

The Heidegger Paradox

On Our Being Devoid of Intrinsic Meaning

By Douglas Lockhart

It is silence that hears the echo of stillness which constitutes the essence and origin of language.

Tetsuaki Kotoh
'Language and Silence:
'Self-Inquiry in Heidegger and Zen' (p.210)

He [Heidegger] takes hold of the Being of things in the concretest way, a way he learned originally from the phenomenology of Husserl, according to which one's vision is addressed to things as they show themselves in the fullness of their appearance.

Albert Hofstadter's introduction to
Martin Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought* p. xiv

The Problem of 'Language' Revisited

The very mention of Martin Heidegger's name can produce, in some, a raising of philosophical hackles. Or a shrug of philosophical incomprehension in that his use of language is reckoned by many to be impenetrable. What is it about this German philosophers style of thinking and writing that annoys some to the point of desperation, yet for others constitutes a necessary break with philosophy's failed attempts at an ultimate lucidity? Failed? In the sense that ultimate reality, in being defined *as* ultimate, can never be captured in and through language. Approached, yes, but never cornered in its entirety in spite of the hope of some to produce a *theory of everything*. There again, a "theory of everything" is not actually a theory of everything in the sense of explaining everything that exists, merely a theory that allows us to comprehend the bigger picture in terms of how and why reality functions the way it does. It is then a "general theory of everything" that's being sought, not a definitive blow by blow explanation for the minutia of existence.

In this sense does the philosopher Thomas Nagel suggest that a philosophical summing up of reality may be possible, but not in a reductionist, or raw physicalist sense. And that leaves us with thinkers such as Heidegger to contend with, for if anyone has called the metaphysical ruminations of philosophy into question, he has. At least that is how it seems. Having evolved a special type of language to deal with ultimate questions concerning Being and beings, Heidegger has crossed the threshold between philosophy, science, culture and religion and

ended up on a plateau of thinking far removed from everyday philosophy. He is, it seems, out there on his own, the sheer originality of his thinking alarming some and delighting others. But is the core of Heidegger's thinking as original as it appears? Is it possible for anyone in this day and age, indeed any day or age, to evolve a system of thought so original that it cannot be traced, in some respect, to the thinking of others? Did Heidegger perhaps alight upon his deep and telling sense of Being and beings from some unacknowledged source? From the East, perhaps? Or is it just that he was already on to the key questions he would eventually examine in such extraordinary detail? Claiming to be the West's first thinker to have overcome philosophy's metaphysical bent, Heidegger is nevertheless criticised by Jacques Derrida for being "logocentric", that is, of being enmeshed in the Western metaphysical tradition in spite of claiming to have escaped its clutches. The reasons for Derrida's accusation need not concern us here, but his raw accusation stands: was Heidegger's use and conception of language an escape from that tradition, or was it a subtle tumbling, a stumbling back into such traditional concerns via intellectual formulations around the problem of Being and beings? Or was it a genuine attempt to find a middle way, a language capable of accommodating the East's insights about Being and beings without given in to its more extravagant claims? Heidegger was aware of Asian thought on such matters early on, and that fact is made evident in *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (1990), a compendium of essays by eminent Eastern thinkers edited by Graham Parkes. This is not to suggest that Heidegger's thinking is in some sense a disguised and unacknowledged replaying of Eastern ideas, but it is to suggest a parallel interest in such ideas.

To be aware of Eastern thinking is, at some level of inception, to be influenced by it, and that may in fact explain the drift of Heidegger's thinking away from, rather than towards, Eastern philosophy. It may also explain why there are only cursory references to Asian thinkers in his work.¹ Heidegger's philosophy seems to be purely Western in drift, the influence of Eastern thought having perhaps been annulled by his later insistence that "language" is *the house of Being*. Not in Don Cupitt's sense of everyday language being all there is, but in the sense of language being a dimension of mind unto itself, a dimension of *psyche* from which we cannot escape. This did not accord with Eastern thinking, and in this vein Husserl's idea of "pure perception" would not have seemed probable to Heidegger; language, as far as he was concerned, had not only penetrated the self's original state of pure subjectivity, it had become a psychic realm, a world unto itself within which and through which the world itself could not be known or comprehended. Language, or, more properly, our capacity for language, had invaded the structure of the perceived world to such an extent that it now lay between us and world in the form of a linguistic ocean, an invisible medium within which, like fish, we swam without registering its all-encompassing presence.

Language in this sense is however fraught with conceptual difficulties; in the final analysis it is an idea, a postulate that begs the question as to what this extended notion of language is in

itself. Is it in some disguised sense an underlying computational scheme as neuroscience suspects, an algorithmic manipulation of neuronal information that emerges as language? Or is it something altogether different? In 'Language is Conversation' Jeff Malpas offers us a definition of language reminiscent of Ferdinand de Saussure's *langue*, that is, language defined as "a fully present, static, language-state (*etat de langue*), a synchronic totality from which the passage of time is entirely excluded."² Yet more than that when Malpas's statements are properly evaluated. Malpas has in fact stepped beyond the notion of language as a "static" language state and elevated it to the level of a dynamic interaction between psychic factors that cancels out as a species of creative freedom. Language is no longer an "instrument at our disposal and so under our control, nor . . . something that controls us in the sense of preventing our access to things and the world."³ Language is now an originary form "out of which particular statements are merely an abstraction [that] never [exhaust] any such statement." There is never a time when *everything* is stated; there is always the *unsaid*⁴ to contend with.

