

**‘Sight’ or Insight?**  
**Fundamental Alternatives in Heidegger and Lonergan**

Michael Sharkey  
Professor of Humanities (Philosophy)  
University of Wisconsin-Platteville

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Daniel Arioli’s remarks for the present occasion show the same fine qualities of thought and expression as his dissertation, defended this past summer here in Dallas. I am lucky enough to have served as outside examiner for his defense, and am delighted to see new talent directed to the Heidegger-Lonergan exchange. Moreover, I am happy to see that, since the defense, Daniel has eased off to some degree on his claim of complementarity for these two thinkers, a thesis which was already qualified to a good degree in the thesis. But I do not think he has gone far enough in this direction. Why? Heidegger is devoted to ‘sight’, Lonergan to insight, and never the twain shall meet, it seems to me. ‘Sight’ is still a species of looking or of intuiting, however interpretive and falling, and it is in fact evidence of Heidegger’s continued indebtedness to the modern philosophic problematic. Heidegger regularly refuses the alternatives, empiricism or constructivism, but then opts for something like hermeneutic Platonism or Scotism--which is to miss the Lonerganian alternative. In what follows I’ll try to convince Dan of Heidegger’s oversight of insight.

I agree with what Dan says on page one, namely that “[f]or Heidegger, being is at the beginning, as the imperfectly disclosed, that which is always revealed and concealed” while “for Lonergan it is the terminus, the goal of knowing, that intended by all-inclusive notion.” I argued just this in my 2011 essay in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, “Heidegger, Lonergan, and the Notion of Being.” But I cannot agree with what Dan goes on to say next, namely that “It is, finally, this directional difference in how being is to be conceived that accounts for the distinction between Heidegger and Lonergan, in regards to Heidegger’s emphasis on *alethic* truth, and Lonergan’s greater emphasis on the truth of judgment which for Heidegger is always derivative and secondary.” For I do not take the difference here to be one of mere “directional difference.” As I noted in my essay, I take being, for Heidegger, to be intuited, a priori, or naturally, and take the understanding and judging which concretize and explicate that intuition to be themselves intuitive. I believe this conflicts with, and is not complementary to, Lonergan’s Thomist cognitional theory.

I agree again with what Dan says on page two, namely that “in the thought of both [Heidegger and Lonergan], there is an attempt to give an account of the human person’s basic mode of access to reality, which cannot be conceived as an intellectual beholding.” Heidegger is as staunch a critic of theoretical immediacy as is Lonergan, explaining that he has “deprived pure intuition (*Anschauung*) of its priority,”<sup>1</sup> by ensconcing it in a set of end-directed involvements. However this is only to situate intuition in everyday practical

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Richard Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 187.

context, where it interpretive and falling, subject to bias and cover-up of originary revelation. It is not to do away with it altogether, by acknowledging perfection and procession. If being is given at the top, as it were; concretized in practical understanding (*Verstehen*); and laid out (*aus-legen*) and said out (*aus-sagen*) in acts of progressive explication, there is no perfection in understanding, direct or reflective, and no procession therefrom in conception and assertion: there is neither development nor intelligent and rational causation. Everything has always already been accomplished and the human being functions almost as a sieve. The culminating event is no doubt the ‘moment of vision’, which has the ring of mystical intuition. The story is very far from Lonergan’s sober account of discursivity.

For these reasons—just given here, and not defended, I know—I am also hesitant about Dan’s likening of Heidegger’s Being-in-the-world to Lonergan’s patterns of experience. “[M]ight there not be some place, here [in connection with Lonergan’s doctrine of experience], for Heidegger’s concern with the way in which beings reveal themselves and step forth into the light of day prior to all conceptualization, formulation, and judgment?” I do not think so since, for Heidegger, such stepping forth is the result of practical understanding (or *Verstehen*) with its hermeneutic ‘as’, while for Lonergan understanding does not occur on this level. It is true that, for Lonergan, experience is always patterned by interest, but this is in sync with the cogitative sense, as Liz Murray has explained<sup>2</sup>, which is an affair of level one. And even Fr. Doran, who would identify a “minor intelligibility on level one,” insists that this must not problematize, even though it will likely “complicate” the structure.<sup>3</sup> I fear that Heidegger’s intuitionism would collapse the first three levels, at least.

