

The Ode on Man in Sophocles' *Antigone*

by *Martin Heidegger*

We read the first chorus from the *Antigone* of Sophocles (lines 332-75). First we listen to the Greek words in order to get some of the sound into our ears. The translation runs:

There is much that is strange, but nothing
that surpasses man in strangeness.

He sets sail on the frothing waters
amid the south winds of winter
tacking through the mountains
and furious chasms of the waves.

He wearies even the noblest
of the gods, the Earth,
indestructible and untiring,
overturning her from year to year,
driving the plows this way and that
with horses.

And man, pondering and plotting,
snares the light-gliding birds
and hunts the beasts of the wilderness
and the native creatures of the sea.
With guile he overpowers the beast
that roams the mountains by night as by day,
he yokes the hirsute neck of the stallion
and the undaunted bull.

"The Ode on Man in Sophocles' *Antigone*" by Martin Heidegger. From *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Copyright © 1959 by Yale University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Translated by Ralph Manheim.

And he has found his way
to the resonance of the word,
and to wind-swift all-understanding,
and to the courage of rule over cities.
He has considered also how to flee
from exposure to the arrows
of unpropitious weather and frost.

Everywhere journeying, inexperienced and without issue,
he comes to nothingness.
Through no flight can he resist
the one assault of death,
even if he has succeeded in cleverly evading
painful sickness.

Clever indeed, mastering
the ways of skill beyond all hope,
he sometimes accomplishes evil,
sometimes achieves brave deeds.
He wends his way between the laws of the earth
and the adjured justice of the gods.
Rising high above his place,
he who for the sake of adventure takes
the nonessent for essent loses
his place in the end.

May such a man never frequent my hearth;
May my mind never share the presumption
of him who does this.

The following commentary is necessarily inadequate, if only because it cannot be built up from the poet's entire work or even from the whole tragedy. Here I shall not be able to go into the choice of readings or the changes that have been made in the text. Our interpretation falls into *three phases*, in each of which we shall consider the whole poem from a different point of view.

In the first phase we shall set forth the intrinsic meaning of the poem, that which sustains the edifice of words and rises above it.

In the second phase we pass through the whole sequence of strophes and antistrophes and delimit the area that is opened up by the poem.

In the third phase we attempt to take our stand in the center

of the poem, with a view to judging who man is according to this poetic discourse.

First phase. We seek that which sustains the whole and towers above it. Actually we have not far to seek. It is threefold; it bursts upon us like a triple assault, shattering at the very outset all everyday standards of questioning and definition.

The first is the beginning:

There is much that is strange, but nothing
that surpasses man in strangeness.

In these first two verses the poet anticipates. He will spend the rest of the poem in catching up with himself. Man, in *one* word, is *deinotaton*, the strangest. This one word encompasses the extreme limits and abrupt abysses of his being. This aspect of the ultimate and abysmal can never be discerned through the mere description that establishes data, even though thousands of eyes should examine man, searching for attributes and states. Such being is disclosed only to poetic insight. We find no portrayal of existing specimens of man; nor do we find any sort of blind and fatuous inflation of human essence from below, inspired by peevish yearning for some unattained glory; here there is no suggestion of a pre-eminent personality. Among the Greeks there were no personalities (and for this reason no supra-personality). Man is *to deinotaton*, the strangest of the strange. Here we must anticipate an explanation of the Greek word *deinon* and of our translation. This calls for a tacit glance over the whole poem, which alone can provide an appropriate interpretation of the first two verses. The Greek word *deinon* has the strange ambiguity with which Greek discourse cuts across the contending separations [Aus-einander-setzungen] of being.

On the one hand *deinon* means the terrible, but not in the sense of petty terrors, and above all not in the decadent, insipid, and useless sense that the word has taken on today, in such locutions as "terribly cute." The *deinon* is the terrible in the sense of the overpowering power which compels panic fear, true fear; and in equal measure it is the collected, silent awe that vibrates with its own rhythm. The mighty, the overpowering is the essential character of power itself. Where it irrupts, it *can* hold its overpower-

ing power in check. Yet this does not make it more innocuous, but *still* more terrible and remote.

