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Being Paul Edwards

BEING PAUL EDWARDS

Thinking lets itself be claimed by *being* in order to give utterance to its truth, says Heidegger. Can *being*, approached as personified, possess an unspoken truth – or any truth? To ask this is to forget that although grammar requires *being*, as the theme of a discussion, to go into the subject place, we are not thereby reifying it. To think so would be to mistake personification for reification. By personification one handles the endemic tendency of thought towards reification. One makes a fictional figure of an abstraction, overtly. One gains the expressive and imagistic power of a resonant word like 'being' without the mystifying suggestion of an arcane entity working away, hidden, in a noumenal background. This way of dealing with Heidegger on *being* can steer us between the impression of the mystification in Heidegger's writing of which Edwards complains, and the unconvincing rejection of it as elementary linguistic confusion that he attempts.

READING HEIDEGGER ON BEING

Paul Edwards, in *Heidegger's Confusions*,ⁱ diagnoses a false profundity in Heidegger's search for the meaning of *being*. The use of 'being' as a noun can be analysed in terms that leave no room for a theme of *being*. We can analyse 'a house has being' as 'there is at least one thing that is a house'. ('No house has being' appears, correspondingly, as 'for each and every thing there is, it is not a house.')

Heidegger's puzzle that *being* is neither an entity nor nothing then disappears. We have no need of sentences that place *being* as something we need to discuss and for which we must search out a meaning. It is not only Heidegger's allegedly bombastic language of *being* that would be demolished by Edwards's methods of analysis, moreover. He claims that the very idea of taking *being* as a major theme for philosophy – a mark of much post-phenomenological European philosophizing, rests on linguistic confusion. The nerve of Edwards' attack is a very simple logical thesis. A rhetoric of intense political and aesthetic animus intrudes upon its precision and effect, however. Edwards betrays some lack of confidence in the method of reasoned argument. He concludes his crucial first section (after the introduction) on Heidegger's 'quest for being' by flailing at Heidegger's readers:

Heidegger will continue to fascinate those hungry for mysticism of the anemic and purely verbal variety, the 'glossogonous metaphysics' of which his philosophy is such an outstanding example. More sober and rational persons will continue to regard the whole Heidegger phenomenon as a grotesque aberration of the human mind.ⁱⁱ

Edwards is being un-sober and less than rational in writing like this. His sentences will not sustain analysis. What does he mean? He writes as if to criticise those who are satisfied with a merely 'anemic and verbal' mysticism. As if they ought to hanker after a full-blooded and substantial variety? How does he rate various mysticisms on a scale of their being anemic? Anyway, surely a 'sober and rational' thinker would criticise mysticism, whether anemic or not. Edwards has lost control of his critique in the face of Heidegger's writing. Presumably he means simply to say that Heidegger's admirers are not sober, and that sobriety is the proper attitude of philosophy.ⁱⁱⁱ In that case to 'be Paul Edwards' is to remain strictly sober even when reading Heidegger's lyrical 'glossology.'^{iv} Exasperated at the power of Heidegger's writings however, he succumbs sometimes to the desire to throw abuse and his measured sentences fall apart.

Many readers of Heidegger have been threatened with a sense of mystification by his uses of language, even while they find that his writing catches aspects of life and experience and casts them in a new light. This is a problem that Edwards recognises but, in exasperation, fails to resolve. Edwards' diagnosis of what is wrong with a search for *being* employs the elements of the predicate calculus that an undergraduate might learn in their first few weeks of a logic course. Nevertheless, one could accept Edwards' elementary diagnosis of Heidegger's 'quest' without having to regard Heidegger as more foolish or cunningly manipulative than is believable. It is not uncommon to raise up something as needing enquiry on the basis of being able, grammatically, to make a theme of it. To accept Edwards' diagnosis of an elementary flaw is logically consistent with finding much that is of value in Heidegger's writings. The intricate workings of a project can be informative and revealing even when a project is fundamentally flawed. For instance, we read Berkeley not only to show off to undergraduates how we can refute him. Though there is a flaw in his fundamental premise that all we experience are ideas, we can see in the details of what he says, a process of critical thought about experience, its objects and the self in process of formation. Similarly, while there is no such thing as phlogiston, we can see the early structures of genuine experimentation in chemistry in the work that was conducted within its terms. Suppose that Edwards is right – that we need not speak of *being* at all. We restrain ourselves to stating, 'there is this', 'there is not that' and so on. It does not follow that there is nothing of value in anything Heidegger wrote in terms of his enquiry as a search into (the meaning of) *being*.

