

Article

The Inversion of Mysticism—*Gelassenheit* and the Secret of the Open in Heidegger

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Abstract: The article explores the topic of *Gelassenheit* (releasement) in Heidegger, through the lens of the ambiguous role of Christian mysticism in general and Eckhart in particular in and for his thinking. In an analysis of how mysticism appears in his early lectures on religion, it explains why he is critical of this concept and of how it is commonly understood. It also gives reasons for why we too should be cautious in using it to describe his position in his later writings where he explicitly reconnects to themes and concepts from Eckhart. The text provides a critical rehearsal of Eckhart's understanding of both "Abgeschiedenheit" (detachment) and "Gelassenheit" and how Heidegger relates to it both in his early lectures and in his later essays. Ultimately it outlines a phenomenological understanding of what is commonly referred to as a "mystical" comportment more along the lines of a heightened openness and awareness, in Heidegger's words as a "releasement toward things and an openness to the secret". Thus, instead of seeing Heidegger's later writings as a sort of crypto-mysticism, the text seeks to show how his critical appropriation of Eckhart explicitly points beyond a standard dichotomy between the rational and the mystical, in an effort to develop a comportment of thinking than can respond to the demand of modern technological predicament.

Keywords: Heidegger; Eckhart; mysticism; *Gelassenheit* (releasement); open; secret

1. Introduction

During the dramatic winter of 1944–1945, amid the violent final stages of the war, Heidegger composes a text comprising a conversation between three people: A "Scientist", a "Scholar", and a "Teacher". The topic of their discussion is ascertaining the meaning of *Gelassenheit*, a word which can be translated as "equanimity" or "serenity", but which more literally denotes "leaving" and "letting be", *gelassen*. The standard translation of the term in the English literature on Heidegger nowadays is "releasement".¹ In several of Heidegger's later texts it appears as a term for the fundamental comportment by which human beings make themselves open to the truth of Being and by which authentic thought can take place. There is also a lecture from 1955, titled simply "Gelassenheit", in which he evokes the "releasement towards things" (*Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*) together with an "openness to the Secret" (*Offenheit für das Geheimnis*) as a way for human beings to find a new foundation.² By recalling the term "Gelassenheit" Heidegger's thinking does create a sounding board against which the mysticism of German Christianity can reverberate anew. In the standard English translation of this text "openness to the secret" (*Geheimnis*) is rendered as "openness to the mystery", thus creating a more immediate relation to the tradition of mysticism. But for reasons that

¹ For a profound exegesis of this thematic in the larger context of the problem of the will, see Davis (2007), *Heidegger and the Will. On the Way to Gelassenheit*.

² Both these texts are collected in the short volume *Gelassenheit* (Heidegger 1959).

will become clear as we proceed, this is a misleading translation that creates confusion by establishing too quick and too easily a connection to the mystical tradition that needs to be more carefully reflected.

The term *Gelassenheit* makes its first appearance as a philosophical-psychological concept in the work of Meister Eckhart, in whose sermons the idea recurs in continually varied articulations: In order to find God human beings must release themselves, *sich gelassen*, and make themselves unfettered and separate, *abgeschieden*. In Eckhart, this is a matter of making oneself receptive to God's power and spirit and, with increasing passivity, becoming open to another kind of activity. Taken to its most radical conclusion, it requires that human beings ultimately abandon God himself.³ How should we understand Heidegger's relationship to Eckhart's mysticism? Is there a deeper connection between his subsequent development of the metaphysical question about the meaning of Being as an "event" (*Ereignis*) and mystical thought? Is the ideal of *Besinnung* ("reflection" of "mindfulness") which he stresses in the later text related to practical spiritual life in the tradition of Christian mystics? In what follows I shall outline an approach to this problematic, which concerns not just the work of Heidegger but also the question of the nature and meaning of mysticism as such.

