

IN DEFENSE OF HEIDEGGER'S FREEDOM: MAN IS THE SHEPHERD AND NOT A SLAVE OF BEING

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Abstract

It is claimed that Heidegger is a philosopher of freedom. (Ruin 2008; Nichols 2000; Figal 1988) Such idea is less contentious in his *Being and Time*, where freedom is clearly articulated in Dasein's existential self-determination to be authentic even in the background of angst and anonymous crowd. However, the idea of freedom becomes less clear in Heidegger's text *Letter on Humanism*. In this text, he clarifies that the essence of Man as Dasein is ek-sistence. Heidegger gives priority to Being to determine man and relegates man as a shepherd of Being. As a result, he seemingly abandons Dasein's capacity to be free and signals his shift to determinism and fatalism. Seeing this development in Heidegger, the paper's task is to clarify such apparent shift in his thinking. I claim that Heidegger, in his clarification of Dasein, does not abandon freedom and turns to determinism and fatalism. He maintains freedom both implicitly and explicitly in his *Letter on Humanism*; this is elucidated in four points: (a) Heidegger's *performative* freedom, (b) the contingency of the metaphysical definition of man, (c) Heidegger's priority of Being in redefining man, and (d) Heidegger's view on the primacy of logic. Having said those, the idea that later Heidegger abandons agency in man becomes questionable, for to define Dasein's essence as ek-sistence does not mean enslavement to Being. It is rather a form of freedom from the traditional way of thinking; it is an opening of a clearing, a space for thinking human being and its agency anew, turning away from the metaphysically burdened concepts and logical dichotomies, and moving more to essential and originary path of thinking.

Introduction

"We have no excuses" we have choice, and no matter what, "we are condemned to be free." These are Sartre's words and not of Heidegger, but the popular existentialist literatures have always identified Heidegger as proposing these same words. He was actually branded by Sartre to be *one of them* (an atheist existentialist precisely), seeing that they have the same sentiments over human condition of *thrownness*, having possibilities, and being free to aim an authentic existence.

Of course Sartre is not actually right to claim that Heidegger is an existentialist; it is an over simplification. But he is not actually wrong. Similar with the existentialists, Heidegger views his Dasein as having this capacity for self-determination in the background of possibilities—Dasein is free. Heidegger in his *Being and Time* works out the notion of freedom.¹ The existential themes resonate in this early work that Schurmann even described his notion of the will as more

¹ Such notion of freedom is so crucial to Heidegger's philosophy that some of the scholars even point to as the central unifying theme of the whole of Heidegger's philosophy, i.e. of early and later Heidegger. See, Craig Nichols, *Primordial Freedom: The Authentic Truth of Dasein in Heidegger's 'Being and Time'*. In: Thinking Fundamentals, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 9: Vienna 2000.

“voluntaristic kind” in comparison to his later thinking.² This freedom stems in Dasein’s ontological structure called as care (*sorge*), the primordial structure of Dasein that unifies the three aspect of its fundamental experience: its being thrown in the world, its having sense of “being-ahead-of” i.e. having existential possibilities to be realized, and its *fallenness*, its preoccupation with entities in this world.³ In this Dasein’s condition, freedom arises from its existential determination of its existence. Dasein could assert one’s authenticity in the background of the temptation to fall in the anonymous crowd of the *they*, and the uncomfoting disclosure of the possibility of nothingness fundamentally revealed through *angst*. Heidegger’s freedom is perceivable at this early stage, as Schurmann perfectly describes this early work; it is wherein “[t]he voluntary and involuntary...are opposable as the authentic is to inauthentic.”⁴

It is in *Letter on Humanism* that Heidegger explicitly distances his view from Sartre, which then implies a distancing from voluntarist view of Dasein. Heidegger clarifies that Dasein’s essence is not a Sartrean notion of existence, but it is “ek-sistence”: a “the ecstatic inherence of truth of Being,”⁵ in other words, Dasein’s essence is to stand open to the truth of Being. In this clarification of the notion of existence, Dasein becomes dependent to the revelation of Being. Heidegger no longer appeals to an authentic decision, but to “let it be,” to let whatever unconcealment of Being might grant. In this notion of Dasein, the *Letter on Humanism* also distances from Sartrean humanism of choices; Heidegger rather expresses an anti-humanism. He dethrones man as the master and center of everything and relegated him to be the shepherd of Being. Such then, it implies the lost of human freedom in this thinking, since what’s at the center after all is the favoring destiny of Being.

