

## PREPARING FOR THE XXIst CENTURY - HEIDEGGER'S CONCERN

Heinz Kulüke, SVD

The twentieth century is about to come to a close. Like all centuries before, it has its unique features. In a very special way it has been the age of science and technology. Great achievements in various fields, such as medicine, computer science, and astronautics have given human beings confidence that they can determine their own history and destiny. It was also a century, however, in which human beings in many ways have experienced their limitations. Two world wars, the Holocaust, the Gulf war, genocidal spasms in Bosnia and Rwanda, the outbreak of a plague in India, the uncontrollable world wide phenomenon of AIDS, and the increasing devastations of nature, for example, have shown human beings their limitations. It has been a century of great hope and despair at the same time. Perestroika, the fall of communism, of dictatorships and military regimes, people's power revolution, restorations of democracy in various countries, Tiananmen Square, terrorist attacks, calamities, and corruption scandals have gone side by side.

When preparing for the XXIst century what is needed is the search for a vision in face of man's continuous longing for deeper insights into the meaning of his life; but a vision also in face of the loss of values, the worldwide broadening gap between the rich and the poor, the technization and secularization of our world. What has caused evil and suffering in the present century is its emphasis on "parts" rather than the "whole": the superiority of countries that are developed over those in the process of development, of white over colored people and abled over disabled, of men over women, of the individual over community, of reason over feeling and meditation, of scientific and technological over philosophical and religious knowledge, of doing over thinking, etc. A meaningful vision for the next century can come into being only if the emphasis shifts from the parts to the whole. In reconstructing such a vision which must be based on holistic thinking, philosophy will have to play a decisive role.

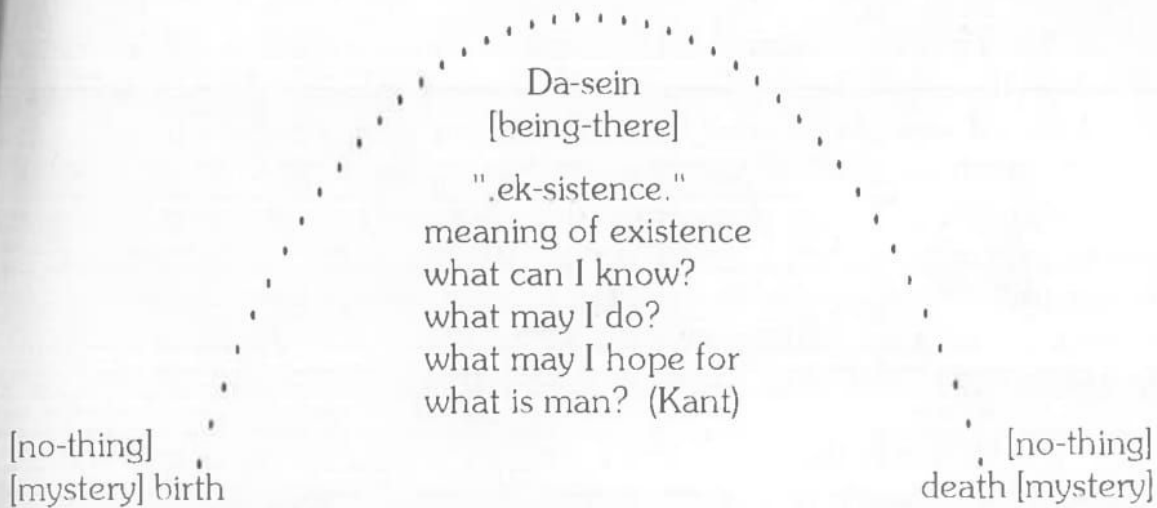
Holistic thinking will open up new horizons for the comprehension of the meaning of our lives. It will broaden our understanding for what we can know, what we can do, what we may hope for, and who we are. Holistic thinking will help us to realize the importance of having an horizon at all for the understanding of our lives; it will enable us not to be limited to the present, to look beyond and to remain open for future possibilities. As Gadamer writes: "A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, 'to have a horizon'

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means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small." <sup>1</sup> Trying to think wholeness may help us to realize that suffering and death, too, belong to the life of each one of us, and that beyond birth and death a further horizon unfolds; a mysterious dimension that is not absolutely nothing but certainly no "thing"; a dimension that can give ultimate meaning to our lives.