2. Heidegger and Mystical Thought

The question of Heidegger's relationship to mysticism and to a mystical tradition can be considered from many aspects. From the very beginning his writing displayed an interest in, and special affinity for, German mysticism. He read Eckhart at an early stage and was said to be in the habit of referring theologically-minded visitors back to Eckhart.⁴ In his habilitation thesis, which examined a medieval linguistic-philosophical treatise, he gestured towards a possible extension of the analysis in the direction of Eckhart, yet without pursuing this avenue further. At an early stage in his career he also outlines a longer course of study for the academic year 1919–1920 on "The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism", centered on Eckhart, which, though never completed, was published posthumously in his collected works.⁵ Composed as part of a larger project of developing a phenomenology of religion, this lecture seeks to define mysticism as the constitution of a specific position or comportment of consciousness and knowing within a subject-philosophy tradition dating back to antiquity. Beyond this sole contribution, however, he never developed an explicit philosophical challenge to mysticism as an intellectual tradition. In all his meticulous critical readings of the central bodies of ideas in the German philosophical tradition—Leibniz, German idealism, Hölderlin, Nietzsche—he never tried to offer a clear and elaborated position on a legacy that was clearly important for him and that continued to recur as a point of reference throughout his writings. A notable example of this is that he chose to ground his critical reflections upon "principle of reason" (*Der Satz vom Grund*) upon the ideas of an ultimate being "without why", *ohne warum*, as articulated by Angelus Silesius, the 17th century German physician and religious mystical poet (Heidegger 1957, pp. 101–2).

However, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that Eckhart and Christian mysticism remained a kind of secret resource of which he uncritically availed himself as and when he needed. On the contrary, on several occasions Heidegger distanced himself from mysticism and the mystical as

³ This specific formulation occurs in perhaps his most radical sermon on this subject, taken from Matt 5:3 on the poor in spirit. See "Sermon XVIII" in (Eckhart 2009, pp. 133–36).

⁴ Cf. Otto Pöggeler. "Mystical elements in Heidegger's Thought and Celan's Poetry" (Pöggeler 1994). Before Pöggeler's essay, John Caputo had published his important study on *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Caputo 1986), that focuses in particular on the relation between Heidegger and Eckhart. Over the course of the last two decades, the scholarly discussion about Heidegger and mystical thought has expanded, especially in the English-speaking world with notable titles: Sonya Sikka, *Forms of Transcendence: Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology* (Sikka 1997); Pezze Martin Heidegger and Meister Eckhart: A path towards *Gelassenheit* (Pezze et al. 2008); and most recently George Pattison's *The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought* (Pattison 2019).

⁵ The proposal for the lecture series is published as an appendix to *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Heidegger 1995, pp. 303–37). In English as *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Heidegger 2004, pp. 231–54). Henceforth I will provide references to both of these texts, first from the English translation and then from the German original, as (Heidegger 1995, 2004).

such. In his lectures on Nietzsche from the late thirties, for example, he writes that many today are vainly searching for ways out of the current philosophical impasse by taking refuge in “the mystical” as something that lies beyond. Yet mysticism, he argues, thereby remains trapped in a reversed determination, as the antithesis of the logical or the rational.⁶ And in some of the short remarks on Eckhart to be found in his published works, he also signals that he regards Eckhart’s philosophical position as partly trapped within a Christian metaphysics—and even within an unreflective conception of will and reason. Actually, Heidegger’s work provides almost no positive sense for what he himself titles “the mystical”. For him, the term denotes rather a historically inherited label, and never the name of a positive doctrine. To be sure, he himself was often accused of both mysticism and obscurantism in a pejorative sense, but as a rule such accusations naively operate within a metaphysical constellation in which the meaning of reason and mysticism remain unproblematized. One of the many reasons why the question of Heidegger’s relationship to the mystical tradition warrants our attention is that it precisely invites a problematization of these polar opposites and thus also of a conventional understanding of the mystical itself.