This loss of man’s freedom is not a new theme unique only in the *Letter on Humanism*. For some scholars, this reversal from being a voluntaristic thinker into a fatalist is one of the themes of the later Heidegger especially as he engages in the problem of modern technology. Feenberg, as a representative, explained that Heidegger turned to be a technological determinist in his later thinking. Thus, Dasein is transformed here from an active determinant of authenticity into a passive receptor of the inevitable danger produced by modern technology.⁶ Heidegger’s essentialist thinking of the technology leaves no room for change, we have no escape to the technological *enframing* that at best what we can hope is a certain “free relation” but in totality we just let it be.

Seeing this development in Heidegger’s thinking from early voluntarism into later fatalism, the task of this paper is to clarify later Heidegger’s seemingly determinist and fatalist thinking, precisely as espoused in his clarification of the essence of Dasein in the *Letter on Humanism*. His anti-humanism and the explicit call to be open to the destiny of Being as expressed on the text seem to remove any traits of human freedom thereby subscribing to fatalist and determinist thinking.

² Reiner Schurmann. “The problem of the Will” in *Heidegger on being and acting: From principles to anarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1987), 245.

³ Heidegger explains the *Sorge* as: “The formally existential totality of Dasein’s ontological structural whole must therefore be grasped in the following structure: the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (-the-world) as Being-alongside (-entities-encountered-within-the-world). This Being fills in the signification of the term ‘care.’” Martin Heidegger, “Dasein’s Being as care” in *Being and Time* Trans. John Macquiarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers Inc., 1962), 237.

⁴ Schurmann. “The problem of the Will” in *Heidegger on being and acting...* 245.

⁵ Heidegger, Martin. “Letter on Humanism” in *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc. 1977), 205.

⁶ Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, (London: Routledge 1999), 185.

However, I claim that Heidegger's thinking hardly fits the categories of fatalism and determinism. There are four pointers to consider first before concluding that Heidegger is a member of philosophers who deny human freedom, and these are all implied and expressed in *Letter on Humanism*: (a) Heidegger's *performative* freedom, (b) the contingency of the metaphysical definition of man, (c) Heidegger's priority of Being in redefining man, and (d) the anti logical primacy of his later thinking.

In showing that this is the case, this paper is divided to four tasks. First, the paper will explicate Heidegger's redefinition of man and his anti-humanism in *Letter on Humanism*. Then secondly, it will explain the fatalist and determinist implication of his redefinition. Then third, the paper will claim that those determinist and fatalist claims and categorization pointing to Heidegger's thinking are unwarranted, giving four reasons to consider. And lastly, the paper will conclude by reflecting and thinking upon Heidegger's notion of Man being the shepherd of being, approximating his conception of freedom.

Perhaps there is nothing wrong if Heidegger is considered to be a fatalist or determinist; basically it just suggests a new development in Heidegger's thinking in the latter part. However, the question of responsibility (whether moral or not) opens if he actually removes any human freedom: who is accountable for the continuous hiding of Being and the danger opened by the modern technology, and furthermore what we can hope doing to at least alleviate the situation? Feenberg espouses the same sentiments against the later Heidegger. He argues that Heidegger's passivity and resignation in the face of the danger do not create any hope for politically and substantially changing the situation.⁷ At worst, man shall let things happen as it is: let the crimes, injustices, and the evils of the world triumph. Much more we are not even responsible before our actions since we have no ability to determine ourselves but only the Being. Without human freedom, Heidegger's thinking seems to be guilty of this criticism.

