

# Spiritual and Religious Speech as a Poem Inspired by Heidegger's Fouring

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## Abstract

The article is based on Heidegger's understanding of the world as the so-called fourings, in which one relates to counterparts who are not entirely graspable to him, yet provide a person with a significant orientation. Such an orientation relates to the spiritual aspects of life. It is not possible to speak about them in the same way as everyday things in ordinary or professional scientific language, because by their very nature they do not allow for grasping in the form of definitions. Instead, poetry is presented as a possible testimony of spiritual aspects, the subtle. It does not seek to give a definitive description and explanation, but rather to capture the substance and, above all, to invite humans on the path to what it says. Poetry is presented as an important part of education and erudition, where in the spiritual direction the scientifically conceived language will not suffice.

## Keywords

Heidegger; fouring; spiritual life; poetry; upbringing of man to wholeness.

## Opening

This reflection essay attempts to raise a question. This question is not about a poem, poetry or a literary mode as a spiritual or religious testimony. It asks the other way around, whether spiritual or religious speech is not always a poem by nature when it strives for a deep testimony.

## How one understands oneself and the world in the context of Heidegger's fouring

Heidegger draws from Hölderlin's verses when he tries to capture human existence, and agrees that "poetically man dwells" (Heidegger 1971). This dwelling, as Heidegger explains, does not mean to have a shelter. It actually means something essential, namely "the basic character of human existence" (Heidegger 1971, 213). For Heidegger, poetry is a way of this dwelling, providing peace for man, human interplay with Sky and Divinities. He says, among other things, that man belongs to the "fouring" of the Earth, Sky, Divinities and Mortals, who are so as to be to each other. They are determined by their relationship with each other and to each other. They form oneness. "But the fouring does not come about in such a way that it encompasses the four and only afterward is added to them as that compass. Nor does the fouring exhaust itself in this, that the four, once they are there, stand side by side singly. The fouring, the unity of the four, presences as the appropriating mirror-play of the betrothed, each

to the other in simple oneness. The fouring presences as the worlding of world” (Heidegger 1971, 178).

A person belongs with the world as a Mortal. Mortality relates to the clinging to life and postponing of death. Mortality is not death, it is a possibility of death. “As long as man is mortal, his death is not around” (Benyovszky 2012, 37). He is Mortal on Earth, under the Sky and in front of the Divine. Earth in this context is not just the planet. It is more of a foundation which we dwell on, which we rise from. Sky represents a measure. For setting measure does not belong to man. Man is, for example, unable to decide what will become a truth. One can identify it, yet not determine it. In this sense, measure is transcendent to man. One can recognize it, but not manipulate it. One can subject himself to it. But he cannot subject it to himself without deforming its expression. Sky represents a measure – it is not subject to our arbitrariness and manipulation. It is a counterpart to the Earth we are on. The counterpart of Mortals are the Divinities – the unreachable which we relate to. They are the unattainable, yet manifest themselves as a source of hope for the meaningfulness of ourselves. In a fouring, everything is a part of a whole, it is together and towards itself, it constitutes unity. Sky surpasses the Earth and refers to the Divinities. Mortals are entrusted and devoted to the Earth, open towards the Sky and Divinities. Poetry is a participation in a fouring, in relation to the world (cf., Benyovszky 2012). Thus, poetry is a way of being, of man belonging with the fouring.

### **A poem as an attempt to capture the unspeakable**

Man in the world relates not only to the things he has at his disposal or to the people with whom he can communicate, but also to what goes beyond him, which is not available to him at all – to what is not reachable like things are. It is not graspable for physical manipulation, nor for manipulation by the force of language. In the end, we only have our ordinary language to express the extraordinary, the intangible. When we talk about what is extraordinary, uncommon, sacred, incomprehensible, all we have to do is use common and mundane words. We do not know other words. Therefore, we have to use ordinary words in an extraordinary, poetic way.

The “poetic dwelling” can be understood in such a way, that what is deep (deepest) within man or within the world can only be spoken about in a poetic manner. In this case, poetry is not the rhyming of words, but rather the rhyming of understanding and the profound truth. It is about finding something deep and substantial that is difficult to grasp in words – more precisely, what defies an exact expression in definitions. Poetry springs from submitting to the transcendent claim of something great, to which it speaks and to which it refers. “But man is capable of poetry at any time only to the degree to which his being is appropriate to that which itself has a liking for man and therefore needs his presence” (Heidegger 1971, 226). In this sense, the poem is just a partial testimony about the whole, but at the same time it captures something important. It is not banal. It impacts the whole it testifies about. In this way, it is possible to testify about what defies a clear, always valid definition. In this manner, it is possible to testify, for example, about human life, which is dynamic and constantly changing. A poem does not simplify what it talks about by claiming to say everything. It does

not simplify things as models and diagrams do. Instead, it strives to convey the essential. And it does so as long as it stays real and authentic.