In this context it is worth noting that Eckhart never describes himself or his ideas as “mystical”. He adheres consistently to a rationalistic and Thomistically-oriented conceptual apparatus and he sees no contradiction between “reason” and the kind of abandonment of oneself to the divine that his teachings advocate. In one of his sermons he speaks of how “argument that can be verified” show the way to this new relationship to God (Eckhart 2009, p. 30). And in one of his most spectacular formulations, he says that *if* God would turn away from the truth, one would have to “cling to truth and let God go” (Eckhart 2009, p. 95). Running through all this is the idea that nothing should inhibit that which is *free* in human beings. Only in this way can the idea of radical freedom be realized. For Heidegger, however, his reservations about the mystical tradition are elicited partly from this very emphasis upon knowledge and insight, an emphasis that, in his early lectures on religion, he counterposes to a deeper existential uncertainty and unpredictability of which he finds traces in the very oldest sources of Christianity (Heidegger 1995, p. 124; 2004, p. 88).

With regard to the concept of the “mystical”, the traditional approach in the study of religion is to recognize its ambiguity while also using it to designate a specific doctrine and a practice that is concerned with how to achieve a unity with God. In the large secondary literature on various so-called “mystics” or “mysticisms”, not only in Christianity but also within the other world religions, the concept is invariably taken for granted as having a distinct descriptive meaning. And yet, before assuming that the term “mystical” does indeed have a distinct denotation, it is important to reflect on how the word itself acquired its current use and meaning. By partly neutralizing its inherited usage, both from a historical and a semantic perspective, we can hopefully make ourselves receptive to something that can perhaps be said to constitute its more original essence. To put it in Eckhartian terms: Those who wish to understand mysticism must perhaps be willing to abandon it too.

3. Definitions of the Mystical

The Greek word *myeo* means both “to teach” and “to initiate into”—in other words, to show the way into a mode of knowing and practice. The word *mysterion* means “that into which one is initiated”, whence it has also acquired the meaning of a specific rite or truth—in other words: Into a “mystery”. Among the earliest preserved texts that refer to a *mysterion* is a fragment by Heraclitus, that describes in a sarcastic tone “the mysteries” (*mysteria*) current among men through which they are said to be “initiated” (*myontai*) into “impiety”.⁷ In the same passage he also refers to “mystics” (*mystais*)—literally, “the initiated”—in the same breath as “magicians, night butterflies, and Bacchants”. It is only very

⁶ (Heidegger 1961, p. 28). This quotation is also cited in (Davis 2007, p. 122).

⁷ Fragment DK14, originally preserved in Clement’s *Protrepticus*. For an English rendering, see (Kahn 1979, p. 81).

much later, via Dionysius the Areopagite's *Theologia Mystica* from the 6th cent. AD, that the word comes to explicitly designate a (controversial) theological position within Christianity.

The modern general and generalizing use of the term “mystical” in the psychological study of religion runs parallel with the emergence of comparative religious studies during the nineteenth century. From that point on it is possible to talk of “mysticism” as an umbrella category to describe a presumably transcultural experience that can be accorded psychological features, as in the work of William James. But in the case of Eckhart, whom surveys of the mystical tradition often mention as its most prominent exponent, this was not a term which he himself invoked or even recognized. On the contrary, to call his ideas “mystical” would seem to lead our understanding away from the distinctive *openness* which is a hallmark of his sermons and which does not refer to some secret initiation. He does, it is true, speak of “as long as man is not equal to this truth, he cannot understand my words” (Eckhart 2009, p. 425). But far from implying an *initiation* into a hidden mystery, what he has in mind here is an existential practice by which human beings, in a paradoxical gesture of both denial and recognition, make themselves receptive to what is understood as a universal experience.

