Article

The Subjection of the Question of Being in a Secular Age: The Young Heidegger's Confrontation with Modern Constitution and Identity

Yohei Kageyama

Abstract: In Heidegger's philosophy, a human being is defined by his or her relation to Being in general. And given this relation, the human being is further characterized as dialogue and especially as a questioner in his later philosophy of language. This poses a problem about how human being as the questioner was subjected in the development of Heidegger's philosophy that was always standing in dialogue with its spiritual-historical circumstance. In this paper, I will examine how such a questioner of Being was formed in the context of secularization and identity politics in the young Heidegger's lifeworld when he was a theology student around 1910. In the first section, I will consider Messkirch's local newspaper and make clear Heidegger's attitude toward the tension between the state and the church whose uncertainty motivated the question of Being. In the second section, I will overview the writers around 1900, especially Wilde, with whom the young Heidegger confronted as regards the problem of the modern identity, and explain the role of the poet Jørgensen for him to overcome the rootlessness of modernity. This project of overcoming was destined to remain incomplete, the uncertainty of which was the motivational environment to the question of Being.

Keywords: Heidegger, ontology, secularization, subjection

In a fictional dialogue with a Japanese Germanist in 1955, Heidegger wrote:

So läge alles daran, in ein entsprechendes Sagen von der Sprache zu gelangen.

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Ein solches sagendes Entsprechen könnte nur ein Gespräch sein.¹

The first quotation takes out human speech that corresponds to and makes visible "Sprache" as the house of Being. As Heidegger characterized his later concept of language by pointing out its function of "Versammlung," the language at stake here is not ordinary natural language such as German or Japanese, but the fundamental dimension of the relation between Being and human beings within which the understanding of the beings as beings is related to the factum of this understanding. For Heraclitus, $\xi v \pi \alpha v \tau \alpha$ is not a matter of assertion, but the way how Λόγος manifests itself.² And it is this ἔν that "assembles (versammelt)" and lets beings be "as such and as a whole (als solches und im Ganzen)." For Kant, the synthetic unity of apperception is the "λόγος in the primordial sense" that "unites and assembles (versammelnd)."4 Apperception as $\lambda \acute{o} \gamma o \varsigma$ is "the place (Ort)" within which "the logic" could first guide us "in determining the concepts (categories) of being of beings."5 Language in Heidegger's sense is accordingly the place into which human understanding of beings as such (als solches) is related, i.e., "assembled," while this understanding is always facing and confronting beings as a whole (im Ganzen).

The second quotation states that an "Entsprechen" to "Sprache" could only be in "Gespräch." The later Heidegger related human speech to the concept of " $\lambda \acute{o} \gamma o \varsigma$ " in *Being and Time*, 6 where " $\lambda \acute{o} \gamma o \varsigma$ " is defined as "making visible" by "the speakers that mutually speak to each other (*die miteinander Redenden*)." Given this, we could assume that an "Enstprechen" could only be in "Gespräch" because "the assembly (*Versammlung*)" of the relation between Being and human beings could show itself (*sich zeigen*) in its *middle voice* only through a mutual and verbal exchange that transcends each other's perspective.

These two passages have significant consequences for today's philosophical inquiry of human beings. As was suggested in *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger criticized the metaphysical concept of humans and tried to capture the essence of human beings concerning Being.⁷ Given that the fundamental relation of human beings to Being is accomplished through

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¹ Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 14. Aufl. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 151.

² Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittolio Klostermann, 2000). 225.

³ Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 7, Vorträge und Aufsätze, 225.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 9, Wegmarken (Frankfurt am Main: Vittolio Klostermann, 1976), 462.

⁵ Ibid., 462.

⁶ Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 7, 218f.

⁷ Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 9, 336.

the Question of Being,⁸ it can be said that the ability to question Being is the most important aspect of human beings and that the human nature of questioning Being is accomplished only through dialogue.⁹

Now, the motif of the "human beings as questioner" accomplished through dialogue needs to be considered against the background of the later Foucault's concept of "subjection," so that we could estimate the reach of Heidegger's idea of humanity in the time when even the project of "post-humanity" is being discussed. As is well known, Foucault stated that the moral self-reflexivity of consciousness necessarily involves "styles of subjection," that is, "the various systems of rules and values at work in the society or group in question, and the institutions and devices with a coercive force that embody these systems." ¹⁰ In other words, the self-identity of the subject is always established simultaneously with a particular order of communal norms. A similar idea is found in the later assertion that the subject is constituted through "practices of subjection" as "practices of freedom" in "a certain number of rules, forms, and conventions found in the cultural environment." ¹¹

