

XII. Heidegger and the Possible

IN the introduction to *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger announces his project of 'overcoming' metaphysics. One of the most salient features of this 'overcoming' (*Überwindung*) is his crucial inversion of the traditional metaphysical priority of actuality over possibility. From the point of view of a post-metaphysical or phenomenological ontology – of which *Being and Time* is to be the first sample – the possible is considered 'higher' than the actual¹. But what precisely does Heidegger mean by 'the possible' and to what extent can a re-interpretation of the traditional meaning of this term contribute to the task of 'overcoming' metaphysics? This is the question, hitherto much neglected by Heidegger's commentators, which we wish to reflect on in this study.

Firstly, it must be remarked that 'the possible' is not an unequivocal notion in Heidegger's philosophy. His understanding of this term alters and develops in tandem with the overall movement of his thought. Thus, if we borrow the celebrated distinction between Heidegger I and II (first outlined by W J Richardson in his *Heidegger* and approved by the master himself in an introduction to this work) we might say that the 'turning' (*Kehre*) from the early (I) to the latter (II) Heidegger, in the thirties and forties, is evinced in a parallel 'turn' in his understanding of the possible. We shall attempt, therefore, to analyse Heidegger's post-metaphysical comprehension of 'the possible' on the basis of his distinction between: a) the possible understood as a mode of human existence, *Dasein* (Heidegger I), and b) the possible understood as a mode of Being itself, *Sein* (Heidegger II). The understanding of 'the possible' in *Being and Time* (1927) – as *Möglichkeit*/ *Seinkönnen*/ *Ermöglichen* – will serve as representative of Heidegger I; the understanding of 'the possible' in the *Letter on Humanism* (1945) – as *Vermögen* – will represent the thought of Heidegger II.

I

The possible is one of the key terms of the existential analysis of *Being and Time*. From the outset we are struck by the originality of

Heidegger's threefold understanding of this term as: a) *Möglichkeit* (possibility); b) *Seinkönnen* (potentiality-to-be); c) *Ermöglichen* (to render possible).

a) *Möglichkeit/Possibility*: In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that man is neither a worldless subject nor an object among others but a 'being in the world'. Phenomenologically considered, Being is no longer reducible to a simple presence – whether this be the idealist notion of a subject present to itself, or the realist notion of an object given to us in its real presence. Heidegger maintains that phenomenology enables us to consider the Being of man as a possibility rather than a simple, substantified presence. Phenomenology reveals that we are beings who exist beyond our present selves, that we are always extending ourselves along ever expanding temporal horizons. We discover ourselves to be beings in time, beings continually moving beyond the actual givens of the present towards the future and the past: those dimensions of ourselves which we possess only as absences, as *possibilities*. Phenomenology is therefore the first philosophy which permits us to 'overcome' the traditional hegemony of presence, fundamental to all metaphysics. Thus, Heidegger founds his distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence on this primordial difference between presence and possibility.² More precisely, man is authentic when he understands his 'existence qua actuality' (*Befindlichkeit*) on the basis of his 'existence qua possibility' (*Verstehen*) and not vice-versa.

This manner of understanding the Being of human existence (*Da-Sein*) as possibility rather than presence goes against the whole metaphysical tradition. Since the Greeks, truth was considered the property of the actual rather than the possible. Aristotle accords an absolute priority to act (*Entelecheia*) over potency (*Dunamis*).³ Faithful to this priority classical metaphysics designated the Divine Being as a pure and eternal *Actus* over and above all transitory and material *Potentia*. Hence St Thomas' definition of God in the *Summa*: 'Deus est Actus purus, non habens aliquid de potentialitate'.^{3a} Even Leibniz who appeared to vindicate the possible in some measure, finished by reducing it to a mere represented *Possibilitas* in the mind of a God perfectly actualized in His own Being.

By contrast, Heidegger sees the possible (*das Mögliche*) as the transcendental horizon of man. The possible is nothing less than that horizon of transcendence which makes possible both the individual historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of man and the general history (*Geschichte*) of mankind. Historicity and history are grounded on the fundamental human experience of openness towards time. By time Heidegger understands here, in *Being and Time*, the temporal horizons which extend the present towards the possible worlds of

past and future thus endowing it with meaning. Time is an 'ex-static' horizon of possibility into which man steps when he steps outside of (*ex-stasis*) his present existence, i.e. his existence considered as simple presence. Heidegger argues that traditional metaphysics treated man solely in terms of the simple presence of his being (*Seiende*) and thereby ignored the very Being (*Sein*) of this being-present. This Being of being reveals itself as the non-present possibility of man. Heidegger can thus conclude that the Being-there (*Da-Sein*) of man is his existence *as possibility*.⁴

In contrast to classical metaphysics which, since Aristotle, viewed time as an addition of present moments, Heidegger proposes a 'fundamental' ontology which will reveal time as an horizon of possibilities which possibilizes and grounds (*Grunden/Fonder*) the present.^{4a} So doing, he will enable us to question the very Being of our being-present, that absence which grounds our presence and appears to us, phenomenologically, as possibility. By thus defining man's 'fundamental' way of being-in-the-world (*in der-Welt-sein*) as *possibility*, Heidegger intends to 'overcome' the metaphysical definitions of existence in terms of *presence*: *Ousia*, *Existentia*, *Substantia*, *Res Cogitans*, *Gegenstand*, *Gegenwärtigung*, *Vorhandenheit* *Anwesenheit* etc.⁵

But Heidegger does not suggest that human existence is *only* possibility. More exactly, he describes man as both actuality (*Da*) and possibility (*Sein*), stressing the fact that the latter is the ground of the former. Man is a being-there (*Da sein*) who has been 'thrown' into existence and who can do nothing to alter this 'fact'. But the very 'meaning' (*Bedeutung*) of man's thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) and facticity (*Faktizität*) as a being who *actually* exists, can only be comprehended from the more fundamental perspective of possibility. Our comprehension of man as 'thrown' (*Geworfen*) into this actual world is only meaningful on the basis of our understanding of him as a being who is always 'projected' (*Ent-worfen*) towards the world as possibility. But we must not misunderstand this to mean that man inhabits two worlds. There is only one world which, like *Dasein*, is both actual and possible, both present and future. The possible is the horizon of the world; and the world is the horizon of *Dasein*. Possibility is that world-horizon towards which (*Woraufhin*) man directs himself in that temporalizing transcendence which alone gives meaning to our actual world.⁶

But if Heidegger maintains thus that an understanding of our existence as 'possibility' is the very meaning and ground of our actual existence, he does not deny that such an understanding may sometimes be inauthentic. Possibility is inauthentic when it is apprehended as a modality of our being-present (*Seiende als*

Vorhandenheit) rather than of the 'Being' of our being-present. All 'logical', 'factual', 'existentiell' or 'ontical' possibilities are for Heidegger *inauthentic* in so far as they construe the possible *on* the basis of 'presence', thereby masking its *authentic* role as the basis of 'presence'.⁷ Thus we recognize that authenticity is an ontological rather than a moral term. In short, possibility is authentic when it is understood as an expression of the *Sein* of our existence and inauthentic when it is understood as an expression of our existence as *Seiende* i.e. as presence.⁸

But Heidegger goes even further. He states that our 'inauthentic' possibilities only have 'meaning' to the extent that they are recognized as ultimately 'grounded' in our 'authentic' (*eigentlich*) possibilities, i.e. those possibilities which are acknowledged as the ownmost (*eigenst*) modalities of our being in the world.