This is to suggest that what is "unsaid" constitutes the ever creative nature of language, a creative matrix best identified in dialogue; and that in spite of Saussure having perceived spoken language as *parole*: patter or chatter. Language, for Malpas, is an "ongoing play of possibilities"⁵ that "operates *beyond* proposition or linguistic content" (my italics), while at the same time being allied to proposition and content to the extent that each reveals language's essentially indeterminate nature. Language is then more than a mere ability to use words; it is by its very nature a *state of being* housing a capacity for meaning, coherence and insight in terms of an inexhaustible urge towards coherence originating in our very bones, not just in our conscious minds. In speaking thus Malpas opens up our form-bound conception of language to include the notion of constant creative possibility in the "unsaid", in the potentially *not yet said* of dialogue where speakers launch themselves into communication trusting that what they say next may be creatively useful. There is a creative darkness in the mind, a linguistic capacity from out of which language as form springs, but which in itself has no actual linguistic form. Conversation is then the place of discovery, the place of fundamental creative ferment in that it takes place in the presence of another mind, another being within whom the same creative state is operative. By such means are the vagaries of dialogue dismissed, our searchings into mental darkness imbued with an aura of importance missed by Saussure, but not by Heidegger.

And so we come to an essay in *Heidegger and Asian Thought* where the Zen scholar Tetsuaki Kotoh refers to the overpowering linguistic tendency in Gadamer's thinking as a "mistake of focusing too much on language", a failure to recognise the place of "the 'stillness of silence' at the centre of Heidegger's theory of language and Being."⁶ Kotoh believed Gadamer to have misunderstood Heidegger, and in misunderstanding him to have misrepresented him.⁷ By

way of mitigation I would add that this perceived mistake in interpretation was Heidegger's own fault in that he often seems to be saying exactly what Gadamer believed him to be saying: the "stillness of silence" is not everywhere evident in his writing. So the question we have to consider is two fold: has Malpas got it right when he identifies the unsaid in dialogue as an inbuilt freedom from the restrictive effect of words, and does Kotoh's raising of the question of the "stillness of silence" in Heidegger's thinking change how we ought to perceive Heideggerian philosophy? Was Gadamer right, or wrong? Or does all of this merely add further levels of confusion to an already confused subject? What are we to make of this "stillness of silence", this "echo of silence" (*Gelaut der Stille*) as Heidegger so carefully renders it? Outside of some extremely esoteric language about language and Heidegger's belief that he was speaking, or trying to speak, the language of Being itself, are we in fact any the wiser as to what this stillness, this silence, portends? So too the element of creative freedom in spoken language identified by Malpas. Does this insight constitute a break with fatalistic determinism's dour evaluation of the human, or is it no more than a whiff of psychic freedom that immediately evaporates back into the vicissitudes of language and human behaviour? Herald creative possibilities it may, but there's nothing new about that idea in terms of momentary outcomes. In marked contrast to all of this is Erich Neumann's *encounter* with *psyche* as "presence", which to my mind goes well beyond either the mysteries of dialogic exchange or the insinuated mysteries of *Gelaut der Still*. Silence and stillness may embody more than creative possibilities; they may constitute a pathway into other dimensions of conscious experience. But only in combination; split them apart and something quite different may form.

Silence without Stillness

Silence without a deeply encountered stillness of body and mind can be defined as a potential nihilism, an emptying of ourselves by way of a system of ideas or suspicions that logically rip *psyche* and world apart for what are supposed to be very good reasons.⁸ So what is Kotoh getting at when he talks of the *stillness* of silence in Heidegger's philosophy? Why should this stillness let Heidegger off the hook in relation to Gadamer's sensing of a mistake in Heidegger's philosophy? Why, if there is in fact no Eastern influence on Heidegger's thinking does he have this concept of stillness in his philosophy? What *is* Heidegger's basic premise in relation to the *echo of silence*? What is this echo? In the sense that Kotoh uses stillness and silence they constitute a form of cognitive awareness in relation to Being, a seeing into the primordially-alive reality underpinning our existence. The language of the *true self* "emerges from this silence", he tells us, "It [the 'true self'] arises from and is nourished by silence to become something which expresses this silence."⁹ The true self is composed of this silence, and it is out

of this silence that language, and our capacity to describe the world, is born. Language "makes sense because it has its origin in the "soundless voice of Being", which precedes and continues to accompany language, and without which language cannot say a word."¹⁰

Heidegger seems to be in agreement: "[A]ccording to the essence of the history of Being, language is the house of Being which arises from and is structured by Being'. Being's influence is however only detectable in the active tension experienced by beings during dialogic exchange, as in Malpas, and then only by inference through its creative offerings - it is an *echo*. *Being* is then a sensed *perturbation* in dialogue, it is not *stillness* as such. Which tells us that Being is both revealed and simultaneously concealed during such exchanges, although we can, according to Kotah, become aware of the constant escaping of Being through a *readiness* in relation to silence and stillness, a *prepared* and *sharpened* form of awareness, a place of *no language*. So is this Heidegger's echo of silence? Or was Kotah perhaps reading something into Heidegger's use of "silence" and "stillness" that wasn't actually there? Are they talking about the same thing? Is Heidegger's "echo of silence" an *encounter* with silence and stillness through a sharpened form of awareness that enlivens; or is it a form of silence deficient in both silence and stillness because no more than an empty, nihilistic echo, a form of *speechlessness* in the face of *psyche's* depths?¹²

More on this in a moment.

This, to my way of thinking, is "secular mysticism" in a new/old guise, a *style* of thinking that progressively renders us experientially flat and lifeless without our knowing exactly why. Sense of self, minimal as it is, is written out of the script of what and who we are through a system of logic that seems correct in every way, and probably *is* correct in every way but for one important factor: it has no living, affective dimension to correct its logical excesses. There is no proper human context, no inherent *value* to its clinically exact philosophical propositions other than the value placed on the correctness of those propositions. Correctness of proposition in terms of coherence and rationality is undoubtedly valuable, but it is not evidentially strong enough a platform on which to build such a severe, truncated philosophy of the human. Enter Ertha Kit with an old song that perfectly captures the dilemma being forged: "If this is all there is my friend, then let's keep dancing, let's break out the booze."