This poetry is the touching of the substantial and profound. It resembles the astonishment from which philosophy is born. Perhaps it resembles Wittgenstein's silence from what cannot be completely said. It is argued that philosophy and contemplative silence can be a kind of poem, a gripping of something deep. (Even silence can be a strong testimony.) It is a way of human relationship to what is deep and the deepest. The world (as a fouring) is so deep it cannot be expressed in full in a human speech. It cannot be defined – that is, to say everything about it, to determine the beginning and the end. Every honest testimony will always be partial. At the same time, it can be a reference to the whole, a celebration of depth, a poem.

Sokol points out that human life, simply put, takes place in three layers that interact with each other. At the top is the layer of normal daily operation, characterized by the utilization of available options without much thought. It is using things in accordance with the manual, without having to know how those things function inside. The layer of a creative approach is a deeper one. One goes under the surface of normal use, to understand how things work. A creative approach seeks the new and even risks at times. It does not stick to mere use and consumption. It is actually the source for the shallower layer of normal operation. The spiritual layer is the deepest one. It represents deep sources of human endeavour and heading, the deepest of motivations. It is the source of the previous layer. It touches the reason for life and human existence. Sokol calls these layers civilization, culture and religion. But in addition to culture, we could also talk about science and technology, which go beyond the superficial approach of using things and are undoubtedly creative. Aside from religion, we could also talk about spiritual life, because the deepest human grounding does not have to be discovered and manifested only in ways that can be called religious. Substantial philosophy and sometimes also art can also be considered spiritual paths.

To keep things simple, let's stick to calling the deepest layer a religion. It includes, among other things, questions about the meaning of human existence as well as questions as to whether human existence can lean on or capture something that transcends man and is therefore not subject to him, thanks to which it can become a measure or direction for man, as Heidegger recognizes in the Divine fouring. These questions aim deep under the layer of regular operation. They refer to transcendence. They invite from the layer of regular to the depth of the extraordinary, sacred. This brings along certain difficulties in terms of expression and communication. To express the extraordinary, we can only use ordinary language. This is why the expression of spiritual depth often uses the language of analogies and symbols, which can describe plenty, but it is not possible to perceive them in their literal meaning as unambiguous definitions. In this context, a poem can be understood, not as a mere rhyme, but as a symbolic speech that captures something deep.

If we call a testimony a poem, it is not to belittle it. It is the other way around. A poem represents a piece of art, an authentic testimony. It is a result of creation, in which deep themes are captured. It is also important whether a poem is good, whether the experience of depth resonates within it, rather than being just a superficial rhyme. When compared to scientific work, a poem is not more or less. It is an entirely different speech. It is valuable

when it is substantial and profound. Therefore, delivering a poem is not a banality. It is the manifestation of searching, the manifestation of the attempt to find. It is the staying on the path, Not resting in the definite destination. It appears that in spiritual context one can be a pilgrim for all his life. It is poems that can accompany him on his journey and describe it to him in many ways. (This does not mean he is not accompanied by certain prose in matters of everyday life.)

### **Religious testimony as a poem**

We can even take a look at religion in the narrower sense of the word, that is, at a specific path by which the general need for spiritual grounding or search can be fulfilled. In the European cultural context, it will be mainly Christianity. Some sacred texts of Christianity and Judaism have a distinct literary form of a poem or song. But this is not all. In the context of the aforementioned, we can say that any testimony of a deep spiritual experience, about a relationship to a transcendent counterpart, can be a poem. Since it is a testimony of what is not definitively graspable, this is what is not definable in a way that is clearly defined (of a transcendent nature). This is also shown in the context of the aforementioned Christianity, as is evident in Christian authors:

Whatever we say about God can only be a symbol that obscures more than it reveals and loses any good meaning if we take it 'literally'. Then we forget about the nobility of the God's mystery, and our words and images cease to be humble references to silence and become mischievously blasphemous idols and obstacles instead of bridges (Halík, Jandourek 1997, 276).

When we begin to speak about God as who 'is', we can only speak in parables, metaphors, and paradoxes. God is certainly not a thing in any conceivable sense, God is nothing imaginable or conceivable, he is not alive in the zoological sense, he is not conventionally depictable or imaginable, and in no way is he a so-called supernatural being (Vácha 2014, 42).

