Shadow-jumping, corner-peeping, and related arts

"The idea of transcendence, according to which man is more than a mere something endowed with intelligence, has worked itself out with different variations."[1]

The promise of anthropology, Charles King claims, is that with enough effort, building skills over a lifetime, "we might come to know humanity in all its complexity, in fits and starts, with dim glimpses of a different world appearing through the mist of custom, changing us, unseating us, in a way destroying us—the baffling, terrifying liberation of home truths falling away."[2]

The image is of "humanity in all its complexity" as the something to be known beneath or behind or beyond home truths after these cultural particulars have fallen away. Yet Clifford Geertz maintained that "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture. . . . We are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture – and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it . . . Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products . . . [human beings], every last one of them, are cultural artifacts."[3]

There is something paradoxical in Geertz's claim: no human nature independent of culture yet our (logically prior) nature is to complete ourselves through culture.[4] "The most enduring prejudices," King writes, "are the comfortable ones, those hidden up close; seeing the world as it is requires some distance, a view from the upper air."[5] Paradox, insofar as it induces distance – even better, dissociation – may aid the project of transcendence: "seeing the world as it is."

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[1] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson 1962) 74. *Diese Transzendenzidee, wonach der Mensch mehr ist als ein Verstandeswesen, hat sich in verschiedenen Abwandlungen ausgewirkt.*

[2] Charles King, *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century* (2019) 345.

[3] "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973) 49, 50, 51. Feral children?

[4] *Cf.* 'Nāgārjuna's Paradox': "If Nāgārjuna is correct in his critique of essence, and if it hence turns out that all things lack fundamental natures, it turns out that they all have the same nature, that is, emptiness, and hence both have and lack that very nature." Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest, "Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought," 15 *Philosophy East and West* 1 (2003); quoted from the version in Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (2nd ed. 2002) 269-270. Starkly put: "What is the intrinsic nature of the Tathāgata, that is the intrinsic nature of this world. The Tathāgata is devoid of intrinsic nature; this world is devoid of intrinsic nature." *MMK* 22.16, p. 251 in Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way:* Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (2013). The latter authors comment that "the very idea of how things really are, independently of our (useful) semantic and cognitive conventions, is incoherent;" "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth." *Id.* 273. The correlate for Geertzian anthropology would then be 'the ultimate truth is that there are only home truths.'

[5] *Gods of the Upper Air* 345.

(Provided that belief in the capacity to see the world as it is is not just another enduring prejudice.)

Boasian anthropology then enjoins us, in King's words, to "Work hard at distancing yourself from ideas that feed your own sense of specialness."[6] Yet is not the very possibility of that effort the brightest index of the specialness of human being – the very being capable of taking distance from its own sense of being? And if the effort fully succeeds is not that itself a special achievement: to be at once on both sides of a limit; grounded of necessity in one's highly particular culture, and at the same time outside culture, in the upper air? In other words, at the same time taking the view from somewhere and from nowhere.

Should Boasian anthropology fully succeed its success would be another case in which "there is a totality (of all things expressible, describable, etc.) and an appropriate operation that generates an object [view, understanding] that is both within and without the totality."[7] Graham Priest names these two situations, or moments, *Closure* and *Transcendence,* respectively.

Priest and Garfield describe the Inclosure Schema as arising in this way:

> "The inclosure comes with an operator, δ, which, when applied to any suitable subset of Ω gives *another* object which is in Ω (that is, one that is not in the subset in question, but is in Ω). Thus, for example, if we are talking about sets of ordinals, δ might give us the least ordinal not in the set. If we are talking about a set of entities that have been thought about, δ might give us an entity of which we have not yet thought. The contradiction at the limit arises when δ is applied to the totality Ω itself. For then the application of δ gives an object that is both within and without Ω: the least ordinal greater than all ordinals, or the unthought object."[8]

Formally put:

> "We . . . require two properties, φ and ψ, and a function δ, satisfying the following conditions:
> (1)   Ω = {y; φ(y)} exists, and ψ(Ω)
> (2)   If x is a subset of Ω such that ψ(x):   (a) δ(x) ∉ x
>   (b) δ(x) ∈ Ω
> Given that these conditions are satisfied we . . . have a contradiction. For since ψ(Ω), [and since any set is a subset of itself] we have δ(Ω) ∉ Ω!. [In Priest's notation 'α!' stands for $\alpha \land \neg\alpha$. So the last expression says δ(Ω) ∉ Ω ∧ δ(Ω) ∈ Ω.]
> I will call any Ω that satisfies these conditions (for an appropriate δ) an *inclosure.*

[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Beyond the Limits of Thought* 3-4.
[8] "Nāgārjuna and the limits of thought" 253.

