

# ESCHATOLOGY IN HEIDEGGER

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WHATEVER may be the import of the "theology of hope" in the long run, when with George Bernard Shaw we will all be dead, there can be little doubt that after Jürgen Moltmann, no contemporary understanding of faith can be viable which fails to give utmost attention to the problem of mankind's future. Theology must strive boldly to conceptualize futurity as a constitutive mode of distinctively human being which can be rendered determinate even if not determined, the ground for all that is hopeful in and about man. One need not commit himself to carry out the task in Moltmann's terms exclusively in order to affirm as inescapable that theologian's clarion call to eschatological seriousness:

From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The Eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day . . . the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church.<sup>1</sup>

This essay seeks to assess the possibilities for a Christian doctrine of eschatology which are ingredient in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Specifically, two theses will be defended: (1) that the summary dismissal of such inquiry which initial exposure to Heidegger's thought seems to make appropriate points rather to a widely prevalent misunderstanding of that philosophy; and (2) that Heidegger's understanding of hoping as a mood or state of mind (*Befindlichkeit*) suggests unique and positive contributions to any eschatological statement which strives to render the concept of futurity determinate without undermining faith's conviction that God alone finally determines, in gracious bestowal, the destiny of a created order whose future is He.

## 1. THE IMPLAUSIBILITY OF A HEIDEGGERIAN ESCHATOLOGY

Heidegger's philosophy speaks of man's future "proximally and

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<sup>1</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, tr. by James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 16.

for the most part" in terms of death, in the confrontation with which possibility men achieve either an "ownedness" of self or a "fallenness" increasingly difficult to transcend; hence, it would seem a curious proposal at best to insist upon hopefulness as congruent with Heideggerian thinking. The difficulty is compounded once it is noted that Heidegger's preoccupation with *Sein-zum-Tode*, though by no means a brooding pessimism about human prospects, nevertheless posits just this mode of being as the horizon within which alone all the universally conceded human perfections appear as genuine existential possibilities. Though Dasein's distinctive mode of Being-in-the-world is care, whose primary structure is Being-ahead-of-itself,<sup>2</sup> that in the light of which Dasein cares is Dasein's ownmost futural possibility, death, whose anticipation turns Dasein immediately toward its past which now is seen alone to mediate those possibilities which constitute its unique potentiality for-Being. Thus, the *content* of the "ahead" is not futural but past, received possibilities toward which Dasein now must comport itself. Further, the future *qua* determinate future would actually *impede* Dasein's achievement of wholeness in the unity of temporal ecstasies; the "ahead-of-itself" means *only* that there is always something still "outstanding" which is a potentiality for Dasein's Being, precluding that Dasein could ever be brought into its own "forehaving" as Being-a-whole. Not even in unqualified hopelessness can Dasein find release from its imposed incompleteness; Heidegger insists that he who is without hope has merely taken up another mode of comporting himself toward those possibilities which, in Being "his," bind him to finitude in thrownness. Only in death is his situation transcended; in death Dasein achieves the wholeness of no-thing, for which nothing out-standing remains: "For as long as Dasein *is* entity, it has not arrived at its unity. But if it arrives at such, its gain is at the expense of its Being-in-the-world. In such a case, it is no longer experienceable as an entity." (SZ II, 1, 236) At SZ II, 1, 238 Heidegger puts the issue starkly: "at the moment Dasein achieves wholeness by death, it is no longer *there-Being*." It hardly could be said that these remarks in any obvious manner suggest genuine eschatological thinking.

This line of argument seems unassailable when that passage is examined in which Heidegger takes up explicitly the phenomenon of hope, SZ II, 4, 345, an analysis which undergoes no significant alteration in his subsequent writing. Here, Heidegger makes plain what has been implicit through II, 1, that what is especially significant about the structure of hope is not that which is hoped for, but rather

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<sup>2</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Seventh edition (Tuebingen: Neomarius Verlag), II, 1, 236. Further references to this work will be cited in the text itself with the abbreviation SZ. Translations are my own.

the enterprise of hoping itself and what it implies about the Being of Dasein: hoping is *Für-sich-erhoffen*, a hoping-on-behalf-of-oneself in which an augmenting of oneself is the sole "object" of the hope. More important still is Heidegger's contention that hope, however it may seem to be founded upon what is future, is in reality a *mood*; hence, like all other moods in Heidegger's philosophy, it is founded upon the mode of *Gewesenheit*, "having-been."

