

## Foreword

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Heidegger *bifrons*. What thinker of the twentieth century more than he followed the furrows of metaphysics, delineated its constitutive difference, measured its structure, reasigned it to unity? There is another aspect, found by many worrisome or inconsequential: the “destruction” of that tradition, the discovery that its rational foundation (*Grund*) is an abyss (*Abgrund*), that the enigma of Being is still unthought, and that our “salvation” is still as fragile as the quivering of speech on the verge of silence. A historian of thought reassures; a thinker is disconcerting. *On that limit*, isn’t he yet still a metaphysician—the most original and powerful of our times? In other words, didn’t he bring metaphysics to its extreme limit, similar to an octopus that has emptied out its ink, so much so that every thing now plays out *differently*?

The *limes* is not at all a straight line drawn on a map. It is a path that can, either directly proceed between two fields, opening an access to them while delineating them, or surround and close a domain upon itself, as was the case for the border of the Roman Empire. Both meanings are applicable to Heidegger, and we do not intend to disjoin them: we seek first a free encounter with metaphysics, better encompassed and mastered; and second an advance into the inviolate or a path that leads beyond the acknowledged ways and perhaps beyond what can be traveled. It is true, as Jacques Derrida notices in *Margins of Philosophy*, that philosophical discourse “has

always been intent on ensuring for itself the mastery of the limit." On this view, wouldn't Heidegger's thought be a mere *repetition*, one perhaps involving genius but nonetheless much less remarkable than it first seemed? "In other words, does the limit, obliquely, and by surprise, always reserve one more blow to philosophical knowledge?" This question, which Derrida raises in the most general terms, seems pertinent concerning Heidegger only if its terms have been slightly modified or shifted. The Heideggerian gaze indeed reserves, in its very fulgurating, a certain part of the oblique *limus* (another possible etymology for our question on the "limit"); but if such a gaze is surprising, it is also because of its refusal merely to contribute to the increase of knowledge, because of its own way of suspending the quest for "more" and of allowing the advent of the Antecedent.

Indeed, Heidegger's thought is unique. Everyone is bound to grant the following: Every major thinker worthy of the name should be studied in terms of his irreducible specifics, if his originality is not for show. However Heidegger, whatever the judgment that may be passed on his work by each reader, has not perhaps been recognized *in his most demanding uniqueness*. Hundreds, thousands of papers and books have been written on him all over the world. In France, intellectuals have greeted him first as the grandfather of existentialism, then as the godfather of structuralism. But today people talk a lot about difference, yet hardly have reread *Identity and Difference*; there is ample concern for the crisis in rationality, but people have hardly reread *The Principle of Reason*; alarms are sounded around the enormous dangers that technological civilization seems to pose and heap upon us because of its own movement, but one hardly takes into consideration *The Question Concerning Technology*. Is an illustrious example necessary? Ilya Prigogine, winner of the 1977 Nobel Prize for chemistry, disparages in *Nouvelle Alliance* (New Alliance) "Heidegger's more than dangerous theses" (p. 38). After devoting exactly thirty-five lines of text (filled with very general quotes which, he claims, manifest Heidegger's "radical hostility" toward technological work as well as every "communicable knowledge"), he does not stoop to articulate any

sort of refutation, but instead prefers to move on to the next critics, Bergier and Pauwels, who obviously were contestants much easier to unmask.

If acknowledging Heidegger's singularity is to consist of bringing a great name under a classification, then this is not our business. In this respect, praise is at least as dangerous as attack: against both sides we are on the defensive because, in the background, we nurture no recuperating afterthought, no ideology. We don't even intend to propose a new interpretation. More modestly, we suggest taking into account—by thinking them anew—the *requirements* of such a singularity which, beyond the invitation to a sobriety of language and rigor in reading the major texts of metaphysics, are centered around the will to unmask always better the unthought of Western metaphysics. Heidegger is therefore unique not only in his ambiguous *bifrons* situation vis-à-vis metaphysics, which he both announced and denounced, but also in the dynamic he creates by claiming over and over again—for example in *What Is Called Thinking?*—that “we do not think yet.” Has anyone, at least in the Western tradition, sacrificed so much to the task and work of thinking while claiming that just about the entire path still needs to be traveled? Has anyone gone so far in his meditating quest while still calling for an even deeper gathering recollection, as for the miraculous catch of a thinking still to come?

Such a requirement is all the more demanding as we are not attempting to repeat the Master, but instead to undergo the apprenticeship of what one of us has called “contiguity” and the experience of dizziness in the face of the domination of the earth and its worrisome results. At the time when the numbers are growing of those who have doubts concerning the way taken by the Western world and seek another outcome in vain, it would be paradoxical that in neglect one should overlook the smallest seed sown in the field of thought and, among others, the seed of the Heideggerian meditation.

In deciding to join our efforts, yet without confusing them, we produced the five following studies while remaining

aware, each one of us, of what brings us together and what differentiates us in encountering Heidegger's literally crucial challenge to "overcome" metaphysics.

Since the issue was to follow Heidegger to the most extreme limits of this thought, to push the questioning as far as possible along with, or against, him and not to summarize the *corpus* nor to claim that we had finally isolated its definitive quintessence, there was no reason to have a unified approach. On the contrary, as much as possible the ways of access, the angles of attack were diversified. To an essay of traditional interpretation—traditional perhaps only by its form, since nothing is more contemporary than the reexamination of the figures of writing leading to the *chiasmus* as a central piece—four essays respond whose orientation is more toward modernity (its metaphysical essence, its undecidable rationality, its possible *both* revealed and reserved), each of these four being also different from one another: two paper-like articles, a deliberately fragmented meditation, and a dialogue with four voices.

"Crossroads" punctuate the meditation on the Heideggerian chiasmus, and silences surround exchanges between the four friends in New York, the capital and crossroads of the technological world. The questioning precipitates, then suspends itself, as the gravity of night settles. Plato and Lao-Tse with their ancestral wisdom slip within the star-like emergence of our common perplexities. Unplanned encounters . . . .

We wish to be allowed to associate in the memory of Jean Beaufret all those who do not entirely despair of thought and patiently attempt to delineate a path amidst what *Holzwege* names "the night of the world."

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