Man's Essence as Ek-sistence

The *Letter on Humanism* is set on the task of rethinking the essence of man. This is inspired by the question of Heidegger's French friend, Beaufret, who asks: how can we restore the meaning of the word *humanism*? Heidegger translates this into a question of what it means to be a human, i.e. what it means to be "humane," because after all, humanism is but a realization of the essence that is proper to man.⁸

The problem that Heidegger deals with arises from the situation that the humanism commonly known hasn't properly thought the essence of human. Philosophers failed to grasp the more originary character of man, since the searching was always framed and answered in the ground of certain presupposed metaphysics that was left forgotten and unquestioned. For Heidegger, it is the forgotten ground that caused the essence of humans to be (mis)interpreted in the frame of beings (like any other kind of beings); it is the ground that defines man as *animalitas*. This presupposition is present in the thinking of man of Marx, Christianity, Plato, and Sartre as all of

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Historically, Heidegger traces this kind of humanism from the Roman system of education, which can be traced as influenced by Greeks. Here, the humanity of man is based upon the Greek notion of *padeia*, of a man being trained culturally to ascribe to the Roman virtues. This is to realizing the fitting of essence of man, and that is not be a barbarian, uncultured and uneducated. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" ..., 200-202.

them viewed man as a *rational animal*.⁹ To sum up their whole (mis)interpretation: what they did was just to conceive “*man in a certain categories*” ranked above plants and animals simply because “it has the faculty of reasoning.”¹⁰

Metaphysics limits their thinking to beings. To be exact, it is the onto-theological metaphysics. This metaphysics forgets the Being because the manner it answers and thinks the “question of being”—what is being?—is identified with the search for the ultimate ground. Such quest either sees Being as ontological, the most general and ultimate ground of all beings; or theological, the highest of all beings. In both cases, they fail to think of the difference between beings and Being, in short Being is confounded with beings. As a result, metaphysics fails to ask the “truth of Being itself,” which presupposes the common humanism, a metaphysics that fails to question “what way the essence of man belongs to the truth of Being.”

Heidegger then tries to move away from the conception of man based on the metaphysics of onto-theology. He rethinks the presumption of man as *animalitas* (which still thinking it as beings)¹¹ to what is more proper to its essence, which recognizes man’s relation to Being, *humanitas*.¹² For Heidegger, humans in its originary sense cannot be thought without its relation to Being. Before conceiving man as a *homo faber*, or a social creature, or an animal higher than beasts but lower than God, man’s primordial essence is ek-sistence, i.e. its “ecstatic inherence of truth of Being.”¹³ Human is standing open to the truth of the Being such that “man is being claimed by being” in comparison to other beings. Humans are not just a biological being developed through their success over the evolutionary process, they have this unique relation to Being, a distinctive sense that generates an awe and conscious feeling arising from existence, a sense that inspires one’s questioning of own Being.

Heidegger’s Anti-humanism, Determinism, and Fatalism

As Heidegger re-thinks man from *animalitas* to its *humanitas*, he also rethinks the common humanism, which basically summed up in Protagoras words and the Renaissance ideal that “man is the measure of all things.” The essential definition of man as ek-sistence and being “claimed” by

⁹ Marx, as an example of it, as he defines that Man as a social creature, man’s humanity is recognized in the society as it secures the “natural needs” of man. He also see Christianity – the Humanity of man is seen in contradistinction with God, we are the “child of God.” Man’s salvation. Plato – similar with Christianity, man is seen in an ideal world and not of this world. Sartrean – The humanity of man lies in its freedom. Roman – The humanity of man is based upon its training on Roman virtues, being based upon the Greek civilization. The humanity is based on being cultured in contrast with the barbarians. Ibid.

¹⁰ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”... 203.

¹¹ Yet still, Heidegger qualifies that the metaphysical thinking of man is not wrong. Rather, it is only way to make Being conceal and appear, and at this thinking, it presence as beings. Heidegger’s questioning therefore is set on the task of unconcealing what has been concealed because of the presupposition of the metaphysics, to think which what was actually have been forgotten to think, and that is, being.

