outlook is profoundly pathological. As Heidegger (1962) wrote, when human beings concern themselves with "becoming rid of . . . Being-in-the-world," the result is a world characterized by superficiality—by "idle talk" (*Gerede*), by mere "curiosity" (*Neugier*), by "restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters," by the longing for the "constant possibility of distraction" (pp. 214-216). In such a world, a person will happen on a wholly "new kind of Being" in which one must "constantly uproot" oneself in an attempt to reach a state of "*never dwelling anywhere*" (*Aufenthaltslosigkeit*) from which one will (presumably) be capable of "seeing the 'world' merely as it *looks* while one tarries and takes a rest" (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 216-217).

For Heidegger (1962), this is a false outlook on the world—one that dramatically distorts its true character. Not only is it mistaken to believe that one attains a greater understanding of the world when one ceases to act within its ready-to-hand equipment context and instead stands back from and gazes on it in a state of present-at-hand detachment. But more profoundly, such an outlook fails to understand that an advanced scientific account of the world (such as mathematical physics) is possible only on the basis of what Heidegger called a "projection" of a view of beings as a whole (i.e., "nature"). Scientists do not merely discover "facts" about a world that are already present before them, as empiricists would claim; rather, scientists mathematically "project" nature itself:

> In this projection something constantly present-at-hand (matter) is uncovered beforehand, and the horizon is opened so that one may be guided by looking at those constitutive items in it which are quantitatively determinable (motion, force, location, and time). Only "in the light" of a Nature which has been projected in this fashion can anything like a

> "fact" be found and set up for an experiment regulated and delimited in terms of this projection. (pp. 413-414)

Far from telling us about "the way things are," scientists first adopt (or project) an outlook on beings as a whole and then seek to provide an exhaustive account of the whole in terms that are compatible with this outlook. When seen in the light of Heidegger's phenomenology of Being-in-the-world, this adoption of an outlook on beings as a whole cannot help but appear to be a constriction or narrowing of one's view of the world, not an expansion of it. For Heidegger, philosophers and scientists fundamentally misunderstand themselves and misconstrue the true character of the world and the place of human beings within it.

It is important to note how foreign—and indeed, diametrically opposed—this account is to the traditionally philosophic standpoint that the members of the Enlightenment understood themselves to be championing. The traditional view received its classic formulation in the "allegory of the cave" presented by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. In this image, philosophical enlightenment is described as a process of liberation from imprisonment in a cave where shadows of beings (false opinions about them) are mistaken for truth. Eventually the philosopher escapes the cave, leaving behind its illusions to dwell in the light of the "ideas" (or true "looks" of the beings). Heidegger (1962), by contrast, described the same process in wholly negative terms: "The 'emergence' of the theoretical attitude" consists, he claimed, in the "*disappearance* of *praxis*"; that is, because "'practical' concern" is the "primary and predominant kind of Being" that human beings possess, "the ontological possibility of 'theory' will be due to the *absence* of *praxis*—that is, of a *privation*" (p. 409). Although Heidegger clearly rejected the assumption underlying Plato's allegory (namely, that there is a region of theoretical truth outside of the practical world into which we are thrown), it is not entirely inaccurate to say that for Heidegger, the rise of philosophical reflection amounts to the digging of a "cave beneath the cave"; what appears to the advocate of philosophical-scientific enlightenment to be an ascent to a higher truth is in fact a descent from or a distortion of the true human situation. The quest for philosophical-scientific enlightenment, in other words, leads not to wisdom but to obfuscation.[9]

The Ground and the Abyss of the World

The account of Being-in-the-world in Division I of *Being and Time* is intended as a sketch of the broad outlines of the human situation as Heidegger (1962) understood it. Some of the most accessible and rhetorically powerful passages in his writings and lectures are attempts simply to describe the everyday experience of the world and defend it against those who would dismiss it as "unscientific."[10] Yet we would be wrong to think that Heidegger's ultimate goal is to defend average everydayness as a human ideal. On the contrary, despite his abiding sympathy and appreciation for conservative and rural, even peasant, ways of life, especially when contrasted with urban cosmopolitanism, Heidegger's philosophical project points in a very different direction, toward the affirmation of a much more radical human possibility.[11]

The key to understanding this possibility is Heidegger's (1962) account of "moods," and the mood of anxiety (*angst*) in particular. Far from being a subjective psychological state that interferes with, by distorting or enhancing, the experience of a neutral world of objective facts, the mood of anxiety, for Heidegger, discloses the deepest truth about the human situation. One could say that anxiety enables Heidegger to proceed to the next level in his excavation of human life: Just as phenomenological description reveals that philosophical reflection is grounded in Being-in-the-world, so an intense focus on the experience of anxiety shows that Being-in-the-world is itself grounded in something even more fundamental or primordial.