But on the other hand *deinon* means the powerful in the sense of one who uses power, who not only disposes of power [Gewalt] but is violent [gewalt-tätig] insofar as the use of power is the basic trait not only of his action but also of his being-there. Here we use the word violence in an essential sense extending beyond the common usage of the word, as mere arbitrary brutality. In this common usage violence is seen from the standpoint of a realm which draws its standards from conventional compromise and mutual aid, and which accordingly disparages all violence as a disturbance of the peace.

The essent as a whole, seen as power, is the overpowering, *deinon* in the first sense. Man is *deinon*, first because he remains exposed within this overpowering power, because by his essence he belongs to being. But at the same time man is *deinon* because he is the violent one in the sense designated above. (He gathers the power and brings it to manifestness.) Man is the violent one, not aside from and along with other attributes but solely in the sense that in his fundamental violence [Gewalt-tätigkeit] he uses power [Gewalt] against the overpowering [Überwältigende]. Because he is twice *deinon* in a sense that is originally one, he is *to deinotaton*, the most powerful: violent in the midst of the overpowering.

But why do we translate *deinon* as "strange" [unheimlich]? Not in order to hide or attenuate the meaning of powerful, overpowering, violent; quite on the contrary. Because this *deinon* is meant as the supreme limit and link of man's being, the essence of the being thus defined should from the first be seen in its crucial aspect. But, in that case, is the designation of the powerful as the strange and uncanny [unheimlich] not a posterior notion derived from the impression that the powerful makes on us, whereas the essential here is to understand the *deinon* as what it intrinsically is? That is so, but we are not taking the strange in the sense of an impression on our states of feeling.

We are taking the strange, the uncanny [das Unheimliche], as that which casts us out of the "homely," i.e. the customary, familiar, secure. The unhomely [Unheimische] prevents us from making ourselves at home and therein it is overpowering. But man is the

strangest of all, not only because he passes his life amid the strange understood in this sense but because he departs from his customary, familiar limits, because he is the violent one, who, tending toward the strange in the sense of the overpowering, surpasses the limit of the familiar [das Heimische].

To understand the full implication of these words of the chorus, we must bear this in mind: to say that man is *to deinotaton*, the strangest of all, is not to impute a particular attribute to man, as though he were also something else; no, the verse says that to be the strangest of all is the basic trait of the human essence, within which all other traits must find their place. In calling man "the strangest of all" it gives the authentic Greek definition of man. We shall fully appreciate this phenomenon of strangeness only if we experience the power of appearance and the struggle with it as an essential part of being-there.

The second passage that sustains the poetic edifice and rises above it is to be found in line 360, in the middle of the second strophe: *Pantoporos aporos ep'ouden erchetai*. "Everywhere journeying, experienced and without issue, he comes to nothingness." The essential words are *pantoporos aporos*. The word *poros* means: passage through . . . , transition to . . . , path. Everywhere man makes himself a path; he ventures into all realms of the essent, of the overpowering power, and in so doing he is flung out of all paths. Herein is disclosed the entire strangeness of this strangest of all creatures: not only that he tries the essent in the whole of its strangeness, not only that in so doing he is a violent one striving beyond his familiar sphere. No, beyond all this he becomes the strangest of all beings because, without issue on all paths, he is cast out of every relation to the familiar and befallen by *atē*, ruin, catastrophe.

It is not hard to see that this *pantoporos aporos* contains an interpretation of *deinotaton*.