Man begins to exist authentically as soon as he ceases to experience his life, and his life-world, as given actualities of presence and unveils that horizon of possibilities which is the hidden significance of this presence. The horizon of the possible is always covered over by the anonymous crowd (*Das Man*) which reduces life to the uniform, compelling the past and future to conform to the one form of an insular present. The Crowd hides the possible because it threatens to expose the mediocrity and inertia of our daily life. The Crowd protects its subscribers from the responsibility of having to choose their present manner of existence from a host of possibilities. It isolates the present from the unsettling dimensions of past and future. It assures us that all that is is well and could not be otherwise. The discovery of the possible, which alone renders our lives authentic, shatters this myth of anonymous presence and compels each individual to face up to his responsibility. The disclosure of the horizon of possibility which grounds our present existence makes us respond to the past which made us and the future which limits us. This disclosure fills us with anguish (*Angst*) for we realize that our sovereign limiting possibility is the possibility of death.

Death is the ultimate possibility of man. It is the fundamental project which founds all other projects. Thus Heidegger concludes that the horizon of our world – be it the *Umwelt* of serviceable and referential objects (*Dienlichkeit* and *Verweisungsganzkeit*) or the *Mitwelt* of interrelating subjects (*Miteinandersein*) – is finite. The temporal horizon of our existence is a transcendental horizon which leads from our present to our open future of possibilities. But the openness of the future is not infinite; it terminates in death, the end of all our possibilities. Heidegger defines man as a temporalizing being in so far as he is always transcending the reality of the present towards the possibility of the future, and ultimately towards our

most future possibility, death. Death is the possibility which it is impossible to go beyond. Man is free to the extent that he experiences his life as possibility; he is only authentically free however when he experiences his death as his ultimate possibility, the impossibility of further possibility, the end of his time.

To acknowledge death as the supreme possibility of my existence is to discover that the world is always *mine* in so far as it is an horizon of possibilities limited by *my* death. Death represents the finitude of *my* temporalization; it cannot belong to another. In order to live our life, as a 'being towards death', authentically we must live it as our *own*, as individuals over and against the collective 'crowd'. In thus authentically experiencing death as *my* supreme possibility, I experience the possibility of the impossibility (*Unmöglichkeit*) of my existence, the possibility of being-no-longer-able-to-be (*das Möglichkeit der Nicht-mehr dasein-könnens*).⁹ Death is the end (*Umwille/Umzu*) of all our possibilities. I exist authentically when I live my possibilities *towards* my death.

It seems clear then that the Heideggerean notion of the possible as *Möglichkeit* cannot be understood metaphysically as either the represented *Possibilities* nor the immanent *Potentia* of some being considered as 'presence'. *Die Möglichkeit* for Heidegger in *Being and Time* is rather the horizon of *Dasein* which transcends all presence. It represents a post-metaphysical understanding of the possible which shatters the notion of Being as a solid and substantial self-presence exposing it to the temporalizing projects of *Dasein*. Man is a being who is always transcending his being as presence towards his being as possibility, because he is a being who exists in time. Metaphysics hid the truth of Being in hiding this fundamental rapport between Being and Time.

b) *Seinkönnen*: In addition to *Möglichkeit*, Heidegger employs two other key terms in *Being and Time* to express his understanding of the possible: *Seinkönnen*, translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as 'potentiality-for-Being'; and *Ermöglichen* or the power of rendering possible, possibilizing.

Dasein projected itself, 'potentiality-for-Being' (*Seinkönnen*) signifies *Dasein*'s ability to project in the first place. 'Potentiality-for-Being' is the sine qua non of every projection of possibility. And every projection is a projection of the possible to the extent that it is a surpassing of the present. We can only project ourselves towards our 'possibilities' because we have the 'potentiality' to do so, i.e. to *be* our possibilities. *Seinkönnen* means that it is possible to reach out towards the possible. To say, as Heidegger, does that *Dasein* exists as possibility is to presuppose that *dasein* *can* project its possibilities, *can* exist as 'potentiality-for-Being'. To be able to

project that which is able to be (*Verstehen*) I must first be a being who is able to be (*Seinkönnen*).¹⁰ More exactly, all our projection, comprehension or realization of 'possibilities' issues from our 'potentiality-to-be' projection, comprehension or realization.

Though 'potentiality-for-Being' like 'possibility' may be either authentic or inauthentic, ontical, factual or existentiell,¹¹ these two modes of living the possible are not to be identified as most commentators thought. Whereas, for example, *Möglichkeiten* can refer to both the 'possibilities' of *things* (i.e. cultural, technical, linguistic or perceptual objects) and of *human existence* (*Dasein*), *Seinkönnen* is attributable to human existence alone.¹² If *Möglichkeiten* are the projects of *Dasein*, *Seinkönnen* is *Dasein*'s prerequisite power of projection. Similarly, if the former are extended along the temporal horizon of *Dasein*, the latter is *Dasein*'s very capacity to temporalize this horizon. Thus, while the 'possibilities' of *Dasein* may be said to be variable, its *Seinkönnen* is constant. We may, for example, project many 'possibilities' which we simply don't have the 'potentiality-to-be', i.e. the possibility of being a bird or a god. Accordingly, even though we are invariably 'potentiality-for-being-towards-death' we are always projectively aware of this as our most sovereign 'possibility'. It is on the basis of this distinction between two modes of existing the possible, that Heidegger speaks of a conscience ((*Gewissen*)) which calls man to choose, for amidst the multiple 'possibilities' of his horizon, the singularly authentic 'possibility' of acknowledging oneself as a 'potentiality-for-being-towards-death'.¹³ As Heidegger puts it: 'Being-towards-death is the anticipation of a potentiality-for-Being of that entity (i.e. man) whose kind of Being is anticipation itself . . . Death is *Dasein*'s *ownmost* possibility, and being towards this possibility discloses to *Dasein* its *ownmost* potentiality-for-Being (*Seinkönnen eigenst*).'¹⁴