For Heidegger, moods function to bring Dasein face to face with its own *thrownness*; as such, they are especially illuminative of finite-being-in-the-world. Here, Heidegger concerns himself with the conditions under which it is possible for Dasein to hope in the midst of its thrown condition; as with moods generally, hope as a finding oneself-in-a-situation is a possibility only if the Being of Dasein has as an essential structure the mode of *Gewesenheit*, if Dasein *is* as having-been. Moods could illumine the thrown character of Dasein only if Dasein persists now as it has persisted; that moods do in fact disclose thrownness means that Dasein *is* such a mode. Every mood brings Dasein back to that which it has been, and as such, now is. If Dasein, in hoping, is able to comport itself toward something futural, it is because in hoping Dasein lays hold upon itself with special forcefulness, gathering itself up toward what is futural in the power of its Being which is "arrived at." But only because in the mood of hoping Dasein has already experienced its having-beenness as a burden can hoping at all alleviate that burden; it does so precisely by turning Dasein to its burden all over again, *de novo*. Properly speaking, *indifference* is hope's counter-mood, disclosing the existential possibility that one might abandon himself to his thrownness by resolving merely to "get by" (or in Heidegger's words, to "live along"). Dasein's existential possibilities are thrown "at" him as part of that total situation of Being-in-the-world into which he, *qua* Dasein, is also thrown. When in hope they are affirmed anew even though they "are" as "from the past," Dasein achieves *equanimity* in resoluteness, a circumspect looking at those possibilities for its Being-a-whole which are disclosed in the anticipation of death. It is clear that in *Sein und Zeit*, Dasein's future impels toward the past which itself is the ground for Dasein's hope in the future.

It would seem that there is ample cause for Moltmann's finding so little in Heidegger which could be of use to his own eschatological inquiry. That Heidegger grounds human history in the *historic* nature of Dasein rules out, for Moltmann, all possibility of a genuinely ontological consideration of the future *qua* future in Heideggerian terms; insofar as the historical process is founded upon the finitude and temporality of man's ways of Being-toward-death, history is elicited not by

the lure which is futurity, but only in the recapitulation of those existential possibilities given over to Dasein from Dasein's past become "tradition." In Moltmann's words, history as such is merely the recurrence of the possible, Dasein's return to and re-echoing of its potentialities in the process of choosing its hero; "anticipatory resoluteness" in Heidegger looks not to a genuine future, but throughout remains mired in Dasein's own past.<sup>3</sup> Though Heidegger can overcome historical relativism by means of an ontology of the possibility of history, he seems to do so at the expense of history as such, within which events actually transpire from the past through the present to the future; since happenedness is alone that which is a possibility for some Dasein, future happenings can consist only of recollections of that which-is-as-having-been.

## 2. THE COGENCY OF A HEIDEGGERIAN ESCHATOLOGY

Though Heidegger's philosophy remains from beginning to end an integrated whole, *contra* the "later Heidegger" thesis (*viz.* Richardson, *et al.*) there are to be found at various stages of that philosophy's development differences of emphasis which serve to warn against judgments which do not take into account the total context of Heidegger's thinking. For this reason, the possibilities of a Heideggerian eschatology cannot be exhausted by references to that period of Heidegger's writing which concerned itself with "fundamental ontology," a depiction of Dasein's Being as a plethora of existential possibilities, virtually *causa sui* in anticipatory resoluteness; as has been shown, on these terms man's future reduces to *traditio*.