Foucault was considering ancient philosophies such as Stoicism. Now, in what kind of "cultural environment" of "dialogue" is Heidegger's human beings "questioning Being" subjected? In this paper, as one such environment of "dialogue," we examine Heidegger's texts written before and after he gave up his theology major around 1910 and examine how Heidegger, who was brought up as a very conservative Catholic, constituted himself and showed up as questioner in the conflict of a secular age. In the dialogue mentioned above, he expected his Japanese interlocutor to stand in a different house of Being that could enable them to withhold from being absorbed into the era of technology and Western metaphysics. However, this could be Heidegger's Orientalism, and the uncritical acceptance of this by the non-Western world could be an internalization of Orientalism. Instead, it would be more significant to examine Heidegger's own "cultural" or academic-political environment, as this would provide a more helpful basis for questioning Being in the Asian context.



⁸ Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, 18. Aufl. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer. 2001), 14f.

⁹ I discussed this notion of humanity and its consequences for basic questions of philosophy such as general metaphysics and categories, reality and world, and human existence in the following monograph: Yohei Kageyama, *Introduction to Philosophy beginning from Questions* (Tokyo: Kobun-sha, 2021) [in Japanese]. Korean translation, 질문으로 시작하는 철학 입문. 2022.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *L'usage des Plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). Quote is from the Japanese translation by Tamura Hajime (Tokyo: Shinyo-sha, 1986), 470f.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, "The Use of Pleasure and the Techniques of the Self," quoted from the Japanese translation, *Michel Foucault Collected Thoughts vol. IX* (Tokyo: Chikuma-shobo, 2001), 250f.

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In this paper, we reconsider the interpretive frame of the standard Heidegger studies on his youth. Various studies, such as Otto's Heidegger – Unterwegs zu seiner Biografie (1988), Safranski's Ein Meister aus Deutschland (1994), and Heidegger Jahrbuch, Volume I (2004) have examined Heidegger in his early years. The results include historical accounts of Heidegger's dependence on Catholic scholarship and his struggle for a faculty position in Catholic theology, but above all, the "Kulturkampf" and Catholic "Antimodernismus" in the Grand Duchy of Baden in the early 20th century. In this paper, we agree with their focus on the Kulturkampf in Baden. However, we reject the political slogan of "Antimodernismus" as an interpretive frame for Heidegger's thought. The term "anti-modern" is just an index of some conflict, which can be "pre-modern," "non-modern," or "hyper-modern." It can scarcely clarify the matter. In contrast, we will consider the "origin (Herkunft)" of Heidegger's Question of Being against the background of "secularization," since it gives a more comprehensive frame to analyze the tension between religion and modernity. In recent years, the authors such as Habermas and Taylor have discussed secularization. This resonates with the tension between Islam and right-wing Christian beliefs in the public sphere in Europe and the U.S. In Japan, a religious cult also exerts influence on the ruling party. Given this situation, "secularization" is useful to interpret Heidegger and provides an effective clue to the place of the Question of Being in our historical context.

The first section below examines texts on the relationship between the modern constitution and the church around 1910. In the second section, we examine texts on human identity in the literature of the *Jahrhundertwende*. Overall, we argue that the "cultural environment" in which humans who question Being are subjected is a situation in which the relationship with God becomes indeterminate, typically a situation of secularization.

The Conflict between the Modern Constitution and the Church: Heidegger in Messkirch's Local Newspaper

There is evidence that Heidegger's first "Question of Being" was when he was still almost a theology student. In an article he contributed to the *Akademiker*, the journal of the conservative "Catholic Students' Union," in May 1911, Heidegger wrote:

Und bei diesem Hin- und Herflattern, bei dem allmählich zum Sport gewordenen Feinschmeckertum in philosophischen Fragen bricht doch ... das Verlangen hervor nach abgeschlossen, abschliessenden Antworten auf die Entfragen des Seins, die zuweilen so jäh

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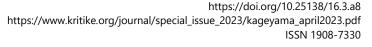
aufblitzen, und die dann manchen Tag ungelöst wie Bleilast auf der gequälten, ziel- und wegarmen Seele liegen.¹²