Anxiety can be grasped most clearly by comparing it to the mood of fear, with which it is in some ways akin. Fear is inspired by an identifiable threatening object within the world—Heidegger (1962) gave the example of a tiger lurking "over there," just behind a patch of nearby brush—whereas anxiety can be described as fear in the face of nothing at all. I fall into the mood of anxiety when I begin to sense that despite my attachment to the world and my myriad involvements in it, I am, in fact, a finite being who confronts the prospect of my own death—and, hence, the end of myself and my world—at every moment of my life. Anxiety discloses, in other words, that my "own most outstanding possibility"—the one that unlike all other possibilities, cannot be outstripped—is absolute annihilation.

Anxiety thus reveals that beneath the seeming solidity of the world and its for-the-sake-of-which there is, quite literally, nothing. The world (in which I am "fallen" and "stuck") and its ends (to which I devote myself in everything I do) are fundamentally arbitrary and contingent. The world could easily have been quite different than it is and thus I could have been quite different than I am—or I could have been thrown into a completely different world, in which case I would have devoted myself just as intently to completely different (but equally arbitrary and contingent) ends. Everything that matters to me—everything that I care[12] about, including most of all, myself—floats, mysteriously, over the gaping maw of an abyss.

When we turn back to our involvements in light of what is disclosed in the mood of anxiety—in the state that Heidegger (1962) famously called "anticipatory resoluteness" regarding our finitude—the world appears quite different than it did before (in other, less intense and existential and thus also for Heidegger, less clarifying, moods). What once appeared to be a rock-solid, unquestionable given—namely, the sense of meaning and purpose that prevails within my world—now appears to be the product of a mysterious emergence or disclosure of truth from out of the nothingness that precedes, surrounds, and underlies every world. Put somewhat differently, anxiety discloses to us that beneath or prior to my prereflective understanding of the beings that make up my world is the origin or source of that understanding, which Heidegger called Being (*Sein*) as such.

Precisely what Heidegger meant by Being is notoriously difficult to determine, not least because there is evidence that Heidegger's understanding of it changed to some extent throughout his career.[13] In the terms employed in *Being and Time*, however, it is possible to say that for Heidegger (1962), Being is the ungraspable and unmasterable

source of the meaning that permeates every human world; hence, Heidegger's repeated use of the term *meaning of Being* to describe the subject of his inquiry in *Being and Time*.

In other words, Being is that from which the truth that holds sway within every human world arises. Truth in this primordial sense should not be confused with the theoretical and "commonsense" understanding of truth as the correctness of an assertion or proposition. Although Heidegger never denied that the latter is a valid way to think of truth—and indeed, his own numerous discussions of truth inevitably employ assertions that he obviously held to be correct—he maintained that the condition of the possibility of the truth or falsehood of an assertion is a prior, propositionally inexplicable, revelatory "unconcealment" (*aletheia*, in Greek). This, for Heidegger, was the primordial meaning of truth: the revelation of meaning (by, in some sense, Being itself) that establishes a human world in a heretofore "open region" (somewhat like a house that mysteriously appears on an open plot of land). It is only on the basis of this prior unconcealment that it becomes possible to make an assertion and thus begin to construct a philosophical or scientific system at all (Heidegger, 1998b, p. 144; cf. also, Heidegger, 1962, p. 256ff). In Heidegger's thought, revelation everywhere and always trumps reason.

This is the early Heidegger's substitute for philosophical-scientific enlightenment: an anxious leap into an awareness of the groundlessness of human existence and meaning. For his project to succeed, Heidegger needed to inspire an existential crisis (an anxious mood) in his readers, which he did by presenting a highly formalistic account of the prereflective world that relativizes the content of every particular world. That is, Heidegger set out to provoke an existential crisis that would reveal the true groundlessness of all human worlds.[14] And he believed or hoped that this crisis and the vision of meaninglessness that accompanies it would prepare the way for the emergence of a new world—one purged of the distortions and degradations of enlightened reflection.[15]

The End of Enlightenment

For anyone sympathetic to the enlightened ideal and aware of its fragility, there is something especially chilling about Heidegger's project after the end of World War II. The late Heidegger attempted nothing less than to eviscerate the critical intellect as such, to extricate it from the mind once and for all. He sought to do so by initiating a new form of thinking—one from which reflection and criticism, and especially self-criticism, have been thoroughly exorcised. Once this had been accomplished, it would become possible for humankind to receive a new revelation of truth that could ground a new world without reflection—a world permanently closed to enlightenment. To think with Heidegger in his late writings is thus to abandon enlightenment as a human ideal altogether.