But Dasein as projecting Being is not, and never has been, the sole subject matter for Heidegger's reflection; in *SZ* it was made abundantly clear that the existential and ontological analysis of being-in-the-world is undertaken solely for the purpose of achieving access to the disclosures of Being-itself. As Dasein is alone that for which its Being is a matter of concern, it becomes the "clearing" in which Being appears as the meaning of its existential possibilities. In that clearing Being truly is disclosed; it is the ontological task to lay bare the contents of the disclosures. To suppose that Heidegger's aim is merely to show how Dasein is to "get along" in the world into which it is thrown is to confuse *SZ* with *L'Être et le Néant*. Most important for the present analysis is that the disclosures of Being to Dasein found futurity as a genuine and irreducible mode of Dasein's Being. There is no fundamental shift in outlook reflected in Heidegger's salient comment in the *Letter on Humanism*, that the essential source of man

always remains for historical humanity the essential future. Meta-

<sup>3</sup>Moltmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-8.

physics thinks of man as arising from *animalitas* and does not think of him as pointing toward *humanitas*.<sup>4</sup>

Having delineated the process by which Dasein wrests an "owned" (*eigentlich*) mode of being from an immense range of existential possibilities toward which it also persists, of which fallenness is one (cf. *SZ and Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*), Heidegger is then prepared to speak more openly of that which makes possible such a process; by the time of the *Letter on Humanism* it is nothing less than Being-itself, that which elicits those situations within which Dasein discovers itself *via* its "moods":

Man must, before he speaks, let himself first be *claimed again by Being* at the risk of having under this claim little or almost nothing to say.<sup>5</sup>

In "What is Metaphysics?", Heidegger designates Dasein's attunement to the presence of Being with the word *joy*: he to whom Being is bestowed celebrates joyfully the coming of that No-thing from which all things come, *ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit*.<sup>6</sup>

Most germane to the purposes of this essay is Heidegger's rarely cited essay, "Andenken," one of two written in 1943 to commemorate the poet Hölderlin.<sup>7</sup> Heidegger's aim has become that of showing that poetic language alone is appropriate to the expression of Being; philosophical thinking has been rendered subordinate in importance to that poetizing through which Being "hails" Dasein and by which in turn Being "is hailed." That kind of thinking by which the poet draws near to Being, now designated as "the Holy," is *recollection*, a thinking upon that which "is" as having-been, through which the poet comes to abide close to "the Source." The poet is the first to achieve historicity because he is first to apprehend that law of historicity (*Gesetz der Geschichtlichkeit*) which requires that man voyage to unfamiliar terrain in order that upon returning home he may learn to *be* "at home" in the recollecting of his experiences, thereby achieving a primordial ownedness of Being. Without significant contrast, at-homeness cannot be disclosed as an existential possibility at all; an "owned" existence, however, is just such at-homeness: the Odyssey is meaning-laden because it points to just such a *terminus*. But at-homeness is not merely a return to the home which is as-having-been; being-in-the-mode-of-

<sup>4</sup>Tr. by Edgar Lohner in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by W. Barrett and H. Aiken (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 270-302.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, italics mine.

<sup>6</sup>Tr. by R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick in *Existence and Being*, ed. by Werner Brock (Chicago: Regnery, 1949), pp. 353-92.

<sup>7</sup>Included in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 2nd ed., (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1951), pp. 75-143. I am grateful to Father Richardson's study for guiding me to this text. Heidegger: *Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).

at-home lays before Dasein a genuine and novel future as well as that past which the poet recollects. The eschatological significance of Heidegger's thinking has begun to emerge.