The 'Turnings'

According to Tetsuaki Kotah, Heidegger's thinking about language "when considered in the light of Eastern ideas about language and silence, has not been fully understood so far."¹³ That's quite a claim, but it hinges on whether Heidegger's "echo of stillness" is the conceptual equivalent to Kotah's "stillness of silence". Can we safely link Zen thinking to Heidegger's

thinking and avoid epistemological distortion? Given the clues provided by Kotoh, it seems so, but "seems" is an unstable and possibly dangerous word when used in connection with Heidegger's prose; the pitfalls are many. There are what appear to be correspondences in language as Kotoh claims, but they may only be phonetic at best. So how to determine the truth of the matter? Not through sentence matching, that's for sure. More safely arrived at by way of philosophical drift given that Heidegger often leads his reader this way and that before settling on some unexpected ledge of reasoning. The conceptual view from this ledge may be sensed as spectacular, but one's position as a thinker will almost always be precarious, that is, uncertain. Uncertainty rules in Heidegger; everything teeters on the edge of being questioned further.

Getting to grips with Heidegger's philosophy is no easy task, but it is a task ably taken up by Julian Young in *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life* (2003), an overview of philosophers from Plato to Hegel and Marx within which he tackles the ins and outs of Heidegger's thinking and his checkered political past.¹⁴ Heidegger, we are told, "shared Nietzsche's analysis of the condition of the post-death-of-God West as one of 'nihilism'", and in possible alignment with this analysis did something strange and hugely problematical - he joined Hitler's National Socialist Party in 1933. A mighty force for change was in the air, a "revaluation of all values" according to Nazi propaganda, and for reasons unclear to most Heidegger was enamoured. Eighteen months later he changed his mind, his hope of influencing Nazi thinking finally recognised as a radical misjudging of the movement's character.¹⁵ For some this "change of mind" is unconvincing; for others it is an obvious reversal of attitude in that from 1935 onwards Heidegger became a vocal critic of the regime.¹⁶ There was however no *mea culpa*, and that damaged, and continues to damage, his philosophical standing.

In relation to all of the above there are then four identifiable "turnings" in Heidegger's thinking. One in 1930 identified by scholars as his "U-turn" in relation to language, mind and consciousness; one in 1933 when he joined ranks with the National Socialists; and one in 1935 when he began to criticise Nazism. But according to Young there is another important change of mind to consider, and it is Heidegger's abandonment of the post-death-of-God view that life has no meaning, for the view that "there is such a thing as the meaning of life."¹⁷ As this particular change of mind is also said to have taken place in 1930, that is, three years prior to Heidegger associating with the Nazis, it can surely be argued that it was this early change of focus in relation to "meaning" that prompted (tempted?) Heidegger to see in Nazi thinking something that did not in fact exist: a way of weaning the German psyche away from nihilism towards a total re-evaluation of life and living. Preoccupied as Nazi thinking was with a willful redirecting of personal and collective energy, it would, in its early form, not only have appeared to offer a timely antidote to this debilitating social phenomenon, but also the means to bring meaning

back into the lives of individuals so affected. Given the initial turn (*Kehre*) in Heidegger's thinking after the publication of his seminal work *Being and Time* in 1927, it is legitimate to think that he sensed a usable element in National Socialism, an orientation he could channel in the direction of the philosophical overview he was then beginning to develop. This was of course a mistaken hope, a naive hope, but if the tenor of Heidegger's more developed post 1935 philosophy is anything to go by, it was a fundamentally decent hope all but derailed by egregious mistakes in behaviour and attitude. Caught up in the furor of the times he joins the Nazi Party, takes on the mantle of Rector at Freiburg University, makes compromising decisions and speeches in support of Hitler, and with mistaken zeal attempts to forge a philosophy of spiritual renewal for National Socialism in conjunction with a revamping of the German universities.¹⁸ But it's all in vain. He has overestimated his ability to influence the Nazi's and fundamentally misunderstood their intentions. In disarray, he resigns, returns to his former professorial duties and begins, slowly, but steadily, to criticise the regime's emerging vision.

By 1935 the Nazi's have exhausted his patience, but he has learned a thing or two in the interim, not the least of which is that human beings are more than a mere resource to be exploited. But more than that, for as I hope to show, he had already glimpsed what might be termed the numinosity of *Dasein*, the beating heart of our "being here" that elevates "world" from being a mere generator of human consciousness, to that of a womb of creation from out of which we meaningfully emerge, or, more exactly, emerge with meaning as a capacity. Withdrawing his loyalty from the Nazi's, he adjusts his philosophical vision, abandons the determinist, post-death-of-God assumption that there is no such thing as the meaning of life, and by way of intellectual expiation constructs what must have been one of the earliest conservationist visions. Conservationist? That's how it seems to Julian Young, and he may well be right in that Heidegger's "being here" has in some profound sense turned into an intuitive re-evaluation of the human, a subtle shift of emphasis in relation to self, other and world. At least that is how I interpret Young's observations. Most philosophers associate Heidegger's "U-turn" solely with language, as Gadamer is said to have done by Kotoh, but it may have had more to do with a developing sense of the earth's importance beyond it being a utilitarian generator of awareness. Hence his massive philosophical output post 1935 being built around the question of human authenticity. Why authenticity? Why this arrowing in on how a human life functions in relation to self, other and world given that the "being here" of *Dasein* seems to be sufficient unto itself?