The point of these reflections upon the history of a concept and doctrine is simply to show that, in Eckhart's case, the label “mystical” contributes little to a deeper understanding of his thought. If we want to access the specificity of Eckhart's spiritual orientation, a more promising avenue is to be found in what Heidegger outlines as a way of “entering into the different world and forms of experience”, yet without claiming to have “rationalized” them (Heidegger 1995, p. 305; 2004, p. 232). But in order to do so, we also need to explore its philosophical underpinnings in classical thinkers, notably Augustine, Aristotle, Plato, Neoplatonism, and the Stoics.

What Heidegger is looking for in these early texts is something he himself refers to as “primordial understanding” (*Urverstehen*)—and that is equated with giving an account of discrete experiences and types of experiences in terms of how they are lived by subjectivity and a human existence. Over time he dissociated himself from this somewhat scientific terminology that he takes over from Husserlian phenomenology, yet without thereby necessarily abandoning his original position and aspiration. To him, phenomenological interpretation should enable us to access fundamental experiences and positions of consciousness without transforming them into rational psychological facts or theories. Through adopting descriptive neutrality, the meaning of a particular mode of relating to the world is then made accessible through language. It is in a similar spirit that he will later also approach poetic writing, notably in his readings of Hölderlin.

For Heidegger it was “detachment” or “seclusion” (*Abgeschiedenheit*) rather than *Gelassenheit* that constituted the most important concept for understanding medieval mysticism. The latter concept is actually mentioned only in passing in the preserved lecture notes (Heidegger 1995, p. 314; 2004, p. 239). He also offers an interpretation of *Abgeschiedenheit* as a particular “subject formation”, connecting it to an “increase of inner vivacity” and of an experienced “unity of subject and object”, but it is not developed much further. How should a more expanded interpretation be formulated? In what is perhaps Eckhart's most central text, “On Detachment”, he describes this attitude as the primary *virtue*, one that bears comparison with other subordinated virtues, such as love and humility (Eckhart 2009, pp. 566–75). A virtue is an attitude, a *hexis* in Aristotle's terminology, an acquired way for human beings to encounter the world. Detachment as Eckhart understands it is not a matter of stepping aside or of going into oneself but is integrally bound up with a notion of openness and receptiveness. It is what makes it possible “for God to join himself more intimately with me”. It can thus be conceived of as a kind of passivity through which human beings make themselves receptive to that which is other and alien. For Eckhart, however, this position is equally a *freedom*. He himself writes about how detachment means being “free of all creatures” and not being a “burden on anything” (Eckhart 2009, p. 567). This accords precisely with the consistent emphasis in his thinking upon an understanding of spirituality as independence and autonomy, as well as impassiveness. Here more than anywhere can be seen his proximity to Stoicism, above all Seneca, whom he often cites positively as a “heathen master”. In detachment, the spirit stands unaffected, an attitude in which it most closely resembles the divine.

In seeking to understand the meaning and specific nature of this spiritual practice, this exercise or *askesis* in the original sense of the word, we can choose to turn our attention towards the object of this striving towards God's essence and humanity's union with it. The exercise ought thus to be understood as determined by a belief in a higher power, which in some measure also connects its meaning to a metaphysical conception. Yet we might also pause for a moment to consider what we, using more modern terminology, can speak of as its actual existential situation and experience. In this way we become able to discern how Eckhart is in fact seeking a new form of subjectivity in which the relationship to the self, as the core of subjectivity, is actively modified. This self-abnegating self is characterized by a freer receptiveness that is attained when human beings detach themselves from their desire for being in general and for their own selves in particular.

In this respect it is both remarkable and consistent that he finally also demands that human beings abandon God. If the purpose were only a union with God, pure and simple, such a formulation would be absurd. How can one choose to abandon that which is the ultimate purpose of all abandonment? In a curious formulation about the "poverty of the soul", Eckhart writes that one must ultimately stand with such independence and freedom that one can no longer know or have knowledge about whether God is active in one's own soul. The presence of the divine will be, as it were, the almost unnoticed consequence of having made oneself receptive: "A man should be so free from all things and all works, both outward and inward, so as that he may be a proper abode for God where God can work" (Eckhart 2009, p. 423). It is nonetheless critical for an understanding of this as a concrete spiritual practice that such dissociation, isolated and liberated as it is, does not mean that human beings lose their world, nor that they leave it behind. On the contrary, it simultaneously constitutes preparation for action and activity, for engagement with creation, and as the basis for other virtues, such as humility, mercy, and love.

