Heidegger, Martin

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d. 26 May 1976, Meßkirch, Germany

Life and Work

In his opinions on language and speech two aspects should be distinguished in Heidegger's philosophical work: first, the language he uses to describe the role of language in his specific philosophical approach and, secondly, language as the object of philosophical thought. It is essential to Heidegger to create a new terminology to reveal the structure of being in his ontological research project. He is keen on etymological roots of terms or of the parts of composita (like the German 'example' or Bei-spiel or the difference between vor-handen and zu-handen) he uses or of linking words to create new composita (for instance: being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein) or being-toward-death (Sein-zum-Tode)).

The place of language in Heidegger's philosophical thought can be grasped from his intention. Heidegger calls his philosophical approach "fundamental ontology". This fundamental ontology should give an answer to the all-embracing problem of the meaning of "being" (Sein). The meaning of the word "being" in its ontological sense should not be confused with a specific being (Seiendes). A specific being is what we meet in our everyday experience (the factical life) but does not belong to the level of ontology although it can exist or stand out to specific beings. The most important specific being to Heidegger is human being or being-there (Dasein). Human being understands its being (Seinsverständnis). Being reveals itself in the specific way human beings understand their being-in-the-world. Now language should be

understood in a specific way in the relation between being and human being: Language, understood ontologically, does not consist of words as signs to describe reality but reality shows itself in thought (Denken), art and poetry (Dichten; among Heidegger's favourite poets were Friedrich Hölderlin, Rainer Maria Rilke and Georg Trakl) by means of language. Language itself speaks without being the object of human concepts or even without referring to reality.Language reveals (ent-birgt) or shows (zeigt) not only aspects of the object but its being, its existence. Therefore, language precedes human being, "is" already, and we are born into a world in which language speaks for itself, it presents being to human being. There is a correspondence between speaking, what human beings do, and the silent pre-given language by announcing language in speech.

For Heidegger language did not have a central place in his thought but it is an ontological phenomenon which gives human beings access to reality.Therefore, not man or consciousness is essential but the ontological structure of realty of which language is the way to reach truth.

Major Works

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