

Some Remarks to the
HEIDEGGER CIRCLE 2013
MAY 3
at the OMNI New Haven Hotel

1. I would like to thank David Pettigrew, Natalie Nenadic, and the Heidegger Circle for this invitation to speak to you. Welcome to New Haven! I urge you especially to look at the newly renovated and greatly enlarged Yale University Art Gallery. It deserves all the rave reviews it has received.

In it you can discover two small panels by the Master of Messkirch, named after the high altar painting of St. Martin in Messkirch, the church whose patron saint gave Heidegger his first name, the church in which he was an altar boy and his father a sexton. When I showed Gadamer the gallery, now many years ago, these two panels made us of course think of Heidegger. And when later, in the gallery shop, we found a little booklet on the panels, we decided to send it to Heidegger with a note that in considering the four great persons Messkirch had produced, Abraham a Santa Clara, Konradin Kreuzer, Archbishop Conrad Gröber, and of course Heidegger himself, we had forgotten the Meister von Messkirch. We were teasing, of course, and Heidegger never answered. And there was a little barb in our friendly teasing.

2. I am very much aware of what I owe Heidegger. His thinking has accompanied my own from the very beginning. But from the very beginning I also felt a need to keep a certain distance from Heidegger. I have always had an aversion to hero worship, perhaps because of my childhood in war-torn Germany. When I was a guest professor in Bonn, it was suggested to me that I visit Heidegger. The wife of professor Gottfried Martin wanted to smoothe the way. But I knew that the questions I wanted to ask were too serious to be addressed in a friendly conversation over a cup of coffee and Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte. They were too personal, involving both his and my own past. And I have always had an aversion to academic tourism.

I have had my chance to say what I felt needed saying about Heidegger's political engagement in a number of essays and reviews and, despite all that has been published since, including the books by Farias, Ott, and recently Emmanuel Faye, I have seen no reason to change in any fundamental way what I said already in my early essay, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker."

3. As I said, I know what I owe Heidegger and I was pleased when asked to contribute to the Festschrift in Honor of Heidegger's 80th Birthday — Hans Jonas and I were the only contributors from this side of the Atlantic. To my contribution I gave the title *Das Befreite Nichts*. It already represents a first attempt to use Heidegger's essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art* to cast some light on the present situation and future of art. That has remained a central concern, although my emphasis soon shifted from painting to architecture. My book, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* and a great many related essays are unthinkable without Heidegger. This concern found its most recent expression in a lecture I gave a year ago at the

Eikones Forum in Basel, in the same room where Nietzsche once lectured, and which in the not too distant future should appear in print. I gave it the title: *Entwurf, Vorauswurf, Zuwurf: Zur Vorläufigkeit des Kunstwerks*, Those familiar with the German text of the *Origin of the Work of Art* may recall the passage that gave me my title, a title that picks up on Heidegger's play with the word *werfen*, to throw. Traditionally of course we distinguish between the finished work of art and the *Entwurf*, the preliminary sketch that points ahead and calls for a future work. To understand a work of art with Heidegger as essentially an *Entwurf* is to challenge the traditional understanding of the aesthetic object as ideally a self-sufficient whole. To develop that challenge has long been a central concern of mine. To consider the work of art as essentially a *Vorauswurf*, a something thrown ahead, into the future, is to challenge the emphasis on the present that finds striking expression in Kant's understanding of the beautiful as the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction, which Nietzsche later was to poke fun at, then in Schopenhauer's popularization of this Kantian understanding of the beautiful, as it still does in Michael Fried's proclamation about minimal art: "presentness is grace." To speak of the work of art as essentially a *Zuwurf* is to recognize that those who are to receive it are constitutive of the work of art. *Vorläufigkeit* finally suggests that something is only preliminary, incomplete, and further that every great work of art is essentially futural.

4. There is of course tension between such future orientation and a nostalgia that is never very distant with Heidegger, so when he recalls his native Messkirch, the field-path, the Black Forest farmhouse of the 18th century, which is to teach us how to dwell and build; but also when he writes of the Greece of the tragic age. The place Heidegger assigned to the 18th century farm-house has its analogue in the place the Bavarian rococo church has in my own thinking. That both date from the 18th century, i.e. place us on the threshold of the Enlightenment, is significant. A critical confrontation with our Enlightenment heritage that has shaped our modern world is at the center of Heidegger's, as it is of my thought.

5. One could say that this is also a central theme with Husserl. Does his *Crisis of the European Sciences* not represent a valiant, almost desperate attempt to rescue reason from the too narrow understanding that has presided over our technological thinking? But that attempt did not and could not succeed. The phenomenological project as Husserl conceived it, suffers shipwreck on the question of Being, as Husserl sensed, when he finally began with a serious reading of *Being and Time*.

