World, Finitude, and Solitude as Basic Concepts of Metaphysics


With the publication of this volume of the *Complete Edition* of Heidegger's works, probably one of the most significant texts of the early Freiburg period becomes available. Delivered as a lecture course in the winter semester of 1929-30 at the University of Freiburg, this text presents the most detailed discussion of the problem of the world yet to appear in Heidegger's corpus. Presumably, this accounts, among other things, for the fact that Heidegger dedicated this text to the memory of Eugen Fink after the latter's death. (At the end the volume also contains the text of a short talk Heidegger gave on the occasion of Fink's sixtieth birthday.)

What is noteworthy at the outset is the proximity of the language of this early text to the language of the later Heidegger: At times one encounters the same exacting simplicity of words which marks the works of the later Heidegger. The text of *Die Grundprobleme der Metaphysik* once again shows what is common knowledge by now, namely that Heidegger regularly prepared the text of his lecture courses carefully and painstakingly.¹

The volume is edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann who has diligently prepared a text that reads well, and is free from repetitions that often occur in a lecture course. He has divided the text into sections and given them appropriately chosen titles which greatly help the reader in understanding the text they precede. Moreover, the formulation of the
titles has been accomplished by using words and phrases that occur in the main body of the text, thus eliminating the need for making alien additions to the text.

This volume is significant in at least two respects. It shows Heidegger meticulously and uncompromisingly dealing with the Seinsfrage via an extended analysis of boredom, a subject to which he merely alludes in Was ist Metaphysik? of 1929. The volume also presents a detailed discussion of the problem of the world which takes a different route from similar discussions in Being and Time and in Vom Wesen des Grundes. In reading this text it becomes clear that here, as elsewhere in his early writings, Heidegger does not yet distinguish between thinking (das Denken) and philosophy, i.e., metaphysics. He speaks consistently in favor of metaphysics and quite generously considers metaphysical what undoubtedly is no longer a metaphysical thinking. In what follows, I shall offer a brief account of the main concern of this lecture course by first delineating its general context.

I

The lecture course begins by rejecting as inadequate those approaches to philosophy which define it in terms of science, art or religion. Heidegger finds a more congenial approach to philosophy in the statement of Novalis according to which “philosophy is actually homesickness, the urge to be at home everywhere.”(7) Taking this statement seriously, Heidegger asks what the term “everywhere” means. Because this term refers to the world, Heidegger suggests that a discussion of the nature of philosophy should be preceded by an analysis of the world. This is so because only as finite, isolated (vereinzelt) individuals can we long for being at home everywhere. Thus an attempt at coming to terms with the nature of philosophy or metaphysics ipso facto, calls for a discussion of the concepts of world, finitude and Vereinzelung (a term which has connotations of isolation, separation, solitude but also individualization).²

The first step in this direction consists of working out the appropriate way in which these concepts are to be studied. A metaphysical concept (Begriff, i.e., what seizes and holds in its grip) is not unconditionally accessible. A discussion of metaphysical concepts only makes sense when we find ourselves already in the grip of these concepts (ergriffen von dem was sie begreifen sollen)(9). To be held in the grip (Ergriffenheit) of these concepts is not something that requires an effort on our part. For these concepts stem from a disposition (Stimmung) which like dispositions in general precede all our efforts.³ Moreover, like dispositions in general, the one which gives rise to these concepts, has the characteristic