

Heidegger's *Erfahrung*: The Feeling of Existence

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Heidegger's philosophy is difficult because he wanted it to be. Or, more precisely, he wanted it *to become*, to be continually in the process of *becoming true*, and therefore to be forever incomplete. His philosophy is difficult because its meaning is always in process. What he opposed most of all was definitiveness and finality, because his search was for truth and reality as it is becoming true and real. "*Wege – nichts Werke* [ways – not works]" was the slogan that he attached to his collected opus.¹ His philosophy is always on the way; it is never a finished work.

To try to understand Heidegger definitively, therefore, is to work against his purpose. Instead of merely understanding him, I will argue, we must try to imagine the experience that he was seeking. Heidegger's philosophy is experiential rather than merely conceptual. Concepts are determinate patterns of thought; what he sought was more primordial. The experience of reality-as-becoming-real must be felt rather than merely understood because it involves the *activity* of Being by which truths *become* true.² Heidegger's Being cannot be conceptualized because it is prior to any fixed reality or given truth. Not only do conceptualizations fail to capture the experience of Being, as

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften, Gesamtausgabe Band 1* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978), 437.

² "We are still far from pondering the essence of action decisively enough. We view action only as causing an effect.... Thinking, in contrast, lets itself be claimed by being so that it can say the truth of being. Thinking accomplishes this letting." Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 239.

determinate representations, they get in the way of that experience. Heidegger wanted us to break down our accepted conceptualizations of reality in order to make an opening within ourselves for the unmediated experience of Being as the becoming of truth.

My argument in this chapter is *ad hominem*, which need not mean that is fallacious. *Ad hominem* arguments are fallacies when they seek to undermine the coherence of an idea or set of ideas by irrelevantly criticizing the person who holds it. By contrast, my argument seeks to clarify Heidegger's ideas by describing the relevant feelings with which they are arguably associated. I will suggest moreover that those feelings are shared by many members of Western modernity, which is why Heidegger's philosophy is popular despite its inscrutability.

As a contribution to the wider project of the redemption of feelings as proper objects of study, my goal is to describe the *affective* power of this notoriously difficult thinker as a way to find his meaning. Heidegger gives us no choice but to try to *feel* what he means, because he does not want to be merely understood. "To make itself understandable is suicide for philosophy," he at one point tells us.³ His obscurity is meant to challenge our belief in fixed realities, such as the "facts" of scientific thinking, so that we can instead experience the feeling of the real as it becomes real.

The German word *Erfahrung* means "experience." In Heidegger's later writing, he used it often, much more often than *Verstehen* or "understanding." For example, in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie* [*Contributions to Philosophy*; hereafter BP for the German and

³ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 344. In all quotations in which it appears, I have replaced the translators' "beying" with the original "Seyn."

CP for the English; all emphases in original],⁴ the former word and its derivatives appear perhaps 20 times in the first 50 pages, almost always in significant contexts, while derivatives of the latter appear perhaps half as often and almost always in trivial contexts. What Heidegger sought was not an understanding or mere knowledge but a special kind of inner experience, which is the feeling of existence as the coming-to-be of newness within oneself. Below, I will call this feeling post-Lutheran. In Heidegger's specific case, he sought the experience of philosophical origination as one who participates in the inception of a new way of thinking. In the *Contributions*, the work to which I will most often turn, he often called it "*er-denken*" (BP 3, 56-57, 73 *et passim*), which a literalist could translate as "*ur*-thinking."

Heidegger's favorite words have connotations that typically go beyond their ordinary meaning. Perhaps his most favorite word is *ursprünglich*, which as an adjective means "original" but which many of his translators, seeking to capture his special sense, render as "originary." The prefix, "*ur*-" with which English speakers are familiar, means "out of, originally, in the beginning."⁵ "*Sprung*" simply means "jump" or "spring," so "*ursprünglich*," if we read it with etymological literalness, refers to something that "springs forth from the origin." In some of his writings from the same period as the *Contributions*, Heidegger added a hyphen, for example writing "*Ur-sprung*" for "origin," to emphasize the sense of self-origination or self-grounding.⁶ Hence "*ursprünglich*" and its variants in Heidegger's special usage have the connotation of existential origination.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, *Gesamtausgabe Band 65* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, [1936-38] 1989); Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*.

⁵ Friedrich Kluge, *An Etymological Dictionary of the German Language*, trans. John Francis Davis (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1891), s.v. "*ur*-"

⁶ For example, Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1958), 8. The context provides the idea of self-origination as self-grounding. In English, Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 6-7.