Death is the limit of the possible both as our ownmost 'possibility' and ownmost 'potentiality-for-Being'. But death limits thus in different ways. As the limit of 'possibility' it is that 'towards which' *Dasein* projects itself; as the limit of 'potentiality-for-Being' it is that 'for which' *Dasein* projects itself. To apprehend death as the sovereign 'possibility' is to recognize *Dasein* as our 'potentiality-for-Being-in-its-totality' (*Ganzseinkönnen*). This apprehension of one's Being in the totality of its possibility presupposes that we recognize ourselves as temporal ekstases stretched between past and future. To recognize our *Ganzseinkönnen* is to gainsay the prefabricated opinions of the Crowd (*Das Man*) which reduce us to a part of ourselves in reducing us to what we are exclusively now in the present, the fiction of a permanent undying 'presence'.¹⁵ To recognize our *Ganzseinkönnen* is to simultaneously recognize our *Selbstseink-*

önnen, that 'potentiality-for Being-one's-self' denied us by the Crowd.¹⁶ All the other 'potentialities-for-Being', i.e. the 'potentiality-to-be' someone who works, speaks, feels anguished, guilty or at issue etc. are ultimately derivative of our ownmost 'potentiality-for-Being-towards-death' which is at once *Ganzseinkönnen* and *Selbstseinkönnen*. Death is the 'potentiality-to-be' complete in oneself which in turn totalizes and individualizes all other *Seinkönnen* oneself which in turn totalizes and individualizes all other *Seinkönnen*.¹⁷ Heidegger concludes accordingly: 'The certain possibility of death discloses Dasein as a possibility, but does so only in such a way that, in anticipating this possibility, Dasein possibilizes (*ermöglicht*) this possibility (*Möglichkeit*) for itself as its ownmost potentiality-for-Being (*Seinkönnen*).'¹⁸

c) *Ermöglichen*: This last quotation clearly underlies the difference between *Möglichkeit*, *Seinkönnen* and the third key term for the possible in *B T* – *ermöglichen*. In this and other passages, the verb *ermöglichen*, meaning to 'make or render possible' is used to designate the most fundamental activity of Dasein, that is, the activity by which it deploys itself as a 'potentiality-for-Being' which projects its 'possibilities'.

However, at several junctures during the concluding chapters of *B T* Heidegger seems to suggest that the subject of the verb, *ermöglichen* may be something other than Dasein itself. This enigmatic switch of subject is scarcely perceptible but is, nonetheless, of profound importance for the subsequent development of his thought. In section 65, for example, Heidegger defines the 'meaning' (*Sinn*) of Dasein as 'that onto which' (*Woraufhin*) Dasein projects itself, a *Woraufhin* which for its part 'renders possible' (*ermöglicht*) all of Dasein's projects. I cite in German, for this twofold meaning is lost in translation: '*Das Woraufhin eines Entwurfs freilegen, besagt, das erschliessen, was das Entworfenen ermöglicht*'.¹⁹ This sentence is ambivalent in that '*Das Entworfenen*' (that which is projected) may be understood as either the subject or the object of the verb '*ermöglicht*' (to 'render possible'). If it is subject then the *woraufhin* (the 'that onto which' Dasein projects itself which in turn 'renders possible' this projection) is nothing other than the projection of Dasein itself. In this case, the 'rendering possible' of Dasein constitutes a self-projecting, solipsistic circle. If *Das Entworfenen* is object of the sentence however, then it would seem that the *Woraufhin* which 'renders possible' Dasein's projection is something radically *other* than this projection itself. In the first instance, 'the rendering possible' of Dasein's projection' is to be understood as a *genitivus objectivus*; in the second as a *genitivus subjectivus*. The ambiguity is probably intentional,

Macquarrie and Robinson offer the following translation here: 'To lay bare the "upon-which" of a projection, amounts to disclosing that which makes possible what has been projected'. The translators' choice here of the second of the two possible meanings is in line with my suggestion that the general movement of Heidegger's treatment of the possible in *BT* is progressively away from a metaphysical interpretation which would see the possible as a dimension (*potentia* or *possibilitas*) immanent in the being (*Seiende*) of things or of man, towards a post-metaphysical interpretation (i.e. Fundamental Ontology) which would recognize possibility as a transcendent dimension, emerging from beyond men and things, from that Being (*Sein*) which renders both men and things possible in the first place. The sentences which follow Heidegger's enigmatic phrase further confirm this reading: 'What has been projected is the Being of Dasein, and it is disclosed in what constitutes that Being as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole. That upon which (*Woraufhin*) the Being which has been disclosed and is thus constituted has been projected, is that which makes possible this Constitution of Being as care'.²⁰

In section 71, we find an equally enigmatic passage in which Heidegger suggests that the fact that 'temporality . . . is rendered possible by the *'Being'* of Dasein (*die Zeitlichkeit . . . das SEIN des Daseins ermöglicht*) can only be genuinely understood on the basis of an understanding of the 'meaning of Being in general (*Sinn des Seins überhaupt*)'.²¹ Is there not the suggestion here that the *'Being* of Dasein' (*Being* underlined by Heidegger himself) which 'renders possible' temporality refers ultimately to 'Being in general' which, as we know from Heidegger's later writings, is fundamentally 'different' from Dasein itself? As Heidegger puts it elsewhere, whereas Being in general may be without man, man may never be without Being.²²

Heidegger corroborates this suggestion in section 76, when he makes mention of 'the quiet power of the possible' (*die stille Krafte des Möglichen*) which 'renders possible' both our history and our comprehension of history.²³ Heidegger goes on to identify this 'quiet power of the possible' with the futural 'towards-which' of all man's temporal projections. Moreover, in the concluding sentences of *Being and Time*, this circular manner of referring possibility to temporality and temporality to possibility reconfirms our suspicion that it is ultimately Being itself which 'renders possible' the projections of Dasein: 'The existential-ontological constitution of Dasein's totality is grounded in temporality. Hence the ecstatic projection of Being must be made possible (*ermöglicht*) by some primordial way in which ecstatic temporality temporalizes. How

is this mode of the temporalizing of temporality to be Interpreted? Is there a way which leads from primordial *time* to the meaning of *Being*? Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of Being?"²⁴

The final suggestion would seem to be that it is Being which 'render possible' (*ermöglicht*) time. Or more exactly, it is Being itself which 'renders possible' the temporality of Dasein as a 'potentiality-for-Being' which projects its own 'possibilities'. But within the compass of *Being and Time* this reading remains no more than a suggestion, for the overall perspective of the possible in this work is based on Dasein, that is, on the Being of human existence rather than on Being itself (*Sein als Sein*).