In the conversation between a "Scientist", a "Scholar", and a "Teacher", which Heidegger drafted in the winter of 1944–1945, the topic is at first how we can arrive at a way of thinking the essence of human beings. The Teacher, who in the trio appears to be closest to Heidegger's alter ego, gives us to understand that such a question requires us in some measure to be able to detach ourselves from the human subject itself. Yet releasing ourselves from a conventional understanding of the human also involves detaching ourselves from a traditional conception of thinking as idea and will or as "spontaneity" in Kant's sense. To reflect upon thinking itself thus leads to a desire "to will non-willing" (Heidegger 1959, p. 60; 1989, p. 30). Shortly after, the Teacher returns to this position that is necessary for de-naturalizing desire, namely "the right releasement", *Gelassenheit*. Only by means of a change in our approach to the thing can the thing itself be apprehended. Yet this release is not something which we can simply *achieve*, but rather something which we must be "awake" to and prepared for: Such releasement is not something that can simply be recalled and awakened, but that we must "let be". Heidegger then allows the three conversing voices to move toward an understanding of releasement as something which lies beyond the domain of the will yet which does not permit itself to be understood in terms of a passivity opposed to an activity, but rather "beyond the distinction between activity and passivity" (Heidegger 1959, p. 61; 1989, p. 33).

According to the "Scholar", the difficulty of catching a glimpse of the essence of such releasement lies in the fact that it is often imagined as being within the domain of the will, as was also the case with "the masters of the past, such as Master Eckhart". To this, the "Teacher" replies that there is nonetheless "much to learn" from him (Heidegger 1959, p. 62; 1989, p. 34). At this point Heidegger and the dialogue explicitly reconnect with Eckhart, while also signalling that the Christian-metaphysical framework for his thinking remains something towards which we must adopt a critical attitude. As he puts it, the comportment which he himself is seeking does not involve "casting off sinful selfishness and letting self-will go at the expense of the divine will". In these few sentences Heidegger makes it clear that he regards Eckhart and Christian mysticism as partly caught up in the same metaphysics of the will that he had examined in his comprehensive critical readings of German idealism and Nietzsche during the preceding years. To him, it is not entirely different from, and thus does not constitute

an obvious counterforce to, the nihilistic will to power, which he regards as having shaped modern thought and as having led to the supremacy of technology and forgetfulness of being.

In other words, Eckhart is here held up as a source of inspiration but also with a view to showing that it is a question of thinking anew in relation to a tradition whose best writings are still marked by a problematic tendency. But as indicated earlier, another and more generous reading of Eckhart is possible, while still following Heidegger's lead. From this perspective we can let them encounter each other on a more uncertain ground around the question of the *ethos* of thinking from within a transformed subjectivity.

If for Eckhart *Abgeschiedenheit / Gelassenheit* concerns the attitude in which human beings can become most receptive to God, for Heidegger it is explicitly a matter of the *ethos* of thinking, of its attitude, and perhaps even its *ethics*. *Gelassenheit* for Heidegger is not something that lies beyond thinking and the exercise of reason. On the contrary, it designates a transformed practice of reason, an exercise in a different kind of thinking. This type of thinking which understands itself, not as conceptualization, representation, and manipulation, but as an openness to that which reveals itself. It involves, as the interlocutors in Heidegger's text stress, a capacity for "waiting", a waiting in which we make ourselves open to that which is awaited, so as to "move closer to that which is distant" (Heidegger 1959, p. 42f). Ultimately, thinking will reach a point at which it understands itself by proceeding, not from itself or its waiting, but from "its other" (Heidegger 1959, p. 77; 1989, p. 51).