In these first few pages of his Introduction to *Being and Time*,^v Heidegger recognises that if one takes *being* as one's theme, there can be no question of defining or describing it. In that case the critical reader will ask how he manages to write the book. The textual answer is that he leaves the question of *being* in the wings, and writes the book by bringing on to the stage a fascinating and rich variety of ways of being in the world. Heidegger may hold, or imply, that the point of this is only to exhibit, indirectly, the real theme of *being*, itself. But the readable material on the *ways of being* is what gives us something valuable to take away.

Certainly, Heidegger does characterise his philosophy as an inquiry into *being*. He leads with his jaw, as they say in boxing circles. Still, one may have reservations about Edwards' confidence that the basis of Heidegger's entire work can be undone by diagnosing one elementary logical error. In fact, Heidegger anticipated one central critical point made by Edwards. What Edwards will insist upon (almost eighty years later) Heidegger had already seen. It is a basic error to treat *being* as a descriptive category – even the most general of all categories. So a search for (the meaning of) *being* cannot be a search for some description of it. For the same reasons, *being* is not some mysteriously indescribable entity. It is not an *entity*. As Heidegger always insists (Edwards admits he does) *being* is not a being. So Edwards is mistaken in sometimes saying that Heidegger's error is to have taken *being* as a super-entity. It is the very use of 'being' as a noun rather than a participle that creates trouble for an ontologist. To say 'being is not an entity' provokes the question 'Well, what is *being* then?' A question in that form still treats *being* as some object of enquiry. The only solution, by means of a 'definition in use', or 'incomplete expression' is never to place 'being' as the subject.

In order to keep some sense of perspective in criticising Heidegger's ambition (from 1927) it is necessary to recognise that it is not only some recent European philosophers who have made a renewed investment in the theme of *being*. Some analytical philosophers have chimed in with Edwards. But two of those who praise Edwards in this way have their own investments in ontology. They see a renewal of ontological commitment as rescuing philosophy from a conceptual analysis that is only descriptive. Ontology is a *logos* (account, explanation) of *being*. Within that style of analytical philosophy it is said that we have to ask the *ontological* question about the differences that lie behind our various descriptions of individual things – *beings*, that is.

This revival of metaphysics assumes as intelligible an ultimate enquiry into ultimate *being* – what there is as it is. Anyone engaged in *being Edwards* might like to defend the ontological quest typical of analytical philosophy on the ground that, ultimately, it concerns only beings. Ontology has its own dynamics, however, once people join in the dance. For instance, under pressure of making sense of the new ontological quest, the ancient and medieval debate about 'universals' has taken flight again. This is a strange development. The same argument that Quine used to dispose of *being* as something one had to admit in order to say 'of' something that it did not exist, applies also against the alleged need for universals. We are ontologically committed only to that over which we quantify – the values of our bound variables. We must predicate something of those values in order to state anything, but this is not, in turn, to bind *universals* to warrant those predicates. If I say that foxes are red, Quine points out, foxes are the values of my bound variables. When something is described as red, 'redness' is not a value of a bound variable. Quine's criterion of ontological commitment is the framework of Edwards' critique of Heidegger for recognising *being*. *Being* cannot be a value of a bound variable. One gives a 'definition in use' of what it means to say that something (a fox) *has being*. To say that a fox has being is to say that there is at least one fox. The apparent mention of *being* as what things possess, disappears. But the universal now accepted again as a proper theme of inquiry within the analytical philosophy that Edwards defends, also disappears.

This internal critique of one style of analytical philosophy for getting involved in ontology – its own quest for *being* – does nothing to legitimate Heidegger's quest for its meaning. Perhaps all forms of fundamental ontology are logically flawed. In any case, Heidegger's project must stand on its own feet. To search for the meaning of *being* seems to make a kind of sense to some thoughtful readers. If they are right and Edwards is right in his elementary point, then what Heidegger achieves in a text that makes *being* its centrepiece must be somewhat other than he imagines it to be. Opening *Being and Time*^{vi} afresh at the one-page preface confronts us with the enigma of Heidegger's question of *being*. First he quotes the words of Plato's Socrates: 'For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression 'being'. We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed.' Heidegger asks, rhetorically, whether 'we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'. The answer is 'Not at all'. It is declared therefore 'fitting that we should raise anew *the question of the meaning of Being*.' (More than seventy years later, Derrida could write twenty or thirty pages just as a note on Heidegger's 'Note' in *Being and Time*.)