The crucial statement is Heidegger's insistence that the past upon which the poet thinks is not *mere* past; the past "is" in more ways than that of having-been:

. . . as what-is-past returns in our thinking upon it, it also thrusts itself beyond our present in order to greet us as a future. All of a sudden it is as if our recollecting what is as having-been finds it necessary to contemplate this past as something altogether undetermined.<sup>8</sup>

That which makes possible the new ad-vent of past as future is the primordial unity of past and future in the Holy, Being-itself. Though Being still greets the poet only as he recollects what-is-past, in the recollection is discovered a reconstituted past which has been taken up into Being and re-presented as a new existential possibility, the poet's future. His task becomes that of "hailing" the past in words which become prophetic for the future and which, in articulating the unity of temporal ecstasies in Being, participate in the process by which Being is re-origin-ated in the words of the Primordial Poem. Hence, the poet's thinking upon what-is-past becomes at once the attuning to Being's new disclosures, a willing whatever the new ad-vent of Being bids. Hölderlin's poetic employment of the north wind becomes especially illuminative of that cardinal Heideggerian principle, that Being discloses itself only through and not apart from the beings. Richardson expounds the point ably:

If the north wind has brought Being's hail, it is the north wind he hails in turn, but as already having constituted him in what he is. In the poet's responding hail to the north wind, then, he greets his own past. That is why the same emissary that serves as Being's emissary to the present (by which Being comes to him as future) becomes in turn the poet's emissary by which he hails the past.<sup>9</sup>

The point which runs through an admittedly torturous exposition is that the poet's future is not *merely* his past, even though it is that which "swings out over" the present to become future; past, present, and future are *Being's* temporality, conferred upon Dasein: Dasein's existential possibilities are *Being's bestowal*. The new expression is "mittence": through constituting "mittences" to which Dasein remains open, Being com-mits man; in the willingness that such be so, the

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95. Translation mine.

<sup>9</sup>*Op. Cit.*, p. 467.

poet's thrownness is transformed into com-mitment. The call of conscience which once had to be thought of as founding only Dasein (SZ) has become Being's hailing Dasein to tasks which remain genuinely futural in their yet-to-be-determined-ness. In SZ Dasein's future could only be characterized as a retrieve of existential possibilities *qua* their being as-having-been. Once the existential and ontological analysis of Dasein lays bare the phenomenon of the coming of Being to Dasein as that which founds Dasein, however, it becomes possible to say of Being that, in its coming, "all things are made new."

The theological import of Heidegger's notion of "inter-mittance" (Richardson's excellent rendition of *Geschichke-Geschichte*) becomes most evident in those pages wherein Heidegger expresses human history (*Geschichte*) with the term *Ge-schicht*, a coming-to-unity: history is the configuring of those moments in which Being e-mits to the poet, and a folk through its poet, a co-mittment to a new future which is at once their respective past:

the history of a people taken as a whole is the gathering into sequential unity of the various manners in which Being has disclosed itself to a folk.<sup>10</sup>

Heidegger's stress on the point that every poet is a poet *of* a folk makes all the the more inescapable the judgment that history plays a genuinely indispensable role in his philosophy, with the entailed conclusion that in no way can Dasein's career be understood as discrete intentional acts performed toward and upon a fund of possibilities whose existentiality reduces to the bare logicity of timeless essences. Rather, in the ad-vent of Being, every Dasein discovers itself co-mitted in inter-subjectivity to a destiny yet to be made plain in a future which is the non-cancellable promise of Holy Being.

### 3 CONCLUDING APPROPRIATION

From the foregoing, it ought not to bewilder that a Christian theologian could utter, on grounds believed to be thoroughly Heideggerian, words such as the following:

. . . the doctrine of eschatology means theologically that man and the world are destined for holy Being and will find their completion and fulfillment in God. . . . The end would be all things gathered up in God, all things brought to the fulfillment of their potentialities for being, at one among themselves and at one with Being from which they have come and for which they are destined.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>11</sup>John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), pp. 317, 20.