We can call the transcendent fullness of existence a God, but there is one condition. No testimony should be given a definite, sole and always valid meaning. In other words, unfortunately, nothing we say about God is unambiguous. Admittedly, we are coming to relativization here, which may hurt many. People who search plainly for reassurance may be disappointed by it. (...) However, they do not realize that they have failed to place their assurance in God himself. Instead, they have put their full trust in something as weak as human words. Words do not have iconic function for them. They are not transparent. They do not lead the mind above them and behind them, as do the icons that refer from themselves to the mystery shown. For them words become an idol. They overshadow God and stand in his place. The Bible, dogmas, summits, catechisms or denominations are their idols (Štampach 2000, 49).

Therefore, if a religious testimony is to be true, it must present a reference above and beyond itself, in depth. This is also how we understand poem in our context.

Understanding spiritual or religious speeches as poems certainly does not mean admitting any sort of interpretation. Certainly, there is a certain risk of intentional or unintentional confusion of context, as well as a risk of misunderstanding. But it is necessary to take this risk, because only with it, will it be possible to lead a speech which will be a testimony of the unspeakable. If we are to think that we have found a definition in the scientific sense, it is very likely that our speech will lead to the materialization of something that is not a thing. Once we are aware of the poetic conception of our speech, we can refer to and testify to what is not a thing and resists to be grasped. A poem may represent a bridge being built with the risk that it will not lead the intended goal or that it will be difficult to cross. Yet at the same time it is being built in the hope that it will be perceived and used as a bridge. Then it can become an important step in finding paths to the spiritual layer of life.

### **In education, scientific speech is not sufficient, it needs poem too**

We can understand education as the care of a human being as a whole, and at the same time as the care of the world as a whole. Such education faces, among other things, the question of inspiration for the spiritual layer of life and the world. It will balance between the manipulative indoctrination on one hand and the inability to express something strong and convincing on the other. This dichotomy can be exceeded by understanding the potential of poetic speech as an authentic and in this sense the true reference to the unspeakable or indefinable.

Educational inspiration for the spiritual life cannot then be conceived as a field of education powered by the knowledge of the relevant exact science. In an exact, scientific way we can only investigate religious, philosophical or literary texts in the formal manner, and not the message of this text, which is radically personal. The task of education here is above all openness to questions and the offer of poetic testimonies. The offer means the possibility to freely reject, but also the possibility to freely accept, critically examine, or transform. Here, education is an invitation. It is not a presentation of ready-made truths for an approval. The key value is openness, both on the part of the educated and on the part of the educators. Openness is the opposite of “thickheadedness”, blindness, indoctrination. It means that education will not offer final solutions and definite answers. But it will offer much more. An invitation for a journey. A poem and poetry may help with it. This is because a poem is always somewhat open. It does not claim to be definite. Yet it refers to the depth. It opens the way.

### **Conclusion**

Poetically, man dwells. Namely, that on Earth under the Sky it relates to the Divine and recognizes himself as Mortal. He thus recognizes the world in its wholeness. Aside from tangible things, he also reaches to the intangible, which belongs to the integrity of the world. Then it is about the spiritual aspects of the world and life (not necessarily religious).

Today’s man often strives for a scientifically and technically accurate expression of what he does. He wants to define. However, this is not possible when it comes to the spiritual aspects, when it comes to what we can aim for as a vanishing point beyond the horizon, but we cannot

subjugate it in any way. As in the Heidegger's fouring, Mortals relate to the Divinities and somehow measure themselves against it, but they are unable to replace the Divinities themselves. Thus, accurate, defining, exact speech cannot capture and exhaust everything that can be said about the spiritual depth of the world. Poetry may assist here as an expressive speech. Yet it is not about speaking in verses, above all it is about knowing that speaking of spiritual depth is always only a reference and not a definition, that it is always symbolic and analogous and not exact, and that it is never completely exhaustive nor exhausted.

For upbringing and education, it is therefore important not to build solely and above all on the scientific description of things (which certainly has meaning and great results on the Ontic level). If education is to be a cultivation of humanity and care for the world as a whole, i.e., with a spiritual depth, it also needs to cultivate the poetic language.

Education can and should open paths from the superficial layer of life deeper to the spiritual layers. At the same time, education can be poetry, i.e., an invitation to the journey to the depth, to the journey of the Mortals across the Earth under the Sky for the Divine. Understanding a poem as a testimony which does not intend to be a definition and yet captures something substantial can thus lead to openness to the spiritual aspects of life. Thus, a poem can be a kind of analogy to prayer (without being conditioned by religion). At last, even silence, if understood as an authentic expression, can be such a poem, for instance, when one rests in amazement at the depths of the world, as the Heidegger's fouring reminds us.

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