The interpretation is completed in the third salient phrase, line 370: *hypsipolis apolis*. In construction it is similar to *pantoporos aporos*, and its situation in the middle of the antistrophe presents another parallel. But it moves in a different direction. It speaks not of *poros* but of *polis*; not of the paths to all the realms of the essent but of the foundation and scene of man's being-there, the point at which all these paths meet, the *polis*. *Polis* is usually trans-

lated as city or city-state. This does not capture the full meaning. *Polis* means, rather, the place, the there, wherein and as which historical being-there is. The *polis* is the historical place, the there *in* which, *out of* which, and *for* which history happens. To this place and scene of history belong the gods, the temples, the priests, the festivals, the games, the poets, the thinkers, the ruler, the council of elders, the assembly of the people, the army and the fleet. All this does not first belong to the *polis*, does not become political by entering into a relation with a statesman and a general and the business of the state. No, it is political, i.e. at the site of history, provided there be (for example) poets *alone*, but then really poets, priests *alone*, but then really priests, rulers *alone*, but then really rulers. *Be*, but this means: as violent men to use power, to become pre-eminent in historical being as creators, as men of action. Pre-eminent in the historical place, they become at the same time *apolis*, without city and place, lonely, strange, and alien, without issue amid the essent as a whole, at the same time without statute and limit, without structure and order, because they themselves *as* creators must first create all this.

The first phase shows us the inner design of the essence of the strangest of all beings, the realms and scope of his power and his destiny. Now we go back to the beginning and attempt the second phase of interpretation.

The second phase. In the light of what has been said above we now follow the sequence of the strophes and hear how the being of man, the strangest of beings, unfolds. We shall try to determine when the *deinon* is meant in the first sense, how the *deinon* in the second sense emerges concurrently, and how, in the reciprocal relation between the two, the being of the strangest being is built up before us in its essential form.

The first strophe names the sea and the earth, each of them overpowering (*deinon*) in its way. It does not speak of them in the manner of us moderns who experience them as mere geographical and geological phenomena and then, as though by an afterthought, brush them over with a few faint and fleeting emotions. Here "sea" is said as though for the first time; the poet speaks of the wintry waves that the sea creates as it unceasingly tears open its own depths and unceasingly flings itself into them. Immediately after the main,

guiding statement of the first verses, the song begins, hard and powerful, with *touto kai polion*. Man embarks on the groundless deep, forsaking the solid land. He sets sail not upon bright, smooth waters but amid the storms of winter. The account of this departure concerts with the movement of the prosody; the word *chōrei* in line 336 is situated at the point where the meter shifts: *chōrei*, he abandons the place, he starts out—and ventures into the preponderant power of the placeless waves. The word stands like a pillar in the edifice of these verses.

But woven into one with this violent excursion [Aufbruch] upon the overpowering sea is the never-resting incursion [Einbruch] into the indestructible power of the earth. Here the earth is the highest of the gods. Violently, with acts of power [gewalt-tätig] man disturbs the tranquillity of growth, the nurturing and maturing of the goddess who lives without effort. Here the overpowering reigns not in self-consuming wildness but without effort and fatigue; from out of the superior tranquillity of great riches, it produces and bestows the inexhaustible treasure that surpasses all zeal. Into this power bursts the violent one; year after year he breaks it open with his plows and drives the effortless earth into his restless endeavor. Sea and earth, departure and upheaval are poined by the *kai* in line 334, to which corresponds the *te* in line 338.

And now to all this the antistrophe: it names the birds in the air, the denizens of the water, bull and stallion in the mountains. The living things, lightly dreaming, living in their own rhythm and their own precinct, perpetually overflowing into new forms yet remaining in their *one* channel, know the place where they wander and pass the night. As living things, they are embedded in the power of the sea and the earth. Into this life as it rolls along self-contained, extraordinary in its own sphere and structure and ground, man casts his snares and nets; he snatches the living creatures out of their order, shuts them up in his pens and enclosures, and forces them under his yokes. On the one hand eruption and upheaval. On the other capture and constraint.