It is important that in the conversation it is the "Scientist" who is later permitted to add that, in this understanding of thinking as a releasement beyond will, it is not a matter of "an apathetic and life-denying allowing of anything". Rather, it means developing new concepts for thinking human beings' relationship to truth and being. In an influential critical article on Heidegger from 1953, Jürgen Habermas described Heidegger's thinking in the twenties and thirties as characterized by a "decisionism", with a focus on will and decisiveness that also brought him into close proximity to fascism, a position which eventually gave way to defeatist pietism after Germany's collapse.⁸ In light of this suggestion, it is important to notice how Heidegger himself, as early as in this text from 1945, was actually trying to build a bridge between these ostensibly different aspects of his own thinking, as when he writes that the "decisiveness" of which he had spoken in *Being and Time* in 1927 should rather be understood as "the opening up of existence to the open" (Heidegger 1959, p. 85; 1989, p. 59).

In this dialogue set in the final winter of the war, the speakers find themselves in a strikingly indeterminate historical space. The appalling events taking place around them receive no mention in their contributions. A world, their world, is falling apart, ushering in a new era. The war has brought with it a battle not only between peoples and ideologies but, ultimately, between technological systems and artefacts. This would be definitively confirmed some months later when American nuclear weapons were used against civilians in Japan. But at this moment the attention of the speakers is turned inwards, in peaceful contemplation of how thinking can be achieved and can preserve an authentic relationship to its object. An eerie yet inviting calm permeates the scene.

When Heidegger, ten years later, returned to the question of *Gelassenheit*, the situation was quite different. He had been invited to make a speech for the anniversary of the birth of Conradin Kreuzer, who originated from his own home town of Meßkirch. He began his address with an encomium to Kreuzer before turning his attention to a diagnosis of the present moment. Heidegger saw in it a mode of thought "in flight", a growing "thoughtlessness" (Heidegger 1959, p. 45; 1989, p. 12). As we have already noted in several of his texts from this period, he contrasts "contemplative" thinking (*Besinnung*) to "calculating" (*rechnende*) thinking. Both have validity, and both have their proper sphere, but the former requires more; it requires "effort" and "practice" (*Anstrengung, Einübung*).

Contemplation may be demanding but it is far from being abstract. Rather it is presented as something which is latent in each of us in our tendency to observe that which is ours. It emerges

⁸ This text was first published as an article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 July 1953.

from an attentiveness to the place and the situation in which one finds oneself, as well as to one's own domicile or home region or ground. Heidegger asks the question: Doesn't every deed in some sense belong to a home ground, a *Heimatsboden*? And he quotes the Romantic author Johan Peter Hebel on how "we are plants, which—whether or not we acknowledge it—must put down roots in order to grow, to bloom, and bear fruit in the ether". In the presence of his own native people, Heidegger then develops a sad account of a modern Germany in which so many people have lost their roots, whether driven from their homes or still in place. Because rootlessness is not merely a loss of home but a predicament that defines the age of technology and its ubiquitous mediatized reality. Our age, he writes, inevitably creates groundlessness and rootlessness.

There can be few texts more suited to an ironic refutation of what has often been critically alluded to as Heidegger's neo-romantic *Heimat* philosophy. His sweeping critique of technological modernity and his reference to corrupted ideals of home and earth, can give the impression of a thinker out of tune with the times. And yet it is here, when he seems to come closest to such an outdated and obsolete intellectual position, that he also displays his originality by seeking, in an implicit dialogue with the foundational concepts of Christian mysticism, a way of confronting the fate of modernity. This era, he writes, is the Atomic Age in which humanity's relationship with nature is being fundamentally recast as the world becomes transformed into a resource for the extraction of energy. Today technology determines human beings' relationship to being, which acquires its metaphysical attributes as an object of calculation and exploitation. In the development of biology and chemistry he likewise sees the ushering in of a new age, one aptly summarized in the words of Wendell Meredith Stanley, American Nobel Laureate in Chemistry: "[T]he hour is near when life will be placed in the hands of the chemist". Human beings are now becoming the tools of their own actions, trapped in their fascination with technological perfection. They are becoming slaves to technology.