To conclude our analysis of the possible in *Being and Time*, we might say that just as our understanding of *Möglichkeit* referred us to an understanding of *Seinkönnen*, so in turn our understanding of *Seinkönnen* lead to an understanding of *ermöglichen*. This movement from a nominal to a verbal notion of the possible, reflects in some fashion the progressive movement in Heidegger's thought away from man as a being-present (*Seiende als Anwesenheit*) who lives his possibility only secondarily and accidentally, towards man as a Being-there (*Da-Sein*) whose temporalizing 'renders possible' (*Sein*) and, more remarkable still, is 'rendered possible' by it. Heidegger himself does not at any time explicitly allude to this terminological progression. But as I hope to have shown he does not have to, for the text speaks for itself. The important point is that with his original analysis of the possible in *Being and Time* Heidegger has already taken the decisive step beyond a metaphysics of presence.

Before terminating this first part of our analysis some reference must be made to Heidegger's allusions to 'the possible' in two other works written before the 'turning' (*Kehre*) of his thought. In *Nietzsches Wort Gott ist Tot* (a resumé of lectures given between 1936 and 1940) there is a curious passage, where Heidegger observes that for Nietzsche 'the essence of art is the creation of *possibilities* for the will, on the basis of which the will to power liberates itself for itself for the first time'.²⁵ Art reveals the essence of all willing to be a perpetual self-creation which goes beyond our given nature by appropriating other 'possible' experiences. A propos of this reading Heidegger cites the following sentence from Nietzsche's *Will to Power* (aph. 796): 'The world like a work of art gives birth to itself'. Art is, as Heidegger comments, primarily a *value* for Nietzsche, the willing of *more* power: 'a perspectival direction towards possibilities . . . which are given only through a penetrating forward look that belongs to the essence of the will to power'²⁶. It seems that here as in *Being and Time* Heidegger interprets the notion of possibility as an horizontal projection of the Being of man, that

is, of *Dasein*. The work of art constitutes a world of the possible. As such it unfolds as an horizon of valorizing human projection. Thus we recognize that just as the 'worldhood of the world' in chapter 3 of *BT* was understood on the basis of 'readiness-to-hand' (*Zuhandenheit* as the totality of the referential valorization, *Verweisung*, and orientation, *Ausrichtung*, of *Dasein*'s projects), so also art as conceived by Nietzsche, the first rebel against metaphysics, is a world of unfettered human valorizing. In short, in art the 'meaning' of the will to power is revealed as a valorizing projection of man towards the possible.

It is in a similar perspective that Heidegger interprets the notion of possibility in part three of *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929).²⁷ Here Heidegger defines possibility as the auto-affective horizon of human temporality grounded in the 'transcendental imagination'. With Kant the possible emerges for the first time in the history of metaphysics as the field of temporality. The possible is the temporal horizon of human imagination which renders possible the unity of understanding and sensibility.²⁸ For Kant in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as for Heidegger in *Being and Time*, the possible is that anticipative-projective structure (*Vor-haben*, *Vor-stellung*, *Vor-bildung*) which grounds human temporality. Thus when Kant says that man is a being who temporalizes by 'imaginatively' transcending the present towards the possible i.e. non-present, of the past and future, he is anticipating Heidegger's claim in *BT* that *Dasein* gives itself a world by projecting itself temporally toward a transcendental horizon of possibility. Heidegger acknowledges that Kant's insight into the temporalizing nature of the 'transcendental imagination' was the precursor to his own understanding of *Dasein*.²⁹ Indeed Kant's attempt to think being in terms of time, and presence in terms of possibility, was one of the earliest challenges to the traditional metaphysical claim that Being be understood as 'presence' rather than temporality. But as Heidegger goes to great length to point out, Kant was so disturbed by the implications of this challenge that he suppressed his analysis of imagination as the temporalizing pass-over from presence to possibility in the second edition of the *Critique*.³⁰ Not until the publication of *Being in Time* some hundred and forty years later would this omission be redressed. We must bear in mind, however, that we are dealing here with Heidegger's *interpretation* of Kant's theory of imagination (as of Nietzsche's theory of will) rather than with the theory itself.³¹

In the two works cited, therefore, Heidegger's analysis of the possible shows itself perfectly consistent with his profoundly original definition of this term in *BT* as a temporalizing-projecting-valorizing

horizon of Dasein. Heidegger I (Heidegger before the 'turning') thus leads us to think the being of the world less as a permanent presence and more as Dasein's transcendental horizon of possibility. But even if Heidegger I raises our understanding of Being from presence (*Vorhandenheit*) to possibility (*Möglichkeit*), he does so only within the limits of transcendental subjectivity. In short, his analysis of the possible emerges from his original (i.e. post-metaphysical) disclosure of the Being of man as temporality, rather than from an even more fundamental disclosure of Being as Being (*Sein als Sein*). This second disclosure was to be the prerogative of Heidegger II.

II

In the forties there occurred the famous 'Turning' (*Kehre*) in Heidegger's thought. This 'Turning' is clearly manifest in his approach to the notion of the 'possible'. Now the 'possible' is thought in terms of Being itself rather than in terms of the Being of man as transcendental subject. As Heidegger makes quite clear in his introduction to Richardson's commentary, however, there is no question here of a philosophical volte-face. The thought of Heidegger II is to be understood as a deepening of, rather than a deviation from Heidegger I. The two say the *same* thing but from different perspectives. 'The possible' which is thought about in both instances remains the same, the only difference being that in Heidegger II it is approached from the perspective of Being rather than man. This point will become clearer when we show how the second Heidegger's interpretation of the possible as *Vermögen* already exists in a germinal and enigmatic form in the first Heidegger's notion of *ermöglichen*.

The 'Turning' in Heidegger's thought on the possible is best expressed in the following key passage from *Eine Brief Über den Humanismus* (1947):³²

Being as the element is the 'quiet power' of the loving potency (*Vermögens*) i.e. of the possible (*des Möglichen*). Our words 'possible' and 'possibility' are, under the domination of 'logic' and 'metaphysics', taken only in contrast to 'actuality', i.e. they are conceived with reference to a determined – viz. the metaphysical – interpretation of Being as *actus* and *potentia* the distinction of which is identified with that of *existentia* and *essentia*. When I speak of the 'quiet power of the possible', I do not mean the possible of a merely represented *possibilitas*, nor the *potentia* as *essentia* of an *actus* of the *existentia*, but Being itself, which in its loving potency (*das Mögend*) possibilizes (*vermag*) thought and thus also the essence of man, which

means in turn his relationship of Being. To possibilise (*vermögen*) something is to sustain it in its essence, to retain it in its element.³³

Firstly, it is evident that the repetition of the enigmatic phrase from *Being and Time* (i.e. 'the quiet power of the possible') in hyphenated form, signals Heidegger's intention to elucidate and develop its original meaning. As we observed in our analysis of the term *ermöglichen* in *Being and Time*, the notion of 'possibilizing' was frequently used ambiguously to refer to either of two different subjects – the Being of man (*Dasein*) or Being as Being (*Sein als Sein*).³⁴ Here in the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger replaces *ermöglichen* by *vermögen* thereby unambiguously identifying the fundamental power of possibilizing to Being itself.