The Tyranny of "Why"

In 1955 and 1956, Heidegger taught a lecture series and delivered a public address titled "The Principle of Reason" (Heidegger, 1994). The two texts contain the most powerful and compelling statement of his late outlook and ambition. We "know," Heidegger (1994) claimed, that modernity is an age in which "technology intractably presses toward bringing its contrivances and products to an all-embracing, greatest-possible perfection" (p. 121). Technology is everywhere in our world—from mechanized agriculture to the "manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers"; and its reach extends down even to the level of the atom, where it has unleashed the power to destroy the human race and its planetary home (Farias, 1989, p. 287). Yet Heidegger (1968) maintained that the "essence" of technology lies elsewhere—beneath the surface of our technologically permeated lives. For Heidegger, technology "brings to fruition" the "innermost," and at the same time "most concealed," essence of modernity. This essence is nothing other than what Heidegger (1994) called "the principle of reason" (p. 121).

Much of Heidegger's (1994) 12-part lecture series is devoted to a methodical interpretation of Leibniz's statement of this principle: "Nothing is without reason." In Heidegger's view, this principle—which, he asserted, has covertly shaped Western thinking and history at least since the time of Plato, despite having been explicitly articulated for the first time by Leibniz in the 17th century—determines in advance (as a primordial, ontological presupposition) "that every thing counts as existing when and only when it has been securely established as a calculable object for cognition" (p. 120). Having thus posited the essential calculability of all beings, cognition then asks, Why does what is cognized exist, and why is it the way it is? Hence, the principle of reason can be reformulated as follows: "Nothing is without a why" (Heidegger, 1994, p. 35). The West in general and modernity in particular are thus characterized by their incessant striving for an answer to the question of why—by a restless longing to reflect on grounds. As Heidegger wrote,

> We have an eye for grounds in all that surrounds, concerns, and meets us. We require a specification of reasons for our statements. We insist upon a foundation for every attitude. Often we content ourselves with the most immediate reasons; after a while we investigate the more remote reasons; finally we try to get at the first reasons and ask about the ultimate reason. (p. 117)

Philosophers as otherwise different from one another as Aristotle, Hobbes, and Kant believed that the longing for an answer to the question of why is rooted in human nature—and that it demonstrates humankind's natural proclivity for philosophy and science, physics and metaphysics. But in his late work, Heidegger claimed that far from being "natural," the longing to answer the question of why—which motivates all critical reflection and thus makes possible intellectual inquiry of every kind—is merely the result of a historical dispensation or "destiny" (*Geschick*) that has been "sent" by Being. It has culminated in the technological nihilism of modernity—or rather, its nihilistic essence has finally been disclosed in modernity—and moving

beyond that nihilism can be prepared for only by expelling the longing from the privileged position it has come to hold in the West.

For a suggestion of how such a revolution can be accomplished, Heidegger (1994) turned to a short poem by the 16th-century Christian mystic Angelus Silesius: "The rose is without why: it blooms because it blooms, / It pays no attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen" (p. 35). For Heidegger, the West must learn to become more like the rose—to understand that "humans, in the concealed grounds of their essential being, first truly are when in their own way they are like the rose—without why" (p. 38). We must learn, in other words, to stop asking after causes, to stop striving for grounds and explanations—about ourselves, about beings and events within the world, and about the world as a whole—and simply allow ourselves, the world, and its contents to be, like the "blooming" of the rose, a "pure arising on its own, a pure shining" (Heidegger, 1994, p. 57).[16] In the 1956 lectures and address, Heidegger offered little beyond these vague pronouncements. We receive somewhat more guidance about what it might mean to live "without why" from a pair of essays Heidegger wrote in the early 1950s.