Prior to 1935 there is little chance of misunderstanding Heidegger on the basic question of what it means to "be here" in the world. It's cut and dried. The brutal fact of our physical existence has a utilitarian significance for Heidegger from which, basically, he shifts only slightly. Our "being here" is an expression of "world" grounded in a necessary conformity to the

moral demands of "community" fraught with the unavoidable anxieties and tensions in relation to those demands. We may not always agree with what community expects of us, but on the whole we sail along without too much trouble. We may claim to be free agents, but that is an illusion. We are, all of us, beings who *do* things in relation to world; without world there can be no doing, no decision-making, and therefore no us. We *are* what we do. "Self" is not a being *apart* from world, *apart* from body or *apart* from language; it is a "state" dependent on world *and* body *and* language generated out of a reactive *doing*. There is a sense in which we do not actually decide anything; we simply *respond* by way of decisions that are predetermined by the situations in which we find ourselves. That being the case, we have, theoretically, no specific existence apart from this "doing", and that, when language itself is elevated to the level of a "domain" from which we cannot escape, to being the "house of Being" within which we unwittingly dwell, tells us that the "self" is no more than a helpful system of orientation.

This hardline view of human existence is however followed by a subtle change of emphasis in Heidegger's thinking: our "being here" is later elevated by way of numerous caveats to the level of an *interactive* mystery. By means not explained another level of perceptual, conceptual insight is now available to us if we can gear our minds in the direction of a more authentically lived life, a life within which we intellectually detect what is going on in ourselves, and in others. That, I think, is what is at the back of Heidegger's mind when he says: "He who knows what is . . . knows what he wills in the midst of what is."¹⁹ He had, in some subtle sense, developed his signature *Dasein* argument and bought into both Nietzsche's and Hitler's quasi-mystical notion of an elite individual capable of, well, capable of just about anything as it turned out. Jeff Malpas does not make this mistake; he strains towards a modicum of freedom in dialogic exchange, and in doing so leaves us with the rudiments of a possible freedom yet to be developed.

Turning Towards the 'Echo of Silence'

Tetsuaki Kotoh is fully aware of, and seems to be in basic agreement with, Heidegger's change of mind in relation to language as "the house of Being". But he is also aware of Heidegger's thinking beyond this point in relation to the presencing of Being. Quoting the master, he tells us that language isn't just "the means to portray what already lies before one," but rather "grants presence - that is Being- wherein something appears as existent". There is an *echo* of something in language that is other than language, something that goes beyond what language is able to convey.²⁰ As language is the "house of Being", we have however no choice but to approach Being through this already established house. We are, in other words, subject to the word "wood", or "well", when walking through a wood or drawing water whether these words arise in

our minds or not. Which is to say that the phenomena we encounter "occur simultaneously with the occurrence of language", and that "the world exists only where words exist." Fine. That's cleared that up. Well, not quite. Kotoh adds: "It is obvious that such a view, which could be misunderstood as a theory of the absolute primacy of language, has influenced Gadamer's view of language."²¹

Misunderstood? From how it sounds there is nothing to misunderstand; without language there wouldn't be anything recognisable as an experience, end of story. Again, not quite. If you stop there, says Kotoh, you haven't properly understood Heidegger for exactly the same reason Gadamer failed to do so. Language has to be viewed in relation to the *presencing* of Being as Heidegger states, not just in relation to words as an explanatory system we can't escape from. Being comes to language; not language to being. Being, in terms of phenomena, is *unhiddenness*; Being in terms of language is hiddenness. Language, even as it reveals, hides the thing that has presenced itself to the senses and leaves us stranded *between* language and Being. But not completely. There is an *echo* of Being in language, an echo from out of the "silence of Being" that is detectable, experienceable, and this echo, this "silence of stillness" is at the heart of what we are as human beings.

Kotoh believed Heidegger to be aware of this phenomenon and strained to convey its presence in his writings. It was, he says, "a basic current which flows through not only [Heidegger's] theory of language but also through his thinking in general." There is a hidden source in Heidegger that "attunes man into the abyss of nothingness,"²³ into *Nichtigkeit*. But is this right? Isn't the nothingness of *Nichtigkeit* a silence that silences speech for a quite different reason? This is not Kotoh's "silence of stillness" apprehended through a meditative sharpening of awareness; it is an "unnerving" (speechless?) silence glimpsed through a lone and sustained philosophically-driven stare into reality's entrails. Heidegger's "echo of silence" is then not fully an escape from nihilism, it is a courageous intellectual descent into the self's abyss of nothingness mistakenly perceived to be more than it actually is. It is, in essence, an *act of will*, a questioning or interrogation of Being by the language-bound self teetering forever on the brink of Kierkegaardian *angst*. It is "astonishment", to use Heidegger's own term, but it is not Kotoh's deepening state of silence and stillness. It is the existential "aloneness" of a self forced to perceive "world" as the sole generator of selfhood, the intuited "echo of Being" creating the ego-self's illusion of being a "thing" among other things.

Turning Away From the Echo of Silence

Martin Heidegger's thinking is said to have undergone a radical change in direction from 1930 onwards, and according to Julian Young this change included a turnaround on the question

"What is the meaning of life?" Early Heidegger's response to this question had been stock post-death-of-God in tenor: meaning cannot be established personally, only communally. There is no "universal, community-transcending meaning of life, no meaning written into the condition of being a human being as such."²⁵ To ask such a question was to presume the possibility of an answer, and that was a false presupposition.

