

## Heidegger & Harding from Alan Mann

The subject of our last meeting was 'Heidegger and Harding'. I'd realised there were a number of points in their respective philosophies at which they come surprisingly close to one another. I recently found the following Heidegger quotation which prompted me to look more carefully at their meeting points: *"To live authentically is to live in the full awareness of the nothingness of one's self."* I used Heidegger's *Conversation on a Country Path* to explain what I thought about the correspondence between the pair and as the opening to our usual dialogue.

*Conversation on a Country Path* is a parable in which three men, a scholar, a scientist and a teacher explore the possibility that truth may require a more comprehensive approach than is available through traditional philosophy. The choice of the path as metaphor reminds me of the many paths to realization, Zen, Advaita, Krishnamurti, the mystics of all traditions, etc., etc. Heidegger offers 'meditative' thinking as a necessary correction to the everyday 'calculative' thinking which, he reminds us, has become our dominant mode of being.

The three walkers, with the teacher as a wise prompt, arrive at various conclusions, which will be familiar to us as fairly typical of the perennial philosophy, and which can be demonstrated by the Harding experiments. The country path conversation explores the possibility of becoming free from our familiar technological habitation of thought, explanation and concept thus leading us into a more peaceful environment and finally to arrive home at where we truly belong. Somewhere else, Heidegger describes philosophy as inspired by *homesickness*, the urge to come back to where we truly belong. He talks about this destination as *Gelassenheit*, the essence of thinking, which provides different and a more radical insight into who we are.

***Comment: This is an interesting parallel with Douglas Harding's insistence of finding out "what we really, really are", another way of understanding the perennial philosophy which assumes an incomplete apprehension of our true being, a habitual overlooking of first nature.***

In explaining how I intended to present my case I reported that at a recent meeting of our men's group one of our members mentioned that at a recent concert he had suddenly felt that he was somehow absent and that the music was all there was. This brought to mind the Eliot quotation: "...or music heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all, / but you are the music/ While the music lasts"— and it was exactly such moments that set me off on my particular path of enquiry. Searching around for explanation of such experiences I stumbled on Ken Wilber's early writings from which I now quote the following:

*In unity consciousness, in no-boundary awareness, the sense of self expands to totally include everything once thought to be not-self. One's sense of identity shifts to the entire universe, to all worlds, high or low, manifest or unmanifest, sacred or profane. And obviously this cannot occur as long as the primary boundary, which separates the self from the universe, is mistaken as real. But once the primary boundary is understood to be illusory, one's sense of self envelops the All—there is then no longer anything outside of oneself, and so nowhere to draw any sort of boundary. Thus, if we can at all begin to see through the primary boundary, the sense of unity consciousness will not be far from us.*

*From the foregoing it's too easy to jump to the erroneous conclusion that all we have to do to usher in unity consciousness is destroy the primary boundary. In a crude sense that is true, but the situation is actually much, much simpler than that. We really don't have to go to the trouble of trying to destroy the primary boundary, and for an extremely simple reason: the primary boundary doesn't exist.*

*Like all boundaries, it is only an illusion. It only seems to exist. We pretend it exists, we assume it exists, we behave in every way as if it exists. But it does not. And if we now go in search of the primary boundary, we will not find a trace of it, for ghosts leave no shadows. Right now, and I mean right while you're reading this, there is no real primary boundary, and so right now, there is no real barrier to unity consciousness.<sup>i</sup>*

Back in 1987 I bought a paperback copy of the book *Discourse on Thinking* which comprises three sections. The final section is *Conversation on a Country Path* and the first two sections of the book provide Commentary on the conversation. I'm not sure what prompted me to buy the book, four years before I met Douglas Harding, but I

must have recognized correspondence between the Heidegger essay and the Harding article 'On Having No Head' I read about that time. That too, triggered an intuitive 'yes' but without a realisation of why such a strong affirmative response.

In preparing these notes I found an article on Gelassenheit by *Barbara delle Pezze*<sup>ii</sup> particularly helpful in unraveling Heidegger's meaning and I have extracted from her paper what I think are the main points and added my Comments on why they correspond with Harding and how the Harding experiments reveal the actuality of what is being pointed to by the trio on the walk. Extracts from the delle Pezze paper, sometimes mixed with my additions, are shown in italics from this point. I have inserted notes on direct parallels with Harding and marked these inserts as 'Comment'.

The most important area in which the Heidegger and Harding stories correspond is in their conviction that we have to go beyond conceptual representation into actual experience to understand our essential being; to make the shift which discloses first as well as second nature. At the meeting we tried the pointing finger experiment to see if we could at least see, if not agree, about what was looking. For those who sense there might be something in these 'simple instruments' but not convinced I suggest they try Sam Harris's version. <sup>iii</sup>

Now to the Heidegger essay, there is deliberate uncertainty in the account of the walk and the contributions of the three participants are less important than the combined effect of their dialogue in breaking our traditional patterns of thought. The process of the exchange involves giving priority to the process above individual contributions, in much the same manner as Bohmian dialogue.