To Dwell and to Think

"Building Dwelling Thinking" (1971a) and "The Thing" (1971b) stand as the most striking examples of the late Heidegger's attempt to inaugurate a truly postenlightened form of writing and thinking. The two essays overlap in content, style, and terminology. Both of them seek to give a thoroughly nondiscursive, nonreflective account of a thoroughly practical, pretheoretical world—and to forestall the emergence of reflection—the posing of the question of why—within it. The experiment is as fascinating as it is unsettling.

Both of Heidegger's (1971a, 1971b) essays focus on what he maintained is the authentic character of human beings, beneath the surface of modern, enlightened sophistication. In our essence, "we are *dwellers*," he claimed. Heidegger (1971a) unpacked this assertion in the following terms:

> Human being consists in dwelling . . . in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth. But "on the earth" already means "under the sky." Both of these also mean "remaining before the divinities" and include a "belonging to men's being with one another." (pp. 148-149)

Earth, sky, divinities, mortals—these are what Heidegger called "the fourfold," the essential aspects of any possible world, which show themselves in the "primal oneness" of human "dwelling." What follows are several opaque, oracular declarations:

> Mortals are in the fourfold by *dwelling*. . . .
> Mortals dwell in that they save the earth. . . .
> Mortals dwell in that they receive the sky as sky. . . .
> Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities. (Heidegger, 1971a, pp. 150-151)

And so forth.

Perhaps sensing that his repetition of self-referential tautologies fails to convey his intention, Heidegger (1971a) went on to supplement them with a pair of accounts of how individual things within this primordial world show themselves. In "Building Dwelling Thinking," it is a bridge crossing a stream. "The bridge," Heidegger claimed,

> is never first of all a mere bridge and then afterward a symbol. And just as little is the bridge in the first place exclusively a symbol, in the sense that it expresses something that strictly speaking does not belong to it. If we take the bridge strictly as such, it never appears as an expression. The bridge is a thing and *only that*. Only? As this thing it gathers the fourfold. (p. 153)

But what does it mean to say that the bridge *as such* "gathers the fourfold"? It means that the bridge serves as a nexus or jointure connecting every "thing" that composes this particular world. In Heidegger's words, the bridge "does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream"; likewise, "the bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream" (p. 152). Heidegger continued,

> The bridge *gathers*, as a passage that crosses, before the divinities—whether we explicitly think of, and visibly *give thanks for*, their presence, as in the figure of the saint of the bridge, or whether that divine presence is obstructed or even pushes wholly aside. . . . The bridge *gathers* to itself in *its own way* earth and sky, divinities and mortals. (p. 153)

Heidegger (1971b) provided an even more striking account of another worldly thing—a jug—in the essay "The Thing," which attempts to illustrate the way in which a thing anchors and unifies the fourfold. This is how Heidegger described the process of filling and pouring out the contents of the jug:

> In the spring the rock dwells, and in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth, which receives the rain and dew of the sky. In the water of the spring dwells the marriage of sky and earth. It stays in the wine given by the fruit of the vine, the fruit in which the earth's nourishment and the sky's sun are betrothed to one another. In the gift of water, in the gift of wine, the sky and earth dwell. But the gift of the outpouring is what makes the jug a jug. In the jugness of the jug, sky and earth dwell.
>
> The gift of the pouring out is the drink for mortals. It quenches their thirst. It refreshes their leisure. It enlivens their conviviality. But the jug's gift is at times also given for consecration. If the pouring is for consecration, then it does not still a thirst. It stills and elevates the celebration of the feast. The gift of the pouring now is neither given in an inn nor is the poured gift a drink for mortals. The outpouring is the libation poured out for the immortal gods. (p. 172)

In these passages, Heidegger sought to reveal the fundamental, innate meaningfulness of the primordial human world, prior to the emergence of enlightenment. Contrary to what modern science would have us believe, the jug is not first and foremost—in its being—a material object with certain physical attributes to which human beings attach

various meanings. This way of conceiving of the jug gets it backward; the jug—in its being—is a thing used within a meaningful, concrete world for concrete, proximal purposes. The meaning and purpose, in other words, is always already there first; we can "see" it when we go about our business within the world without reflecting on it in any way. Modern life, in which reflection is woven in the very fabric of the world, gets in the way of, and even destroys (annihilates[17]), this primordial relationship with things. Hence, Heidegger's preference for rural peasant communities, where "building" (not to mention "thinking") remains properly informed by "dwelling."[18] Hence, also, his insistence on using quasi-poetic and mystical language to capture the essence of the primordial world of human dwelling; the formal structures and analytical edifice of Heidegger's (1962) *Being and Time* has by now been deemed inappropriate to the task—remnants of a philosophical tradition shot through with the ambition to reflect and explain rather than merely to allow the prereflective world to reveal itself.

