

Heidegger's Subtle Revealing of Revelation

The *Beitrage* as a 'Work'

The commentaries on the *Beitrage* have improved significantly since the initial "wha?" following its publication and subsequent translation. Thomas Sheehan's "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research" is a good example.

One point that I feel has escaped notice is the wording of Heidegger's note as to his refusal to publish the book until the centenary of his birth. This wording has implications, I believe, as to how the book should be approached and understood. These implications also answer the apparent contradiction between the notion of the book as a failure from Heidegger's perspective, and his desire to associate the book's publication with a personally important event, albeit one at which he would not be present except in the mode of absence. It also perhaps clarifies the disparity between the two titles and Heidegger explication of the reasons for that within the book itself.

Sheehan quotes in translation Heidegger's note in the following manner: 'The *Beitrage*, he wrote ca. 1941, fails to achieve "the form that I precisely require for publication as a 'work'" ' (GA 66, 427.11-13).

Initially this seems a straightforward admission of failure to achieve the projected nature of the book. What has apparently been overlooked in the secondary literature, so far as I have been able to discover, is the technical meaning of 'a work' in Heidegger's vocabulary.

Heidegger, in the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" spends a good deal of time thinking on the word 'work'. Two short definitions that are mutually reinforcing on the meaning of 'work' allow the results of this thinking to be gleaned:

1. "The work "holds open the Open of the world".".
2. "The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there. The work lets the earth be an earth..

Heidegger's notion of a strife between the protective, concealing nature of earth and the opening, unconcealing nature of world have been well discussed, so I will assume a familiarity with it.

In both definitions, 'work' is defined by its verbal intent and effect. A work, as opposed to a thing or a piece of equipment, "holds open ...", "moves the earth ...", and "lets the earth". Relating this back to Heidegger's statement about the *Beitrage*, it must be in this manner that the book failed, specifically its form failed to achieve "the form ... that I precisely require ... for publication as a work".

The notion of a work as an active revealing cannot be valid only for the originator (the artist in the case of a work of art). It has to engage the audience in its activity as a revealing. Any revealing, as well, has to be a revelation of some thing. The notion of *ereignis* itself was a sudden thing for Heidegger, as he expressed to Medard Boss while discussing recurring dreams. Revelation itself could be described phenomenologically as "abrupt insight". Something in the nature of revelation is also entirely convincing to the person who experiences it, and this conviction that the revelation is true appears to originate in the self-reinforcing nature of revelation itself. The difficulty inherent in any revelation is communicating that conviction to someone who has not, themselves, experienced the idea as revelation.

In his confrontation with Hegel's "Phenomenology of Mind" Heidegger notes the abruptness of each dialectical sublation into the next level of development. The end of the development itself is the sublation of a dialectical understanding of self consciousness and knowledge into absolute knowledge. Absolute knowledge is absolute in terms of its reflexivity, i.e. its self-reinforcing character. Heidegger also spends a good deal of the confrontation on the intent and purpose of the *Phenomenology of Mind* as the preparation of the reader for the *a priori* insight required to understand his "System of Science", science being "the" science, rather than this or that science or all of them. Heidegger's approach to Hegel on this basis

is focused on the different titles Hegel used for his books at different times.

As a work, then, the *Beitrage* ought to have its purpose as an active revealing in a similar way to Hegel's *Phenomenology*. The insight of the latter, though, is insight precisely into absolute knowledge, which is the requisite state a reader must have achieved in order to understand the books to follow. Heidegger spends some time in the *Beitrage* discussing the two titles of his book, much as he had with Hegel's. He declares the two titles as 'public' and 'essential' respectively. Since the book was apparently meant to have both titles on its cover, the essential title isn't less 'public' in this most apparent sense.

It is less public, then, in itself. "vom Ereignis", means from x, no matter how one chooses to translate the second word as x.

"Enowning", "Propriation", "Event of Appropriation" have been variously used in the English translations of *Ereignis*. Without taking sides in the debate as to the accuracy of each (not having the expertise to determine from the word itself any worthwhile personal opinion), I will only note that Heidegger often preferred words that had multiple meanings, intending all of them. This is in contrast to the common use of esoteric language to prevent the ambiguity of multiple meanings often associated with less technical terms.

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If "vom Ereignis" is Heidegger's fundamental interpretation of the meaning of the *Beitrage* when viewed as a work, as an active revealing, then the form of the work has to reveal the meaning of

Ereignis itself. As a sudden insight, as it was described in conversation with Boss, Ereignis has the character itself of revelation. Since the revelation of Ereignis appears to be a requisite for understanding the discourse of the later Heidegger, the *Beitrage* would be the revealing of revelation itself. In this sense then the *Beitrage* could be viewed as Heidegger's equivalent, in terms of his oeuvre as a whole, of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in Hegel's oeuvre, or Thus Spake Zarathustra in Nietzsche's work. This would properly characterize its status as a 'work'. It would also place its importance as recognized by its publication on an anniversary, while providing the meaning of Heidegger's admission that it did not achieve the 'form' necessary. The

final view of the work, then, is that its intention is, through form, to reveal the nature of revelation. Its failure to achieve this form is the same failure of the *Phenomenology of Mind*. Without an a priori experience of revelation its intention and meaning are totally missed. A revealing that only reveals to those who have already experienced the meaning of the revealed fails to provide a revelation to those without the experience of revelation. "For the few and the rare" and "The Ones to Come" within the book is Heidegger's admission that only those who have experienced revelation, or absolute knowledge, can have any understanding of the book as a work. The *Beitrage* contains many correspondences in both form and content with other revelatory books. A proper analysis of these correspondences might itself reveal much as to what Ereignis signifies in its full sense.