Certainly, some defenders of the Heideggerean project will reply to Edwards that for him to suppose that Quine's criterion of ontological commitment is relevant shows that he has entirely mistaken the nature of

Heidegger's quest. Edwards argues that what 'Horses have being' states, can be said equally by 'There is at least one thing that is a horse' He thinks that this undermines Heidegger's quest. But Heidegger could reply that his interest in *being* runs parallel with his interest in the 'is' employed by Quine's analysis of ontological commitment. If Heidegger learned to talk Quine-ese he would ask 'When I bind my variables, when I say that there *is* something that is a fox, what is the meaning of this 'is'? Following Parmenides and Plato, the meaning of 'Something is' fascinates Heidegger. Edwards notes this, but makes a slip. He reads this preoccupation as Heidegger's belief in a property of 'is-ness'. He takes Heidegger to make the mistake Kant first diagnosed – of treating existence as a 'predicate'. That something exists is not something *about* it. (Surely Kant and Edwards are right in this, however much we bicker over what can rightly be called a 'predicate'.) Edwards alleges Heidegger's making this error as the reason why he thinks he can pursue his 'quest'. (A wild goose chase, as Edwards sees it.) But that is Edwards' slip. Heidegger's fascination with 'is' (profound or misguided) is equal with his quest for the meaning of *being*. His interest both in 'being' and 'is' derives from the fact that the words are *not* descriptive – they are not predicative. One cannot deal with *being* by saying that *being* exists. That would be to say that there *is* this *being*. One cannot deal with the meaning of 'is' by saying *is-ness* exists. That would be to say that there *is* this *is-ness*. In both cases, 'is' remains with us, unexplained.

[INTERLUDE] SENSES OF *SINN* AND *BEDEUTUNG*

One can put Edwards's critique of Heidegger this way. It is in his mis-understanding of words that have a use but no reference ('all', 'none', 'is', 'not') that Heidegger is looking for what 'being' refers to – its '*Bedeutung*'. To Edwards one can reply that Heidegger asks about the sense (*Sinn*) but not the *Bedeutung* of 'being' (*Sein*). Certainly, there are conceptual problems in translating *Sinn* ('sense') and *Bedeutung* ('reference') that arise in these opening lines of the Preface to *Being and Time*. The problems remind us of some origins shared by analytical philosophy and phenomenology. Where Russell mediates Frege for Quine, it is Husserl who mediates Frege for Heidegger. They hold in common the ideas of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* - meaning or sense, and signifying or referring. In reviving ontology in philosophy ('On What there Is') Quine distinguishes describing from reifying. Beside that project we can set Heidegger's question of the 'meaning of being' – the *Sinn* of *Sein*. When Heidegger first raises the question of the meaning of *being* he is asking about the sense of *being such and such – seiend* not about something to which *Sein* might refer. And when he asks about the sense of *Sein* – the meaning of the *being* of whatever *is* – certainly he is not asking about its *Bedeutung*. Furthermore, there is never a question of something to which the participle '*being*' ('*seiend*') could refer. It is only a whole phrase of which *seiend* forms a part that can signify. The same goes for '*Sein*' understood as infinitive or as abstract noun. The analysis of 'being' given by Edwards (following Russell and Quine) would have the point, in this context, of undercutting the importance of its being a substantive. (The 'important substantive', *Sein*, as the Macquarrie translation puts it). We cannot coherently think of it, either, as having a reference in and of itself. There is no question of the *Bedeutung* of *Sein*.

Those with a taste for logico/grammatical explanations of the significance (or non-significance) of grand philosophical projects will be pleased to hear that the descriptive book called *Sein und Zeit*^{viii} can be written even though it is preceded by an introduction that demonstrates its impossibility. The quest(ion) for the meaning of *being* is the pursuit of a quarry that remains always on a horizon that (as horizons do) recedes at the same rate as one approaches it. But while chasing this receding horizon of a noun (*being*) Heidegger is covering the picturesque and memorable ground marked out by participles – *being there, being with, being ready at hand, being ready to hand, being towards death, and being temporal*.

Anglophone analytical philosophers from Russell onwards have hammered home Frege's supposedly simple distinction between *Sinn* ('sense' or 'meaning') and '*Bedeutung*' ('reference' or 'referent'). The distinction has made its way into analytical philosophy – between 'meaning' as 'connotation' and 'reference' as 'the thing referred to'. Frege observes that the *Sinn* of 'Morning Star' is different from that of 'Evening Star', but their *Bedeutung* is the same. In the British adoption of Frege, the *Bedeutung* of 'Morning Star,' and of 'Evening Star' is read as 'reference' in the sense of the planet itself. In common with words like 'choice,' however, 'reference' is ready-made for ambiguity between the activity of referring and the thing to which we refer. Thus the joke, at a cattle show, about the judge's choice. (I owe the example to Keith Campbell some decades ago.) 'The judge's choice is wise', says the winning owner. 'You've got a fine bull, but I wouldn't go so far as to say that!' says his mate. 'Choice' as the choice made, and 'choice' as the thing chosen. In the same fashion, 'reference' in relation to the planet Venus may be taken as the *reference made* (thus '*precise*') or as the planetary body (thus '*massive*'). So we should be cautious in using the simplified distinction between sense and reference that has become such a commonplace in analytical philosophy. John Macquarrie tells us that he will render '*Sinn*' as 'meaning' or 'sense' (depending on context). '*Bedeutung*' is to become 'signification' and the infinitive '*Bedeuten*' is to be read as 'to signify'. If you are signifying something then you are engaged in '*Bedeutung*'