¹² “Such positing is the manner of metaphysics. But then the essence of man is too little heeded and not thought in its origin, the essential provenance that is always the essential future for historical mankind.

Metaphysics thinks of man on the basis of *animalitas* and does not think in the direction of his *humanitas*.” See, Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”... 203-204.

¹³ Ibid., 205

Being involves rather new humanism (or as termed it: anti-humanism) that follows from discovering the proper status to man.

Man is no longer the master of the world and his essence; it is the Being. Man is no longer a Sartrean creator of his own essence or a Nietzschean Superman who overcomes man; his essence is not out of self-creation but based upon its “unique” relation to being. Therefore, Heidegger dethroned man, or in a postmodern jargon, he “de-center[ed] man.”¹⁴ He is a progenitor of anti-humanism in the sense that he removes man from his pretentious primacy, teaching him how to be humbler about his existence. Man’s task therefore is not to be the lord of beings but to be the shepherd of Being. Man’s initial work as a “master of universe” becomes unqualified after the realization of his dependent being, a being whose essential quality is to be related, and thus affected, by the truth of the being.

Man therefore becomes subordinate to the truth of Being. This raises the issue of human freedom in the place of Heidegger’s Dasein. How could we attribute freedom to man if he is dethroned from the center and becomes the guardian of the truth of the destiny of Being? There’s lesser power now being ascribed to man. As his essence is no longer created out of his hands and redefined to fit its unique relation to Being, a determinism and even fatalism of Being in the lives of men is implied. It is not man who has the final decision; the primary determination is now based upon the granting of the Being.¹⁵ Human being’s task is just to guard whatever that determination is, because the final say when and what such determination where come about—whether it is the event in the world or a new found thinking—certainly is not of man’s decision, but comes from the granting of Being.

This sense of loss of man’s freedom is what exactly Feenberg’s sentiments are against the later Heidegger’s thinking, especially because it creates a despairing image of man in the face of the problem of modern technology. He sees Heidegger’s essentialist conception of technology to be overly determinist and left no room for change. The overall modification of modern technology to the overall structures and conceptions of reality, with its imperturbable *enframing* essence, left nothing to human being to change the dangerous condition than to be in “free relations” (i.e. letting the technology enters upon one’s life but prevents its overrule that it controls the agent) or to be in a passive waiting stance to whatever events that will be disclosed by Being.¹⁶

The *Letter on Humanism*, as it rethinks the proper essence of man, seems to take similar path of technological determinism and fatalism that Feenberg points against Heidegger. But while Feenberg focuses on the determinist essence of technology, the *Letter on Humanism* shows the determinism of onto-theological metaphysics. The confusion between being and beings has set the trajectory of what is only conceivable in the entire history of thinking, and in this regard the thinking of man. The forgetfulness of being is so pervasive that it determines the possible ways in thinking to the extent it even determines the way human being thinks of himself and the way he should be critical about his status.¹⁷

¹⁴ As Gavin Rae puts it: “Heidegger decenters the essence of the human being from the human itself and holds that the essence of the human being lies in its unique relation to being. Heidegger calls the human being’s unique relation to being, its ‘ek-sistence.’” Gavin Rae, *Rethinking the Human: Heidegger, Fundamental Ontology, and Humanism*. Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2010, 33.

¹⁵ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”..., 210-211

¹⁶ Feenberg, *Questioning Technology...*, 185.