Whereas *ermöglichen* could be either authentic or inauthentic, *vermögen* is always authentic. To put it in another way: *vermögen* (which I will translate as 'possibilization', 'possibilizing' since the author uses it as both verb and noun) is to be correctly understood as the exclusively authentic essence of *ermöglichen* ('render possible'). It is *ermöglichen* viewed from the point of view of Being in general (*Sein überhaupt*) rather than the of the Being of man in particular: 'It is on the strength of this loving potency or possibilization of love (*Das Vermögen des Mögens*), that something is possibilized (*vermag*) in its authentic (*eigentlich*) being. This possibilization (*Vermögen*) is the authentic "possible" (*das eigentlich "Mögliche"*), that whose essence rests on loving (*Mögen*).'³⁵

'Possibilization' (*Vermögen*) is thus identified with Being itself to the extent that it possibilizes what is most proper (*eigenst*) and authentic (*eigentlich*) for man i.e. thought. Correlatively, thought is that which cares for Being, shows care (*Sorge*) for what is most proper (*eigenst*) to it. Heidegger exploits here the hidden resources of the term *Vermögen*, notably its root, *mögen* meaning 'to love'. To care for Being is consequently to love it in taking care of its essence as it manifests itself in all things: 'Thought is . . . to concern oneself about the essence of the "thing" or a "person", that means to like or to love them'.³⁶ Possibilization is therefore the love of Being. Love of Being is here to be understood in both its meaning, that is, both as man's love for Being and Being's love for man which possibilizes (*vermag*) man's loving – thinking – in the first place.

Thus we may say that thinking is man's most proper and authentic possible (*eigenst und eigentlich Möglich*). Thinking is that which is possibilized by the 'loving possibilization' of Being itself so that it may in turn lovingly possibilize the come to be (*wesen*) of all beings. Being possibilizes thought which in turn possibilizes the Being of

things. This reciprocity originating from Being is ingeniously captured by the untranslatable accusative nominative duplexity of the German 'das': 'Aus diesem Mögen vermag das Sein das Denken'. Lohner's translation of this sentence as 'Being is capable of thought' is incorrect because onesided. It is not merely a question of Being being capable of thought, but also of Being making thought capable of Being, i.e. of thinking Being. Within a space of ten lines Lohner uses three different terms to translate 'vermögen' (i.e. potency, to be capable of, and – inexplicably – command!) with not the slightest indication to the reader that we are in all cases concerned with the *same* term. We offer the alternative translation 'possibilizing' (meaning both 'to possibilize/possibilization') to cover these three cases and to capture the noun-verb duplexity within a single term. We therefore render the German 'Aus diesem Mögen vermag das Sein das Denken' as 'Being possibilizes thought which possibilizes Being'. This version is irrefutably confirmed in the sentences which immediately follow: 'Jenes ermöglicht dieses. Das Sein als das Vermögend-Mögende ist das 'Mög-liche' – 'The one renders the other possible. Being as the loving-possibilizing is the "posse-ible".' There are three crucial points to be made about this crucial statement (the entire second sentence of which Lohner omits to translate!).

The first is that the juxtaposing here of *ermöglichen* (Heidegger I's term for the possible in *BT*) with *Vermögen* (Heidegger II's word, the possible) shows how both terms refer to the *same* truth of the possible without denying the difference of their respective perspectives (that is, *ermöglichen* as the possible seen from the perspective of *Dasein*, *Vermögen* as the possible seen from the perspective of Being). In this movement from the *ermöglichen* of Heidegger I to the *Vermögen* of Heidegger II the ambiguity which we underlined is shown to be – in its essence (i.e. from the point of view of Being itself) – the very truth of Being itself as a reciprocity of loving and thinking.

The second point concerns the use of the term 'Vermögend-Mögende' to describe Being. This particular grammatical usage means that Being is at one and the same time a possibilizing and a loving: it loves because it possibilizes and possibilizes because it loves.

Thirdly, the direct equation of Being with 'das Mög-liche' shows that the root of both loving (*Mögend*) and possibilizing (*Vermögend*) is the *same*, namely, *Mög*. It is impossible to render this two-in-one-foldness of *Mög-liche* in English. But by translating 'Mög-liche' as 'posse-ible' we hope at least to have communicated one of the fundamental meanings, that is, Being as *posse*: to be possible, being-possible, possibilizing. Whatever about the impossibility of

an adequate translation however, it is abundantly clear that Lohner's omission of this pivotal sentence in its entirety makes Heidegger's crucial identification of Being as *Vermögen* incomprehensible to the English reader.

In this cardinal yet much neglected passage from *The Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger goes so far as to identify Being itself as a 'loving possibilization' (*Mögende Vermögen*). In so doing he reveals the implicit truth of the three preceding notions of the possible – i.e. 'possibility' (*Möglichkeit*), 'potentiality-for-Being' (*Seinkönnen*), and 'make possible' (*ermöglichen*) – to be nothing less than the 'possibilizing' (*Vermögen*) of Being itself.

'Possibilizing' is Being itself to the extent that it 'possibilizes' (*vermag*) beings out of love for their essence. But there is another and more literal meaning to the term '*Vermögen*' which would be immediately obvious to the German reader and which cannot be ignored in this context. Surprising as it may seem the current meaning of *Vermögen* is 'power' or 'property'. Used as a verb it thus signifies to have power or to have influence on persons or things. Though this alternative meaning of *Vermögen* appears in stark contrast to Heidegger's etymological rendition as a 'loving possibilizing', it is by no means accidental. Several critics, notably Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber, have attacked Heidegger's notion of Being as a anonymous Totality which reduces beings to the measure of its self-identical power.³⁷ Moreover, one of Lohner's three alternative translations for *Vermögen* was 'to command': 'When I speak of the "quite power (*kraße*) of the possible" (I mean) . . . Being itself, which in its loving potency (*Vermögen*) commands (*vermag*) thought and thus also the essence of man, which means in turn his relationship to Being'. Heidegger's hyphenated singularization of the term '*Kraft*', meaning 'force', as a virtual synonym of *Vermögen* further endorses the 'power' signification of this term. It is not our purpose here to assess the validity of the interpretation of Being as 'power'. Suffice it to say that the identification of Being with *Vermögen* can mean that Being is either a 'loving-possibilizing' or a 'power' which appropriates and commands, or even both at once. Indeed, it is just such an identity of Being as both 'possibility' and a 'power' which appropriates (*ereignen*) that which is most appropriate (*eignet*) and authentically proper (*eigentlich eigenst*) to beings, which emerges in Heidegger II's ultimate term for Being: *Das Er-eygnis*. *Vermögen* and *Ereignis* may both be translated as 'appropriation'.³⁸