even when the intended referent does not exist. It still has the *sense* of referring. So ‘*Sinn*’ and ‘*Bedeutung*’ do not secure the hard and fast difference that is imputed to Frege when he said that the *Bedeutung* of ‘Evening Star’ and of ‘Morning Star’ are the same while the *Sinn* of each is not. The usual business of language is to allude to something beyond the words one employs and beyond the act of reference achieved by use of the words. *Bedeutung* (like ‘reference’) is the referring, or the referent itself, depending on context. The referring done by ‘Morning Star’ is not exactly the same as that done by ‘Evening Star’. Each referring ends at the same point, but it sets out from a different one.

Bedeutung as referring or signifying is a function of language engaged in by a user. For example, one cannot invoke the distinction between ‘*Sinn*’ and ‘*Bedeutung*’ to claim that ‘Hamlet’ has a *Sinn* but no *Bedeutung*. There is no historical figure against which it is relevant to test the statements Shakespeare pens about Hamlet. Nevertheless, because of its grammar, ‘Hamlet’ (unlike ‘thoughtful’) *refers* – to a figure *described* as thoughtful. This *Bedeutung* in the absence of a real thing or person is not confined to fictional uses of language. If you refer to your house in ignorance of the fact that it has burned to ash since you left it earlier in the day, still your phrase ‘my house in Sydney’ has *Bedeutung*. It is not just that the phrase still has a sense, a *Sinn*. The phrase is being used in an act of referring. In relation to Heidegger’s quest for the meaning of *being*, his exclusion of a *Bedeutung* of *Sein* means that he takes ‘*Sein*’ not to be involved in any manner of reference. ‘*Sein*’ does not refer – not even to an imaginary object.

Sinn and *Bedeutung* come hand in hand. Neither has conceptual or operative priority over the other. The issue of sense instantly arises as we attempt to refer to something. Equally, just as soon as we form into a sentence terms that have a sense, we are involved in some sort of reference. (It makes no difference whether we are stating, issuing imperatives, speculating or writing fiction.) There have been, over the centuries a few brilliant attempts to construct a theory of significant language that rests, ultimately, on pure names that lack any sense. First, in Plato’s *Theaetetus* and more recently in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and Russell’s logical atomism, we are given a vision of such an ultimate level of language. Such theories attempt to forestall the regress that arises from explaining the meanings of words by reference to other words. The summary reason why these attempts fail is that referring is already a kind of signifying, even when it does not, overtly, involve describing. It is incomprehensible that signifying should succeed without description waiting in the wings. *Sein* might have a *Sinn* and not have *Bedeutung*, but in having a *Sinn* it is part of phrases and sentences that do make an attempt at reference – an attempt that might succeed.

In connection with Heidegger’s quest for *being* (and Edwards’s critique), my argument is that *Sein* has this role of contributing to reference in its cognate participle *seiend* (*being such and such*). In the space between the introduction and the work of *Being and Time*, the quest for *being* becomes the description of the richly diverse *modes of being* – *being anxious*, *being full of care*, *being cast into the world*, and so on. This permits the text to be generated.

THE *SINN* OF *SEIN*

Having cleared the air that shimmers above the shifting sands of ‘sense’ and ‘reference’, how do we stand in relation to Heidegger’s ‘re-raising’ of the question of the *meaning of being* – the *Sinn* of *Sein*? We have observed that Heidegger does not ask about the *Bedeutung* of *Sein*. So he is not, as Edwards alleges, trying to clarify some *thing* that is the object to which we attempt to refer. *Bedeutung* is relevant in our relation to *beings* but not in connection with *being*. Regarding *being*, it is only *Sinn* that is in question. But can Heidegger significantly ask even that much? What *Sinn* can pertain to *Sein*? Certainly, the sense that pertains to the word ‘*Sein*’ is not the *Sinn* of *Sein* that Heidegger seeks. But that is no objection. It is not only words that have *Sinn* – a ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’, as we say. A street-sign, a handshake, a tone of voice, a way of dressing and a way of living – any of these can have a *Sinn*. It is not an error of syntax or of sense to ask for the meaning of ‘*being*’. The problem is that, as an object of enquiry, *being* is elusive, whereas ‘being’ can be analysed in its linguistic functions.