For Heidegger the human being is always already concerned about wholeness. Man is the unique being that in his being is always already concerned about being as such. Heidegger determines man as *Dasein* (being-there), the "place" where being is there, where it is present but also absent; where it is present in its absence and absent in its presence. In later writings Heidegger defines man as "ek-sistence"; man "stands out" into the truth of being; man is always already attentive to the whole. In a diagram, the above can be expressed as follows:



### MARTIN HEIDEGGER - THE THINKING "OF" BEING

Thinking holistically, then, has something to do with what Heidegger elaborates as the question concerning being. Learning to think holistically means to learn with Heidegger to ask the question about being. This question stands like a guiding star over Heidegger's way of thinking and determines his life and his work. He says: "To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky." <sup>2</sup>

In the year 1907, Heidegger, then a student at the *Gymnasium* of Konstanz, just eighteen years old, studies Brentano's dissertation *On the Manifold Meaning of Being since Aristotle* (1862). For the first time, here, he encounters the question concerning being. If being can have many meanings since Aristotle, Heidegger wants to know the unique meaning of being itself.<sup>3</sup> As years pass by, the question concerning being takes different forms. In 1927, Heidegger publishes his first major work, *Being and Time*. Here, he asks "the question concerning the meaning of being." In

his introduction, Heidegger distinguishes four aspects of the question concerning being:

- + What is asked about (*das Gefragte*), i.e., being itself.
- + The question to be formulated (*das Erfragte*), i.e., the question concerning the meaning of being.
- + What is interrogated (*das Befragte*), i.e., *Dasein* (man insofar as he is concerned about being), and
- + The questioner (*der Fragende*), i.e., *Dasein*.<sup>4</sup>

The being that is interrogated and the questioner are the same. The question concerning being thus has a reflexive structure, i.e., to ask the question about the meaning of being means to study the questioner.<sup>5</sup> In order to distinguish his study of being from traditional metaphysics, Heidegger now calls it "Fundamental ontology." "Fundamental ontology," he writes "must be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*."<sup>6</sup>

Under the influence of Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger develops his method as hermeneutical phenomenology. He expresses it in the form of *Apophainesthai ta phainomena* and translates it as "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself."<sup>7</sup> The phenomenon encountered is not to be prejudged but can show or unconceal itself as it is. What is to be studied first of all is being itself. As a possible horizon for an understanding of "being," "time" comes to the fore. Being unconceals itself in time. *Being and Time*, however, does not reach its intended goal. It remains a fragment.

Starting with the early thirties, a new approach in Heidegger's study of being can be seen. The question about being now becomes the question concerning the truth of being. Heidegger's second major work *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* [Contributions to Philosophy - (From the Event of Appropriation)] (1936 - 38),<sup>8</sup> then, asks the question about the truth of being as the question concerning the being of truth. Here a certain turning [*Kehre*] in Heidegger's thinking can be observed. The attempts to find an answer to the question of being submits to a perpetual preparedness and readiness for the advent and further unconcealment of being itself. Heidegger summarizes his insights in the principle of the turning [*Grundsatz der Kehre*]: "*Alles Wesen ist Wesung*" ("All essence is a coming to pass").<sup>9</sup> The essence of a thing, traditionally called its "whatness" or "quidditas," is not something static, it is something that is "coming to pass." This is especially true for being as such. The inquirer has learned that he can not determine being, but that it is, moreover, being that will determine him and his inquiry. The unconcealment of being, Heidegger terms event [*Ereignis*]. Every unconcealment means a broadening of man's horizon. The important thing in asking the question concerning being is the questioning itself and through questioning to maintain a certain kind of readiness and prepared-

ness for being's advent. In face of man's preoccupation with beings, the answer to the question of being has to remain open. Heidegger writes in his *Letter on Humanism*:

"Yet being - what is being? It is it itself. The thinking that is to come must learn to experience that and to say it. 'Being' - that is not God and not a cosmic ground. Being is farther than all beings and is yet nearer to man than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest from man. Man at first clings always and only to beings." <sup>10</sup>

In this way of questioning about being, thinking itself receives a new meaning. In other words, the breakthrough to a deeper dimension transforms thinking. Thinking is no longer understood merely as the subjective ability of the human being. What is thought is what is handed over to man by being itself. Only the unconcealment of being enables thinking. Thinking is the "thinking 'of' being." As Heidegger nicely expresses it in *The Thinker as Poet*: "We never come to thoughts. They come to us." <sup>11</sup>

In later writings, Heidegger variously applies this thinking of being. This thinking has consequences for the understanding of history, science and technology, art, language, ethics, theology, and human beings themselves. It leads to a deeper discernment of the essence of human beings and helps to rediscover the mysterious dimension of their lives.