The goal of his philosophy is to experience that which is *ur-sprünglich*. His *Erfahrung* is the feeling of coming into existence.

The “er-” of “*Erfahrung*” is an etymological variant of the “ur-” of “*ursprünglich*.”⁷ In the *Contributions*, Heidegger again sometimes used the device of hyphenation to emphasize the connotation of pure origination, writing “*er-fahren*”, “*er-fährt*” and “*Er-fahrung*” (BP 160, 391, 483). “*Fahren*” means “to drive” or “to move,” so Heidegger’s “*Er-fahren*” and its variants, when hyphenated in this emphatic way, explicitly connote the feeling of being moved by the power of origination. With this device, Heidegger makes it clear that his *Er-fahrung* is the feeling of the *Ur-sprung* of new existence. But even when he used the unhyphenated “*Erfahrung*” in more ordinary ways, as he often did, it was never mere *Verstehen* that he sought.

For a thinker who always focussed on the question of Being, origination means existential newness, which is the coming of something into existence from nothingness. Hence Heidegger’s *Erfahrung* is the feeling of being created *ex nihilo*; it is the feeling of actively experiencing that kind of godly power. In the history of the early modern West, that idea and that feeling can be traced to the affective teachings of Martin Luther. I will argue that all Westerners can imagine the inner feeling of self-existence as the *spiritual* power of creative newness within ourselves, because we have learned that idea and that feeling from our culture.

The Post-Lutheran Feeling of Existence

Luther’s famous inward turn can be traced to Augustine, and before him perhaps to the Greek idea of *entheos* or “God within,” but what Luther sought to feel as an inner

⁷ Kluge, *Etymological Dictionary of German*, s.v. “er-.”

presence had nothing to do with Greek eternalism. Luther's God is the power of new existence, the very power of creation *ex nihilo*. For such a God, there are no eternal truths in the world because everything comes into existence as an utter newness from him. The post-Lutheran enthusiasm, notwithstanding its etymological relation to "*entheos*," is the inner feeling of existential newness, which did not belong to the Greeks.

The early Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* was developed in part as an explicit refutation of the eternalist ontologies of the Greeks.⁸ From the beginning, *creatio ex nihilo* was not just about the creation of matter out of nothing but also about the utter newness of the forms that God created to shape the world. According to the doctrine as it matured into the medieval centuries, God's existential power is prior to every worldly essence; this idea is the model of Sartre's famous slogan, as he perhaps understood.⁹ What his existentialism sought to capture is the idea that human self-existence is an ontological power that is prior the created patterns of reality, but this is a post-Christian conceptualization in which the human self replaces God as the free maker of reality. Hence Sartre's existentialism is derivative: Christians much earlier had seen their God

⁸ According to a comprehensive study of origins of the doctrine by Gerhard May:

Not before the middle of the second century was the debate with [Greek] philosophy recognised as the central task of Christian thinking and tackled as such.... How to reconcile the idea of the God who creates freely and unconditionally with the concepts of Greek metaphysics now becomes a central theme of Christian theology. This group of questions forms, alongside the gnostic problem, the second focal point of the controversy over ideas of creation which took place in the second century. It was within the scope of the questions thus raised that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was developed.

Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A.S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1-2.

⁹ "Atheistic existentialism ... states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence.... That being is man, or, as Heidegger put it, the human reality." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 22.

as the pure power of existence. He is personified as a loving father but his power is ultimately existential.

The idea of a purely existential God was reinforced for Christians by the influential Muslim philosopher, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), near the beginning of the second millennium. He famously argued that for everything other than God, the issue of whether it exists is a different kind of question than what kind of thing it is. Hence existence and essence are to be distinguished for all worldly things. But for God, his essence just is his existence. (In *Being and Time*, Heidegger plays with the same language with reference to human *Dasein*.)¹⁰ This means that God just is the power of existence. This God is the first and final existentialist. For later Christians, to feel the power of that God within themselves is to experience the inner power of existence. Again, this is not existence understood as Greek eternalism but as Christian creationism: it is the world-making power of creation *ex nihilo*. The inner presence of that power is the self-feeling that Luther taught his followers to look for within themselves.