We have observed that Heidegger senses a difficulty in formulating his question. ‘Being’ can occur as a plural noun (*Seiendes*), as in ‘These (human) *beings* are precious to us’. We can make specific reference (*Bedeutung*) or a general reference as in ‘Human *beings* are a mixed bag of troubles and delights’. These *beings* themselves have their various ‘meanings’ – their social significance, their affiliations and so on. Also, human beings have various meanings in relation to the inanimate world. In a related sense of meaning, the words for these beings, too, have their various meanings. As well as occurring as ready to take the plural, ‘being’ occurs also as essentially singular – as an abstract noun (*Sein*). We can say, ‘The being of the world is inexplicable’, or ‘He was shaken in his very being’. That abstract noun can occur in scientific contexts. We could say ‘The being of a

colour is that of the molecular surface structure of a coloured object'. (Evidently such a use of 'being' is well established in metaphysics – classically in Plato's *Parmenides*, later in the Scholastics, in the nineteenth century by Meinong, and then in a variety of experiments in the twentieth century). Heidegger's romance with the abstract noun resonates with the way we use *being* idiomatically to evoke a mood of seriousness and an atmosphere of gravity – 'The news affected him in his very being'. Edwards is alert to the power Heidegger derives from the very sounds and (half-imaginary) etymologies of words. He lacks a critical method for dealing with that power, however. He is reduced to invective against the *aesthetics* of Heidegger's writing.

Nouns and participles

The abstract noun in English has its counterpart in a sort of abstract infinitive in the German '*Das Sein*', like 'l'être' in French. Unlike the participle, the use of 'being' as an abstract noun (*Das Sein*) does not qualify a noun or adjective to complete a phrase. Whether in science or philosophy, to take *being* as a theme creates an intensive and evocative atmosphere. This is the effect that Edwards condemns as 'glossological'. When used thus, '*being*' signifies that the speaker/writer is undertaking some breath-taking adventure with words. The metaphysical scientist wants to know, not just how we get to see things in colour, but *what colour is* – its 'nature' – what it is to *be* coloured. Going further, the metaphysical philosopher wants to consider the *being* of all that there is – the sheer fact *that* there is what there is. The metaphysical thinker wants to draw a distinction not merely between cats and descriptions of cats, but between *language* and *world*, forgetting that language is itself ('in its being'?) a material matter – part of the world. As a scientist, the metaphysical impulse leads towards the *world itself* ('in its being'?), hidden behind appearance. As a philosopher, the impulse leads into an enigma already structured as impenetrable.

Thus, we create or enter into a world of words that promises limitless adventures. One would cite, pell-mell, the early dialogues of Socrates, Plato's *Parmenides*, Augustine's *Confessions* and Descartes' *Meditations* ('*I am caught between being and nothingness*'). For the twentieth century, works as different as Wittgenstein's first formal *Tractatus* and the tentative conceptual geography of *Philosophical Investigations* spring to mind. And Heidegger's *Being and Time* must be read as one of those linguistic adventures. Such works change the language they employ in their very employment of it. These adventures with words re-intensify and revive their meanings along with the meanings of the words that surround them, sharpening our apprehension of over-familiar language.

It is in the context of such adventures that one must read and examine critically Heidegger's use of '*Sein*' as an abstract infinitive in '*What is the nature (meaning, truth) of being (itself)?*' The practised philosophical writer knows that the insertion in a sentence of a bare occurrence of 'being' as an abstract noun is liable to make the reader draw their breath, reel at least somewhat, and enter a profound state of consideration or an ironic attitude of self-displacement. We have observed how the same philosophers (call them 'anglophone analytical') who would be suspicious of Heidegger's use of 'being' as an abstract noun are themselves eager to speak about ontological questions as defining philosophical enquiry. Not content with our richly diverse modes of *describing* things, they call upon philosophers to articulate the *ontological* differences that lie behind or support these descriptions. The language of *being* lends gravity to the undertaking. *What is it really in the world itself that is marked by, or upholds, our descriptions?* They draw a favourable contrast of their deep enquiry into the ultimate nature of things with 'superficial' conceptual enquiries into our manners of description. Within analytical philosophy the 'ontological question' wraps up, in the mists of ancient tradition, whether one can talk about *being*.