So what was it about Heidegger's later thinking that makes Young think he had changed his mind on this question? What was it about the later Heidegger that has Young set him "apart from - and above - all the other post-death-of-God philosophers"?²⁶ To answer this question Young delves productively into the thick of Heidegger's thinking, but his conclusion is far from convincing. Heidegger emerges not as a being "apart from - and above - all the other post-death-of-God philosophers", he remains more or less the same. Yes, we see a side of Heidegger not often emphasised, a way of perceiving the world of which we are a part in terms of "guardianship", but does that warrant such a bold build up? Am I really expected to fall back in awe over the idea of Heidegger being an early exponent of planetary conservation? Are Young's notions of a revolution in Heidegger's thinking substantiated when, paraphrasing/quoting Heidegger's thinking, he says "[there is] something rather than nothing", or the world is "something granted to us, something which might not have been, something fragile and precious".²⁷ Were such word arrangements supposed to leaven the terrors of nihilism? Is it for reasons such as these that Heidegger invites us to step into "the full breadth of the space proper to [our] essence"? If so, then I'm grossly disappointed. Guardianship of the planet is a laudable task, perhaps even a "holy" task as Young suggests, but it does not constitute an answer to the question "Is there such a thing as the meaning of life?" That is the question we started out with, but it is not the question we end up with. What we end up with is a different kind of question where the meaning of life is swapped for *a* meaning to life.²⁸ That is not at all the same thing. It's an inbetween kind of question; it is not a change of mind that *reinstates* the notion of life having meaning in its own right. Life having "a" meaning is not at all the same as "the" meaning of life. We're back in the territory of post-death-of-God thinking in spite of the claim that Heidegger is "apart" and "above" such thinking. *The* meaning of life has been transformed into "a task which belongs to, constitutes the essence of the human being as such."²⁹ This task is "living in such a way that the changes we make to it [the planet] are always "bringings forth" rather than violations, bringings forth that are always circumscribed by the will to conserve the fundamental order of things that is granted to us."³⁰ Question: By what means are we supposed to find this "will" towards guardianship?

In leaving the question of Being and beings thus, everything sensed by Kotoh about Heidegger and his "echo of silence" is called into question. Kotoh's opinions may have been a complete misreading of Heidegger, a kind of wishful thinking that Julian Young, in spite of an attempt to separate Heidegger from post-death-of-God assumptions about the meaning of life, inadvertently annuls Heidegger's "echo of silence" which may not have signified some deep, beyond-language response from Being in the way Kotoh imagined. It may only have signified the big, scary, empty silence of our having no meaning at all channelled into the worthwhile, and distracting task of planetary conservation. If so, then the threat of nihilism had been warded off through no more than the elevation of a worthwhile task to the level of a quasi-religious experience. And to "living in such a way that the changes we make to it [the planet] are always 'bringings forth' rather than violations, bringings forth that are always circumscribed by the will to conserve the fundamental order of things that is granted to us." No, that can't be it, surely. That isn't sufficiently strong enough a reason to have caused Heidegger to evolve the language of *Being and Time*. Something else was going on in Heidegger's mind, and I suspect it may have had something to do with Edmund Husserl's radical phenomenology, a phenomenology that transposes the question of life sporting myriad meanings onto the plain of life being experienced *as* a meaningful condition in itself. In his introduction to Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought* (2001), Albert Hofstadter makes a similar connection between Heidegger's poetic thinking and Husserl's depth phenomenology, but I think he failed to understand both Husserl's perceptual insights and Heidegger's deft dumbing down of the same.

Heidegger became Husserl's assistant in 1919, and in the same year broke with the Catholic Church. As Husserl's "pure cognition" claims would in all likelihood have been passed on to Heidegger as part of his studies, and Heidegger is known to have used Husserl's phenomenological method eight years later in his writing of *Being and Time*, it could be argued that it was Husserl's notion of "pure cognition" *as an experience* that helped set the trajectory of Heidegger's thinking on *Dasein*. Problem is, Heidegger abandoned Husserl's language and methodology by the mid-1930s; he turned his attention instead to thinkers such as Nietzsche, Plato, Parmenides and Heraclitus.³¹ But there is good reason to think that something of Husserl's radical thinking lingered on, and that in Heidegger's hands its experiential dimension was turned into a set of subtle, but telling poetic insinuations. There is an unquestionable quasi-mystical, quasi-theological, quality to Heidegger's prose that is difficult to explain, an echo of something profound sensed by Tetsuaki Kotoh and Julian Young.

This is particularly obvious when Young speaks of "things show[ing] up in their 'ownness, [of] their being-in-itself",³² and of "step[ping into the fullness of the world . . . out of 'the dull overcastness of the everyday' and into the 'radiance' that comes from an intuitive apprehension of the infinite depth, the boundlessness of Being."³³ And followed by: "That things show up in

their being-in-itself is essential to our knowing how to care for them: unless something shows up in its oneness . . . one cannot possibly care for it"³⁴ Something showing up in its oneness? The being-in-itself of things? Infinite depth? A stepping into the fullness of the world? This is heady stuff; it shouts "primary" rather than "secondary" experience and Kant would not have approved. But does it mean what it seems to mean? Is it something communicated by Husserl to Heidegger that Heidegger himself eventually experienced? Or is it no more than information used by Heidegger to extend his theoretical thinking around the question of Being and beings? Did Heidegger simply miss out on the beating heart of what was being shared with him - namely, the possibility of perceiving self, other or world *minus* ego interference? That was after all Husserl's claim, a claim rejected outright by the Zen philosopher Sekida, but perhaps intuitively appreciated by Heidegger. Gris to the mill, one might say; a strengthening of his already burgeoning premise around Being and beings that caused him to reassess the nature of meaning and move away, or *appear* to move away from post-death-of-God assumptions about life having no meaning. He could "sense", I think, something "revelatory" in Husserl's more hidden phenomenology, but in the end could not penetrate to the heart of what "pure cognition" might be as an experience.

