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MYSTERY (*GEHEIMNIS*)

MYSTERY IS THE general and constitutive concealment that prevails over being and all that is. One of the central points of Heidegger's entire phenomenological approach is that something is unconcealed only against the background of this general concealment. Consequently, the mystery concerns essential aspects of Heidegger's philosophy such as LANGUAGE and TRUTH and is particularly connected to the CONCEPT OF BEING (*Sein*).

First of all, for Heidegger a mystery is not something that is not, or not yet properly, known. He explicitly says that the mystery is not something that cannot be explained adequately in a scientific manner (GA54:92–93). The openness of the mystery is not its explanation but on the contrary the acceptance of a general concealment (GA54:93). The structure of this concealment can be elucidated with Heidegger's main point that every disclosure or UNCONCEALMENT (*Entbergung*) can only be understood against the background of a concealment (*Verbergung*). This also is the core of Heidegger's concept of truth as ALËTHEIA. The structure of unconcealment through concealment is explicitly connected with the mystery (GA7:26/QCT 25; GA67:233), which in turn is specified as the essence of truth (*Wesen der Wahrheit*, GA9:196/150) or even as the highest mode of truth (*höchste Gestalt der Wahrheit*, GA39:119). In a metaphorical way, Heidegger illustrates the structure of unconcealment through concealment with the expression that the darkness (*das Dunkle*) is the mystery of the light (*des Lichtes*, GA11:138/BFL 88; GA79:93). Another metaphor for this structure is the simultaneous nearness and distance of the mystery (GA12:223/OWL 154), which is combined again with a metaphor of light: The supposed distance of the mystery turns out to be an incomprehensible nearness and is spelled out as the CLEARING (*Lichtung*, GA7:287–88/EGT 121–22).

Furthermore, the mystery is not a particular mystery about concrete entities, but the concealing of what is concealed as a whole, of entities as such (GA9:194/148–49). This leads to Heidegger's concept of being (*Sein*), which can be interpreted as an expression of the inconceivable fact of the existence of entities as such. In a famous phrase, Heidegger illustrates the concept of being as the miracle of all miracles: that entities are (*Wunder aller Wunder, dass Seiendes ist*, GA9:307/234). But entities are not only a miracle, but also a mystery, since Heidegger equates the mystery with the center of BEYNG (*Mitte des Seyns*, GA39:285) and with beyng itself, which, as a mystery, can be named in POETRY (GA39:250–51). In addition, he identifies the essence of the mystery (*Wesen des Geheimnisses*) with the truth of being (*Wahrheit des Seins*, GA5:265/197) and discusses the mystery of being (*Geheimnis des Seins, ibid.*). According to the above-mentioned characterization of the mystery as general concealment, the highest mystery of beyng (*das höchste Geheimnis des Seyns*) is the refusal (*Verweigerung*, GA79:77). An explicit connection of concealment (*Verborgenheit*), truth of the essence of beyng (*Wahrheit der Wesung des Seyns*), ADAPTATION (*Ereignis*), and mystery can be found in the *Contributions to Philosophy*: the mystery of adaptation is its concealment and this is the truth of the essence of beyng (GA65:78).

Another important use of the term “mystery” can be found in Heidegger's philosophy of language. Similar to his general approach, Heidegger refers in this context to the structure of

unconcealment through concealment and claims that the speech of a language (*das Sprechen der Sprache*) is an effect of unconcealment, which he again characterizes as an inapprehensible mystery (*unausdenkliches Geheimnis*, GA7:218/EGT 64) and particularly as the mystery of language (*Geheimnis der Sprache*, GA8:195/191). Again, Heidegger stresses the simultaneous nearness and distance of the mystery, which he also calls the mystery of the word (*Geheimnis des Wortes*, GA12:223/OWL 154). This mystery concerns language, but is itself ineffable (*ibid.*). Moreover, the origin (*Ursprung*) of language is a mystery (GA39:75) and that which cannot be said in words is also called a mystery (GA12:241–42/OWL 122–23).

The last two examples are not directly referring to the structure of unconcealment through concealment and there are some more examples of mystery in Heidegger's texts in a more general sense. DEATH, for example, is called the mystery of being (*Geheimnis des Seins*, GA7:180/PLT 176) or the mystery of life (*Geheimnis des Lebens*, GA16:90, 279) respectively, and he also discusses the mystery of the game (*Geheimnis des Spiels*, GA10:167/112, 169/113) in the context of Heraclitus. While it might be possible to relate these examples to the general concealment, this would be really hard for the mystery of the belfry (*Geheimnis des Glockenturms*, GA13:113–16), to which Heidegger dedicated a small text in 1954.

More important is the question of how to deal with the mystery. This question immediately leads back to the center of Heidegger's philosophy. It is one of its central aims, if not its central aim of all, to provoke a shift in the attitude toward the world. The human being should consider himself as part of an incomprehensible adaptation (*Ereignis*), which Heidegger discusses in his entire philosophy. This is the key idea of his concept of the world in the early lectures, of the BEING-IN-THE-WORLD in *Being and Time*, of adaptation in the *Contributions*, and of the FOURFOLD in his later texts. In terms of the mystery, this aim can be formulated as the demand of conceiving the mystery *as* mystery (GA4:24/42–43), of admiring (*verehren*) the mystery (GA29/30:510) or of letting the mystery be what it is (*das Geheimnis wahrhaft sein lassen*, GA39:119). To conceive the mystery as mystery, the mystery must be obvious (*offenbar*, *ibid.*). Accordingly, Heidegger's concept of a new attitude toward the world, which he sometimes calls RELEASEMENT (*Gelassenheit*), is related to the openness for the mystery (*Offenheit für das Geheimnis*, GA16: 528/DT 55). In an address on releasement in 1955 he explicates the mystery exactly in the aforementioned sense as unconcealment through concealment (*ibid.*) and identifies the mystery with the hidden sense of the technological world and the openness for the mystery with the releasement to things (*ibid.*).

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REFERENCES IN HEIDEGGER

- Mystery and concealment** GA6.2:334, 336/N4 226–27, 228; GA9:194–98/148–51; GA39:119; GA54:92–93; GA65:78; GA67:233
To conceive the mystery as mystery GA4:24–25/42–44, 28–31/46–49; GA12:140/OWL 50; GA39:119, 234–35, 246–52, 284–85; GA54:93
Mystery and language GA12:217–25/OWL 148–56
Mystery of the belfry GA13:113–16

FURTHER READING

Hatab 1983, Withy 2017, Wrathall 2011