**History** is for Heidegger the "history 'of' being." The genitive "of" emphasizes that history belongs to being. Heidegger plays with German words. The *Geschick* [destiny, the process of this sending (being)] *schickt* (sends) itself. This becomes man's *Schicksal* (fate). *Geschichte* (history) is, then, that which is being sent. In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger writes: "The happening of history occurs essentially as the destiny of the truth of Being and from it. Being comes to destiny in that It, Being, gives itself."<sup>12</sup> Being historical, then, means to be aware of the *Geschick* (being).<sup>13</sup>

The thinking of being also points to the limits of **science and technology**. Heidegger says: "What the sciences accomplish, ideally speaking, is an approximation to the essential nature of all things." <sup>14</sup> And later, in the same lecture, he continues: "Only when science proceeds from metaphysics can it conquer its essential task even afresh, which consists not in the accumulation and classification of knowledge but in the perpetual discovery of the whole realm of truth, whether of Nature or of History."<sup>15</sup> Metaphysics means here to go beyond, i.e., to think being. At times, Heidegger becomes very critical about science, when he for example writes: "Modern science neither serves the purpose originally entrusted to it, nor does it seek truth in itself." <sup>16</sup>

Heidegger introduces an important distinction between "calculative" and "meditative" or, as he also calls it, "essential" thinking.<sup>17</sup> "Calculative" thinking in simple terms is the thinking of science and technology. "Meditative" or "essential" thinking, on the other hand, characterizes the thinking of being. It is that thinking which, especially in the West, is much neglected. For Heidegger, "calculative" thinking without "meditative" thinking is limited. He declares:

"Calculative thought places itself under compulsion to master everything in the logical terms of its procedure. . . . That which, however, is always and everywhere closed at the outset to the demands of calculation . . . this can sometimes put the essential man in touch with a thinking whose truth no 'logic' can grasp. The thinking whose thoughts not only do not calculate but are absolutely determined by what is 'other' than what-is, might be called essential thinking." <sup>18</sup>

Besides "calculative" thinking, "meditative" or "essential thinking" is needed, because "it looks to the slow signs of the incalculable and sees in this the unforeseeable coming of the ineluctable. Such thinking is mindful of the truth of Being and thus helps the Being of truth to make a place for itself in man's history." <sup>19</sup>

We are not prepared for the fast progress of science and technology, because due to our preoccupation with calculative thinking, we have forgotten to "go beyond" and to think meditatively. Heidegger says: "Yet it is not that the world is becoming entirely technical which is really uncanny. Far more uncanny is our being unprepared for this transformation, our inability to confront meditatively what is really dawning in this age." <sup>20</sup>

Heidegger's intention is not just to attack science and technology. He can give credit to them and acknowledge their accomplishments. He warns, however, that we should watch out not to be so much under their influence that we lose our freedom in using their devices. The right attitude he describes with an expression used by Meister Eckhart as *Gelassenheit* (releasement). Man can make use of technological inventions but must not allow them to determine him; moreover, he keeps his freedom to use them according to his needs. Heidegger writes:

"It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. I would be short-sighted to condemn it as the work of the devil. We depend on technical devices; they even challenge us to ever greater advances. But suddenly and unaware we find ourselves so firmly shackled to these technical devices that we fall into bondage to them. Still we can act otherwise. We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves

so free of them, that we may let go of them any time. We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them be alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core. We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and waste our nature. . . . I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses 'yes' and at the same time 'no,' by an old word, *releasement toward things*" <sup>21</sup>

Essential thinking will make us released [*gelassen*]. And it is in releasement that we will rediscover the mysterious dimension of our lives. As Heidegger maintains: "Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together." <sup>22</sup>