In this situation, it is the task of thinking to find a liberating attitude by letting the technological devices be, by letting them go as it were, in not permitting them to "affect our innermost selves". It is not a question of refusing or trying to escape technological modernity, but of being able to live it in simultaneous affirmation and denial. This is not a matter of sheer indeterminacy but of finding simplicity and calm. This attitude of both saying yes and no to technology, he later writes, is "what, using an old word, I refer to as a releasement towards the thing", *Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*. This releasement does not only involve stepping aside or withdrawing from the claim of things. It is equally a matter of thereby training oneself in readiness for the meaning which lies latent in and promised by the very adventure of technology itself. Because technology today is not only an external threat, it is human beings' own metaphysical movement in which they are caught up in a transformation of themselves, of nature, and of their interaction with this latter. But in order to be able to experience this promised content we must not allow ourselves to be governed by its own manifest logic. We must be ready for the unexpected to reveal itself. In this way another attitude towards releasement can also give a reply, what he describes as an "openness to the secret", an *Offenheit für das Geheimnis* (Heidegger 1959, p. 55; 1989, p. 24, translation modified).

In the earlier dialogue from 1945, modernity and its technological predicament were absent from the conversation around the proper comportment of thinking. Here, however, Heidegger situates the same topic at the heart of what he takes to be the principal challenge for humans in the modern predicament: *Technology*. The two "attitudes"—both of which resonate strongly with Eckhart's themes of "releasement" and "openness to the secret"—are both made possible and are called for by that which is specifically modern. Modernity, as it is concentrated in technological rationality, requires that thinking find an attitude which allows it to contemplate and experience that of which it itself is already a part. It is thus in relation to what is most contemporary that an Eckhartian sounding ascesis is re-actualized as an avenue for philosophical thought.

The striking aspect of this gesture is that it is also precisely here that Heidegger is able to return to the question of foundations and of the earth. Because in this age there no longer exists a safe foundation to which humans can turn—no geographical, national, or linguistic home offers refuge. Even though

the lecture addresses the topics of home and earth, of *Heimat* and the loss of roots, its projected solution is not a return to a specific domicile, as if geography could save us. Because this situation is now planetary. Even though the question of the proper human comportment is raised in the context of a very local German cultural festival, it signals toward the possibility of prevailing in the world as a whole, in its totality and multiplicity, as both foundation and earth. It outlines an alternative to a calculating mode of thought which otherwise risks becoming hegemonic.

At the end of the text, Heidegger takes up Hebel's words on roots and blossoming only to turn them in a new direction. He writes of how the emergence of a releasement toward things and an openness to the secret can lead us to a way that can provide "a new foundation and ground", where the creation of sustainable works can find new roots. If Hebel's lines would seem to depict the necessity of being rooted in order to blossom and flourish, Heidegger reverses them by indicating a way of establishing a new rootedness from out of letting go, and of not clinging to things, a rootedness made possible by giving up roots.

The new way of inhabiting the earth which he outlines here could thus be described as an inverted rootedness. Human beings cannot rest on the earth and in one place. For their lives to bloom and bear fruit, they must free themselves from the rootedness entailed by technology when the latter forcibly exploits the earth. They must instead seek to counter the forces of manifest technological necessity, because only in this way can they allow its promised content to do justice to itself. In such liberation from necessity, and in openness to that which is not-yet, in an anticipatory readiness for the unexpected, they can first find a root and a foundation. But the purpose is not simply to find rest or to tie oneself to an imagined origin or to a community or to God, but to engage in an ongoing openness to the truth and event of what is. If there is a Heideggerian "mysticism", it lies perhaps in the idea of such a living enactment of thinking, as a never-ending practice.

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