Heidegger was only 21 years old. This "Question of Being" is, of course, not directly connected to *Being and Time*. He speaks here of the subject matter of the Catholic faith, God as the ground of all beings. This itself is more a classical question of metaphysics or theology than the "Question of Being" posed in *Being and Time*. Still, the young Heidegger was not simply discussing the metaphysical ground of beings, but he situated himself in the uncertainty of such ground that is revealed in the tension of secularization. In this situation, the facticity of the coming-into-existence of all beings is experienced as the subject matter of question. As "Hin- und Herflattern" suggests, and as previous researchers have pointed out, this "Question" derived from faith is situated in the political conflict of the *Kulturkampf* in Baden.

As one aspect of this conflict, Heidegger wrote an article in a local newspaper in Messkirch about the conflict between the modern constitution and the church. The Grand Duchy of Baden, originally established during the Napoleonic Wars, was liberal in its secular power, such as parliament. However, because of its geographical proximity to the Vatican, it had a large Catholic population, and the secular power and the church were at odds over such issues as the right to ordain clergy. This conflict was also seen in the local newspapers in Messkirch, where the liberals launched the "Oberbadische Grenzboten" and the Catholic conservatives the "Heuberger Volksblatt" and engaged in a debate. On April 5, 1911, a liberal commentator of the "Grenzboten" criticized the Catholic conservatives and the Zentrum party for "denying freedom of conscience, freedom of worship, and freedom of academic research." To this, Heidegger, under the pseudonym "g.g.," replied in the "Volksblatt" (April 7) as follows:

[Just as the state restricts the freedom of action of its citizens in times of existential crisis], noch mehr hat die Kirche das Recht und die Pflicht, die Gläubigen zu schützen [...] und kann deshalb verlangen, daß die höchsten Güter des Menschen nicht von jedermann in Reden und Schriften frei und ungehindert entwürdigt, verspottet und verhöhnt werden können. ¹³

¹³ Martin Heidegger, "Dem Grenzbot-Philosophen zur Antwort," Heuberger Volksblatt.
1911.4.7, zitiert nach Elisabeth Büchin, Alfred Denker, Martin Heidegger und seine Heimat (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 65.





¹² Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 16, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittolio Klostermann, 2000), 11 (emphasis added).

dagegen kann die bürgerliche politische Toleranz, wonach Andersgläubigen die Ausübung ihrer Religion zugelassen oder Religionsfreiheit gewährt wird, im Interesse des öffentlichen Friedens un zur Vermeidung größerer Übel gestattet und selbst *pflichtmäßig* sein, zumal wenn dieselbe durch öffentlichen Verträge und völkerrechtliche Akte sanktinoiert wurde. ¹⁴

The first quotation indicates the position that freedom of speech in the public sphere may be restricted for the sake of the dignity of faith. What is in mind would not be general religious criticism, but the kind of insulting speech that today would depict Muhammad in the way a French satirical magazine portrayed him, demeaning to the faithful. The second quote is the position that freedom of religion, a principle of the modern constitution, should be recognized to avoid religious wars. For a person of faith, his faith is unique and cannot be paralleled with others, but neither can he intervene in the faith of others.

These two points can be seen as public aspects of the uncertainty imposed on faith in a secular age. As Hegel summarized in his Philosophy of Law, the basic principle of the modern constitution is that religion, which is an inner matter, does not interfere with the objective legal regime of the state, and conversely, the state does not interfere with the inner faith of its citizens. 15 Heidegger never disagreed with this most important principle of the modern constitution. However, the institutionalization of religious freedom means, for the faithful, to live in a community in which the only thing that is, for him, the meaning of life and the Ground of his whole world, becomes essentially a one-of-them, juxtaposed with the beliefs of those who do not share it. This brings us to the third meaning of secularization, which Taylor says is "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged [...] to one in which it is understood to be one option among others." 16 In this public life, faith is suspended, neither affirmed nor denied and in this sense, the very commitment to the ground of all beings begins to exist as an indeterminate "Ouestion."

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¹⁴ Heidegger, "Dem Grenzbot-Philosophen zur Antwort," 66f.

¹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkmap, 1970 [1821]), 418f.

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge: Belknap Harvard, 2007), 3.