The conditions themselves, I will call the *Inclosure Schema*, and any paradox of which this is the underlying structure, an *inclosure contradiction*." [9]

Priest shows that Heidegger's struggle to articulate the meaning of being ends up in such an inclosure contradiction, landing him both within and without the limits of description. Heidegger, he writes,

"has shown that being is such that one cannot say anything about it. Yet it is clear that one can say things about it. The quotations from Heidegger that I have made are littered with assertions about being, as even a casual perusal suffices to verify. Being is a notion that is beyond the bounds of the describable (Transcendence), but it *is* describable (Closure): Heidegger shows how." [10]

The matter can be put in terms of the Inclosure Schema this way:

"$\varphi(y)$ is 'y can be expressed in language', so that Ω is the totality of things that can be expressed; $\psi(x)$ is 'x = Ω'; $\delta(\Omega)$ is a claim about being, say that being is what it is that makes beings be. Then, by Heidegger's arguments, we have $\neg\varphi(\delta(\Omega))$: this fact about being cannot be expressed; but Heidegger himself shows that $\varphi(\delta(\Omega))$ by expressing this fact." [11]

Priest notes earlier in the book that the instance $\psi(x)$ is 'x = Ω' "is clearly a somewhat degenerate case" and it might be thought that admitting it "rather trivializes the notion" of inclosure contradiction. "For given any contradiction in the form Pa!, we can knock it into the shape required by the schema. We simply take 'Py' for $\varphi(y)$ (so that Ω is just {y; Py}), 'x = Ω' for $\psi(x)$, and set $\delta(\Omega)$ = a. Closure and Transcendence then follow immediately." [12] Because: $\psi(x)$ is such that $\delta(x) \notin x$ and $\delta(x) \in \Omega$; so $\delta(\Omega) \notin \Omega$ and $\delta(\Omega) \in \Omega$; i.e., a is not a member of Ω so $\neg$Pa, and a is a member of Ω so Pa; therefore $\neg$Pa $\land$ Pa: contradiction in the form Pa!.

Priest goes on to comment that

"the issue is much more subtle than this, however. We require of the Inclosure Schema not merely that it be a pattern into which the contradictions fit. Patterns are cheap enough . . . We want not just any old pattern, but the essential pattern. . . . for genuine satisfaction of the Schema we need the fact that a contradiction fits the pattern to *explain* why the contradiction arises. It is clear that in the example of the last paragraph [the degenerate case] this cannot be so. For the fact that the contradiction arises is used to establish that the pattern is satisfied. That the pattern is satisfied can hardly, therefore, be used to explain why the contradiction arises." [13]

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[9] *Beyond the Limits of Thought* 134.

[10] "Heidegger and the grammar of being" in *Beyond the Limits of Thought* 245.

[11] *Ibid.* fn. 13.

[12] *Beyond the Limits of Thought* 135.

[13] *Ibid.*

Yet this is

> "certainly not to say that every example of the Inclosure Schema where $\psi(x)$ is 'x = Ω' is pathological. But for legitimate cases we need, at the very least, some understanding of why it is that, given the totality Ω, $\delta(\Omega)$ is able to 'lever itself out'. Once one understands *how* it is that a diagonaliser [δ operator] manages to operate on a totality of objects of a certain kind to produce a novel object of the same kind, it becomes clear *why* a contradiction occurs at the limit."[14]

Casting certain of Heidegger's remarks about being in terms of an expressibility inclosure secures his place in the distinguished company of "paraconsistent frontiersmen such as Kant and Hegel, . . . and Derrida," but fails to qualify him for the Nāgārjuna league; that Nāgārjuna who "delivers to us a paradox as yet unknown in the West;"[15] for "even Heidegger does not follow Nāgārjuna all the way to the dramatic insistence on the identity of the two realities [conventional and ultimate] and the recovery of the authority of the conventional. This extirpation of the myth of the deep may be Nāgārjuna's greatest contribution to Western philosophy."[16]

