INTRODUCTION

*Man is a riddle in the world, and it may be, the greatest riddle.*

Nikolai Berdyaev

Martin Heidegger was quite a riddle. His yearlong membership in the Nazi party during 1933-1934 is well documented, as are his speeches supporting Nazism and his remarks supporting antisemitism. During the decade, 1930 to 1940, and perhaps even up to 1943, the undisputed fact is that Heidegger identified with and expressed loyalty to Nazi ideology and, from 1933, for a period, to Hitler’s regime. Only after it became clear that Hitler was losing the war did Heidegger slowly abandon his support of the Nazi regime. Moreover, after the fall of The Third Reich, Heidegger never apologized for his support of the regime and for his despicable deeds. Nor did he ever straightforwardly and in print condemn the horrors of the cruel wars that Hitler initiated, and the many satanic and wicked deeds that the Nazis performed. After 1945, he persistently evaded relating honestly to the evils of Nazism. He disregarded the Holocaust and chose to never regret his past adherence to Nazism.

To give just one brief example, his book, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, includes a preface to the 1953 German edition in which Heidegger explains: “The present volume contains the fully reworked text of the lecture bearing the same title that I delivered at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau in the summer semester of 1935.” In this 1953 “fully reworked text,” Heidegger decided to not alter the following statement that appears toward the end of the book: “The works that are being peddled about nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism but have nothing to do with the inner truth or greatness of this movement... have all been written by men fishing in the troubled waters of ‘values’ and ‘totalities’.” Nor did he add a qualifying comment, as to the reason he did not rework this sentence within the “fully reworked text.” Thus, in 1953, after the horrors of Nazism and especially of the Holocaust were well known, after writing his famous “Letter on Humanism” in which, as I will show, worthy humane goals are presented, Heidegger did not alter or even add a qualifying comment to his 1935 inspiring praise of the Nazi movement. There is therefore no question that Martin Heidegger fled from any sincere confrontation with the evils of Nazism and from his personal sanctioning and supporting the wicked, vile, and pernicious acts performed by many of his fellow Germans.

Heidegger’s adherence to Nazism and his flight from confronting the evil of his and Germany’s past have led to multiple, and, at times, vehement discussions on the relation between Heidegger’s life and his philosophy. I indicate below that for the theme of this book these discussions are quite irrelevant. The studies on Heidegger’s life that I have read reveal what should be
evident from the above brief list of facts: Heidegger had been a callous coward when faced with evil. For years he firmly supported the evils of Nazism, even announcing in 1933 to Karl Jaspers, whose wife was Jewish: “There is a dangerous international alliance of Jews.” ⁴ In addition, Heidegger was dense and inauthentic in relation to his past supportive relationship to Nazism and to The Third Reich. Throughout his life, he ignored the wickedness of the Nazis. Yet, these important studies of Heidegger’s life, and the damning facts they unveil, cannot challenge the fact that the same Martin Heidegger wrote exciting ideas about humanism and human existence, and that some of his thoughts on poetry are original and enlightening.

This book suggests that quite a few of Heidegger’s thoughts on poetry are well worth learning and thinking about, even if he was an evil person who participated in and supported evil. Jean-Paul Sartre, who was active in the resistance to Nazi domination in France during World War II, learned much from Heidegger’s writings and acknowledged his debt. After the defeat of Nazism, Sartre was attacked by other intellectuals in France for writing books influenced by a Nazi philosopher. Sartre’s response to his critics is worth repeating:

Heidegger was a philosopher well before he was a Nazi. His adherence to Hitlerism is to be explained by fear, perhaps ambition, and certainly conformism. Not pretty to look at, I agree; but enough to invalidate your neat reasoning. “Heidegger,” you say, “is a member of the Nationalist Socialist Party; thus his philosophy must be Nazi.” That’s not it: Heidegger has no character; there’s the truth of the matter. Are you going to conclude from this that his philosophy is an apology for cowardice? Don’t you know that sometimes a man does not come up to the level of his works? And are you going to condemn The Social Contract because Rousseau abandoned his children? And what difference does Heidegger make anyhow? If we discover our own thinking in that of another philosopher, if we ask him for techniques and methods that can give us access to new problems, does that mean that we espouse every one of his theories? Marx borrowed his dialectic from Hegel. Are you going to say that Capital is a Prussian work?⁵

Thus, Sartre holds that it is correct to divorce the important techniques, ideas, and thoughts that appear in Heidegger’s philosophy from the cowardly, at
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Times. evil man who was their author. Such is the approach I adhere to in this study. Why Heidegger "does not come up to the level of his works?" is a riddle that I leave to other scholars to address.