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That Dasein "is" only in some world means that any "end-time" must be envisioned as a gathering up of all things together in the ways in which all things already have been constituted together. If one is to develop a way of thinking about "last things" which does justice both to individual men, their corporate histories, and the universe in which their histories are played out, it must be stressed that none of these can "be" at all apart from the *Mit-Sein* in which they "are" as a unity. Heidegger's ontological analysis exhibits the structures of Dasein-World-Being in a way which rightly precludes that any component being could be understood apart from the structural whole. Any theology incorporating such an analysis thereby would be freed from preoccupation with the destiny of some one mode of being exclusively in order to uncover the basis for a more comprehensive account of the redemption of the individual, humanity and the cosmos together. Most specifically, *contra* Bultmann, theology must resist the temptation to proclaim the present realization of the Eternal in individual consciousness as the "end," which would reduce to vain striving all further attempts to express by means of analogies those corresponding saving events at the levels of historical humanity and the universe (Moltmann seems also to believe that Heidegger's philosophy entails just such a doctrine). Along this same line, it is appropriate to underline the point that there can be no import for Christian eschatological thinking of any theory of the cosmos in terms of which Dasein's Being does not qualify how that cosmos is understood from the very outset.

From the beginning, Christian theology has labored without notable success to express what must be regarded finally as mutually exclusive ideas: on the one hand Christian existence is interim only, lived through in that ambiguous epoch between the Ascension and the *parousia*; yet on the other, that very interim existence is one in which God himself is present as the Holy Spirit, both subduing his enemies and providing consolation to men caught in the viscissitudes of martyrdom and uncertainty. How is the undeniable delay of the *parousia* to be reconciled with the confidence of present participation in the "body of Christ"? How is hope possible at all, when that for which men hope is lost in an indefinite futurity? Contrariwise, why should men hope at all if that for which they hope is already a present reality? Present day theologians of hope seem to be proposing a transcending of these dilemmas by insisting upon the future as man's genuine domain, but proposing about that future a novelty beyond present conception, guaranteed by the Christ who endures in memory and imagination. Since, then, man's future is *God's*, life *ad interim* need not lack vitality and seriousness; only utopian thinking which cedes the future to man



alone could with justification lament the incompleteness of the present order. Eschatology is part of the doctrine of God and not of man; man's future is to be understood as the continuing ad-vent of God, in whose coming again man attains to ownedness in co-mittment. Such a perspective need not entail that hope is encompassed in or exhausted by faith. As Barth argued persuasively, eschatology must seek also to disclose as a possibility an embodied life of hope, in which will be expressed the Church's concern to minister in secular society.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, as Moltmann himself realizes, the future as object cannot be the aim of direct inquiry in theology.

Contrary to much Heidegger criticism, it has been maintained, futurity is a mode of being which persists as an existential possibility for Dasein by virtue of Holy Being which is the ground of the past's persistence and which bids Dasein to appropriate a future from its past in altogether novel ways. Dasein's Being, therefore, is not a fixed range of possibilities whose temporality is that of an enduring tradition, but is rather that which is conferred by Being itself in disclosures which both co-mit Dasein and Being to what-has-been and lay bare the unfinished dimensions of what-has-been as the horizon within which Dasein is to anticipate its future with Others. Dasein's wanderings are ended in that co-mittment which lures him back to his homeland, letting him now be-at-home, in a folk. In an attuning by Being to Being, Dasein appropriates the gracious bestowal of future by retrieving its having-been-ness. Hence, Heidegger's philosophy suggests the correlative to a *logos* of futurity in its insistence upon the meaning of futural thinking for Dasein in the present. The futural object is given over to the process in which it is thought, in such wise that in the process is disclosed the unity of Dasein in the mode of "is-as-having-been": in hoping, Dasein discovers the richness of its own being vis-a-vis its past. In re-trieving (recollecting) itself through that past, Dasein is awakened to the "hail" of that which is ground of all the temporal ecstasies, responding by learning to be "at home" in its own past. There "is" genuinely a future in Heideggerian thinking, but its meaning is the continuity and variety of an accumulating past. Only as Dasein wills what-is-past as his can Dasein properly be said to have a future. But that future he is indeed promised. Christian existence is hopeful precisely insofar as it continues its "perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again. . . ," deeming Him Saviour because He is alone that One Who returned to His Father.

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<sup>12</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV, 3, pp. 902-42. I am indebted to my colleague, Professor John Deschner, for reminding me of this text.

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