In *Zeit und Sein* (the projected third part of *Sein und Zeit* which was rethought by Heidegger II and withheld from publication until 1969), the author renders the enigmatic '*esti gar einai*' of Parmenides as 'the possibility of Being'.³⁹ The *esti* here must, Heidegger states,

be understood as the *Es Gibt*, the giving of Being. The giving of Being is a giving of time and is not to be confused with the metaphysical notion of Being as a permanent presence. This reaffirmation of the identity of Being and time in this crucial late text shows how Heidegger II remains in direct continuity with Heidegger I's initial exhortation in *BT* to think Being in terms of temporality which absences (into future and past) even as it presences (in the present) rather than a metaphysics of simple substantified 'presence'.⁴⁰ As the giving of Being, *esti* is only to be understood as that which 'is capable of Being', the 'power' or 'possibility' of Being. The French translation here as '*pouvoir-etre*' captures this double sense beautifully. Being is thus identified as the 'possibility of Being' in the sense of 'that which *can be*'. This designation of Being as 'possibility of Being' leads directly to Heidegger's celebrated definition of Being as *Ereignis* in this same work.

In a closely related text entitled *The End of Philosophy*, Heidegger affirms that 'the end of philosophy is the place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in its most ultimate possibility'.⁴¹ Heidegger suggests that this 'ultimate possibility' is also the 'first possibility' from which all genuine thought originates. It is an eschatological possibility which holds sway beyond man's power of determination, 'a possibility whose contour remains obscure, whose coming remains uncertain'.⁴² It would seem that this 'ultimate possibility' is nothing other than the *Ereignis* of Being itself, the 'appropriation' of thought by Being whose final, eschatological coming remains beyond our control.

Conclusion

Heidegger's thought on the 'possible' represents a radical departure from traditional metaphysical theories on the subject. Whereas traditional metaphysics regarded the 'possible' as a lack of presence or a mental re-presentation of a presence, Heidegger proclaims it to be that which gives, i.e. 'possibilizes' all presence. No longer thought as a representational *possibilitas* of the subjective mind, or a *potentia* of objective reality, the 'possible' (*Möglich*) emerges in Heidegger as a 'love' or 'power' which 'possibilizes' all presence, be it represented or real. The possible is Being itself in so far as it gives and appropriates. Whereas this identification of Being and the 'possible' remains implicit in Heidegger I, where it is understood primarily in terms of the temporal horizon of human existence (i.e. as that 'onto which' Dasein projects itself in giving itself a world), in Heidegger II this identification is clear and explicit. The 'turn' in Heidegger's thinking on the possible takes place in his *Letter on Humanism*. But more important perhaps than the internal development of

Heidegger's thought on the 'possible' is the degree to which this thought as a whole fulfils the author's programme of 'overcoming' metaphysics. This fulfillment is witnessed to a lesser degree in Heidegger I's threefold treatment of the 'possible' (*Möglichkeit*, *Seinkönnen* and *ermöglichen*) then in Heidegger II's identification of the 'possible' with Being itself as *Vermögen* and its cognates, *Esti*, *Es Gibt* and *Ereignis*. But in both Heideggers the 'possible' is thought of in a post-metaphysical fashion; that is, no longer as an accidental characteristic of the 'presence' of beings, but rather as that temporality which is Being itself in its absencing-presencing, Being as it gives, loves and appropriates. May we not conclude then that the task of 'overcoming' metaphysics is nothing less than the task of thinking Being as possibility instead of simply as 'presence'.

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1. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Max Verläg, Tübingen, 1927), translated by J Macquarrie and E Robinson (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1962). Henceforth the German shall be referred to as *SZ* and the English as *BT*. The statement concerning the primacy of possibility is to be found in *BT*, 63; *SZ*, 38.

2. *BT* sections 25-38, especially 32.

3. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 9.8.1059.

3a. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I pars. qu. 3, a. 4, c. Thus as the Supreme Being, God (*Summum Ens*) becomes an omnipresence (*Omnipraesentia*) in all beings in so far as He is the cause of their Being (*causa essendi*); *Sth*, I, 8, a. 3. For a full development of Heidegger's critique of the scholastic notion of God as metaphysical presence, see his *Identität und Differenz* (1957). For most comprehensive commentaries on the subject see B. Welte, *La Métaphysique de St. Thomas d'Aquin et la Pensée de l'Etre chez Heidegger* (RSPT, Oct. 1966) and Bertrand Rioux, *l'Etre et la Vérité chez Heidegger et St. Thomas d'Aquin* (PUF, Paris 1963). We should also add that even though Aquinas and the transcendental Thomists of today – Rahner, Lonergan etc. – consider man as a being who transcends himself in quest of an always more absolute knowledge, they still continue to understand man primarily as a *substance*, whose being, even as it transcends itself, remains a permanently identical presence. Furthermore, even such metaphysicians acknowledge a role for possibility or potency in their notion of knowledge as conative and transcending, they ultimately subordinate this possibility to the final presence which is achieved when the knower reaches what is known, i.e. Aristotle's *Noesis Noeseos* or the Thomist notion of absolute knowledge as an absolute identity and transience of Being to itself. It is only with Descartes and the German Idealists that man is explicitly defined as a substance which is a 'self-presence'. It must be admitted that in points of detail, Heidegger's critique of the metaphysics of presence and substance leaves much to be desired. But the overall intention of his critique is clear enough.

4. *SZ*, 42 f., 143-5, 188, 248 f., 259.

4a. We do not wish to make any claims here for the unconditional validity of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's notion of time in book *V* of the *Physics*. Nor is it sure that all subsequent theories of time follow this interpretation.

Augustine's understanding of time in *Confessions*, XI, would certainly seem to be an exception. But our purpose here is not so much to dispute the validity of Heidegger's interpretation as to state it; see note 40 below.

5. All of these metaphysical words for Being as presence share the common character of 'permanent subsistence' (*character des Ständige verbleibts*) such that the Being of a being is considered to be 'that which it always is' i.e., its subsistence in permanence. This is why in *BT* truth is no longer defined in terms of Being as 'permanent-subsistence' (*das Vorhandene*) but on the basis of the temporality of *Dasein* (i.e. as revelation and openness (*Erschlossenheit*)). For best examples of Heidegger's discussion of the priority of Being as presence vis-à-vis Being as possibility in the history of metaphysics see his *Die Physik Bei Aristoteles* (1958) and *Entwurf zur Geschichte des Seins als Metaphysik*, 458-480 (*Nietzsche*, Vol. II). As a good secondary source see Ysabel de Andia's *Présence et Eschatologie dans la Pensée de Heidegger* (Editions Universitaires, 1975) particularly 150-190.