Enough with these assertions of intuitionism, you will say! With the possible exception of Jacques Derrida, Heidegger is the critic-of-intuitionism par excellence. Or is he? I think it is important to make a distinction. There is the intuitionism of encounter, or confrontation with another unmediated by time, place, language or interest and so on. And there is the intuitionism which accepts these mediations but refuses discursivity. It is of course the latter sort that I attribute to Heidegger even though he clearly avoids the former. Yet from Lonergan’s perspective, Heidegger’s sort is perhaps the poorer of the two.

Let me now call attention to the passages in *Being and Time* in which Heidegger portrays method, the notion of being, experience in its internal and external dimensions, understanding, judging, and deciding all in terms of ‘sight’, and show how this amounts to oversight of insight. Of course, I can only offer promissory notes on this score. But I hope they may convince Dan that Heidegger misunderstands the pre-predicative, and indeed the predicative, and does not merely place the emphasis differently from Lonergan.

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Murray, “Wolves, Fingers, and Radii: An Inquiry into the Cogitative Act,” an unpublished essay.

<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Doran, SJ, “Empirical Consciousness in *Insight*: Is Our Conception too Narrow?” in John J. Liptay Jr. and David S. Liptay, eds., *The Importance of Insight: Essays in Honor of Michael Vertin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 49-63, and “Reception and Elemental Meaning: An Expansion of the Notion of Psychic Conversion,” in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 20, no. 1 (Fall 2004), 133-57.

In the methodological introduction to his opus, Heidegger says that his aim is ontology,<sup>4</sup> his route to it will be through fundamental ontology, or the analysis of Da-sein,<sup>5</sup> and the method of fundamental ontology is phenomenology.<sup>6</sup> Now, phenomenology, he tells us, is a logos of the phenomena, or an interpretive and discursive account of what is manifest.<sup>7</sup> The phenomena are what show themselves, in themselves.<sup>8</sup> But because they can be mistaken for the semblance and appearance that they ultimately make possible,<sup>9</sup> it is necessary to interpret them correctly. And for this logos, not in the sense of concept or judgment, but discourse (*Rede*), is required.<sup>10</sup> “[Logos] lets something be seen.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, for Heidegger, “‘phenomenology’ means ... to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”<sup>12</sup> And yet this is uncritical. For it affirms the matter for thought to be manifest, and to need only to be allowed to be seen. It takes the Be-ing of beings already to be given, and to be in need of mere interpretation.

In fact, for Heidegger, Being is not only *already* given, but *always* already given: it is a priori. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, the sequel to *Being and Time*, he describes its pre-possession:

Dasein dwells daily and first and for the most part solely with beings, even though it must already have understood being in that very process and in order to accomplish it. However, because the Dasein spends itself on and loses itself in that which is, in beings, both in itself, the Dasein, and in the sort of beings that it itself is not, the Dasein knows nothing about its having already understood being. Factically the existent Dasein has forgotten this prius. ... Plato, the discoverer of the apriori ... saw this.<sup>13</sup>

For Heidegger we understand being from the start, even if we forget or submerge the fact. For Lonergan, we do not “sight” it originally, and so can at best dull our anticipation of it.

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 49. “The task of ontology is to explain Being itself and to make the Being of entities stand out in full relief.” And “... the object which serves as the theme of our investigation ...[is] the Being of entities, or the meaning of Being in general.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 61. “[W]e found it necessary that there should be a fundamental ontology taking as its theme that entity which is ontologico-ontically distinctive, Dasein, in order to confront the cardinal problem—the question of the meaning of Being in general.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 60. “Phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology ... Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible.”

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 55, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 325-6.

There is perhaps one doctrine in connection with which Heidegger's 'sight' is unproblematic, and that is the two-fold doctrine of experience. If we may speak of both experience in its internal dimension, and by this mean self-awareness, and experience in its external dimension, and by this mean sensation, then Heidegger's understanding of sight may be serviceable.

Regarding the first, Heidegger speaks of the way in which we "sight" ourselves. "The sight which is related primarily and on the whole to existence," he says, "we call 'transparency' [*Durchsichtigkeit*]."