Luther was a pessimistic moralist who believed in the doctrine of original sin, but he also believed that God with perfect freedom had chosen some for the unmerited gift of salvation. How then to know whether one had been saved? Good works were inconsequential at best, and at worst could be seen as the prideful attempt to influence God. Those who are justified do good works, but justification is the cause, not the effect. Luther's doctrine of salvation was captured in the slogan, "*sola fide*": those who are

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 11th edn. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967), 42-43; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 67-68. See also Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" 248.

saved from eternal damnation are justified by “faith alone.” To have true faith is to be reborn as justified, not by one’s own power but solely by the power of God.

In his controversy with Erasmus over the question of human freedom, Luther denied that humans have free will in anything other than inconsequential matters. In one of the most evocative images in his *Bondage of the Will*, he wrote that we are like an animal that will be ridden by God or by Satan, but that does not even have the power to choose between them.¹¹ But Luther’s desire to efface the human will had a perverse historical effect: believers learned to feel godly inside, precisely because they learned to open themselves to that feeling by obviating their own willfulness. And because the experience of inner godliness was the essential sign of salvation from eternal hellfire, feelings of enthusiasm – the feeling of *entheos*, Christianized as an existential power – became endemic. Eventually, many Western modernists came to *feel*, more than know, that they instead of God are the ultimate creators of reality.

Creativity, if the word means more than cleverness at discovering realities that already exist, is about bringing something into existence from non-existence. The newly created thing need not be a new kind of matter but something about its form or structure must be, in some non-trivial way, unlike anything that already exists. If not, it is a copy rather than a creation. Creativity, therefore, even in something like a new song, poem or other work of art, is always about creation *ex nihilo*. It is a newness of pattern, which must be non-trivially unlike anything that has already existed. Its creator must bring it into existence from non-existence; this is creation *ex nihilo* exactly. Human creators need not create the whole universe anew every time, nor do they create the material

¹¹ Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, trans. Henry Cole (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1823), 69.

upon which they work, but the newness of each particular creation is always an *existential* newness. It must include a newness of pattern that did not exist prior to its creation. To bring something into being from nothingness is, with straightforward literalness, always an act of creation *ex nihilo*.

When we say that someone is creative, or that some work of art powerfully evokes the creativity of the artist, we are making a kind of spiritual claim that something higher than ordinary scientific causality is involved. My suggestion is that most Western readers can easily *feel* the spiritualistic associations that the idea of creativity arouses, though some will feel it more strongly than others. To say that someone is creative is to suggest that he or she has a power over and above ordinary reality, because it is the power to bring new things into that reality. In the West, this power was originally thought to belong only to God. Today, we in the West have been enculturated to believe in human creativity, not just an idea, but as a positive value with associated affects that are also strongly positive. For us, the experience of creativity in a work of art, for example, is affective and not just conceptual. It *moves* us in more than just our ideas; it is an *Er-fahrung*. All of us can experience the power of creativity as a post-Lutheran inner feeling. What Luther taught his followers to feel remains with us, though many of us in modernity experience it as desacralized and anthropocentric. Heidegger sought the same feeling of inner newness, except that he wanted to experience it as the coming-to-be of an entirely new way of thinking about everything.

The “*Ur-Trembling*” of Being in the *Contributions to Philosophy*

The *Contributions* began as set of private writings from 1936-38 that were not initially intended for publication and that appeared in German as part of Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* only in 1989. As such, they offer a special look into the thoughts, but also the underlying feelings, of the man. My suggestion is that as a believer in the existential power of creativity, he wanted above all to be original, and therefore resisted the recognition that creativity is an unoriginal belief. Moreover, because the idea of existential newness or newness from nothingness resists conceptualization, Heidegger’s belief in creativity operated at an affective rather than at a conceptual level. He knew that any attempt to conceptualize the power of creative newness would get in the way of the experience he was seeking, so he actively resisted conceptual clarity about his own feelings. But for these reasons, and because creationism is in itself a deeply emotional belief, Heidegger failed to attain a critical distance from the affects that, I contend, underlie and drive his philosophy.

At the overt philosophical level, Heidegger’s creationism is careful and subtle. He did not merely idolize newness for its own sake (CP 45; see also *Being and Time*, 397-99). He tells us that “the new is not the ‘modern,’ namely, that which is currently in vogue.... Instead, the new refers here to the freshness of the originariness of re-beginning [*der Ursprünglichkeit des wieder Anfangens*], that which ventures out into the concealed future of the first beginning and thus cannot at all be ‘new’ but must be even *older* than the old” (CP 343, BP 434).

He also rejected the idea of a creative subject, either godly or human, as the source of creative newness, because every subject is an already-extant being.