HEIDEGGER MAKES FRIENDS WITH *BEING*

Edwards excoriates Heidegger for his language and opinions as found in his *Letter on Humanism*. To read more carefully the Arendt whom (at the outset of the book) he damns with faint praise would have revealed some clues for deciphering Heidegger's determination to stay with the theme of *being*. Heidegger's appeal to *being* can be understood (in part) for the role it plays in dealing with the vexed relation of *willing* and *thinking*. One cannot, in considering the later work (of which the *Letter on Humanism* is such a significant contribution) forget the permanent and indelible shift achieved in *Being and Time*. In that work, more radically than Husserl himself, Heidegger has done with Descartes' own radical innovation – the use of an 'I' text as a vehicle for rigorous philosophy. Heidegger 'de-subjectifies thinking, *rob[bing] it of its Subject*– that I who thinks and wills'. In *Being and Time*, it is the various modes of being-in-the-world that replace Descartes' 'I think' and 'at least I seem to see light and to hear sounds' and 'I can at least imagine myself existing even while I imagine that I have no body'. But in Heidegger's later stage (of which the *Letter on Humanism* forms a part) thinking has become a function of *being* itself, *in which all efficacy rests*.^{viii}

At least in the introduction to *Being and Time* Heidegger rightly pointed out that *being* is not a being. It is neither a super-being with special properties nor the most general category of things. In that case certainly it is Edwards who is in the right to complain of Heidegger, in his last phase, attributing 'efficacy' to *being* (if Heidegger meant that literally). Efficacy is a causal category, operating at the level of beings, and modes of beings. Edwards must be right in criticising Heidegger as regressing rather than progressing in that later work, after the war, when he affects to be able to say, at last, some distinctive and positive things *about* being. The right question is 'What is going on here?'

Towards the end of the second volume (*Willing*) of her *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt makes a striking interpretation of Heidegger's famous 'reversal' or 'turning' that '*determines the entire development of his later philosophy*' after the War. (The 'turning' was in process already during the 'thirties'). His decision was to depart from the language of *Da-sein* with its emphasis on the manifold *ways* of being. This might become nothing more than a philosophical 'anthropology.' As if forgetting what he had pointed out in *Being and Time*, Heidegger directly summons *being* itself, using a grammar that places it as a sort of operative in the world. It is something that summons us, that has a 'house' (in language), that requires care (we, or language, must 'shepherd' it) and has broad effects in the world. The puzzle that Edwards cannot solve is how anyone can take Heidegger's writing seriously. Arendt makes light work of that problem. Heidegger is engaged in the device of personification. A striking diagnosis on her part – a daring reversion on Heidegger's to a time before Plato and before the pre-Socratics too. Heidegger reverts, not to Christianity as some fancy but to the world of Homer – a world of personified characteristics – what Socrates, Plato and Aristotle worked so hard to supersede and to eliminate.

In philosophy, to engage seriously in personification is indeed a 'reversal.' It is a reversal of the revolutionary change achieved by Greek philosophy in and after the work of Socrates. The Socratic and post-Socratic philosophers laid hold of the Greeks' language of gods those various figures that embody and live out the various virtues and frailties we recognise in humanity. The philosophers created philosophy by replacing that personification by abstractions – perfect Forms for Plato in one of his phases, and 'universals' for Aristotle. Instead of discussing love in terms of the god of love, and of her interferences in the lives of the other gods, for instance, one talks about the nature or essence of love itself – a quasi-object that is other than the thoughts, feelings and acts of love found in the world of experience.

In that light, we can say that Heidegger's 'turning' is from the mute abstractions of philosophy ('time', 'being', 'mind' etc.) to a drama enacted by figures brought back from that death of abstraction. If *to be Paul Edwards* were always to reject the device of personification as 'irrational glossolalia', such a being would rebuke John Keats as mystical. But, rather, we judge Keats as being most artfully precise. In apostrophe, he hails Autumn itself and parades the lively figures for the extent of his ode as an efficacious force:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run
.....
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours

Perhaps in *being* Edwards one will be milder in chiding Keats than Heidegger for personification. And in that more flexible frame of mind, reckon Shelley no worse than anthropomorphic in addressing a skylark and even to be forgiven a contradiction in declaring that a skylark never was a bird ('Hail to thee, blithe spirit! /Bird thou never wert'). So is this fuss by Edwards an old trade-union dispute? The philosophers may reason but never wield a metaphor, as the welders may weld but never drive a rivet. If there is an objection to Heidegger's addressing *Being* as an agency that thinks *us*, it is aesthetic rather than logical. *Being* as the being-ness (*seiendheit*) of things is not a pseudo-property but simply *that* there is whatever there is. Within the terms of the

figure we *can* imagine letting *being* speak. We pay attention to what there is (whatever it is) and wait for thought to arise. We 'let *being* speak' in not insisting on having something to say. This goes with Heidegger's new injunction to will not to will. Obedient to what perception gives us we wait for words to come; we utter or write them without forcing them upon (the fact) that there is whatever there is – *being itself*.