Does this assessment give Heidegger his due? Heidegger's claims about the being of Dasein, for instance that "The essence of Dasein lies in its existence,"[17] strike one as just Nāgārjuna's ontological paradox[18] with a phenomenological face: that the *svabhāva* of Dasein is *śūnyatā*; the essence of Dasein is emptiness, in other words thrownness, 'mortal relationality,' or something like that. Heidegger seems continually to say in effect that human being **incarnates** the Inclosure Schema, that human existence is "a mighty maze" of planful understandings, "and all without a plan."[19] The idea of transcendence, he says, is "that man is something that reaches beyond himself [*über sich hinauslangt*]."[20] That's possible because human being is **not** inherently **a** 'something;' "No-one is anything" in Mr. Bloom's words. Or as Heidegger says, "Being held out into the nothing – as Dasein is – on the ground of concealed anxiety is its surpassing of beings as a whole. It is transcendence."[21]

Heidegger insists that being transcends beings: "Being, as the basic theme of philosophy, is no class or genus of entities; yet it pertains to every entity. Its 'universality' is to be sought higher up. Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which

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[14] *Id.* 135-136.

[15] "Nāgārjuna and the limits of thought" 250.

[16] *Id.* 267.

[17] *Being and Time* 67.

[18] "Nāgārjuna's enterprise is one of fundamental ontology, and the conclusion he comes to is that fundamental ontology is impossible." "Nāgārjuna and the limits of thought" 266.

[19] "Pope originally wrote *A mighty maze, and all without a plan,* and then altered it to its present form because his friends told him this conflicted with his religious views." William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1st U.S. ed. 1947) 204.

[20] *Being and Time* 74.

[21] "What is Metaphysics?" in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (ed. William McNeill tr. David Farrell Krell 1998) 93. *Die Heineingehaltenheit des Daseins in das Nichts auf dem Grunde der verborgenen Angst ist das Übersteigen des Seiendem im Ganzen: die Transzendenz.*

an entity may possess. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple*."[22] And human being is the being on which being – in the sense of disclosed-as-meaningful[23] – depends. "Being (not entities) is something which 'there is' only in so far as truth is. And truth *is* only in so far as and as long as Dasein is. Being and truth 'are' equiprimordially."[24] Assuming that transitivity obtains here, being *is* only in so far as and as long as Dasein is.

Obviously 'being' cannot here mean, as it traditionally does, 'substance,' and Heidegger says it does not:

> "Entities are uncovered only *when* Dasein *is*; and only as long as Dasein *is*, are they disclosed. Newton's laws, the principle of contradiction, any truth whatever—these are true only as long as Dasein *is.* Before there was any Dasein, there was no truth; nor will there be any after Dasein is no more. For in such a case truth as disclosedness, uncovering, and uncoveredness, *cannot* be. . . . To say that before Newton his laws were neither true nor false, cannot signify that before him there were no such entities as have been uncovered and pointed out by those laws. Through Newton the laws became true; and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to Dasein. Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were. Such uncovering is the kind of Being which belongs to 'truth'."[25]

If any entity is *ein Verstandeswesen* – the argument might go – then this *Wesen* has a built-in delta-operator, *das Verstehen*, 'taking-as.'[26] 'Taking-as' is how this entity makes its way, goes about, gets around, etc. And if its 'taking-as' is capacious enough then it may eventually wend its way – through various moods and encounters – to taking-its-*Wesen*-as. Which operation

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[22] *Being and Time* 62.

[23] "in Heidegger's phenomenology the so-called in-itself-ness of a thing is not its οὐσία or substance or 'being,' its stand-alone, unchanging essential structure but rather its current and very changeable (*jeweilig*) significance to the person or persons experientially engaged with that thing within a specific context of concern and interest. Heidegger investigates entities not in terms of their status as out-there-now-real (Aristotle's ἔξω ὂν καὶ χωριστόν and ἔξω [τῆς διανοίας]), but only in terms of their *Anwesenheit/ Bedeutsamkeit*, their current meaningfulness *to* someone within specific contexts of human purpose, desire, need, and so on." Thomas Sheehan, "Phenomenology Rediviva: On a recent book by Steven Crowell" 1-2 (2019); quoted from the online version; forthcoming March, 2020 as "Renewing Phenomenology: Heidegger and the Reduction(s)" in *Transcending Reason: Heidegger's Reconceptualization of Rationality* (ed. Irene McMullin, Matthew Burch, and Jack Marsh).

[24] *Being and Time* 272. *Sein – nicht Seiendes – »gibt es« nur, sofern Wahrheit ist. Und sie **ist** nur, sofern und solange Dasein ist. Sein und Wahrheit »sind« gleichursprünglich.*

[25] *Id.* 269.