A person's relationship to poetry is also a riddle. Heidegger indicated that this relationship is frequently linked to the question of the relationship of Dasein, or the human existence as Being-in-the-world, to Being and to the meaning of Being. He explained that Being is beyond definition, it cannot be limited by definition: "Table is a use object; a use object is something extant; something that is extant is a being; Being belongs to beings. I cannot pass beyond Being; I already presuppose it in every determination of a being; it is not a genus; it cannot be defined."6

Since I always presuppose Being, it is always present, and the question of its meaning needs to be addressed anew and thought about by every generation. Indeed, Heidegger spent a great part of his life acting in accordance with the maxim that he presented at the opening of his major work, Being and Time: "So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being."7 Again and again, each time from a different perspective, he raised the question of the meaning of Being and persistently asked how persons can and should relate to Being. He stated clearly that "Being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy."8 Here and there in the course of this book, Heidegger's continual concern with this question emerges.

Raising the question of the meaning of Being, Heidegger indicated, required learning from the thought of many philosophers. Plato, Aristotle, Schelling, Aquinas, Hegel, Leibniz, Kant, Nietzsche, are among the many thinkers he studied and about whom he wrote. He also repeatedly studied the pre-Socratic philosophers, and in his writings he suggested that they raised the question of Being in a manner still unsurpassed. In many writings, Heidegger pointed out that it is quite impossible to disclose Being conceptually, that is, with the help of concepts, since every concept will limit Being. In Being and Time, he suggested that one way to address the question of the meaning of Being is through an existential analysis of that human entity, Dasein, which "is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it."9 Heidegger's analysis of Dasein leads to a conclusion which has been quite significant for much existentialist thinking: By resolutely facing my own death, I can live authentically and also relate authentically to the question of Being.

Dasein can address the question of the meaning of Being not only through an existential analysis of its own being, or through resolutely facing its own death. Heidegger often suggested that an additional promising way of seeking the meaning of Being, and of elucidating Dasein's relationship to Being, is by learning from great poetry. He turned to the works of great poets: Sophocles, Goethe, Rilke, Friedrich Hölderlin, Stefan George, George Trakl, and others,
seeking what they could teach him about human existence and its relationship to Being. He wrote a few essays centered around a poem or poems written by these poets. In other writings he expressed much admiration for what poets, especially Hölderlin, had brought to expression. I should add that Heidegger's different approaches to raising anew the question of Being will not be a major thrust of this book. However, in those areas which are relevant to some of Heidegger's insights on poetry, his thinking on Being and human existence will be briefly presented.

An immediate result of his continual learning from poets is that Heidegger is one of few twentieth centuries thinkers for whom poetry was a major philosophical concern and a continual source of inspiration and thinking. He also published poems that he wrote. In English these poems appear in a chapter of a book on language and poetry. He titled the chapter "The Thinker as Poet." I must say that I did not find Heidegger's poems inspiring or beautiful; hence, they will not be cited or discussed. In other essays, even while the question of the meaning of Being is present in the background, he described at length the wisdom that he found in poems by great poets. He repeatedly explained that poetry is a gift of language, which we dare not ignore if we wish to live a fully human life. It is also a major source of all art.

Hence, Heidegger held that to live a full human life, persons must dwell poetically upon earth. Chapter Four will show the source of this idea, dwelling poetically. The locution "poetically man dwells," which Heidegger adopted as the name of an essay on poetry appears in one of Hölderlin's poems. In Chapter Four, I present Heidegger's understanding of how humans may dwell poetically. At present, in accord with Heidegger, I can define dwelling poetically as learning from great poems how to live a worthy life in which we think and relate authentically to beings and to Being. The full import of dwelling poetically will slowly emerge in this book.