Arendt develops her observation that in using (the noun) '*being*' as a word for an agency that can speak and empower, Nietzsche personifies it. Her diagnosis of Heidegger's use of '*Being*' to personify an abstraction is a significant move that awakens the reader from the sonorous gravity of the text; we regain autonomy as readers. 'Yes! This is personification, like Keats's hailing the seasons'. We can then read Heidegger better when he claims that the *history of Being can come to pass* when there is at last an audience who will listen. We can find a way of reading his *descent into the past [that] coincides with the arrival of the future*. The dead cannot reply and yet we cry out to them in mourning, and in mourning that which has happened we recognise the historicity of *that* there is what there is. Heidegger's *seiendheit* of *Sein*.

The will to power itself becomes the *seiendheit*, the *that-there-is* of what is. Nietzsche's will to power, as we recall, works at the level of organic life that strives with and against what surrounds it. So the abstraction about this will to power is at the same ontological level as the personification of *Being*. Heidegger seizes on what Nietzsche accomplishes in his thought-experiment of the Eternal Recurrence. From there, he works out the consequences of his turning away from our Care with *Being*, to *Being's* hold upon us. Heidegger inflects the *will-to-power* (in which we let go of resistance to our powers and use them) into his *will not to will*. We let go of assertion and *let being speak*.

LIMITS TO A REPUDIATION OF 'WILL'

Heidegger thinks that the contradiction in Nietzsche is between the rectilinear concept of time involved in the will-to-power's trans-valuation of values, and his will to power as saying yes to an 'eternal recurrence' of life in which one thinks, as if from outside it, of having first lived through it without perspective upon it of what is to come or of what has been. Then, in the attitude of the eternal recurrence one makes sense of life as something which, though now beyond one's control, one still is prepared to *will*. As so expressed, there is no contradiction. Arendt criticises Heidegger for reading Nietzsche as a philosopher of the will in the first place. Nietzsche uses will to power, but not to characterise something called the Will. As an alternative to passive acceptance of our inclinations, it usurps the old Commanding Will.

Arendt remarks that the destructiveness of the Will is Heidegger's last word in the second volume of his *Nietzsche*. It is reasonable to conjecture that his desire to *correct* Nietzsche's past influence on him may have provoked Heidegger into his abdication of will. To escape the vengeful destructiveness of the Will, we learn the will-not-to-will. Arendt proceeds in her usual fashion, understanding what is going on and allowing judgements to emerge quietly. She is dissatisfied with Heidegger's attempted resolution of the tensions in the Will. This is evident in her own last word on Heidegger and the present (1970s) state of thought about willing. She can make only tentative interpretations of Heidegger, but declares that *Heidegger's denunciation of ... self-preservation ... as a wilful rebellion against the 'order' of Creation as such is [extraordinarily] rare in the history of ideas*.^{ix}

To call this denunciation of Heidegger's extraordinarily rare may speak of foolishness as much as of wisdom. Arendt finds that it resonates with some lines of Goethe's:

The Eternal works and stirs in all

For all must into Nothing fall,

If it will persist in Being.

There is a deep ambiguity in what Goethe writes. Is it a warning to us who *persist* in being? An *injunction* to let ourselves fall into Nothing? Arendt connects Heidegger's ideas about the will to his change from man's quest for *Being*, to *Being's* speaking to us. This change is roughly contemporaneous with his withdrawal of overt support for Hitler's National Socialism. He then would rather stand outside the process as its spectator. In his reverse turn he swerved from seeking Being to waiting to listen to it; he shifted from anxious care about man's existence to *taking* care of *Being*. Reversing his espousal of Nietzsche's *will-to-power* (mis-read as command and obedience) he turned to propose the will not to will.

Heidegger's will not to will relies upon his speaking meaningfully when he uses the term '*being*'. In reading Heidegger's use as personification, Arendt makes easy weather of the metaphysical side of his language. She

leads us readers through his forest, but then she leaves us on the far side of it. We have to make our own way back, but at least we have provisions and a sketch of the journey. Recall, again, that Arendt accepts some antagonism between thinking and willing. Both *make present to the mind what is actually absent*, and both deal with what will be. But, out of the two, only thinking deals with what has been. In relation to the past, the Will can only thrash about. But we can think about the past because we think for the sake of thinking, as we live for the sake of living. In contrast, we *will* for the sake of something we lack, dread or esteem. The will can do nothing about the past, but it acts out of impotent discontent with what has been. It destroys the enduring present cultivated by the thinking ego, and routs the coalition of past, present, and future that thought had gathered together under its god-like eye.