[26] "The 'as' is the basic structure whereby we understand and have access to anything." Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth* (tr. Thomas Sheehan 2010) 129. "That which is disclosed in understanding—that which is understood—is already accessible in such a way that its 'as which' can be made to stand out explicitly. The 'as' makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood." *Being and Time* 189. "We simply never first have 'something' and then 'something more' [*noch etwas*] and then the possibility of taking something *as* something, but the complete reverse: something first gives itself to us only when we are already moving within the projection [*im Entwurf*], within the 'as.'" Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (tr. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker 1995) 365.

generates an entity both within and without the totality of *Verstandeswesen*: contradiction, paradox.

'What's the go o' that?' How does it work? Expounding his notion of interpretation Heidegger writes,

> "The child's question, 'What is this thing?' is thus answered by stating what it is used for, defining what one finds in terms of what one does with it. . . . The interpretation appresents the *what-for* [*das **Wozu***] of a thing and so *brings out* the reference of 'in-order-to' [*Um-zu*]. It brings to prominence '*as what*' the encountered thing can be taken, how it is to be understood. The primary form of all interpretation as the cultivation of understanding *is the consideration of something in terms of its 'as what,' considering something as something*."[27]

Here we have an inchoate Inclosure Schema. E.g. the child finds a gadget in the kitchen and wants to know what it is. That the child even encounters the thing as a questionable object means that it is already *anwesend*, meaningfully present to the child. That the child **asks** about it shows the child's awareness that 'something is missing;' that its understanding of the thing is incomplete. The thing which the child asks about is therefore the member of a singleton subset of Ω, the set of all *Anwesen*. Interpretation, the delta operator, discloses a being, a meaning – the what-it's-for – not in the subset but still in Ω. The child then may – sooner or later – turn the delta-operator on Ω itself to generate the follow-up question 'What's **the** *Wozu* of *Wozu*?' What ultimately is what-for for?

World, the totality of involvements (*Bewandtnisganzheit*),[28]

> "itself goes back ultimately to a 'towards-which' [*ein Wozu*] in which there is no further involvement: this 'towards-which' is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within a world; it is rather an entity whose Being is defined as Being-in-the-world, and to whose state of Being, worldhood itself belongs. This primary 'towards-which' [*primäre Wozu*] is not just another 'towards-this' [*Dazu*] as something in which an involvement is possible. The primary 'towards-which' is a 'for-the-sake-of-which' [*ein Worum-willen*]. But the 'for-the-sake-of' always pertains to the Being of Dasein, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an issue [*dem es in seinem Sein wesenhaft **um** dieses Sein selbst geht*]."[29]

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[27] Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (tr. Theodore Kisiel 1985) 260-261.
[28] "Circumspective concern includes the understanding of a totality of involvements [*Bewandtnisganzheit*], and this understanding is based upon a prior understanding of the relationships of the 'in-order-to', the 'towards-which', the 'towards this', and the 'for-the-sake-of'. The interconnection [*zusammenhang*] of these relationships has been exhibited earlier as 'significance' [*Bedeutsamkeit*]. Their unity makes up what we call the 'world'." *Being and Time* 415.
[29] *Id.* 116-117.

'World' is this totality (Closure) of 'meaning-and-mattering.' Now we need "an appropriate operation that generates an object that is both within and without the totality." For Heidegger the pre-eminent such operation is *Angst*: "Being-anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world."[30] Anxiety transcends the Closure of meaning-and-mattering and discloses it as groundless.[31] Heidegger calls this groundlessness 'nothing' and '**the** nothing.'[32] Anxiety does not make the world disappear; rather it discloses world, sense-making, as senseless, baseless, as finally 'nothing;' and being-in-the-world – the sense-making life – as "held out into the nothing."

The operation of *Angst* "discloses an *in*significance of the world [*Unbedeutsamkeit der Welt*]; and this *in*significance reveals the **nullity** [*die Nichtigkeit*] of that with which one can concern oneself [*des Besorgbaren*]." [33] In *Angst* the interconnection of the involvement-relationships still obtains but it has lost meaningfulness: "The utter insignificance [*die völlige Unbedeutsamkeit*] which makes itself known in the 'nothing and nowhere', does not signify that the world is absent, but tells us that entities within-the-world are of so little importance [*so völlig belanglos*] in themselves that on the basis of this insignificance [*Unbedeutsamkeit*] of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still obtrudes itself."[34]

This description of the experience suggests that just as "It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to 'hear' a 'pure noise'"[35] it requires an equally outré frame of mind to 'see' 'unmeaning.'