Identity in Literature at the *Jahrhundertwende*, Catholicism as Overcoming of Modernity, and its Limits

In "Per mortem ad vitae," which he contributed to *Akademiker* in May 1910, Heidegger wrote as follows:

In unseren Tagen spricht man viel von »Persönlichkeit«. ... Die Person des Künstlers rückt in den Vordergrund. So hört man denn viel von interessanten Menschen. O. Wilde, der Dandy, P. Verlaine, der »geniale Säufer«, M. Gorky, der grosse Vagabund der Uebermensch Nietzsche – interessante Menschen.¹⁷

Safranski interprets this passage as a resentment against urban personalities, and Takada sees it as a reaction against liberal individualism. However, their claims are not well-founded, because they do not provide a grounded interpretation of Heidegger's specific confrontation with the modern identity that is represented in the *Jahrhundertwende* literature of Wilde, Verlaine, and Gorky. In what follows, we will examine Heidegger's confrontation with the late modern identity, with a particular focus on Wilde, and review the ideas of Jorgensen, the Danish Catholic poet in whom Heidegger saw overcoming of modernity. We will then examine Heidegger's position.

In Wilde's classic novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* "personality" and "dandy" are described as follows:

a complex personality took the place and assumed the office of art, was indeed, in its way, a real work of art, Life having its elaborate masterpieces, just as poetry has, or sculpture, or painting.¹⁹

To him [Dorian] Life itself was the first, the greatest, of the arts, Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment universal, and *Dandyism*, which,



¹⁷ Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 16, 3.

¹⁸ Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland*, quoted from the Japanese trans. by Yamamoto Yu (Hosei University Press. 1996), 37. Cf. Tamaki Takada, *Heidegger: The History of Being* (Tokyo: Kodan-sha, 2014), 49f.

¹⁹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (London. Penguin Books, 1985 [1891]), 57.

in its own way, is an attempt to assert *the absolute* modernity of beauty²⁰

The first quote shows that "personality" is not just individualism, but has a specific meaning in the 19th-century notion of aesthetic self-creation. The second citation shows that "dandyism" represents the modern identity of aesthetic self-creation. To review the spiritual history, "dandyism," which was used negatively in the early 19th century as "a lack of manners," became in the middle of the century, as Barbey said, "the ability to be oneself" by attracting others' attention through fashion. ²¹ Baudelaire further states that a dandy "has no other occupation than to cultivate in himself the idea of beauty, to gratify his passions, to feel and think." ²² "The absolute modernity of beauty" in the quote is the consequence of this modern secular identity that sustains its existence through aesthetic self-creation, not God.

This self-creation is inseparable from social exclusion over identity issues. As is well known, Wilde was a homosexual and was imprisoned for two years in England, where homosexuality was illegal at the time. As Wilde argued in court, homosexuality itself is a person's innate sexual orientation and cannot be "against nature." However, in a society that forbade homosexuality at the time, practicing homosexuality and actively deviating from the majority norm became the basis for confirming Wilde's own existence. A century before Judith Butler discussed physical performances that "subvert" gender identity, Wilde was practicing it. This kind of social exclusion, in which deviance itself becomes an identity, can be said of both Verlaine and Gorky. For Verlaine, a life of "Säufer" and "decadence" would have represented the poet's "technique of dying beautifully" in an attempt to deviate from existing artistic norms.²³ Stéphane Mallarmé, his close ally in symbolism, praised therefore Verlaine's lifestyle as that of a poet being "outlaw (hors la loi)." 24 For Gorky, a wanderer himself in his youth, the "vagabond" represented in his early novel "Chelkash" is the image of a person who has lost his home and finds freedom in drifting.²⁵ In other words, a "vagabond" finds his identity in rejection of belonging to home and exile.

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²⁰ Ibid., 125.

²¹ Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, Du Dandysme et de George Brummell (Paris: Édition Payot, 1997); Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, Œuvres romanesques complètes t.2 (Paris: Gallimards, 1966), 669.

²² Charles-Pierre Baudelaire, Œuvres complètes II (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 709f.

²³ Ernest Raynaud, *La mêlée symboliste: portraits et souvenirs* (Paris: La naissance du livre, 1920), 64f. quoted from the following database: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

²⁴ Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1891), 62. quoted from the following database: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

²⁵ Maxim Gorky, Gorky's Short Stories (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1966), 133. (In Japanese.)