Let me be more explicit about what Heidegger may mean by dwelling poetically. Heidegger believed that the gifts to be found in poetry are magnificent. Great poetry discloses aspects of human existence which are concealed by our everyday exigencies and engagements in the technology-dominated world which encompasses us and which frequently directs our life. The profound experience with language, which may arise while reading or listening to poetry, is often a revelation that can lead to spiritual enhancement. Reading or listening to poetry can lead the reader to the neighborhood of thinking; it can open up a clearing for truth to emerge in the closed, often confined world that encompasses him or her. In addition, great poetry provides measures for a worthy existence.

Thus, reading and listening to great poems can help each person who wishes to do so to break out of the superficial existence, the everyday busyness,
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and the idle talk into which he or she was thrown at birth in our corporate capitalist-oriented world. However, Heidegger repeatedly stresses that these gifts are linked to great poetry’s helping us to pose, to address, to wonder about, and to ponder the question of the meaning of Being. Thus, learning to read and to listen to poetry so as to accept its magnificent gifts is an important educational challenge.

Heidegger often warns his readers that the gifts of poetry vanish or are destroyed, and with them the opportunity to dwell poetically, by what are called the scientific approaches. Here is one citation from his writings that rejects such approaches—I could bring at least a dozen:

When a poem is made the object of philological interpretation, the resources of grammar find themselves at a loss, and precisely with respect to the greatest creations of language. Such analyses usually terminate in commonplace observations or arbitrarily selected literary phrases.11

Unfortunately, much teaching, discussion, and writing about poetry in today’s educational institutions are based on philological interpretations and other methods of so-called scientific analysis that Heidegger rejected. The results are “commonplace observations or arbitrarily selected literary phrases.”

Following Heidegger, in this book I will strive to listen to a few poems and to relate to them in a non-philological, non-scientific, non-methodological, manner. In addition, I will often relate personally to a poem and show which of its gifts I appreciate. I will suggest that teachers of poetry relate in this way to poetry, and teach it as a gift of language that transcends any scientific examination or analysis.

I insist on our need to listen to poetry, because great poetry should be read aloud for its gifts to be fully presented, related to, learned from, and appreciated. Unfortunately, in Western societies reading poetry out loud has become rare. This neglect has contributed to a fading away of many of poetry’s gifts. Nietzsche’s biting criticism of his fellow Germans more than a century ago is currently valid for all Western nations:

The German does not read aloud, does not read for the ear, but merely with his eyes: he has put his ears away in the drawer. In antiquity, when a man read—which he did very seldom—he read to himself aloud, and indeed in a loud voice; it was a matter for surprise if someone read quietly, and people secretly asked themselves why he did so. In a loud voice: that is to say with all the crescendos,
inflections, variations of tone and changes of tempo in which the ancient public world took pleasure.\textsuperscript{12}

Heidegger was well aware of the importance of reading out loud and of listening to language and to poetry. As will be seen in the following chapters, he frequently emphasized the spokenness of language, its being a Saying to which we should carefully listen.

Heidegger’s thoughts on the intriguing gifts for enhancing human existence proffered by poetry have been largely ignored. My review of relevant literature reveals a most disappointing situation. Heidegger’s suggestions to the sensitive and thoughtful reader of and listener to great poetry have aroused little interest. No scholar has viewed Heidegger’s writings on the gifts of poetry, which present us with worthy thoughts and wisdom, as indicating a realm from which we simple people may learn much about our everyday life, and about how to live a worthy existence. No educator has undertaken to suggest how you may teach students to relate to poetry in accordance with Heidegger’s insights. No student of Heidegger has suggested how to act so as to dwell poetically. Heidegger’s writings on poetry have been, at times, mentioned or briefly discussed, but primarily as linked to his thinking about the question of Being. In short, no one has asked the simple question: What can be learned from Heidegger’s writings on how to read poetry and how to teach poetry so as to enhance human existence?

A recent book by Gerald L. Bruns, \textit{Heidegger’s Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in his Later Writings}, is a case in point.\textsuperscript{13} This is a poor book, with no original thinking. In the book’s 187 pages of academic chatter, with lengthy citations and piles of footnotes, which supposedly prove his scholarly acumen, Bruns never asks questions which should concern every person, such as: What can a person learn from Heidegger’s thoughts on poetry about living one’s life or about dwelling poetically? Nor does he ask questions such as: How can Heidegger’s thoughts lead his readers to learn from great poetry to see truths, to think, and to live a worthy existence? The results of ignoring such basic questions that concerned Heidegger are that Bruns’s book is a superficial shifting around of statements by Heidegger and by other scholars. No understanding of Heidegger’s vision or thoughts is presented. To not mince words, Bruns’s book is an ego-trip based on the author’s misunderstandings of a crucial area of Heidegger’s thinking.