"The world in which I exist has sunk into insignificance [*Unbedeutsamkeit*]."[36] Yet being-in-the-world **is** *Bedeutsamkeit; is* its world existingly. So the *Angster* is at once 'in meaning' and outside it (an uncanny state; not-at-home, *unheimlich*). If "Being [*Seyn;* i.e.*, Welt, Bedeutsamkeit*] is the *aether* in which humanity breathes"[37] then *Angst* transports one into the upper reaches beyond the breathable *aether*. No wonder then that fundamental *Angst* occurs "rarely enough and only for a moment."[38]

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[30] *Id.* 232. *Das Sichängsten erschließt ursprünglich und direkt die Welt als Welt.*

[31] "That in the face of which one has anxiety is not an entity within-the-world." *Id.* 231. "Nothing which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety is anxious. Here the totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand discovered within-the-world, is, as such, of no consequence; it collapses into itself; the world has the character of completely lacking significance." *Ibid.*

[32] "The 'nothing' with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very basis, is defined; and this basis itself i s as thrownness into death." *Id.* 356. "Uncanniness reveals itself authentically in the basic state-of-mind of anxiety; and, as the most elemental way in which thrown Dasein is disclosed, it puts Dasein's Being-in-the-world face to face with the 'nothing' of the world." *Id.* 321.

[33] *Id.* 393. "Anxiety is anxious in the face of the 'nothing' of the world; but this does not mean that in anxiety we experience something like the absence of what is present-at-hand within-the-world. The present-at-hand must be encountered in just such a way that it does not have any involvement whatsoever, but can show itself in an empty mercilessness." *Ibid*. "

[34] *Id*. 231*.*

[35] *Id.* 207.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] *Das Seyn ist der Aether, in dem der Mensch atmet.* GA 42.169.

[38] "What is Metaphysics?" 88.

Let φ(y) be 'y is meaningfully present,' so that Ω is the totality of *Anwesen*. ψ(x) projects x as; x is projectible (takeable-as); "something first gives itself to us [i.e. as *anwesend*] only when we are already moving within the projection [*im Entwurf*], within the 'as.'" δ(x) projects the what-for of things in x: their what-for, as in the kitchen-gadget case, is not in the set x but is in the set of all *Anwesen,* Ω. In the experience of *Angst* δ operates on the totality Ω to give ¬φ(δ(Ω)): it is not the case that the what-for (point, purpose) of the totality is meaningfully present to one; what is present in *Angst* is the nullity of that with which one can concern oneself; the totality as meaningless. But because the totality is projectible (ψ(Ω)) – and is disclosed in *Angst* **as** groundless, then φ(δ(Ω)), it is the case that its what-for **is** meaningfully present to one, is in the set Ω, **as** meaningless.[39] $\neg\varphi\big(\delta(\Omega)\big) \wedge \varphi\big(\delta(\Omega)\big)$.

The delta-operator – in the mode of *Angst*[40] – when applied to the totality Ω itself generates a novel entity – an understanding – which straddles the limit of Ω: grounded and groundless, worlded and unworlded; one foot in the abyss: the experience that the ultimate what-for of everything is that there is no ultimate what-for of anything.

So Heidegger claims that human existence – the sense-making life of ever generating what-fors and whys – is itself *ohne Warum*, without why.[41] Which, again, appears to be another way of saying that being-in-the-world is devoid of intrinsic nature: no *svabhāva*; only dependent origination, thrownness; *pratītyasamutpāda, Geworfenheit.* It is a further question whether by this understanding Heidegger 'extirpates the myth of the deep' or instead lays bare its taproot– Why 'the clearing' at all? – or, with Nietzsche, unearths another of life's tricks.

DCW 1/10/2020

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[39] No doubt there are better formulations of the existential Inclosure Schema; unfortunately they are not now accessible by me. The disanalogy with the Inclosure Schema lies in the fact that in the Schema δ and Ω are distinct. For being-in-the-world, however, 'taking-as' constitutes its understanding, *das Verstehen.* So for the case under consideration the application of δ to Ω is that impossible critter, a function which takes **itself** as argument. "A function cannot be its own argument, whereas an operation can take one of its own results as its base." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness 1961) 5.251, p. 42.

[40] Every mood has its understanding, every understanding its mood.

[41] "humans, in the concealed grounds of their essential being, first truly are when in their own way they are like the rose—without why." Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason* (tr. Reginald Lilly 1991) 38.