We choose this term to designate 'knowledge of the Self' in a sense which is well understood, so as to indicate that here it is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the 'Self', but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world *throughout all* the constitutive items which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding. In existing, entities sight 'themselves' [*sichtet 'sich'*] only in so far as they have become transparent to themselves with equal primordially in those items which are constitutive for their existence: their Being-alongside the world and their Being-with Others.<sup>14</sup>

Thus we are present to ourselves concomitant with our presence to else in the world. Indeed we understand ourselves through understanding else. We do not need to perform a kind of espionage on the ego in order to come together with it, but already self-coincide.

And with regard to the second, Heidegger says that aisthesis, or sense-perception, still provides a way of access to beings that cuts beneath modern, perceptualist divisions.

Aisthesis, the sheer sensory perception of something, is 'true' in the Greek sense, and indeed more primordially than the logos which we have been discussing [the one characterized allegedly by encounter]. Just as seeing aims at colors, any aisthesis aims at its own (those entities which are generally accessible only *through* it and *for* it); and to that extent this perception is always true. This means that seeing always discovers colours, and hearing always discovers sounds.<sup>15</sup>

Here Heidegger seems to speak of the "sense in act being the sensible in act," or the like. And if this is true, then it is a construal to which Lonergan might be amenable.

However, if Heidegger holds for a kind of identity on the level of experience, and indeed does so on the levels of understanding, judging, and deciding—or on what, in him, are the nearest analogues of these levels—I do not think this means he recognizes insight. For his practical understanding (*Verstehen*) does not possess the 5 features of insight, his interpretation (*Auslegung*) and assertion (*Aussage*) merely explicate understanding, and his moment of vision (*Augenblick*) does not occur in response to an intention of the good. Let me begin a defense of each of these claims, and conclude.

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<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

In section 31 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that “‘sight’... lets entities which are accessible to it be encountered unconcealedly in themselves.” “Of course,” he notes, “every ‘sense’ does this within that domain of discovery which is genuinely its own.” But “from the beginning onwards the tradition of philosophy has been oriented primarily towards ‘seeing’ as a way of access to entities *and to Being*.” And “[t]o keep the connection with this tradition,” he will “... formalize ‘sight’ and ‘seeing’ enough to obtain there-with a universal term for characterizing any access to entities or to Being.”<sup>16</sup>

Now ‘sight’, he says, “is grounded primarily in understanding [*Verstehen*],” or the “common sense” of everyday practical living.<sup>17</sup> And human being “*is* this sight .. in each of those basic ways of its Being: the circumspection [*Umsicht*] of concern, ... the considerateness [*Rucksicht*] of solicitude, [and] that sight which is directed upon Being as such ... for the sake of which any Dasein is as it is.”<sup>18</sup> So ‘sight’ is one with what it sees: it is understanding ‘by identity’.

But this does not mean it is insight. For even if in it, act and content are one, and one is at one with what one understands, whether this be one’s environs or others or one’s ownmost possibilities, it does not follow that this comes in response to question, suddenly and unexpectedly, as a result of inner and not outer conditions, pivots between the concrete and abstract, and enters into the habitual texture of the mind. And in fact there is little indication from Heidegger that it does. To the contrary, understanding seems to be given and not achieved, to be quite familiar, to be the result of socialization, to remain in the arena of the concrete, and to enter nowhere since it has already long been where it is.

Again the interpretation and assertion that follow understanding do not seem to be intelligently and rationally caused, as one would expect them to be if understanding were insight. For insight occurs in response to question, in the light of a standard of which we are implicitly aware, with the result that concrete grasp is *driven* to abstract formulation. And reflective insight occurs in response to a different question, in the light of a standard of which we are also implicitly aware, with the result that we are *propelled* to affirm real existence. Yet *Auslegung* and *Aussage* merely articulate and delineate what is grasped.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Heidegger’s moment of vision does not seem to be valuably caused. For to the degree that it occurs in response to anything, that is quite literally the nothing; and in fact it can seem wholly incommensurate with what precedes it. It may even be like divine insurrection or the intrusion of grace into a world foolishly grounded in concept and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 186. Emphasis removed.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., esp. pp. 189-90.

reason.<sup>20</sup> But if this is so, then it is clear that Heidegger's sight is not Lonergan's insight. Or so it seems to me. I genuinely wonder what my junior colleague might think about it.

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Rickey, *Revolutionary Saints: Heidegger, National Socialism, and Antinomian Politics* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).