What alternative, then, does Heidegger's Jorgensen offer to this identity? In conclusion, it is a state in which the modern self-created identity is so internally radicalized that the grace of the transhuman Absolute is manifested, thus affirming all identities equally, regardless of whether they are majorities or minorities. Jorgensen, one of the representative modern Danish poets, was an atheist in his youth, influenced by the naturalist Georg Brandes. Later, however, he defected from Brandes and became devoted to Verlaine's symbolism. According to Jorgensen, Verlaine originally believed the modern human "principle of the flesh" thoroughly, but after his conversion to Catholicism (Saggese (1880), Verlaine became "a turning point in the spiritual history of the 19th century" in which the "principle of the flesh" was inverted into insight into the divine.26 Such inversion is depicted in "De profundis," a poem dedicated to the death of Verlaine. On one hand, Jorgensen described Verlaine's decadence as an eternal drifting in which he loses forever his possessions. On the other hand, when he lost everything and even his life, his drifting als vanishes with a slight expectation of God.

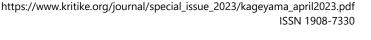
> Night and day, pleasure and pain, they vanish like misty fog, when a soul stands in front of death, God's servant²⁷

It is this inversion that made Jorgensen also break away from symbolism and turned to Christianity, becoming Europe's leading Catholic writer. The character of Catholic identity that *transcends* modern identity is expressed in his *St. Francis of Assisi*.

For *all things*, to live is unquestionably happiness, and to thank the Father for life is a simple and innocent duty.²⁸

As Verlaine described the "technique of dying beautifully," the essence of self-creation is self-denial, which incessantly overcomes the current existing identity. Jorgensen believes that at the extreme of this self-denial, the grace of the Absolute, which transcends the human self, manifests itself. And, taking on the idea of St. Francis that all things become brothers as gifts of God in the poverty of non-possession, the Grace of the Absolute gifts happiness to all identities.

²⁸ Johannes Jørgensen, *St. Francis of Assisi*, Japanese trans. by Nagano Fujio (Tokyo: Heibon-sha, 1997), 329.



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²⁶ Henrik Johnson, "The Route to Catholicism: Symbolism and Idealism in the Works of Johannes Jørgensen," in *Scandinavian Studies*, 93, no. 1 (2021), 52f.

²⁷ Johannes Jørgensen, *The Poems of Jorgensen*, Japanese trans. by Yamamuro Shizuka (Tokyo: Yayoi-shobo, 1973), 55.

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Now, in "Per mortem ad vitae," Heidegger almost literally introduced Jorgensen's assertion that with the *death* of the lower life, supernatural grace appears, ²⁹ Heidegger at this point saw Catholicism as overcoming the attainments of the modern identity. While previous researchers such as Safranski understood Heidegger's attitude toward modernity as the resentment and reaction to urban and personalistic identity, Heidegger himself aims at an immanent overcoming of modernity as the consequence of radicalizing the modern identity. Heidegger's antimodernism is, exactly speaking, hyper-modernism.

However, Heidegger could not rest on his laurels with Catholicism for epistemological reasons, as he clearly stated in the late 1910s in his defection from the Catholic system. ³⁰ I prefer to think that it was a philosophical issue, not an external circumstance such as a scholarship or a faculty post. This is because the argument of inversion from self-denial to grace is incomplete. There is no epistemological guarantee of the reality of Grace since it is impossible to say when the negation is completed from the point of view of the self-denying human being. As with the "possibility of the impossibility of existence in general" in *Being and Time*, the completion of self-denial remains a pure possibility for the person concerned.

But for my part, I see in this incompleteness an internal opportunity for the subjection of the Question of Being in the context of secularization. For the theology student Heidegger, God as the basis of the whole beings is first of all accessed in faith, just as his "Endfragen des Seins" was discussed in the Catholic journal. But as long as faith in the secular age is explained with the logic of self-denial, then, as just noted, human's orientation toward God becomes simply uncertain, a pure "Question" that cannot itself be answered by faith. Faith itself in secularization is a pre-philosophical matter, a matter within Plato's cave, so to speak, but I would like to see here one of the "cultural environments" in which humans who question Being are subjected.

Kwansei Gakuin University Nishinomiya, Japan

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²⁹ Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 16, 5.

³⁰ Brief an Engelbert Krebs / 9. Jan. 1919, in Alfred Denker, Hans-Helmuth Gander, Holger Zaborowski (eds.), *Heidegger Jahrbuch* 1 (Munich: Alber, 2004), 67.

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