Subjectivity cannot be the ultimate source of newness because the subject must exist as a being before it can produce anything. Heidegger wanted to experience Being as an *activity* in itself, as the origin or *Ur-sprung* of every being including every subject. He sought the experience of creativity without any given creator.

Heidegger understood that newness must come to a putative creator before it can come from him or her. His philosophy of questioning is about opening ourselves to the experience of the *event* of newness by subverting or obviating our unquestioning acceptance of what already exists. But the teaching is not new: open yourself to the inner experience of God's existential power by repudiating your own will, said Luther. Heidegger rejected Luther's God because he wanted the experience of newness without a higher being, especially an eternal one. He wanted to experience Being as prior to *any* being.

In my opening paragraph, I claimed that Heidegger sought to know truth as it is *becoming* true and reality as it is *becoming* real. Here is how he described it in the *Contributions*: "Truth never 'is'; instead, it essentially occurs. [*Die Wahrheit »ist« nie, sondern west.*] ... Thus what essentially occurs is also everything that belongs to truth, including time-space and consequently 'space' and 'time'" (CP 271, BP 342). And again: "Inasmuch as truth essentially occurs, *comes to be*, the event becomes truth. The event eventuates [*Das Ereignis ereignet*], which means nothing else but that it and only it *becomes* truth" (CP 276, PB 349; as always here, the emphases are his).

Hence the "event" of the books subtitle, "*Vom Ereignis*" (the prefix is again sometimes set off by one of Heidegger's hyphens, for example on the first page), refers to truth and reality as they come into being. It also has the suggestion of "coming into

one's own," so the subtitle in full means this: we come authentically into our own only when we experience the coming-into-being of truth and reality.

Creationism is exnihilism. To create is always to bring something new into existence from nothingness; existential newness is newness *ex nihilo*. Creationists *need* nothingness as the origin of existential newness. Heidegger understood this better than most. In his inaugural lecture of 1929, published as *Was ist Metaphysik?*, as well as in other works including the *Contributions*, Heidegger repeatedly objected to the idea that nothingness is merely the opposite of somethingness.¹² The problem with that view is that it takes beings as primary or as given, and then defines nothingness as their mere negation. For creationists, this will not do, because for them, *nothingness is first*. For Heidegger, nothingness is powerfully primordial: "Only if we have liberated ourselves from misinterpreting nothingness on the basis of beings ... thus degrading 'nothingness' to a mere denial of the *determinateness* and *mediation* of beings, as did Hegel and all metaphysicians before him, only then will we surmise what power of steadfastness rushes into the human being" as Being is experienced (CP 380).

Nothingness is the "abyssal ground" of everything creative, though it is accessible only to the special few:

It is always only a few who arrive at the leap [*Sprung*], and they do so on different paths. By creating and sacrificing, they always are the ones who belong to the grounding of Da-sein in the time-space of which beings as beings are preserved and thereby the truth of *Seyn* is sheltered. But *Seyn* is ever in extreme concealment and is transport into the incalculable and unique, at the sharpest and highest crest which both constitutes what is along the abyssal

¹² Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1931).

ground of nothingness [*dem Ab-grund des Nichts*] and itself grounds the abyss.

(CP 186, BP 236)

Nothingness, Heidegger tells us repeatedly in the *Contributions*, is not the opposite of Being or *Seyn* but belongs intimately to it. For example: “Or is it precisely not from beings that one gains an intimation of *Seyn* but, rather, from that which alone is of equal rank with *Seyn*, as constantly appertaining to *Seyn*, namely, from nothingness?” (CP 193; see also 80, 325, 378). To overcome the faulty metaphysics that puts beings before nothingness, we must “determine the belonging together of *Seyn* and nothingness more originarily” (CP 194; see also 380). By doing so we may come to see nothingness as a kind of creative power: “Indeed, is it not primarily on account of this *negativity* of *Seyn* itself that ‘nothingness’ is full of that *assigning* ‘power,’ the enduring of which is the origin of all ‘creating’ (beings coming to be more fully)?” (CP 194).

According to Heidegger, “Nothingness ... *is* more than any being” (CP 209). To explain this surprising claim, he uses one of the recurrent tropes of the *Contributions*, which is that of an exnihillistic quivering or “*ur-trembling* [*Erzitterung*].” The quotation above in full: “Nothingness is neither negative nor a ‘goal.’ Instead, it is the essential trembling [*die wesentliche Erzitterung*] of *Seyn* itself and therefore *is* more than any being” (CP 209, BP 266). *Seyn* “trembles” with existential power, which is provided by nothingness as the prior opposite of somethingness. In short, Heidegger’s Being vibrates or trembles with the creative tension between nothingness and somethingness, but always with nothingness as the first partner. His “*Erzitterung*” or “*ur-trembling*” is the

vibratory power of somethingness *from* nothingness. It is the power of creation *ex nihilo*, imagined as the existential trembling of *Seyn*.