*We can say that, as every moment of the dialogue, what we are looking for is already showing itself, and investigation itself is already an experience of it.*

This reminded me of Sam Blight's rendering of this principle: 'We awaken when we realize that what we are looking for is what we are looking out of'.

### **Meditative thinking**

*Man is quite capable of Meditative thinking but is also in flight from it, somehow we manage to lose it needs to be re-awakened. This reawakening rarely happens*

*spontaneously, it does not just happen by itself, it requires effort but the sort of effort involved is more like the farmer waiting for the seed to come up and ripen. It keeps us focused on reality and is the essence of thinking. Without Meditative thinking we become uprooted from ourselves.*

## **Releasement**

The necessary action involves what Heidegger calls releasement. Releasement requires the adoption of a stance of letting go of, releasement from, the familiar perspective of things and of calculative thing.

*This releasement has to be combined with an openness to the mystery, the mystery being whatever might be hidden from us by our habitual mindset. If we are able to do this we are enabled to inhabit the world in a totally different way.*

*Comment: In the case of the experiments, releasement is a necessary condition to enable the perspective of boundlessness. If I insist on what I know, for example, giving priority to the knowledge I have about my head I will not admit what is actually SEEN. Awareness remains bound by and not released from second nature.*

## **Gelassenheit (Waiting upon?)**

*This is a condition which is completely open to Being's governance. It involves turning away from man towards man's essence and could be expressed as surrender to Meditative thinking in which the traditional concept of thought as representing and, consequently, willing are let go, together with the notion of subjectivism: thinker, willer, self. This action, summarized as non-willing, allows Gelassenheit to wake up – it enables us to let ourselves in. Gelassenheit is THE relation to Gagnet.*

*Comment: More like an awakening as Being, an awakening to what we really are as demonstrated in all the experiments.*

Letting oneself be called forth and resolving to let this happen results in in-dwelling which Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, also refers to as 'existence'. Requiring in-standing, standing in care which we might call mindfulness.

*Comment: The first person perspective opens us to Gelassenheit, the experiments provide what Heidegger calls effective effort by, instead of a roundabout country wander, turns us around immediately to see what we really are. (Eckhart talks of Gelâzenheit involving a letting go of images of God and of self. Eckhart)*

*Heidegger: Thinking is no longer representing. Thinking becomes "coming into the nearness of distance".*

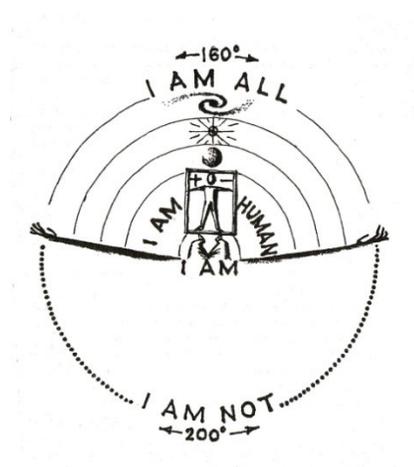
*Comment: I wonder why he doesn't say 'thinking is now awareness?'*

*This apparent passivity is a form of 'higher acting' letting us in to Gelassenheit. An awaiting without expectation upon the as yet unknown. Waiting free of the task of weaning, of needing to arrive at a result of letting go. Not waiting for but waiting upon. Gelassenheit as "higher acting" is further determined in the dialogue as "waiting" [warten]. As Heidegger affirms, what can be done to glimpse Gelassenheit is to actually do nothing but "wait," "we are to do nothing but wait"*

Uncertainty about all this is a good sign, it indicates the necessary openness. AWM

## **Gegnet—That which regions**

*Horizon as the space in which we represent the objects around us. The horizon before us is only the side facing us. The side facing us of an openness all around us involves three elements: objects, the horizon and that which lets the horizon be. That which lets the horizon be, the openness all around us, the region of all regions. This is called Gegnet—the truth of Being.*



*Gegnet is the essential movement that relates and determines the relation to Dasein.  
(Being in the world)*

***Comment: I prefer Being as the world. Both Heidegger and Harding use the word 'region' in similar if not exactly the same way. Heidegger to communicate the various manifestations of Being, Harding to reveal the different levels of Being.***

*It lets everything merge in its own resting. Where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests.*

***Comment: Sounds like Sunyata.***

Heidegger refers to that which regions, Gegnet, as 'source'. Harding calls it 'the aware space here', Traherne uses 'Capacitie', the openness that holds the fillings.

*Technology generates a fussiness about beings at the expense of any reflection on source. ...This is homelessness, since it is precisely this 'source' which in the deepest sense is man's home. Heidegger understood Being as 'source' which in its 'self-blossoming' is responsible for anything coming into the open where it can be encountered by human beings, but which itself remains 'forgotten' or concealed. <sup>iv</sup>*

## **Dialogue**

Unfolding meaning in the space between thoughts and participants. Receptiveness  
And bracketing creating the possibility of new paths, of something new arising. The  
swinging between the participants' input during in the Conversation walk creates the  
opportunity for Gelassenheit to come about.