¹⁷ There is no escape in the all-encompassing framework of metaphysics, because even to be ‘critical’ with the system in the like of Kant still captured in the course of “metaphysical

Although Heidegger provides a way out from the metaphysical determinism, it is rather a way out in exchange of the resignation to the destiny of Being, a form of fatalism¹⁸. Heidegger's redefinition of the essence of man as ek-sistence thus moves beyond the onto-theological grounding of the conception of man, but then it is in exchange of a more radical deprivation of man's freedom. As he describes the originary status of man:

Man is... 'thrown' from Being itself into the truth of Being so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of Being, in order that beings might appear in the light of Being as the beings they are. *Man does not decide whether and how beings God and the gods of history and nature come forward into the lighting of Being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny of Being.*¹⁹

Human being escapes control of onto-theologies by resigning to the fatalism of Being. Freedom and agency are lost, because "man cannot decide;" the advent of beings lies on the "destiny of Being." It is an outright suggestion that the fate that we have does not fall under our powers. It is not man's action and decision that determines the presencing of beings or the events that might come about or the "history" but it is the destiny of being.²⁰ In effect, Heidegger, finding an alternative route to the metaphysical notion of man, moves him to the resignation to whatever destiny of Being opens.

It is this fatalist message implicit in the *Letter on Humanism* where Feenberg's critique over Heidegger can be applied. However the fatalism of Heidegger in the Letter seems to be more radical, because whereas Feenberg identified such passive agency of Heidegger in his resignation to the all encompassing dystopia brought by essence of modern technology, the *Letter on Humanism* located passivity in the originary essence of man itself. In a sense, we have no freedom not because we have no choice in the upsurge of modern technology; it is rather because the very constitution of our being is to be determined by Being. Man's originary essence is to be determined by the truth and destiny of Being, whose truths and capabilities are granted by Being, and whose proper way of living is nothing but to resign in to whatever concealment of Being might be.

In Defense of Freedom

The question resonates: what is the status of human agency in Heidegger's thought? The apparent determinism and fatalism in Heidegger's rethinking of man (which is expressed in Heidegger's subordination of man over Being, which locates the determination of man through the destiny of Being) opens the problem of the capacity of man to be free in that recognition of his essence. Logically speaking, determinist and fatalist worlds remove any capacity of freedom to any

representation."It thinks from beings back to beings with a glance in passing toward Being." Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"... 211.

¹⁸ Fatalism is the view that what will happen in the near future is destined to happen irrespective of the preceding event, or from the agents choices at the earlier time.

¹⁹ Emphasis mine. Ibid., 210.

²⁰ As Heidegger claims: "History occurs essentially as the destiny of the truth of Being and from it, Being comes to destiny in that It, Being, gives itself." History does not take place primarily as a happening. And its happening is not evanescence. The happening of history But thought in terms of such destiny this says: it gives itself and refuses itself simultaneously Because man as the one who ek-sists comes to stand in this relation that Being destines for itself, in that he ecstatically sustains it, that is, in care takes it upon himself. See, Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"... 211

entities that reside in it. As Heidegger rethinks every agent as having their fate dependent to Being, it is logical to infer that he too believes that man is not free. He therefore removes any freedom and self-determination to man.

But this needs to be qualified. The reduction of Heidegger's thinking of man as someone determined and fated needs a clarification, especially as there are some aspects of his philosophy that shows otherwise. I am not certain what exactly the status of agency in Heidegger's thought is, but I have four considerations to give precisely in his rethinking of man, which express a plausible claim that Heidegger cannot be said to deny the human freedom. These four pointers show the spaces where the notion of freedom is still operating in Heidegger's thinking.

The first comes from Heidegger's freedom of thought. There's an implicit freedom in Heidegger's thinking arising from the fact that he has enabled to free his thoughts from the determinism of metaphysics. His very *act of thinking* marks that capacity of being free although not explicitly proclaiming it. We could term this as Heidegger's *performative freedom*. This is his ability to move beyond one thinking to another: the ability to rethink the essence of man from *animalitas* to *humanitas*, from onto-theologically grounded conceptions to a more originary, and from the common ideas to what is still unthought. Simply to say, his thinking cannot just be absolutely determined by metaphysics.²¹ He can act otherwise, even the fact that almost all of the thinking walks in the ground of metaphysics—representations and calculations—Heidegger walks to another path.