The post-religious belief in the idea of nothingness as the origin of creative newness explains why those who are drawn to existentialism are also drawn to the idea of death; for example, that “death [is] the highest testimony to *Seyn*” (CP 181; see also 222 ff.). To imagine our own nothingness is to be awakened to our own livingness, understood not as a fact about ourselves but as the “transformative” activity of coming-to-be (e.g. CP 256-57). To speak of death in Heideggerian is to be ek-cited about ek-sistence. Existentialists (I include Heidegger, notwithstanding his desire to be *sui generis*) are fascinated by nothingness, including the thought of their own death, because they love the *feeling* of life as existence *ex nihilo*. But nothingness is difficult to comprehend or explain, except as the opposite of a prior somethingness. To believe instead in nothingness as the prior origin of everything is to believe in an inexplicability; hence it is more easily *felt* than comprehended. Here again, the post-Christian belief in exnihilism is manifested more easily as a feeling than as an understanding.

In some of his usages, Heidegger’s *Erzitterung* is plainly evocative of the feeling of becoming godly: “*Seyn* is the *ur*-trembling of divinization [*Das Seyn ist die Erzitterung des Götterns*]” (CP 189, translation modified; BP 239). He does not mean that the gods, as already existing beings, *have* this power, but that the process of becoming godly, even for the gods, is the trembling of exnihilation. Soon thereafter he repeats the phrase but adds the emphatic hyphen, “*Er-zitterung des Götterns*” (BP 240); now it is explicitly an existential “*ur*-trembling” and not a mere tremulousness. Elsewhere he connects this “*ur*-trembling” to the idea of nothingness using one of his favorite tropes for the latter,

the “abyssal fissure,” while drawing further links to the idea of intimacy or inwardness: “The intimacy of this trembling requires the most abyssal fissure [*Die Innigkeit dieser Erzitern bedarf der abgründigen Zerklüftung*]” (CP 193, BP 244). To inwardly experience the exnihillistic force of this *ur*-trembling, we must approach the abyss of nothingness.

Another of Heidegger’s portentous *ur*-words is “*Erschwingung*,” which means “vibration” or “oscillation,” though to capture his special meaning I would offer “*ur*-vibration.” Often he strings such words together with other laden phrases; for example, “*Das Erzitern [ur-trembling] dieser Erschwingung [ur-vibration] in der Kehre [turning] des Ereignisses [ur-event] ist das verborgenste Wesen [most hidden essence] des Seyns*” (BP 262).

Describing his coinage, “*Wesung* (essencing or coming to essence),” a gerund based on his transformation of “*Wesen* (essence)” into an active verb, Heidegger writes, “*Wesung* is not supposed to name something that lies beyond *Seyn*; instead, it utters what is innermost [*Innerstes*] to *Seyn*, namely, the *ur*-event [*Er-ignis*], that counter-swing [*Gegenschwung*] between *Seyn* and *Da-sein* in which the two are not objectively present poles but are the pure coming to be of the *ur*-vibration [*Erschwingung*] itself (CP 225, translation modified; BP 286-87). Here again a number of key themes are connected: that “essencing” is the activity by which essences come into existence; that the activity of “essencing” is innermost to *Seyn*; that the relation of *Dasein* to *Seyn* is analogous to the *ur*-vibration within *Seyn*; and finally that this *ur*-vibration is a “pure coming to be.”