A bridge too far? Perhaps; perhaps not. We too may have to move beyond post-death-of-God assumptions about life only having meaning in terms of multiple meanings; it may also have a dimension of meaning in relation to everyday experience. Everyday experience is not as "everyday" as it may seem; it in fact functions as a preliminary bridge between the theoretical and the more potent experiential realm cited by Husserl. Experiences are by nature more than mere happenings; they are happenings that cannot be intercepted without cancelling out their immediacy. Experiences are had within a time frame, but they are themselves not of time. They are *non-temporal* due to their immediacy being beyond the ego's grasping. If we attempt to deal ourselves into an experience it does not take place. It can't. It is in itself primary and cannot be intercepted for the same reason that "self" cannot be intercepted, a simple truth that seems to have escaped everyone's attention. Self, too, is an "experience" beyond our grasping, and being such it too is *non-temporal* by definition. In this sense we straddle both temporal and non-temporal dimensions of experience without realising it, and in doing so are duo-dimensional in nature. But I'll leave the last word on this with Hans Georg-Gadamer, who ever surprises. Well, not quite the last word: Gabriel Marcel, Giles Deleuze, Evan Thomson and John Protevi also have interesting things to add to this business of the self and its position in and out of time.

The Ins and Outs of Time

Life *is* "experience", Gadamer tells us³⁵, and in saying so he presents the idea of "life" back to us not as a series of events and happenings, but as an integration of everything that we are, everything we ever will be. Life is then a unity, a singularity, a whole; it belongs to Being as primary state, not to "mind" as secondary state in relation to memory. We simply cannot hold a conceptually complete notion of what our life is or means in itself, and that tells us that the question "What is the meaning of life?" *is* unanswerable, for if it is beyond concept or idea, beyond remembering as a single, all-encompassing event, then it is by definition beyond explanation. But does that make it meaningless? I think not. We may be unable to capture the combined essence of our life's experiences beyond saying that we are unable to sum either them or ourselves up in one hit, but that does not render our integrated condition of mind and body meaningless. What it does do is reveal the undifferentiated or, to be more precise, *beyond* differentiation underbelly of the conscious mind, a realm of existential interaction constituting the mystery of what we are in our depths. Which tells us that life is Being, or lack of Being, in relation to what we *are* as an ongoing synthesis. Life is something that springs into action as Being each morning when we open our eyes and are intercepted by world. If we were to awaken "meaningless" in terms of having no "felt" dimension of meaning, no sense of our own subjective unity, wholeness, or singularity, then we would surely go mad. Some people do. Our "being here" has to be augmented by some level of "*here-Being*" for our life to kick start, some underlying sense of "Being" as a factor of awareness *beyond* a utilitarian acknowledgement of our physical existence or aspects of our personal history. General awareness (consciousness *of*) is certainly triggered by our being in the world, but awareness specific to sense of Being (consciousness *as* "beyond" differentiation) is triggered *by* the presence of Being *itself*. If Kotah is correct, then such moments can be teased into existence through "preparedness" of mind, and if Husserl is correct, then the whole business of overcoming the chattering, endlessly engaged, language-usurped ego may not be quite as difficult an exercise as Sekida supposed. Which raises the question of what Husserl meant when he told Sekida that *every moment of the ego could be suspended*; what does "suspension" mean in this context?

Gabriel Marcel sums up the existential importance of this situation thus: "[M]y being is something which is in jeopardy from the moment my life begins . . . my being is at stake, and therein perhaps lies the whole meaning of life."³⁶ What then is "Being" in that it has to be safeguarded? What is at stake? Isn't "Being" just a category of understanding, a linguistic device, a pointing at something that has no existence outside of it being an ideal construct? How then can it be in jeopardy? How can it be at stake? And how can it possibly relate to life, *my* life, if "life" is itself fundamentally meaningless beyond the meanings bequeathed to it through event and happening? That isn't the case for Marcel. He thinks life may have a meaning after all, a singular meaning, a meaning related to "purpose" just as Heidegger concluded. Not a

safeguarding of the planet, however; a safeguarding of Being itself, a safeguarding of that which, in being safeguarded, will ensure the planet's safety. If this is so, then we have to reassess Being and beings: "Being" may be more than an ideal category in relation to the "being here" of beings; it may signify a state of conscious awareness at the outer limits of human comprehension, a "*here-Being*" that in some curious sense illuminates and informs out of itself. This is perhaps what lies at the heart of Thomas Nagel's natural teleology question, his biting of the deterministic bullet in reverse and his unwelcomed suggestion that something is going on in matter that contradicts materialism's stark explanation for the origin of life. Is there then an alternative explanation to that of materialism's or theism's similarly deterministic conclusions, a conceptual position that is expansive rather than contractive of the human condition? If there is, then it must surely constitute a whole new paradigm, or humanism, a "new way of thinking" beyond the claim that "thinking" is no more than language having a conversation with itself.

In a footnote to 'Mind in Life, Mind in Process', an essay by John Protevi on Even Thomson's book, *Mind in Life* (2007), Protevi draws on the post-structuralist thinking of Giles Deleuze to help elucidate Thomson's approach to life and living, and in due course spells out a perception of things that goes against the notion of "human, language-expressed, top-level, reflective rational consciousness [being] the sole or prime or most basic or most important candidate for cognition".³⁷ In place of this he directs our attention to Deleuze's reference in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) to "pre-individual singularities" as supportive of primary cognitive realisations. Cognition in terms of *virtual* ideas is, he tells us, a dynamic genesis born out of the "sheer atomic exteriority of sensations to one another".³⁸ Past and future are synthesised in a "living present" where our "viscera" equals a "sum of contractions, or retentions and expectations".³⁹ Thomson is similarly persuaded in that he thinks the *deep continuity between life and mind* is sufficient in itself to produce cognition.⁴⁰ And Husserl is said to buy into this scheme in so far as he equated the "passive synthesis" of primary ideas with our being embodied beings, a trend also detected by Protevi in the thinking of Martin Heidegger. Deleuze's use of language is of course idiosyncratic, but nevertheless considered important by Protevi. Life is not only what has been, he tells us in relation to Deleuze's thinking, it is also "what is going to be and just becoming." We face forward, and in doing so cannot help but create the future.⁴¹ True, but that future depends on which forward direction we instinctively, or intellectually, choose to face, or face up to.