Heidegger is convinced that the world (in its worlding) is vulnerable to philosophical reflection, which effectively destroys it—or at the very least, obstructs our access to it. As Heidegger (1971b) wrote in "The Thing,"

> The inexplicable and unfathomable character of the world's worlding lies in this, that causes and grounds remain unsuitable for the world's worlding. As soon as human cognition here calls for an explanation, it fails to transcend the world's nature, and falls short of it. The human will to explain just does not reach to the simpleness of the simple onefold of worlding. The united four are already strangled in their essential nature when we think of them only as separate realities, which are to be grounded in and explained by one another. (p. 180)

In other words, the reality (or unreality) of "the divinities" cannot be explained (or explained away) by reflecting on or attempting to reflect on the character of "mortals," and neither should earth or sky be gazed on by mortals motivated by the "human will to explain." Philosophical and scientific reflection on—and thus enlightenment about—the world and human beings is incompatible with meaning and purpose.

How should modern men and women, who find themselves in an enlightened—or at least post-Enlightenment—world, respond to their situation? According to Heidegger (1971b), we have no choice but to move forward. And for the late Heidegger, moving forward requires, above all, that we "step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls" (p. 181). Modern, enlightened men and women must learn a new kind or mode of thinking—one that limits itself to boundaries set by the requirements of dwelling.

We catch a glimpse of what Heidegger (1971b) has in mind from a passage of "The Thing" in which he tried to explain what it means "to think":

> If we let the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding world, then we are thinking of the thing as thing. Taking thought in this way, we let ourselves be concerned by the thing's worlding being. Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are be-thinged, the conditioned ones. We have left behind us the presumption of all unconditionedness. (p. 181)

One way to conceive of the longing to answer the question of why is to say that human beings strive to transcend the given world—to follow the chain of conditioned causes back to a first, "unconditioned" (*unbedingte*) cause that can serve as a final, definitive answer to the question. It is this striving to reach the unconditioned that leads us to seek enlightenment in the study of physics and metaphysics. But in the passage quoted here, Heidegger explicitly repudiated this drive for the unconditioned and advocated in its place a form of thinking that opens itself up to the disclosure or revelation of the world and the things that compose it while steadfastly refusing to reflect on them or seek any explanation or understanding of them that transcends or delves beneath the surface of the disclosure or revelation. As Heidegger (1966) famously put it in another essay from the mid-1950s, we must adopt a stance of "releasement [*Gelassenheit*] toward things," which grant us "the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way" (p. 55).[19]

In "The Thing," Heidegger (1971b) painted a pastoral image of how the world can appear when we think in terms of dwelling, with "heron and roe, deer, horse, and bull" as well as "mirror and clasp, book and picture, crown and cross"—each of these things "thinging from time to time in its own way" (p. 182). No doubt this reflects Heidegger's personal preference for a peasant way of life. But he also made clear in numerous other passages that it is impossible for thinking to determine or anticipate the content of any worldly disclosure ahead of time. If, as Heidegger wrote in an epilogue to the essay, the thinking he advocates is meant to prepare the way for the "advent" of a new world and a "coming destiny of Being," we must be open and ready to receive it, whatever it might be.

Darkness and Light

During his notorious interview with *Der Spiegel* magazine (which was conducted in 1966 and published, as per Heidegger's instructions, following his death, in 1976), Heidegger (1993b) spoke with uncommon clarity about his final views of the modern world, philosophy, and thinking. Asked whether and in what way philosophy might be able to improve the world, Heidegger responded as follows:

> Philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all merely human thought and endeavor. Only a god can save us. The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, through thinking and poetizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of decline [*Untergang*]; for in the face of the god who is absent, we decline. . . . We cannot think him into being here; we can at most awaken the readiness of expectation. . . . The preparation of a readiness may be the first step. The world cannot be what it is or the way that it is through man, but neither can it be without man. According to my view, this is connected with the fact that what I name with the word Being, a word which is of long standing, traditional, multifaceted, and worn out, needs man for its revelation, preservation, and formation. . . . To help with this realization is all that one can expect of thought. Philosophy is at an end. (p. 107)