In drawing from whatever phase of the history of thinking about the will that falls to hand, Arendt has formulated these ideas in her own way, making it easier for us to make our own inferences. Because of this rigorous preparation, she is confident in reading Heidegger's language of being and the will. *Being* is not reified (*being* is not a being), and Arendt's personification makes sense of Heidegger's *Das Sein* as a grammatical subject that calls, commands, summons or seeks an abode. As figurative speech it disarms us. The personification of *Das Sein* slips in under our radar to produce uncontrolled affect and effect – impressions of awesome depth or of an obscurity that smacks of charlatanism.

In Heidegger's second stage of thought, he writes, 'Man transforms Being's silent claim to speech, and, Man offers Being an abode'. This holding of *being* in his abode amounts, not to man's creativity of thought, but to his response to *Being's command*. *Being* is now granted the syntax of a commanding agent; it needs our compliance since it is within the 'house' of language that it may emerge from the muteness to which it is been condemned. Whether read as metaphysical speculation or as literary personification, such sentences follow the standard logic of relationships of command and obedience. The commander is figured as wielding power while at the same time he is nothing without the willing compliance (not to mention the intelligence, skills and social networks) of those whose business it is to carry out the orders. As with all personifications, to question the model remorselessly renders it senseless. A mind that was truly of steel would require a mind to dispose its unthinking substance intelligently.

Outside the abode of language, *being* would remain forever in oblivion – mute, unspoken. *Being is*, but not as a (most general) category of things. To say that that something has being, that it is, does not describe it. A quest for the (meaning of) *being* is not the search for a description. As such, there is nothing within *being* to be expressed. Since to speak of being is not to characterise it, *being* can have no way of speaking. It is impossible, from the point of view of *being*, to say *how* it can have any right or power of command.

When Heidegger tells us to let go of *Will* and listen to *Being*, his language, as metaphysical, resembles the metaphorical. More precisely, metaphysics is a reverse metonymy. The paradigm of metonymy is the part or instance as standing in for the whole or the universal. The crown stands in for the whole system of royalty. Abstract metaphysics takes the whole (or things considered universally) as standing in for an unspecified range of specific issues. What of this *being* that speechlessly commands us to go quietly in *gelassenheit* and to listen to it and to speak on its behalf? What does it stand in for, metonymically? Sartre reminds us that in looking to uncover that immediacy in the (partial) openness of another conscious being, he is not looking for some arcane or mystically rare experience. The presence of another conscious being as such is an everyday mystery in broad daylight. It is what this involves and implies that requires our phenomenological work. It is in the same way that Heidegger reassures us that *being* is not some mysterious thing infinitely far off or impossibly difficult to describe – or even bafflingly hidden. If we are to redress the oblivion of *being*, we are required to pay a particular kind of accepting attention to it.

Being stands outside the (stereo)type of a being, exorbitantly grand, or a super-characteristic. The loss of oblivion of being, this *event* of letting *being* speak, is found in experience as we regain a feel for the world as something *that is*:

I sit by the window recalling the last time I could feel at ease, when ideas and feelings came to mind and limbs. Still, I'm seeing the petals of some Impatiens, the patch of industrial harbour a few hundred metres off, the running wooden slats of the balcony outside the window. These details, yes. But not *them*. I've seen them so many times. *That* they are – that these *specific* things are.

I call this letting *being* speak in the everyday. A shift in readiness lets things come to me and me to myself. In its collecting this thinking is almost remembering. This *being willing* is not an effort of Will, not the not-caring of the Stoics, not the Willing of whatever happens of the collaborationists. There is no regress, I did not Will to become thus willing. *Letting being speak*, you let whatever is around or coming

back or coming up at you to make its impression. *Being* is that these things *are*. Some are possessed of beauty. You need only allow them to engage and you feel again the reality of the world. For the love of the world.^x

In writing philosophy after Derrida we see the smudged traces that we over-write. The Author may be dead but each of us can shudder and write our words of *being* in its long run. Then to read is to see the abstracted words that surround *being* working in metonymy. 'Willing', 'nothing', 'anything', 'something' – metonyms for the events of life and what life takes in – words that surround and support *being* itself. They maintain its gravity and buoy its meaning.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*
- ^{iv} *Heidegger's Confusions* 46.
- ^v Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).
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- ^{vii} Martin Heidegger, *Sein and Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1972).
- ^{viii} Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1978), Vol. II 175.
- ^{ix} *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. II 194.
- ^x Max Deutscher, *Judgment after Arendt* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007).