So what exactly is being suggested here? Well, it's the possibility of biological cognition preceding language cognition, that is, *organic* synthesis in terms of "experience" linked to perception and cognition in relation to the senses, or sense-making. Which reflects Yeat's *in a marrow bone* thinking, a form of thought realised in the body and only later organised in the

mind through language. Gone suddenly is the notion of an overarching linguistic "domain" within which language magically conjures "meanings" out of itself. We are instead confronted (encountered?) by a conception of cognition *at depth* not unlike that of Erich Neumann's where meaning is somatically *sensed* into existence, then *corseted* into shapes dictated by current forms of materialistic reasoning. Materialistic? To the extent of such reasoning been born almost solely out of a reductionist logic that is often deficient in somatic, empathic, content. In this sense language *is* conjuring meanings out of language, but it is a process ever in danger of logical faupaux in relation to what it means to be a living, breathing, sensing and willing human being. Hence Gabriel Marcel's warning.⁴¹ We are perhaps being weaned away from our fundamental natures, our informing metabolisms, our instructing and correcting visceral processes by way of mind recognising *only* language (said and unsaid) as its creative source.

The meaning of life is that it quite naturally gives birth to meaning out of its own primary process as *psyche*. As *psyche* is necessarily "timeless" in nature, the experience of "*here* Being" can, under certain circumstances, erupt into an experiential NOW. Such a space has been postulated in psychology by Kurt Stocker in relation to "language as a window to a conceptual level that seems deeper than language itself", a research strategy that "involves manipulating certain linguistic items to systematically identify [an] underlying thought structure - [a] mental structure . . . deeper than language *per se*." There is, it has been determined, "a place field" underlying linguistic structure, "a conceptual level that seems *deeper* than language itself" in relation to *emotion* (my italics) constituting "thought" prior to it becoming expressible as *thoughts*.⁴² This seems to reflect elements of Jordan Zlatev's suggestion that there are different layers of self-awareness, and that the one based on language is an elaboration of pre-linguistic self-awareness. Given such findings, Jean Curthoys' Gottlob Frege based notion of thought being independent of the thought-corseting conscious mind is also pertinent.

So is this the backgrounding reality Heidegger is referring to when he speaks of the "echo of stillness" in language, or when he says : "He who knows what is . . . knows what he wills in the midst of what is." I don't think so. I think he was still firmly ensconced in the metaphysics of reasons and reasoning just as Derrida surmised; that is, in the grip of his own elitist notion that language in some obscure, ultimately unprovable, sense, equalled the outer boundary of human freedom and dignity. But more than that. I also think he believed that the human will, unleashed from social, cultural and intellectual illusions would lead to a new kind of human being, and to a new definition of human freedom. Hence his gargantuan mistake in 1933, a mistake he regretted, but failed to properly acknowledge.

**On Our Being Devoid of Intrinsic Meaning
Reference and Notes:**

- 1) Parkes, Graham, *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 1990. p. 6. For reasons of brevity I've highlighted only Tetsuaki Kotoh's essay on Heidegger's approach to philosophy, but Parkes' book contains contributions from many eminent thinkers around this all-important question, and I heartily recommend it.
- 2) Allen, Barry, 'The Historical Discourse of Philosophy', (?) p. 130. It is interesting to note that Saussure's "static language-state" has no time element attached to it; it is "non-temporal" by definition, and as such theoretically unknowable because beyond the possibility of being experienced. Hence Barry Allen's evaluation of synchronic linguistic structures as not being the result of inquiry, merely "a priori postulates of a certain preconceived idea of 'linguistic' science." p.131.
- 3) Malpas, Jeff, 'Language is Conversation', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 7 (1), p. 9. I would draw attention here to both Tzvetan Todorov's *The Dialogical Principle*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, and V.N. Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986 contribution to the question of "monological" utterance in the sense used by Professor Malpas.
- 4) *Ibid*, p. 10.
- 5) *Ibid*, p. 12.
- 6) Kotoh, Tetsuaki, 'Language and Silence', an essay in *Heidegger and Asian Thought* edited by Graham Parkes, University of Hawaii Press, New York 1989, p. 204. Kotoh's primary question is this: "Why language is a guide to self-inquiry has become clear: it provides the encompassing perspective for all inquiry into the self. However, the question is whether this means that everything can be reduced to language. Can the entire reality of our being be grasped from the level of language?" Kotoh answers his own question in a roundabout way when he says: "Language makes sense because it has its origin in the "soundless voice of Being, which precedes and continues to accompany language, and without which language cannot say a word." This tells us plainly that language is structured by Being, but it gives no hint as to what Being might be in itself beyond it being a transcendent idea. Heidegger appears to be saying much the same thing: "[A]ccording to the essence of the history of Being," he tells us, "language is the house of Being which arises from and is structured by Being." Language as the soundless voice of Being? Language structured by Being? Are these philosophers talking about the same thing? I suspect they aren't.