To recognize that Heidegger's philosophy is driven by the search for the inner experience of exnihiliation is to clarify a number of his key themes and locutions. Why was he so fascinated by nothingness? It is because, for creationists, the *nihil* is prior to *creatio*. What could an "*abgrund* (abyssal ground)" possibly be? It is the nothingness that is the origin of somethingness. What is a "fissure" or "abyssal fissure"? It is an existential opening, i.e. a nothingness, into which and/or from which existential newness can come. Why are there so many emphatic "*ur-*" and "*er-*" words in his writing? See above. Why does he so often write about Being in terms of "*Streit* (strife)," "*Kampf* (struggle)," "*Auseinandersetzung* (confrontation)" and "*polemos* (Greek for war)"? (CP and elsewhere, *passim*)? Because the inner essence of *Sein* is the creative tension between nothingness and somethingness. Why must our *Dasein* be "historical"? Because to be so is to participate in the becoming of truth and reality. Why does he turn nouns such as "*Welt* (world)" and "*Wesen* (essence)" into active verbs, "*weltet*" and "*west*"? They are devices to bring us into the experience of reality as *becoming* real. Why did he so dislike scientific and technological thinking? Because they seek definitive understandings of unmagical processes. Why was he so antagonistic to Platonism and Aristotelianism? Because their ontologies exclude the possibility of creative newness. Why did he so dislike Christianity? Because he wanted a *newer* god. Finally, why did he support the chauvinistic volkishness of the Nazis? Because he thought lesser peoples were calculative and imitative, while only the Germans were creative and spiritual.¹³

¹³ For Heidegger's views of the Jews during the 1930s, which are becoming clearer with the publication of the "Black Notebooks," see for example Gregory Fried, "What Heidegger Was Hiding: Unearthing the Philosopher's Anti-Semitism," *Foreign Affairs*, 93:6 (Nov./Dec. 2014), 159-166. For his belief that only the Germans were truly creative and spiritual, see for example the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 40-41.

It may be *ad hominem*, with regard to both the writer and his enthusiasts, to examine the feelings that Heidegger's writing evokes. But only by identifying the experience that he sought can we find, by abduction, a coherent hypothesis that explains all the themes above at once. For all his brilliance and insight, Heidegger never escaped his enculturated feelings. But if we want to know ourselves, we must examine our feelings and sometimes admit of their origin as an unexamined inheritance from our culture. Some feelings may be natural but others, like the inner feeling of creativity, must be cultural because not every culture (for example, the ancient Greeks) knew those feelings.

Modern Creationism and Its Alternative

All of us in the post-Lutheran West, I contend, can recognize the special feeling that the idea of creativity arouses within ourselves. It is an affective idea because somethingness-from-nothingness does not occur in the natural world, so the notion is suggestive of a higher spirituality. (For simplicity here I omit those philosophies in which nature or reality itself is seen as a process of Becoming. These philosophies, such as those of Bergson or Whitehead, in my view demonstrate how pervasive and manifold creationism is within our largely post-Christian culture.) Creativity has spiritualistic or quasi-religious connotations precisely because it is a self-belief that emerged from religion. *Human* creativity is a post-Christian belief that developed in the West from the teaching that God *is* creativity and that humans were created in his image and likeness. We become human, according to this religious story, when we receive a spark of God's essence (think of Michelangelo's *David*) which allows *us* to be creative. Within Christian

history, this message was mostly latent (except for recurrent outbreaks of Pelagianism) because of the dominance of other teachings, such as that of original sin. But eventually in Western modernity, the belief emerged that humans, often now instead of God, are the creators of reality.

While every imaginative modernist in the West, I suggest, can imagine the *inner feeling* of creativity that our culture has taught us, and some of us feel it very strongly, Heidegger's philosophy reinforced rather than challenged his inherited feelings, because both were about the desire to be original. But creativity is a borrowed idea and the feeling of desire for it is a modern Western peculiarity. In the West today, creativity has become a cliché.

Heidegger's enduring value is in helping us question our clichés of thought, but in the case of creativity, he failed to know himself. Creativity cannot be the antidote to the thoughtless acceptance of inherited paradigms, because it is such a paradigm. That is, it is an enculturated pattern of thought that pre-structures our experience of reality in ways that we ordinarily do not notice. The belief in human creativity is an affective thought-structure inherited from religion. The Bible, especially as interpreted by Christians, tells us that truth and reality are created by God. Then Luther taught us to feel that power within ourselves. Now we feel it as our own power. But those who believe it most fully are neither creative nor self-creative, because they have copied their central idea of themselves. The belief in human creativity is belied by the historical fact that the very idea of creativity is unoriginal.

But if we want to do more than robotically accept our culture's programming, what is the alternative if it is not to be more creative? My own preference is to go back

to the pre-Christian philosophy of the Greeks, not as Heidegger creatively understood them as “primordial” and “historical,” but as early searchers for the differences between better and worse understandings. If we wish to leave behind the post-Christian presumption that truth is what we say it is, we must first accept the possibility that we are the discoverers rather than the creators of reality. The question of whether truth and reality are ultimately created or discovered is a large one, but it cannot be answered by thoughtlessly accepting the post-Christian belief that we are the ultimate truthmakers, even if it feels good to think so.