The thinking of being leads to a new understanding of **art**. In a very unique way the work of art tells us about being. Being unconceals itself in the work of art. In his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger says: "The artwork opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this revealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the artwork, the truth of beings has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work." <sup>23</sup>

As a consequence, it is no longer the artist himself that is the originator of the work. It is not he that is important. As Heidegger says: "It is precisely in great art... that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge." <sup>24</sup>

The truth of being unconceals itself in the work of art. For Heidegger "Beauty is one way in which truth essentially occurs as unconcealment."<sup>25</sup> Or as he says in another formulation: ". . . the beautiful belongs to truth's propriative event." <sup>26</sup>

**Language** is for Heidegger not merely a means of communication that can be studied in a philosophy of language. As Heidegger says: ". . . if the truth of Being has become thought-provoking for thinking, then reflection on the essence of language must also attain a different rank. It can no longer be mere philosophy of language." <sup>27</sup>

In thinking which is the thinking of being, being comes to language. The origin of language is being itself. Heidegger explains: "Thinking brings this relation to Being solely as something handed over to it from Being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking Being comes to language. Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells."<sup>28</sup> "Language is the house of Being" means that the unconcealment of being is preserved in

language. Human beings have a distinctive relationship to the unconcealment of being. What makes them unique among all other beings is that they do have language.

If language is understood in such a new way, then also those who work with language, such as poets and writers, have a particular responsibility. The task entrusted to them is to preserve the unconcealment of being. Heidegger writes: "Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of Being insofar as they bring the manifestation to language and maintain it in language through their speech."<sup>29</sup>

Yet in the ordinary way of using language, we are far away from recognizing this deeper meaning of language. As Heidegger claims: "Language still denies us its essence: that it is the house of the truth of Being. Instead, language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over being."<sup>30</sup>

Heidegger thus again and again emphasizes the importance of silence. It is in silence that we learn to listen and become aware of the deeper dimension, Heidegger calls being. "Everything depends upon this alone, that the truth of Being comes to language. Perhaps, then, language requires much less precipitous expression than proper silence."<sup>31</sup> Earlier in the same essay, Heidegger says: "Before he speaks, man first must let himself be claimed again by Being, taking the risk that under this claim he will seldom have much to say."<sup>32</sup>

Heidegger critics have pointed out that Heidegger's philosophical system does not have an ethics and that it is thus incomplete. Heidegger, however, never wanted to create a philosophical system. The thinking of being can not be expressed in a system. He calls his writings not even works. The *Leitmotiv* of the *Gesamtausgabe* is "Ways not works" [*Wege nicht Werke*]. Thinking itself is for Heidegger original ethics. As he formulates it: ". . . thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who exists, is in itself the original ethics."<sup>33</sup> That of course does not give us concrete guidelines for action: ". . . can we obtain from such knowledge directives that can be readily applied to our active lives? The answer is that such thinking is neither theoretical nor practical. It comes to pass before this distinction. Such thinking is, insofar as it is, recollection of Being and nothing else."<sup>34</sup> Our ethical behavior will change with our learning of the thinking of being. Heidegger says: "More essential than instituting rules is that man find the way to his abode in the truth of Being."<sup>35</sup>

The thinking of being and **theology** is another theme to be considered. Being that unconceals itself, the Christian God who reveals himself; language the house of being, the Bible as Divine Word. - The relationship between Heidegger's thinking and theology is obvious. Heidegger does not deny the influence of theology on his thinking. He starts his academic life as a student of theology and philosophy. As he writes: "Without this theological background I should never have come upon the path of thinking. But origin always comes to meet us from the future."<sup>36</sup> And yet Heidegger is not a theologian. He wants to be the thinker of being. What this thinking can lead to at most is to prepare for and to elaborate conditions for an encounter with the Christian God.<sup>37</sup> Thinking wholeness and holistically creates awareness for the holy. Only then the divine, gods, and God may come into the picture. Heidegger writes: "Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word 'God' is to signify."<sup>38</sup>

