

PREFACE

We hardly ever have a clear awareness of what it means to think in the *enclosure of subjectivity*. Subjectivity, in its specifically modern sense, begins with Descartes' methodical cogitations and finds its philosophical completion in Nietzsche's metaphysics of the "will to power." This completion is the extreme where the thinking of subjectivity must attempt to finally assure itself its own ancestry up to what stirred the Greek onset of thinking, in order to assure *itself over against* this ancestry. This completion must seek the exclusiveness and absoluteness that is attained only when the very unmindfulness of this ancestry constitutes itself as the self-assured universal subject. What comes after Nietzsche in terms of a late "critique" of the subject only attests to and exploits this assurance, thus catering to the meanwhile operatively implemented regime of subjectivity, that is, the "will to will."

To think in the enclosure of subjectivity means: to leave out what is ownmost to man; to leave out what is ownmost to the world. It means to think in a seclusion from that which wants to be thought as that which, in the first place, has withdrawn from thinking. The enclosure as such rests entirely in the ongoing holding off of that which wants to be thought. This holding off is the enclosure. That which wants to be thought is: *das Sein selbst*, that is: being, *kept to its selfhood*, swaying in itself.

The *Seinsfrage* is a liberating wake-up call for the locked-in humanity or humanness of man. Humanness is locked-in because it is already awakened to itself; because having been awakened to itself *in* the world constitutes humanness as such; because, thus awakened, it is nevertheless excluded from that which nourishes its wakefulness. In the tradition to which we belong, the first and decisive wake-up call for the already awakened humanity of man is what gives rise to this tradition in the first place, namely, the onset of thinking in Greece. That wake-up call, however, does not entirely liberate the already awakened humanity of man. Subjectivity is a free consequence of this

insufficient liberation. The more humanness gets caught up in subjectivity, the more it is cut off from the liberating word that is ensconced in that call. The *Seinsfrage*, on the other hand, is the abrupt outspokenness of this liberating word in an interrogating answer to that call, which is now heard anew and in a different tone.

What does *Seinsfrage* mean? From within the enclosure of subjectivity, it means (and can only mean): “the question of being,” that is, one of the possible questions the reflecting mind may ask; one of the “speculative” problems the reflecting mind may engage itself in. However, in the enclosure of subjectivity there is no *Seinsfrage*. The fact that, within this domain and its set of perspectives, there is much talk of and debate about the *Seinsfrage*; the fact that the *Seinsfrage* is already historically appraised, assessed, and evaluated—all this does not disprove the diagnosis that the thinking of subjectivity only deals with a simulacrum of the *Seinsfrage*. The fact is that the *Seinsfrage* as such cannot be dealt with subjectively, for the *Seinsfrage* is that enclosure abruptly collapsing unto the word and way of a likely liberation of the humanity of man.

Seinsfrage means: *das Sein* als *Frage*, that is, being itself, kept to its selfhood—as a *quære*. This is to say: being *itself* now breaks open as an interrogative stress, whose openness (or truth) wants to be borne as such in an interrogating stance, in an asking bearing. The stress is interrogative in that it interrogates man as to his capacity for being in keeping with being itself, which, on the other hand, has as its constitutive trait—and therefore not as a quality, such as a thing may have—that of withdrawing. Of this withdrawing we must, in turn, mind the most initial and initiating character, namely, the fact that it withdraws into itself as a parting or, more precisely, as a breaking off or off-breaking,¹ so that the full name of being’s constitutive trait is “the withdrawing (into) off-breaking.” This trait sets the tone for the wanting that modulates being’s openness.

The interrogative stress, in its open wantingness of an interrogating bearing, is the native element of a being that awakens to itself *in* having been called unto such bearing from within that wanting openness. This openness, in so far as it is borne in an interrogating that is native of the openness itself and belongs to its wanting, may be called *Da-sein*. Therefore we can say: the *Seinsfrage*—being itself as the *quære*—breaks open as *Da-sein*. *Da-sein* is what the being that awakens unto the *Seinsfrage* finds itself to have to “interpret,” that is, to carry out and heed in a thinking. This being, which is now to be called “man,” obtains its being only through the interrogative relation of being itself to it. In other words, being itself, through *Da-sein*, draws man into the reference to itself, and thus, in the first place, enables him to his own, or rather ownable, being.

Now we understand why *Being and Time* begins with an “analytic of *Da-sein*.” We understand why this analytic, and the entire *Denkweg* thereafter, stress the need *die Seinsfrage zu fragen*, that is, to heed the *quære* that being itself is in

an asking which is tempered by its (i.e. being's own) wanting openness. Such asking is the most original manner of being, in that it surrenders to the trait of withdrawing (into) off-breaking *while* bearing the *Da-sein* that awakes in it, so that man's selfhood may, in turn, arise from within the *Da-sein*. Because such surrendering acknowledges that the off-breaking keeps to itself the onset whence springs the tuning of man's being *as this being*; because it acknowledges that therefore being itself, via *Da-sein*, keeps to itself the ownhood of man's being; because such acknowledging amounts to bearing the finiteness of being; because, finally, only through such bearing man is cast into his nativity, that is, into his being native of the freedom or clearance of the withheld onset—because of all this *Being and Time*, as an answer to the wake-up call that is the *Seinsfrage*, must treat “being toward death”: *das Sein zum Tode*.