Scholars have not posed many other important questions such as: How should poetry be read, listened to, and taught if, as Heidegger holds, the reading of poetry can lead the attentive reader to the neighborhood of thinking? How should we read, listen to, and teach poetry so as to enter the enlightened clearing, which, according to Heidegger, poetry opens up for the happening of
truth in the closed world encompassing us? How can the teaching, listening to, and reading of poetry help to ponder, address, and learn from the question of Being? Worthy insights found in some of Heidegger’s essays on poetry, and in other writings, can substantially help a thoughtful person to partially respond to the above questions. Heidegger did not pose these questions, nor did he provide answers. Exploring parts of the terrain opened by these questions is the purpose of this book. It should be evident, however, that my explorations are a mere opening of the terrain. Hopefully, other students of Heidegger and of poetry will continue my research and help to open this ignored area to new thinking.

Four qualifications should be mentioned at the outset. First, this book is not an attempt to present all of Heidegger’s ideas on poetry or to elaborate all of his discussions of poetry. I point to a few of the insights and thoughts on poetry and on other subjects that appear in five of his essays. I discuss the essays on the basis of a broad and careful reading of the Heidegger corpus and of much secondary literature on Heidegger’s thought and on relating to poetry. I focus on these five essays, because they help answer the above questions; they also indicate, clearly, the challenge involved in endeavoring to dwell poetically in our world. I believe that these essays may help us learn to relate to poetry and to teach poetry in a manner that will spiritually enhance our existence.

Second, I am aware that often when Heidegger interprets a poem he is reading into it elements of his philosophy or ideas about life. Hence, only rarely will I turn to his interpretations of specific poems. Nor will I relate to his ways of analyzing specific poems, or to his use of methods of deconstruction or hermeneutics. I do not believe that in his interpretations or deconstructions the best of Heidegger’s ideas on poetry is present. In addition, Heidegger often writes purposely in phrases that resemble an oracle, which can be subject to conflicting interpretations and are obscure. Since the purpose of this book is to learn from Heidegger and not to criticize his approach, or thoughts, or style, I will not address these limitations and problems. Nor will I discuss those essays, or those poems that Heidegger cited, in which these limitations are prominent.

Third, Heidegger ignores many worthy insights of other thinkers on poetry. For instance, it is quite difficult to find an echo in Heidegger’s writings to Edgar Allan Poe’s simple observation: “I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement.” Heidegger often approaches poetry as a source for thinking and not as bringing much joy to its listeners and readers by exciting and elevating the soul. I will partially discuss this problem in relation to simple joyful poetry—for instance, in some ballads—and show that, despite Heidegger’s ignoring these poem-songs, his writings can indicate a novel approach to the magnificent gifts of these poem-songs. This book, however, will not suggest where Heidegger’s thoughts on poetry are deficient in relation to the thoughts of other thinkers.
Fourth, Heidegger often seems to repeat important ideas in the essays presented. In my view, what seems a repetition allows his readers to perceive the realm he is exploring each time from a different perspective. Hence, in this book I will follow the path of Heidegger’s thinking, including, at times, his supposed repetitions. I do so only when I believe that by a seeming repetition a new perspective has been presented.

These qualifications allow me to evade much that is irrelevant and address myself to the major questions of this book, which I permit myself to repeat: What can we learn from Heidegger on how to relate to poetry, and how to educate students to relate to poetry? How can we learn from Heidegger to dwell poetically and where must we go beyond his thinking to live thus?

In order to approach these questions from the perspective of how Heidegger relates to contemporary life, in the first chapter I turn to two essays in which he deals with humanism and technology. The essays also indicate the high regard for poetry that is present in Heidegger’s writings. Put differently, these essays address major contemporary problems while suggesting that we have much to learn from poetry on how to relate to and cope with these problems. The chapters that follow deal with three additional essays in which Heidegger’s most fruitful and potent ideas and thoughts on relating to poetry and on dwelling poetically are presented.