Kotoh eventually suggests that the "echo of silence" might be some kind of cosmic language "that flows wondrously into the arena in which people live." Then comes a Malpas-type rider: "This silence cuts into and explodes the network of ordinary language which has degenerated into mannerism. At the same time it restructures and modifies previous meanings in such a way as to create a new form of language." (p. 207) That may well be so, but it could just as easily be interpreted as the abysmal presence of psyche as mode-neutral witness (Albahari 2009) detectable in the gaps between words, that is, in the "silences" inherent to monologue as well as dialogue. Even written language is punctuated by the non-speaking yet speaking gaps between letters and words. So the question must be: what is speaking through what is being spoken? Is it just the presence of "creative possibilities" as Malpas suggests; or is it an encounterable presence in its own right? If so, then "Being" is more than a grammatical term in relation to ontology; it is also something we can relate to in non-engaged (mode-neutral) states of mind where "the normal relationship between language and reality breaks down into silence, and language then revives through such silence." (p. 204)
- 7) *Ibid*, p. 210.
- 8) *Ibid*, 207. See also 'Nietzsche: Philosopher or Sophist', an interview with Ted Sadler in *Philosopher* Vol 1. No. 4, published three times a year by *Philosophy Magazine*, 10 Echo Street, Cammeray NSW 2062. (p. 30) where, dextrously, Sadler deals with the question of Nietzsche's supposed nihilism and reveals instead a *missing* thirst for "life" underlying our collective sensation of emptiness.
- 9) *Ibid*, pp. 206-7.
- 10) *Ibid*, p. 210.
- 11) *Ibid*.
- 12) *Ibid*, p. 207.
- 13) *Ibid*, p. 208.
- 14) Young, Julian, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, Routledge, London 2003. pp. 109 & 112.
- 15) *Ibid*, p. 107.
- 16) *Ibid*, p. 108.
- 17) *Ibid*, p. 198.
- 18) *Ibid*, p. 107. In *Heidegger's Volk* Stanford University Press, 2005 (2005), James Phillips argues that "the step from Volk to Hitler is certainly one that Heidegger took", but it should be understood in

terms of how 'Volk' is used in *Being and Time* in relation to "Being". It is "within the question of Being that Heidegger addresses the notion of Volk in 1927, just as it is within the question of Being that he confesses his loyalty to Hitler in 1933." (p. 5) This suggests, as I've suggested in my text, that Heidegger's approach to National Socialism was philosophically idealistic, his exit from the regime's clutches a waking up to that simple fact. But nevertheless surprising in that it shows Heidegger to have been quite extreme in his conception of what was allowable, or permissible, in terms of shifting public attention in the direction of a more authentic approach to self, other and world. He was in fact willing to engage in quite extreme practices to accomplish his philosophical aims, aims mistakenly thought to be achievable through the regime's harnessing of the human will both individually and collectively.

The notion of philosophy and extreme action having a distinct role to play in the wresting of European sensibilities away from an encroaching nihilism is also addressed by Peter Gordon in *Continental Divide*, Harvard University Press, 2010, p.46, a role and its consequences taken up by Heidegger in relation to the thinking of his mentor, Edmund Husserl. In a lecture delivered in Vienna in 1935, Husserl suggests two possible outcomes to the "crisis of European existence": either Europe's downfall and its "estrangement from its own rational sense of life"; or, "the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy." (p.46) Philosophy was perceived by Husserl to have a special role to play in this crisis a role Heidegger attempted to impose on National Socialism's extreme "solution" without success. Gordon captures what must have been Heidegger's dilemma when he says: "[C]onceiving of one's cultural-political situation as a crisis implied that conventional methods were no longer adequate and that the only possible salvation lay in swift and decisive action." (p. 46) That, I think, sums up Heidegger's situation quite well, a situation he eventually extracted himself from at considerable cost to his reputation and the way in which his already formed philosophy around the question of Being, would be perceived.

- 19) Ibid. p. 321.
- 20) Kotoh, Tetsuaki, 'Language and Silence' (as above) p. 208.
- 21) Ibid.
- 22) Ibid, p. 209.
- 23) Ibid, p. 210.
- 24) Ibid.
- 25) Young, Julian, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, (as above) p. 198.
- 26) Ibid.
- 27) Ibid, p. 207.
- 28) Ibid.p. 208.
- 29) Ibid.
- 30) Ibid, p. 207.
- 31) Gordon, Peter E., *Continental Divide*, (as above) p. 25.
- 32) Young, Julian, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, (as above) p. 207.
- 33) Ibid.
- 34) Ibid.
- 35) Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, Continuum, London 1989, p. 59. Tetsuaki Kotoh adds a further dimension to the subject of experience when he says that "pure experience" is where "experiences remain as they are without being judged." Cognitive engagement has been laid aside. The boundary between self and other has dissolved. Subject and object are no longer separate entities. "[T]here is" Kotoh tells us, "no split between the world and the one who observes it." (Language and silence p. 206) Which tells us that the non-temporal aspect of experience described by Gadamer has become an experience in its own right. We have moved beyond the "fact" of experience's timelessness and entered into timelessness as an experience. Note also George Steiner's contribution in *Real Presences* (1991) to the idea of life being inherently a unity, a unity we crave to express, for in expressing it we have, to an extent, control over it. Steiner approaches the question of life's experiential unity by means of the self-portrait being "the least imitative, the least mirroring of aesthetic constructs." (p.205) It is our (the artist's) attempt to create "for himself and others the singularity, the verity of his own essence in the face both of the servitude of his unwilling, unchosen coming into the world . . . in the face of the absurd, unnamed logic of death". (p.205-6)
- 36) Marcel, Gabriel, *Being and Having*, A & C. Black, London, Collins 1965. pp. 213-214. I discovered this most interesting quote in Peter Beaton's *The Eye in the Mandala: Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God*. A. H & A.W. Reed, Sydney 1977. (p. 82)
- 37) Protevi, John, 'Mind in Life, Mind in Process', p. 95.
- 38) Ibid.
- 39) Ibid, p. 73.
- 40) Ibid, p. 94.

41) Ibid, p. 99.

42) Stocker, Kurt, 'Place Cells & Human Consciousness', Journal of Consciousness Studies, Vol.23 No. 3-4, 2016. p.149. It should be noted that Kurt Stocker has recently submitted a thesis at the University of Zurich (Psychology) titled: 'The Ocular Mind: A New Theory on the nature of human thought and its implications'.