This capacity to move to alternative path just testifies that the inception of metaphysics that determines the conception of man in two millennia is not absolutely necessary; this is the second point. The metaphysics of beings' (i.e. arche) and the way it dominates the history of thought is not a fix course in history that necessarily needs to be undergone as in a step by step process. At the early inception of thinking, there are other alternative disclosures of Being shown in Parmenides' *alethaeia* and Heraclitus *phusis*,²² and thus these unconcealments could possibly dominate the thinking, and not the onto-theological metaphysics. It is just the fact that the succeeding philosophers have carelessly unthought the other disclosures.

Therefore, Being is not a kind of a conscious God that draws the overall destiny of mankind and decides to disclose itself as beings; there's a human factor that brought the momentum of onto-theologies to carry on. This human aspect can be seen in mankind's forgetfulness to the question of Being, and such continuous forgetting, which is within *the human power* tracing from the earliest inception of being, paves way to the metaphysics of beings.

Likewise, the concept of humanity conceived on the ground of metaphysics is also contingent. The continuous conception of man as *animalitas* cannot be ascribed solely to the pure disclosure of Being; there's an aspect of human forgetfulness that also provides the metaphysical thinking the momentum that contributes to a more production of onto-theologically grounded concepts. In other words, it is safe to say that there is a dialectical relationship between Being and man, for as the former determines the latter, the latter too determines the former. Thus, Heidegger here reminds us of two things: first is that there are other options: there are alternatives to the common path of forgetfulness of Being, because the determination of the destiny of Being is not an absolute law.

²¹ Of course there's a great determination of Being that enables and makes Heidegger rethinking possible. The disclosure of the Being sets up, or at least make it fecund for the new thinking to arise. Nevertheless, the freedom to go beyond, and not to ultimately determined is what is being emphasized here. Whether it is Absolute or not, the point is that there is freedom.

²² Iain Thomson, *Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's Destruktion of Metaphysics* International Journal of Philosophical Studies Vol.8(3) 2000, 317-318.

And second, humans have a contribution to the forgetfulness of being, and to whatever alternative paths that would open.

Third, the task set in the *Letter on Humanism*—which is to give priority to Being over beings—distances Heidegger’s thinking from any *ontic* categorization. Determinism and fatalism, as schemes of thought intended solely for entities, cannot actually capture the task Heidegger’s thinking has set. Both are misrepresentations. The thinking of man’s essence as ek-sistence is Heidegger’s attempt to move towards the forgotten path. To clarify: this path is certainly not the path that views man as beings in rational animals or of higher beings compared to other being’s sense; it is rather the path towards Being.

Such path of thinking is the main reason why Heidegger’s assertions about the essence of man cannot be simply put into categories of determinism or fatalism. The latter are just “isms”, and for Heidegger, there is something mindless about their production²³ as they fail to think carefully the metaphysics that ground their thinking, the metaphysics that forgot Being. Heidegger wanders to the path that actually pursues to move beyond the metaphysics that grounds them that carry those neat categories and those “isms.” To still operate using those categories to reduce Heidegger’s thinking will result to misinterpretation of his thinking. This is what exactly the error of Sartre is he misread Heidegger as he fails to incorporate the distinction between beings and Being that is so fundamental in Heidegger’s thinking.

Sartre’s notion of existence and essence is still bounded by the metaphysics of beings. What he did was just a mere reversal of the metaphysical statement of “essence precedes existence” into “existence precedes essence;” the former man is pre-determined while the latter man is free, yet either or, both are metaphysical statements. But Heidegger’s ek-sistence is different. He distinguishes ek-sistence from existence as *actualitas*, hence the reversal of determinism and freedom cannot be applied to it. This is Heidegger’s alternative path: the notion of ek-sistence of standing open towards Being moves beyond the metaphysically grounded concepts of *essentia* and *actualitas*.²⁴

And lastly, there’s an aspect of logical incongruity. As Heidegger tries to think of being, the notion of man as ek-sistence even moves outside the logical laws; this is again another reason why Heidegger cannot be thought under the schemes of fatalism and determinism. Logic is for beings, the thinking that is solely grounded in non-contradiction. Given that fact, the primacy of logical thinking even hampers the thought to encounter the more originary essence of man. Heidegger’s thought gears toward overcoming even logic. As he clears it out, to set his thought against humanism does not mean that he is being inhumane. Thus, it is same case here: to speak in the language of destiny (as was expressed in the *Letter in Humanism*) doesn’t mean that he abandons freedom, in same way that to speak the language of ek-sistence does not mean that he gives primacy of existence over essence.