If it was not already obvious, this remarkable statement shows that Heidegger broke absolutely with the ideal of philosophical enlightenment. In the ancient quarrel between philosophy and revelation, Heidegger—the philosopher who pronounced the end of philosophy—sided with revelation. All thoughtful advocates of enlightenment down through the centuries have recognized revelation as a fundamental alternative to its stance toward human life and thinking, just as defenders of revelation have understood the formidable challenge posed by critical reflection. Defenders of enlightenment have counseled the pursuit of knowledge and truth unbound by received truth and authority, whereas champions of revelation have insisted on the necessity of limits, on the need for receptiveness to a mysterious, comprehensive truth whose origin transcends human capacities, and on the existence of some entity or agency that sets those limits and determines the content of that truth. For this latter group, the health and happiness of the individual no less than of society as a whole requires that these revealed truths trump whatever humankind may discover in its (ultimately self-destructive) attempts at reflection using its own, limited powers.

In these and other ways, Heidegger's defense of revelation against enlightened reflection echoes those typically made by orthodox religious believers. But in other respects, Heidegger's position is unique. Heidegger differed radically from orthodox defenders of revelation in his refusal to rely on or appeal to the content of any prior revelation. Without exception, every prior notion of truth must be jettisoned and its remnants purged to prepare ourselves to receive a new revelation whose content must remain absolutely indeterminate—until, of course, Being determines it at a time of its choosing. Heidegger set out to inaugurate an age of expectant prophets and godless theologians. His is a defense of a purely formal revelation, thoroughly unmediated and unmoderated by authority or tradition of any kind, as the only possible alternative to an enlightened world he considered to be an abomination.

From what source Heidegger derived his standards of evaluation and judgment—how a person who rejects all authority and tradition, reason and reflection, nature and convention can know, for example, that enlightened modernity is an abomination—seems to have been a matter of indifference to him. Apparently, he "saw"—and that was good enough for him. That is a luxury to be enjoyed only by those who have abandoned all attempts at self-criticism. Others must be more circumspect. Heidegger may well have been right in some of his laments; advocates of enlightenment from Socrates to today may sometimes blind themselves to its limitations; the legacy of the 18th-century Enlightenment might be more mixed than many of its contemporary advocates would want to concede. But none of that justifies the sacrifice of the critical intellect that Heidegger called on us to make—for, quite literally, no reason at all. Heidegger was one of the most gifted philosophers in Western history. His thought can and should be appropriated for the purpose of further reflection. But its greatest virtue lies in the lesson it teaches us about what all authentic counter-enlightenment thinking must ultimately demand: a leap into the dark.

Notes

1. A similar emphasis on diversity has begun to mark scholarship on the Counter-Enlightenment as well (see, e.g., Garrard, 2005).

2. On the situation in France prior to and immediately following the French Revolution, see McMahon (2001).

3. Similar stories could be told about opposition faced by Maimonides, Al Farabi, Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas, and other advocates of philosophical reflection during the medieval period.

4. In a recent essay, historian Hans Sluga (2001) has suggested in strong terms that it is inappropriate to describe Heidegger as a counter-enlightenment thinker. As Sluga wrote, the fact is that "neither in *Being and Time* nor in the writings of the decades that follow does [Heidegger] reveal a substantive interest in the Enlightenment or any of its French or British protagonists" (p. 51). To be sure, much of Heidegger's work "might be taken to constitute a critique of the Enlightenment" (p. 67). Sluga listed, for example, Heidegger's "rejection of an absolute, timeless notion of reason, . . . his critique of instrumental rationality, [and] his repudiation of objective values" (p. 67). Yet Sluga maintained that these important aspects of Heidegger's thought should not be understood in terms of the 18th-century Enlightenment or even the modern age but rather, in terms of "the history of the West and the attempt to rethink its metaphysical foundations" (p. 68). In other words, Heidegger concerned himself with much broader, "metaphysical" issues than the ones involving enlightenment and its critics.