***Comment: A version of two-way looking and how similar this to Douglas's point that how we describe ourselves depends upon the level at which we choose to rest. The onion diagram (above).***

*Turning back to which we belong, in so doing allowing to be our innermost being, to be Da-sein. In this relation, and just in this relation, the human being can be fully himself. When we think in terms of representing , we belong to Gegnet, in that, as 'thinking beings', we remain in that horizon which is but the side of Gegnet that "is turned*

toward our representing. *That-which-regions surrounds us and reveals itself to us as the horizon*".

*Comment: How much simpler to see this as first and third person perspectives. When we remain identified with second nature, we are trapped in the unawareness of our first nature as, in Heideggerian, 'that which regions.*

## **Two-way Looking**

If we are already in it, as an expression of Gegnet why don't we realize it? Heidegger puts it as "a restless to and fro between yes and no". A swinging movement of concealment and unconcealment. Different perspectives of the same "originary" movement, the "originary turning" that is Ereignis.

*"If we can call Ereignis an event at all, it is the 'a priori event' of the opening up of the open." And it does not lie in distant space, but lurks as an intimate obscurity at the heart of our own thought and experience.*<sup>v</sup>

*The task is that of being mindful and moving closer to that which is closest to us, and because of this farthest, that is, be-ing in its truth. Thinking the truth of be-ing is the task of thinking, and thus of man, that as a "thinking being" is called to "in-dwell into releasement into that which regions."*

*Comment: The problem for Heidegger arises from his determination to represent what he has transcended by taking us beyond the representation of calculative thinking; to re-represent what he's just led us beyond. Leading us into his meditative alternative and then undoing his good work by trying to represent it—the revelation. The equivalent mistake in headlessness is to see the revelation of the experiments, the first person perspective, as an attribute of our third personhood. To think of first nature as an attribute of second nature, the 'I am enlightened' trap. On the other hand, we can see that he does leave the openness open at the end of the walk.*

This is the final exchange of the three walkers:

Scientist: Indeed, waiting is really almost a counter-movement to going toward.

Scholar: Not to say a counter-rest.

Teacher: Or simply rest. Yet has it been definitely decided that " Αγγιβαοιή " means .....going .....toward ?

Scholar: Translated literally it says "going near."

Teacher: Perhaps we could think of it also as : "moving-into-nearness."

Scientist: You mean that quite literally in the sense of "letting-oneself-into-nearness" ?

Teacher: About that.

Scholar: Then this word might be the name, and perhaps the best, for what we have .....found.

Teacher: Which, in its nature, nevertheless, we are still seeking.

Scholar: "Αγγιβαοιή": "moving-into-nearness." The word could rather, so it seems .....to me now, be the name for our walk today along this country path.

Teacher: Which guided us deep into the night .

Scientist: ... that gleams ever more splendidly

Scholar: ... and overwhelms the stars ...

Teacher: ... because it nears their distances in the heavens...

Scientist: ... at least for the naive observer, although not for the exact scientist.

Teacher: Ever to the child in man, night neighbors the stars.

Scholar: She binds together without seam or edge or thread.

Scientist: She neighbors; because she works only with nearness.

Scholar: If she ever works rather than rests ...

Teacher: ...while wondering upon the depths of the height.

Scholar: Then wonder can open what is locked?

Scientist: By way of waiting ...

Teacher:... if this is released .

Scholar: . . and human nature remains appropriated to that...

Teacher: ... from whence we are called.

## Postscripts

Dave Knowles: Referring back to the use of the word source, by both Harding and Heidegger, we can add Gebser's 'Ever Present Origin'.

Christopher McLean: The Guide's poetic utterances at the beginning are a mode of being that is in touch with Being, in a less separated way. He keeps responding that way, and they don't get it, so he joins them in something that is more their style of discourse.

Graeme Wilkins: Why don't we watch the You Tube 'Heidegger in 12 Minutes' which we then did. The experience was marred by my inability to get it 'full screen' but the link is below if you want to try yourself. <sup>vi</sup>

My apologies for not including some of the other contributions which have slipped away since the meeting . This exercise has helped me to understand another Heidegger quote '*Making itself intelligible is suicide for philosophy*' which I thought an amusing self-deprecatory observation on his famously impenetrable prose but if truth is inaccessible to conceptual thought, it makes sense.

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<sup>i</sup>'No Boundary' by Ken Wilber p.47

<sup>ii</sup>Heidegger on Gelassenheit—*Barbara delle Pezze* <http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie//vol10/Heidegger.html>

<sup>iii</sup>Waking Up by Sam Harris pages 141 and 165.

<sup>iv</sup> Some helpful references to 'source' in Thinkers of Our Time—Heidegger by David Cooper (pages 71 & 77, etc)

<sup>v</sup> Meaning, Excess, and Event Richard Polt <http://www.heideggercircle.org/Gatherings2011-02Polt.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Heidegger in 12 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A04RhtR0imY>

*Making itself intelligible is suicide for philosophy.*

*Martin Heidegger*