One final note, what is being pointed out in the last two pointers is to understand Heidegger in its proper context set by his task. One must understand the distinction between the

²³ Heidegger seems to suggest that there’s something careless and unessential about the production of “isms.” Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”..., 195.

²⁴ Ek-sistence, thought in terms of ecstasies, does not coincide with existential in either form of content. In terms of content ek-sistence means standing out into the truth of Being. *Existentia* means in contrast *actualitas*, actually opposed to the mere possibility as Idea. Ek-sistence identifies the determination of what man is in the destiny of truth. *Existentia* is the name for the realization of something that is as it appears in its Idea.”²⁴ See, Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”... 207.

metaphysically grounded concepts²⁵ from the thinking that moves beyond that. As has been noted, indeterminism, determinism, and fatalism are categories and concepts commonly ascribed to describe the motions of beings, of entities. On such character alone, it cannot be ascribed to Heidegger's thought, simply because these concepts are grounded on a metaphysics that still confuses beings from Being, which Heidegger quests to overcome.

Man is the Shepherd of Being

Man is not the lord of beings, Man is the shepherd of Being. Man loses nothing in this "less"; rather, he gains in that he attains the truth of Being. He gains the essential poverty of the shepherd, whose dignity consists in being called by Being itself into the preservation of Being's truth.²⁶

Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*

Man is a shepherd of Being, and not a slave. And as a shepherd, it is possible that he could abandon his flock in wilderness, then go and have another career. A shepherd can forget his being shepherd: he could go his own way, build his own empire, and fabricate his own world. But it is possible also that he could come back. Yet no one assures on whether the sheep will still be as tamable when he first left them. It could be that the flock might turn unhealthy that it is just on the brink of its death or perhaps it survived but transformed into dangerous wild beasts that adapted to the harsh world.

But that's just one possibility. Let us remember that the real shepherd listens to his task, he listens to the sheep. To be a genuine caretaker of a flock is to recognize that one is not a master of one's own world. One is required to humble oneself because the whole task of tending the sheep means surrendering one's time, day, and life under the rhythm of the lives of the sheep, because this way the shepherd lets the flock be. A real shepherd guides, but not in a manner of grasping the sheep's bodies to be placed to their desired location as if just placing an object for display. And a real shepherd listens, but not imposes: that's why the shepherd's stick is used not to train the sheep through memory of pain but to signal the way, and that's why the shepherd's bell is rung not to command but to appeal to the flock to listen in a similar fashion that the shepherd listens.

The guiding therefore is a form of surrendering; the type of guiding produced by the listening shepherd, a guiding that does not destroy the rhythm of the sheep but let them be as they would be.

It is obvious in the metaphor that the shepherd who abandons his flock speaks to the thinking who has forgotten being; it is the one that produced a dangerous situation—perhaps because of its wildness and near extinction—captured by the modern technological thinking. And the latter, who is the shepherd who listens and guides and not imposes, speaks to the new path that Heidegger is trying to open up. Either or, the shepherd is free: he has freedom to close his ears and not surrender to his flock, and also he has the freedom to listen and let himself be claimed and determined by the sheep as he wills to let the sheep be.

We are still an agent, and thus, it is up to human to listen to his originary relationship to being: to commit to the alternative stance whose character is not out of grasping but waiting, not demanding but guarding, not imposing but being open to the possibility of the emergence of the

²⁵ This is one of the difficulties of Heidegger's thinking, for as he tries to say the unsayable i.e. to utter what language cannot be said, there's a great chance for its thought to be misinterpreted.