6. Key to that shipwreck is what I have called the antinomy of Being. I developed that antinomy in a paper with that title that appeared last year in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*; much more fully in a book that I just published in German with the title *Wahrheit: Die Architektur der Welt*. Heidegger confronted this antinomy in *Being and Time* in his attempt to think the ontological difference, the difference between beings and Being, the latter referring first of all to the way things disclose themselves to Dasein, i. e. to human being. When we approach that difference from the perspective of transcendental philosophy we will want to say:

Being is constitutive of and therefore transcends beings. Beings can present themselves only to a being that is such as we are, a being that, embodied and dwelling in language, is open to a world in which beings have to take their place and present themselves if they are “to be” at all. The way beings present themselves is always mediated by the body, by language by history and founded in the being of Dasein as care. In the “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger will repeat the sentence: “Only as long as Dasein is, is there [gibt es] Being.” (GA9, 336/216)

But Heidegger qualifies this when he speaks in par. 43 of *Being and Time* of the dependence of Being, but not of beings, of reality, but not of the real, on care, i. e., on the always understanding and caring being of human beings (G2, 281/255). In “The Letter on Humanism” this qualification becomes: “But the fact that the Da, the lighting as the truth of Being itself, comes to pass is the dispensation of Being itself...” (GA9, 336) There is therefore a sense in which beings and the real can be said to transcend that Being (Sein) which is said to be relative to Dasein. To be sure, these beings could not “be” in the first sense without human beings. Only human consciousness provides the open space that allows things to be perceived, understood, and cared for. That space is a presupposition of the accessibility of things, of their being. But this is not to say that we in any sense create these beings. Our experience of the reality of the real is thus an experience of beings as transcending Being. This demands a distinction between two senses of Being, the first transcendental sense relative to Dasein and in this sense inescapably historical, the second transcendent sense, gesturing towards the ground of Dasein’s historical being and thus also of Being understood transcendently. But any attempt to lay hold of that ground must inevitably fail. Here our thinking bumps against the limits of language. And yet this ground, Heidegger insists, calls us, if in silence, opening a window in our modern world, a world shaped by the progress of metaphysics. The evolution of Heidegger’s thought since *Being and Time* can thus be described as supplementing the silent call of conscience with the silent call of Being, where there is a suggestion that only as a response to the latter can there be the authentic speech that would seem to be inseparable from authentic dwelling. To speak here of a *Kehre*, as Heidegger himself does for the first time in print in the “Letter on Humanism” (G9, 328) is misleading, in that it suggests a reversal. But, as Heidegger points out, “there has been no change of standpoint.” The question of Being remains central. The so-called *Kehre* is thus better understood, as Heidegger himself here describes it, not as a philosophical advance, but as a more thoughtful attempt to attend to the matter to be thought (G9, 343). What makes it necessary is the antinomial essence of Being, which denies the thinker a foundation. The antinomy of Being shows us why we cannot dispense with something like the Kantian understanding of the thing in itself, for which Husserl’s phenomenology has no place, as his Fichte lectures emphasized.

6. Why does any of this matter? My answer is not so very different from the answer Kant might have given to the question: why insist that science can comprehend only phenomena and not things in themselves? It matters because that science that continues to transform our life-world cannot know anything of persons as persons. I do not owe respect to a robot with a computer brain. In an age that seems to

promise the technical reproducibility of just about everything the aura that lets me experience a person as such threatens to vanish.

7. A final word. I spoke of the antinomy of Being. In *Being and Time* that antinomy finds one expression in the tension between an understanding of Dasein as essentially homeless in the world and another as essentially in the world and assigned its place by the world. That tension between freedom and rootedness, which is also the tension between open space and place, presides over Heidegger's *Denkweg*. More immediately it presents itself to us in the question: where are we to go? What is to bind freedom? I agree with Heidegger that what is to bind freedom, what is to provide measure and direction, cannot be something we can freely establish, but must be something we receive and discover. With Nietzsche or Heidegger we might say, it is the earth, or, appealing to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, it is nature, which must give us the rule; that is to say also, our own nature, dependent on others, on our fellow human beings. But nature here means also this earth, this planet. There is a sense in which the exploration of space, including the vain search for extraterrestrial intelligence, have led to an ever clearer understanding that we have no other home than this all too fragile, beautiful earth. Despite our freedom, we remain earth-bound mortals. Our bodies and the earth to which it belongs remain the ground of all meaning. In this sense we can speak of the need for a post-Copernican geocentrism.

Karsten Harries
Howard H. Newman Professor of Philosophy
karsten.harries@yale.edu