6. *BT* 271 f.

7. *SZ* existentiell possibilities, 267; factual possibilities, 264; logical possibilities, 143; ontical possibilities, 312.

8. *BT* 250.

9. To express this idea Heidegger calls death the ultimate end (*Umwillen/Umzu und Wofür*) of all our possibilities, *ibid.* 93 f, 109, 467.

10. On rapport between *Verstehen* and *Seinkönnen*, see *BT* sections 58, 68a, 73.

11. On authentic and inauthentic 'potentiality-for-Being' see *SZ* 233-5, 267-302. On three modes of inauthentic 'potentiality-for-Being' see: *ZS* existentiell, 260; factual, 341; ontical, 260.

12. The only critics to have stressed the importance of this distinction are, to my knowledge, the translators themselves, Macquarrie and Robinson, in a note 558, *BT*.

13. *SZ* 263, 268.

14. *Ibid.* 263.

15. *Ibid.* 267-8.

16. *Ibid.* 267-69, 273-75, 298, 312.

17(*Ibid.* 267.

18. *Ibid.* 264: 'Die gewisse *Möglichkeit* des todes erschliesst das *Dasein* aber als *Möglichkeit* nur so, dass es vorlaufend zu ihr diese *Möglichkeit* als eigenstems *Seinkönnen* für sich *ermöglicht*'.

19. *SZ* 324; *BT* 271 - Macquarrie and Robinson offer the following translation here: 'To lay bare the upon which of a projection, amounts to disclosing that which *makes possible* what has been projected.' The translators' choice here of the second possibility of understanding this phrase is in line with my suggestion that the general movement of the approach to the possible in *BT* is progressively away from a metaphysical interpretation which would see the possible as a dimension (*protentia* or *possibilitas*) contained in the Being of man or things, towards a post-metaphysical interpretation (i.e. of fundamental ontology) which would see possibility as a dimension emerging towards man and things from that Being as Being (*Sein als Sein | Sein Überhaupt*) which renders both man and things possible in the first place. Of course, Being cannot be understood here as residing in some Platonic otherworld before it comes to us; it is not *separate* from man and things but it is *different*: see the famous 'ontological difference' in *Identität und Differenz* (1957).

20. *BT* 371.

21. *Ibid.* section 71, 423.

22. See *Was ist Metaphysik* (1943 edition): 'Das Sein wohl west ohne das Seiende, niemals aber ein Seiendes ist ohne das Sein'. In *Identität und Differenz*

(1957) develops this notion of the ontological difference between Being and being (or man as the highest form of being) at great length.

23. *BT* 446; *SZ* 394.

24. *BT* 488; *SZ* 437. We must point out here that there is nearly always an ambiguity in this work as to whether Being refers to the Being of Dasein or Being itself (as *Sein überhaupt*) or both at once!

25. See p. 85 in the English translation by William Lovitt, entitled *The Word of Nietzsche*, printed in the collection of Heidegger essays, *The Question concerning Technology and other Essays* (Harper and Row, 1977).

26. *Ibid.* 85.

27. Translated by James Churchill as *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Indiana University Press, 1962).

28. *Ibid.* 120 f., 141 f., 161 f.

29. *Ibid.* sections 34, 39-45, in particular p. 251: 'Kant's laying of the foundation of metaphysics, which for the first time subjects the internal possibility of the overtness of the Being of the essent to a decisive examination, must necessarily encounter time as the basic determination of finite transcendence, if indeed, it is true that the comprehension of Being in Dasein spontaneously projects Being on time.'

30. *Ibid.* 252: 'If the essence of transcendence is based on pure imagination, i.e., originally on time, then the idea of a "transcendental logic" becomes non-sensical, especially if, contrary to Kant's original intention, it is treated as an autonomous and absolute discipline. Kant must have had an intimation of this collapse of the primacy of logic in metaphysics when, speaking of the fundamental characteristics of Being, "possibility" (what-being) and "reality" (which Kant termed "existence"), he said: "So long as the definition of possibility, existence and necessity is sought solely in pure understanding, they cannot be explained save through an obvious tautology". And yet, in the second edition of the *Critique* did not Kant re-establish the supremacy of the understanding? And as a result did not metaphysics with Hegel, come to be identified with "logic" more radically than ever before?'

31. Heidegger himself makes this point in his conclusion to part 3 of this work, *Ibid.* 207: 'It is true that in order to wrest from the actual words that which these words "intend to say", every interpretation must necessarily resort to violence. This violence, however, should not be confused with an action that is wholly arbitrary. The interpretation must be animated and guided by the power of an illuminative idea. Only through the power of this idea can an interpretation risk that which is always audacious, namely, entrusting itself to the secret élan of a work, in order by this élan to get through to the unsaid and attempt to find an expression for it. The directive idea itself is confirmed by its own power of illumination'. In the light of this claim we can perhaps understand, if not necessarily agree with, Ernst Cassirer's description of Heidegger's interpretation as 'a usurpation of the text rather than a commentary' - 'Bemerkungen zu Martin Heideggers Kant-Interpretation', *Kant Studien*, XXXVI, No. 1/2 (1931) 17. To further appreciate the singular nature of this reading we must recall Heidegger's acknowledgment in the preface to this book on Kant, that this entire study was originally intended as a section of the projected part 2 of *BT*, to be entitled: 'The Fundamental Characteristics of a Phenomenological Destruction of the History of Ontology under the Guidance of the Problematic of temporality'.

32. English translation by Edgar Lohner entitled *Letter on Humanism*, and published in *Phenomenology and Existentialism* (ed. R. Zaner and D. Ihde, Capricorn Books, NY, 1973) 147-181.