Lastly, Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" shows the consequence of the thinking of being for the understanding of the **human being**. The letter is a response to questions raised by the French philosopher Beaufret. It was published in the year 1947. Traditional definitions of man are for Heidegger not sufficient. Heidegger writes: ". . . the highest determinations of the essence of man in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of man."<sup>39</sup> Also the Aristotelian definition of man can not suffice. Heidegger says: "Expelled from the truth of Being, man everywhere circles round himself as the *animal rationale*."<sup>40</sup> For Heidegger man has to be seen in his relationship to being. Man "*ek-sists*", he stands out into the truth of being. Heidegger clarifies: ". . . in the determination of the humanity of man as *ek-sistence* what is essential is not man but Being-as the dimension of the *ecstasis* of *ek-sistence*."<sup>41</sup> Again and again in different formulations, Heidegger expresses man's special relationship to being. In his essential unfolding within the history of Being, man is the being whose Being as *ek-sistence* consists in his dwelling in the nearness of Being. Man is the neighbor of Being."<sup>42</sup> With this relationship to being also his relationship to beings changes. "Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being."<sup>43</sup> The care for the unconcealment of being, the care for the whole is entrusted to him. The new humanism, Heidegger calls "a humanism that thinks the humanity of man from nearness to Being."<sup>44</sup> This is a humanism where people learn to think holistically, where people rediscover that they always already do carry the mysterious dimension that gives meaning to their lives within themselves.



To sum up, being prepared for the XXIst century will mean for us to learn a new way of thinking. This thinking will have to be holistical. Heidegger's thinking of being offers a possibility for holistic thinking. Its applications have shown the richness this thinking advances. New horizons open up for our knowing, hoping, and doing. And in the process we will rediscover the preciousness of our own selves.

Thinking holistically is only possible in genuine dialogue. The XXIst century thus will have to be a century of dialogue; dialogue between men and women, between the poor and the rich, between people of different generations, traditions, colors, social status, and ideological orientations; it will have to be a century of dialogue between the sciences, theology, and philosophy.

Social transformation and development will not merely mean improving the economic situation or political empowerment of a people and democratization. It will also have to take the other dimension into account, i.e., that human beings are meditative beings, who philosophize and practice religion. The XXIst century needs more than ever thinkers in Heidegger's sense - and this is his concern.

### NOTES

1. H. -G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d.ed. (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1993), 302.

2. M. Heidegger, "The Thinker as Poet," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 4.

3. Heidegger, "My Way to Phenomenology," in *On Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972), 74.

4. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), 25ff.

5. ". . . to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity - the inquirer - transparent in his own Being. . . . This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term 'Dasein'." (*Being and Time*, 27).

6. *Being and Time*, 34.

7. *Being and Time*, 58.
8. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, ed., F. - W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989).
9. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 66.
10. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrel Krell (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 234.
11. "The Thinker as Poet," 6. In his Anaximander essay, Heidegger speaks of the "dictates" of being [cf. *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), 303, 340].
12. *Basic Writings*, 215.
13. Gadamer says "To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete." (*Truth and Method*, 302.)
14. "What is Metaphysics?" in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: New American Library, 1975), 243.
15. *Ibid.*, 256.
16. *Ibid.*, *Postscript*, 258.
17. Cf. Gabriel Marcel's distinction between "primary" and "secondary" reflections.
18. *Postscript*, 262.
19. *Ibid.*, 263.
20. Heidegger, *Memorial Address*, 52.
21. *Ibid.*, 531.
22. *Ibid.*, 55.
23. *Basic Writings*, 165.
24. *Ibid.*, 166.
25. *Ibid.*, 181.

26. Ibid., 206.
27. "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, 198.
28. Ibid., 193.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 199.
31. Ibid., 223.
32. Ibid., 199.
33. Ibid., 235.
34. Ibid., 236. Later in the same essay, Heidegger writes: ". . . . thinking is a deed. But a deed that also surpasses all *praxis*." (239).
35. Ibid., 239.
36. "A Dialogue on Language," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 10.
37. Cf. H. Kulüke, "The Relevance of Heidegger's Second Major Work, 'Beiträge zur Philosophie' for the Question of God - Stimuli of the *Seynsgeschichtlichen Denkens*,'" *University Journal: Graduate School of the University of San Carlos*, II (1995): 1-12.
38. "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, 230.
39. Ibid., 210.
40. Ibid., 221.
41. Ibid., 213.
42. Ibid., 222.
43. Ibid., 221.
44. Ibid., 222.