The call of the *Seinsfrage* awakens man as such by claiming his being for the bearing of being's truth or openness. This claim tunes man unto his belongingness to the truth. This tuning is the word. Being itself, keeping to its selfhood, swaying as itself in its borne openness, is the word. Not a word, but the soundless tune in answer to which the tuned words of our languages resound. What else should our languages be than the resounding of man's silently tuned bearing of *Da-sein*? What could they be if not the outspoken heeding of the liberating withdrawal that keeps the openness of the world? What could be the meaning of our languages' being *mother-languages*, if not that the sense of their speaking is to heed, in their sounds, the *mother of languages*—the soundless word—thus grounding man's being into the vigilance of the wanting truth of being? The fact that language appears to “us” as a capacity, or competence, of contingent man, that is, as an implement by which “we” format and organize a given stock of “beings,” including ourselves, as assets of life-enhancement, does not contradict this. It merely attests to a thinking secluded in the enclosure of subjectivity.

Language is today the medium of subjectivity, and therefore itself subjective. It is excluded from the word and relegated to a seeming self-sufficiency that in truth only bespeaks of its subjective deathlessness, which in its turn is mirrored and enhanced by the lifeless objectivity of informational values of which it appears to consist. As long as languages are relegated to the enclosure of objectifying subjectivity, they are secluded from each other. Their “communication” is a wordless trading of pieces of effective information. Never have languages been so indifferent to and deaf for each other's saying as in our being- and wordless epoch with its bustling business of translation.

The word of the *Seinsfrage* has found its answer in Heidegger's *Denkweg*. This means now that the German language is openly broken to its ownmost word. The ownmost word is the silent tune that tunes a language as an answer to *the* word, thus originally ennobling its speaking. The ownmost word is a language's ground-trait in so far as it is a *mother-language*—and not merely the chief linguistic competence of subjects without ancestry and progeniture.

Heidegger's *Denkweg* builds an answer in the German language to the word of being's sway. The *Denkweg* is itself an answer that liberates (or translates) the language it speaks unto its ownmost word.

The answer of the *Denkweg* is unheard in two senses. In a first sense it is unheard, because in this answer becomes outspoken the hitherto unheard *Seinsfrage*—the *quære* inscribed, as its keeping onset, in the humanity of man, whose first call inaugurates Greek thinking. It is unheard in a second sense, because this answer remains unhearable for a thinking shut away in subjectivity, whose ear is deaf to the *only* call. Listening to the *Denkweg* means, in any language, becoming mindful of the word, and eventually attempting to build an outspoken answer that ensconces this word, while at the same time restoring man unto his free birth. Has such minding, has an answer to the word taken place in English? Has the English language been restored, that is, translated into its ownmost and earliest word, the word in which it answers the other onset of thinking? “Earliest,” here, does not mean: first in time, but rather: pertaining to the genesis of time—*being* this genesis.

Being—keeping to itself in its wanting openness; the word—keeping to itself in its ancestral stillness; the onset—keeping to itself in its off-breaking fairness: all this is the *same*. The same, *das Selbe*, frees, awakens, and regenerates man unto the provenance that has already tuned his being to the only onset. Such restoring unto the intraneousness and belongingness to the original, extraneous tune is the sense of the English verb “to weird.” “Weird” is an old English word for fate and destiny. The openness, stillness, and fairness, which awakens man to his humanness, is therefore: the weirdness of being. As long as man is enclosed in the sphere of subjectivity, he is secluded from the call that weirds him unto his ownmost being. He is refused a human world. He does not belong, yet is insensitive to the weird homeliness of his only belonging.

The attempts that form the following chapters in this volume, while minding that unheard answer to the *Seinsfrage*, do not intend to establish a “line of interpretation,” or even elements of a new English “terminology” for Heidegger's *Denkweg*. Indeed, their language is weird, and often unwieldy when first heard. Not though because of imperfections in diction, of which they are certainly not free. Nor because of shortcomings in the idiomatic quality of formulations, which no doubt they present. Least of all because of the use of uncommon words or signs, which nevertheless might offend the subjective ear. But because these attempts speak from the weirdness of the word that belongs to no language, in that any mother-language owns this word as such—and because these attempts from there try to let the weirdness of being resound in English. Thus describing the attempt, I must add that what is said in these chapters is undoubtedly not weird enough, but, on the contrary, by far insufficient in restoring the English idiom unto its native weirdness—as a word of thinking. Is our hearing open for the word of the *Seinsfrage*? An old English saying goes like this: “after word comes weird.”