At a certain level, Sluga's (2001) critique is surely right; Heidegger was clearly uninterested in the 18th-century Enlightenment, as one can see from a perusal of the indexes to his major writings. The question of enlightenment and its place in human life raises issues that go well beyond the confines of the 18th century, however; an absence of references to the 18th-century Enlightenment thus tells us very little, in itself, about whether Heidegger should be considered a counter-enlightenment thinker. Far more crucial is determining what Heidegger meant by rethinking the "metaphysical foundations" of the West. For Heidegger (2002), "metaphysics" is an "interpretation of beings" in terms of "a particular comprehension of truth" that provides an age with "the ground of its essential shape," which in turn "comprehensively governs all decisions distinctive of the age" (p. 57.) To rethink the metaphysical foundations of the West is thus nothing other than to overthrow prevailing Western assumptions about philosophical truth and its relation to human life. Heidegger traced the origins of those assumptions back to positions articulated in ancient Greece, at the dawn of philosophical reflection. To the extent that Heidegger sought to overturn those reigning assumptions about truth and its goodness for human beings, he is very much a counter-enlightenment thinker.

5. Because the book was originally intended to consist of six sections, the "first half" is really only what would have been the first sixth of the book.

6. As anyone who has opened Heidegger's (1962) *Being and Time* is well aware, Heidegger used the German word *Dasein* (which is usually a nontechnical word for "existence") to mean a male or female human being considered in his or her openness to Being (the person is the place, or the "there" [*Da*], where Being [*Sein*] happens). Although it breaks from the standard practice of his English translators, I have chosen not to leave the word untranslated in my discussion. *Dasein* cannot help but sound overly technical in English, despite Heidegger's intent (which is fully realized in the German) to be as practical as possible, and as long as Heidegger's meaning is kept in mind, nothing, I think, is lost.

7. It is interesting, however, that Herf (1984) and Zimmerman (1990) claimed that Heidegger's choice to use the image of the workshop placed his work in close proximity to Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter.* At some level, then, it is possible to say that Heidegger presented an account in which work is at the center of what it means to be human.

8. It leads to a "break in the referential context of equipment" (see Heidegger, 1962, pp. 102-107).

9. For Heidegger's interpretation of Plato's allegory, see Heidegger (1998c). The image of a cave beneath the cave comes from Strauss (1952, pp. 155-156). Strauss used the phrase to describe the negative, unintended effects of modern enlightenment, as distinct from its ancient, Socratic form. For the Heideggerian suggestion that (modern) enlightenment leads to obfuscation, see Strauss (1958, p. 173).

10. See, for example, Heidegger (1962) wherein he described the farmer's experience of the "south wind":

> If . . . the south wind "is accepted" by the farmer as a sign of rain, then this "acceptance"—or the "value" with which the entity is "invested"—is not a sort of bonus over and above what is already present-at-hand in itself—*viz*, the flow of air in a definite geographical direction. The south wind may be meteorologically accessible as something which just occurs; but it is never present-at-hand *proximally* in such a way as this, only occasionally taking over the function of a warning signal. On the contrary, only by the circumspection with which one takes account of things in farming, is the south wind discovered in its Being. (pp. 111-112)

See also the description in Heidegger (2001, p. 110) of the motion of the sun across the sky.

11. For Heidegger's conservatism, see Heidegger (1993a, pp. 426-428).

12. Heidegger's (1962) account of care (*Sorge*) in the final chapter of Division I is closely related to the discussion of anxiety (*Angst*) in the first chapter of Division II.

13. Although, in my view, those changes are usually overstated. Heidegger's concerns and approach to addressing them are remarkably consistent throughout his life, even if his terms change with time.

14. Heidegger came to believe that other moods could inspire a similarly fruitful existential crisis. See, for example, Heidegger's (1995) seemingly endless (not to say boring) description of boredom (*Langeweile*) in the 1929-1930 lecture course, which fills more than 130 pages in the German edition. Likewise, the highly dramatic and compressed accounts of modern decline in Heidegger (2001) seem intended to inspire a mood of "horror" or "deep foreboding" in his listeners/readers—moods that, in his later work, he came to see as a necessary precondition of the advent of the "other beginning" that he hoped awaits modern humanity.

15. For evidence that as early as 1919, Heidegger intended to lead his listeners and readers to confront meaninglessness, see Hancock (2000).

16. Heidegger (1998a) would come to write that we ought to "let beings be."

17. See Heidegger (1971b, p. 170), where he indicated that science is unable to grasp the jug in its being—and that this annihilation of the jug culminates in the annihilation brought about by the atom bomb.

18. See, for example, the description in Heidegger (1971a, p. 160) of peasants living in a small cabin on a mountain slope as the winter wind howls around it.

19. Instead of *releasement*, a translation that highlighted the etymological root of the word might be *letting-be-ness*, or perhaps *allowingness*.

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