²⁶ Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"... 221.

other meaning that has been long forgotten—those truths that could only be encountered by being passive at the moment.

Yes, Heidegger in the *Letter on Humanism* dethrones man from being the master of beings to be the shepherd of Being. It places man at the periphery and Being at the center. Certainly there is a priority of Being. But this does not follow that human being is no longer free after the dethronement. It does not follow that human beings have purged out themselves of responsibility of the dangerous momentum we have all created rooted with our careless thinking of being. The four considerations that were discussed need also to put first in consideration before categorizing Heidegger's Dasein as a being who has no freedom.

If there are some of the statements that Heidegger seems to resign to the destiny of Being, one could read this rather out of the conscious assent of man after the recognition of what's more essential to human being. The situation Heidegger realized is that the history of metaphysics and its history of man have been a record of human being trying to know, to create, to grasp, and to conquer, and this same stance towards being is the reason why the truth of the Being concealed itself, and why the originary essence of man has until now is failed to be thought through. Therefore there's a need to change the stance to be able to let the being unconceal what have been concealed in the previous manner of relating to being. Thus, the call to resign to the destiny of Being is just also a recognition that there are times wherein the only way and the safest to move forward is to be in a passive stance—to wait. This recognition of alternative way—even though not that active—testifies to the fact that we are not just zombies who will repeat the same stance towards Being that produces the same onto-theological result. We are free.

But the freedom being thought here is not in absolute power of man to do whatever he wants; this freedom of course is no longer of a hubristic humanism, whose confidence thinks that man can do anything. We are free, but we are limited; we are free, but we cannot do everything. We are limited and what's novel with Heidegger's thinking is on how he traces such limitation as not solely imposed by the obvious pressures and rules given by the society and situations. He, rather, moves deeper, tracing the limitations of our thinking on the very way we see and understand that which "is," the limitation imposed by the metaphysics that grounded our thinking. Therefore, the freedom that we are experiencing is always relational, the relation precisely brought by human being's unique relation to being's concealment and unconcealment, same way as the shepherd's freedom by virtue of being shepherd is always in relation to his flock.

But of course, this does not entirely grasp the essential notion of freedom that Heidegger is trying to grasp. One of the limitations of my reflection seems to be that this notion of freedom is still being thought as a property of man, which Heidegger clarified in the *Essence of Truth* as, freedom primordially is not a property, but as opening, as "letting be,"²⁷ a more primordial that grounds free will and the both sense by which Dasein and the Being mutually reveals truths.²⁸

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, "The Essence of Truth" in *n Martin Heidegger Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc. 1977), 128.

²⁸ The freedom is captured primordially as revelation, and this is understood in those concerns that we have, actions that we take. The notion of freedom as revelation does not only capture man's free will, but the revelation of the being of Dasein and of the being of beings in Dasein's actualization. potentially reveals the being within of his existence of it is. Heidegger places such ideal of authentic determination through Dasein's care and thus resoluteness to take the path of authenticity despite of many possibilities. See, Craig, *Primordial Freedom: The Authentic Truth of Dasein in Heidegger's 'Being and Time'*..., 3.

Nevertheless, the question of the precise character of such freedom is outside the scope of this essay. Certainly what has been thought here is the place of freedom in Heidegger's thinking. His later notion of what it means to be human is not doomed in a fatalist drama, of having helplessly nothing to do. The shift then from that thinking that he becomes fatalist in his later thinking shall be now questioned, for there are obvious glimpses of freedom implied in Heidegger's thinking.

It is sufficient to say that there is freedom even in Heidegger's reversal of Being; there is freedom even in making man as the Shepherd of Being. Thus, Heidegger does not deprive man of freedom, and in a certain sense, he even makes man freer than before. By delineating what is Being from beings, Heidegger frees us from the old path of metaphysically grounded notion of *humanitas*, and reveals to us a new opening: no longer the notion of man who forgets Being, but a man who remembers that his essence is a unique relation to Being.

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