33. I have made one important alteration in the Lohner translation (*Ibid.* 150)

in rendering 'Vermögen' as 'possibilizing' rather than 'commanding'. Literally, *Vermögen* means to be able or to enable i.e. to be or to make possible. Lohner's rendition as 'command' as well as 'potentiality' and 'is capable of' – without an indication that it is the same word *Vermögen* which is being translated – makes little sense out of the German original. As this is the most crucial text in our commentary I cite the original passage in its entirety: *Das Denken ist, dies sagt: das Sein hat sich je geschicklich seines Wesens Angenommen. Sich einer 'Sache' oder einer 'Person' in ihrem Wesen annehmen, das heisst-sie lieben-sie Mögen. Dies Mögen bedeutet, ursprünglicher gedacht: das Wesen schenken, Solches Mögen ist das eigentliche Wesen des Vermögens, das nicht nur dieses oder jenes leisten, sondern etwas in seiner Herkunft 'wesen', das heisst sein lassen kann. Das Vermögen des Mögens ist es, 'Kraft' dessen etwas eigentlich zu sein vermag. Dieses Vermögen ist das eigentlich 'Mögliche', jenes, dessen Wesen im Mögen beruht. Aus diesem Mögen vermag das Sein das Denken, Jenes ermöglicht dieses. Das Sein als das Vermögend-Mögende ist das 'Mögliche'. Das Sein als das Element ist die 'stille Kraft' des mögenden Vermögens, das heisst des Möglichen. Unsere Wörter 'möglich' und 'Möglich' und 'Möglichkeit' werden freilich unter der Herrschaft der 'Logik' und 'Metaphysik' nur gedacht im Unterschied zu 'Wirklichkeit', das heisst aus einer bestimmten der metaphysischen – Interpretation des Seins als actus und potentia, welche Unterscheidung identifiziert wird mit der von existentia und essentia, Wenn ich von der 'stillen Kraft des Möglichen' spreche, meine ich nicht das possibile einer nur vorgestellten possibilitas, nicht die potentia als essentia eines actus der existentia, sondern das Sein selbst, das mögend über das Denken und so über das Wesen des Menschen und das heisst über dessen Bezug zum Sein vermag. Etwas vermögen bedeutet hier: es in seinem Wesen wahren, in seinem Element einbehalten. The identification of *vermögen* and *wahren* in this last sentence is very significant, for Heidegger sees *Wahren* (to guard or care for) as the root meaning of *wahrheit* (truth). Thus we see how easily Heidegger was able to identify 'possibilizing' as the 'truth of Being' (and later as *es gibt, esti, Ereignis*).*

34. In fact, the two Beings, in question here refer to the *Same* Being but differ in the way we think about this Being i.e. as it reveals itself to man or as it is in itself. This duplicity in our thinking about Being is what Heidegger, in his later writings, referred to as the 'Januscope' (i.e. the double-glance).

35. Here I offer my own translation. The original German reads, as above: *'Das Vermögen des Mögens ist es 'Kraft' dessen etwas eigentlich zu sein vermag. Dieses Vermögen ist das eigentlich 'Mögliche', jenes, dessen Wesen im Mögen beruht'*. For Lohner's inadequate translation see *op. cit.* 150.

36. The original reads, as above: *'Das Denken ist, sich einer "Sache" oder einer "person" in Wesen annehmen, das heisst: sie lieben: sie mögen'*. For Lohner's translation see *op. cit.*, 151-2.

37. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1961); *Autrement qu'être* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1974) and Martin Buber *Between Man and Man* (trans. R. Smith, Fontana, 1947) 199-200.

38. The standard English translation of *Ereignis* is 'Appropriation', see Joan Stambaugh's translation of *Zeit und Sein* in *On Time and Being* (Harper and Row, 1972) 19-24. We must not overlook the significance of the fact that just as *Vermögen* can refer to wealth or power in the sense of 'property', so too *Ereignis* carries this sense of 'appropriation' as 'possession' or 'property' (as its etymological rapport with *Eigen-tum* suggests also). See Heidegger's play on this meaning in the following sentences from *On Time and Being*, for example, 22: 'Being proves to be destiny's gift of presence, the gift granted by the giving of time. The gift of presence is the property of appropriating'. ('Presence' here – *Answering* – is not to be confused with 'presence' in its metaphysical determina-

tions – *ousia*, *substantia*, *actualitas*, *Vorhandenheit* – discussed earlier!). Or again 23: 'Because Being and Time are there only in appropriating (*Ereignis*), appropriating has the peculiar property of bringing man into his own (*eigenst*) as the being who perceives Being by standing within true (*eigentlich*) time. Thus appropriated, man belongs to appropriation'. As Heidegger goes on to say, to the extent that man is 'appropriated' and assimilated' by Being he is to be considered its 'belonging', as its property: that which is most proper to it.

39. See Staumbaugh's translation, *op. cit.* 8.

40. This essential link between 'possibility' on the one hand, and 'Being-understood-as-time-which-absences-as-it-presences' (i.e. as *Es gibt, Esti, Ereignis*) on the other, is clearly manifest in the following passages from a letter which Heidegger wrote to a young student called Buchner in 1950 (printed pp. 183-6 of *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter, Harper and Row, 1971): 'Being is in no way identical with reality or with a precisely determined actuality (i.e. simple, substantified presence). Nor is Being in any way opposed to being-no-longer and being-not-yet, these two belong themselves to the essential nature of Being. Even metaphysics already had, to a certain extent, an intimation of this fact in its doctrine of the modalities – which, to be sure, has hardly been understood, according to which possibility belongs to Being just as much as do actuality and necessity' (. . .) 'The default of god and the divinitas is absence, but absence is not nothing; rather it is precisely the coming-into-presence (*Anwesen*), which must first be appropriated (*ereignet*), of the hidden fullness and wealth of what has been and what, thus gathered, is presencing (*anwesende*) of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus. This no-longer is itself a not-yet of the veiled coming-appropriation (*Ereignis*) of its inexhaustible nature. Since Being is never the merely precisely actual, to guard Being is vigilance, watchfulness for the has-been and future destiny of Being (. . .) The step back from the representational thinking of metaphysics . . . is necessarily part of thinking the thing, a thinking that thinks about the *possible advent* (*Ereignis mögliche*) of world'. Once again we stress that this notion of Being as an absence which presences (*Anwesen-Abwesende/Absen-Abwesende*) is not to be confused with the metaphysical notion of presence as something actual or actualized, as re-presentation or, in its highest form, as some eternal presence (*Ipsum Esse subsistens* or *Nunc Aeternans*). This 'overcoming' of the notion of presence as enduring substance in favour of a notion of 'presencing' (*Anwesen*) as a possibilizing (*Vermögen*) which presences as it absences, is what we have tried to highlight in this article. We have avoided using the presence-presencing contrast because in English this double-use of the same term 'presence' looses the sharp distinction of the German where two *different* terms are always used i.e. *Vorhandenheit* (*ousia*, *substantia*, *actualitas* etc.) on the one hand, and *Anwesen* on the other. The presence-possibility contrast expresses this difference very clearly, even in English.

41. This text was originally presented for Jean Beaufret's *Kierkegaard Vivant* (Gallimard, Paris, 1964) 164 f. It appears as a complementary text to *On Time and Being* in Staumbaugh's translation of this text, *ibid.* 54.

42. *Ibid.* 59-60.