

HEIDEGGER'S SPEECH
AT
HUSSERL'S SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

FOR EDMUND HUSSERL
ON HIS
SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY¹
April 8, 1929

by
Martin Heidegger

translated by
Thomas Sheehan

For your students, celebrating this day is a source of rare and pure joy. The only way we can be adequate to this occasion is to let the gratitude that we owe you become the fundamental mood suffusing everything from beginning to end.

In keeping with a beautiful tradition, today on this celebratory occasion we offer you as our gift this slender volume of a few short essays. In no way could this ever be an adequate return for all that you, our teacher, have lavished upon us, and awakened and nourished in us.

In the coming days many will try to survey your work in philosophy and to evaluate its impact and effect on various scales. In so doing, they will bring to mind many things that we should not forget. However, that way of parceling out a person's intellectual impact and of calculating the influence of his writings fails to grasp the essential matter for which we owe you our thanks.

That essential element will not be found by considering how fruitful your teaching career has been. Surely such effectiveness will continue to be the prerogative and good fortune of every professor as long as German university escapes the doom of getting turned into a mind-numbing trade school.

No, the essence of your leadership consists in something else, namely that the content and style of your questioning immediately forces each of us into an intense, critical dialogue, and it demands that we always be ready to reverse or even abandon our position.

There is no guarantee, of course, that any of us will find our way to the one thing that, so unpretentously, your work sought to lead us to: that releasement in which one is seasoned and ready for the problems.

So too the works we present to you are mere witnesses to the fact that we wanted to follow your guidance, not proof that we succeeded in becoming your disciples.²

But there is one thing we will retain as a lasting possession: Each of us who had the privilege of following in your footsteps was confronted by you, our esteemed teacher, with the option either of becoming the steward of essential matters or of working against them.

On this celebratory occasion, as we view your philosophical existence in this light, we also acquire secure points of reference for giving a true assessment of the value of your work in philosophy.

Does it consist in the fact that some decades ago a new movement emerged in philosophy and gained influence among the then-dominant trends? Or that a new method was added to the list of previous ones? Or that long-forgotten problem-areas got reworked?

¹ Martin Heidegger, "Edmund Husserl zum 70. Geburtstag," *Akademische Mitteilungen*: Organ für die gesamten Interessen der Studentenschaft von der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität in Freiburg/Br., 4. Folge 9. Semester, Nr. 14, May 14, 1929, pp. 46-47. [Note: some corrections from Louvain have not been entered into this footnote. see my questions on their hardcopy.]

² "...in die Gelassenheit, reif zu werden für die Probleme."

³ "...nur eine Bezeugung dessen, daß wir Ihrer Führerschaft folgen wollten, nicht ein Beweis dafür, daß die Gefolgschaft gelungen."

Is it simply that the space then available for philosophical inquiry grew wider and more complex? Is it not, rather, first and foremost that your research created a whole new space for philosophical inquiry, a space with new claims, different evaluations, and a fresh regard for the hidden powers of the great tradition of Western philosophy?

Yes, precisely that. The decisive element of your work has not been this or that answer to this or that question but rather this breakthrough into a new dimension of philosophizing.

However, this breakthrough consists in nothing less than radicalizing the way we do philosophy, bending it back onto the hidden path of its authentic historical happening as this is manifested in the inner communion of the great thinkers.

Philosophy, then, is not a doctrine, not some simplistic scheme for orienting oneself in the world, certainly not an instrument or achievement of human *Dasein*. Rather, it is *this Dasein itself* insofar as it comes to be, in freedom, from out of its own ground.

Whoever, by dint of research, arrives at this self-understanding of philosophy is granted the basic experience of all philosophizing, namely that the more fully and originally research comes into its own, the more surely is it "nothing but" the *transformation* of the same few simple questions.

But those who wish to transform must bear within themselves the power of a fidelity that knows how to preserve. And one cannot feel this power growing within unless one is up in wonder. And no one can be caught up in wonder without travelling to the outermost limits of the possible.

But no one will ever become the friend of the possible without remaining open to dialogue with the powers that operate in the whole of human existence. But that is the comportment of the philosopher: to listen attentively to what is already sung forth, which can still be perceived in each essential happening of world.

And in such comportment the philosopher enters the core of what is truly at stake in the task he has been given to do.

Plato knew of that and spoke of it in his Seventh Letter:

__ητ_ν γ__ ο_δαμ'ς_ σ_τιν, _ς_ _λλα_ μα'_μα_τα, _λλ_ __ πο_λλ_ς
σ_υνου_σ_ας γ_ιγνομ_νης π__ τ_ π__γμα_ α_τ_ _α_ το_ συ_ζ_ν
_ξ_α_νης, ο_ον_ π_ π_υ_ς π_ηδ_σαντος _ξ_α_'_ν_ 'ς, _ν_ τ_ ψ_υχ_
γ_ν_μ_νον_ α_τ_ _αυτ_ _δη_ τ__ι. (Seventh Letter, 341c)

"In no way can it be uttered, as can other things, which one can learn. Rather, from out of a full, co-existential dwelling with the thing itself -- as when a spark, leaping from the fire, flares into light -- so it happens, suddenly, in the soul, there to grow, alone with itself."

⁴The words "comes into its own" translate "sich...ins Werk setzt," which in turn refer to *ντλχια* / *νγια*, that is, the act of being gathered into *τλος* / *γον*. See Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, GA I, 9, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976, pp. 282-288. E.T., "On the Being and Conception of *Φσις*," trans. Thomas Sheehan, in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, Cambridge, UK, 1998, pp. 215-220. Also Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Pfullingen: Neske, second edition, 1961, II, 404-405; E.T. by Joan Stambaugh, *The End of Philosophy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1973, pp. 5-6.

⁵"*das Hineinhören in den Vorgesang, der in allem wesentlichen Weltgeschehen vernehmbar wird.*"