At this point, before we pass to the second strophe and its antistrophe, it is necessary to insert a note calculated to ward off a misinterpretation of the whole poem—a misinterpretation to which

modern man readily inclines and which is indeed frequent. We have already pointed out that this is no description and exposition of the activities and fields of activity of man, an essent among other essents, but a poetic outline of his being, drawn from its extreme possibilities and limits. This in itself precludes the interpretation of this chorus as a narrative of man's development from the savage hunter and primitive sailor to the civilized builder of cities. Such a notion is the product of ethnology and psychological anthropology. It stems from the unwarranted application of a natural science—and a false one at that—to man's being. The basic fallacy underlying such modes of thought consists in the belief that history begins with the primitive and backward, the weak and helpless. The opposite is true. The beginning is the strangest and mightiest. What comes afterward is not development but the flattening that results from mere spreading out; it is inability to retain the beginning; the beginning is emasculated and exaggerated into a caricature of greatness taken as purely numerical and quantitative size and extension. That strangest of all beings is what he is *because* he harbors such a beginning in which everything all at once burst from superabundance into the overpowering and strove to master it.

If this beginning is inexplicable, it is not because of any deficiency in our knowledge of history. On the contrary, the authenticity and greatness of historical knowledge reside in an understanding of the mysterious character of this beginning. The knowledge of primordial history is not a ferreting out of primitive lore or a collecting of bones. It is neither half nor whole natural science but, if it is anything at all, mythology.

The first strophe and antistrophe speak of the sea, the earth, the animal, as the overpowering power which bursts into manifestness through the acts of the violent one.

Outwardly the second strophe passes from a description of the sea, the earth, animals to a characterization of man. But no more than the first strophe and antistrophe speak of nature in the restricted sense does the second strophe speak only of man.

No, what is now named—language, understanding, sentiment, passion, building—are no less a part of the overpowering power than sea, earth, and animal. The difference is only that the latter,

the power that is man's environment, sustains, drives, inflames him, while the former reigns within him as the power which he, as the essent that he himself is, must take upon himself.

This pervading force becomes no less overpowering because man takes it into his power, which he uses as such. All this merely conceals the uncanniness of language, of the passions, the powers by which man is ordained [gefügt] as a historical being, while it seems to him that it is *he* who disposes [verfügt] of them. The strangeness, the uncanniness of these powers resides in their seeming familiarity. Directly they yield themselves to man only in their nonessence [Unwesen], so driving him and holding him out of his essence. In this way he comes to regard what is fundamentally more remote and overpowering than sea and earth as closest of all to him.

How far man is from being at home in his own essence is revealed by his opinion of himself as he who invented and could have invented language and understanding, building and poetry.

How could man ever have invented the power which pervades him, which alone enables him to *be* a man? We shall be wholly forgetting that this song speaks of the powerful (*deinon*), the strange and uncanny, if we suppose that the poet makes man invent such things as building and language. The word *edidaxato* does not mean: man invented, but: he found his way to the overpowering and therein first found himself: the violent one, the wielder of power. In view of what has been said, the "himself" means at once he who breaks out and breaks up [ausbricht und umbricht, departs and plows], he who captures and subjugates.

It is this breaking out and breaking up, capturing and subjugating that opens up the essent *as* sea, *as* earth, *as* animal. It happens only insofar as the powers of language, of understanding, of temperament, and of building are themselves mastered [bewältigt] in violence. The violence of poetic speech, of thinking projection, of building configuration, of the action that creates states is not a function of faculties that man has, but a taming and ordering of powers by virtue of which the essent opens up as such when man moves into it. This disclosure of the essent is the power that man must master in order to become himself amid the essent, i.e. in order to be historical. What is meant by *deinon* here in the second

strophe must not be misinterpreted as invention or as a mere faculty or attribute of man.

Only if we understand that the use of power in language, in understanding, in forming and building helps to create (i.e. always, to bring forth) the violent act [Gewalttat] of laying out paths into the environing power of the essent, only then shall we understand the strangeness, the uncanniness of all violence. For man, as he journeys everywhere, is not without issue in the external sense that he comes up against outward barriers and cannot go on. In one way or another he can always go farther into the etcetera. He is without issue because he is always thrown back on the paths that he himself has laid out: he becomes mired in his paths, caught in the beaten track, and thus caught he compasses the circle of his world, entangles himself in appearance, and so excludes himself from being. He turns round and round in his own circle. He can ward off whatever threatens this limited sphere. He can employ every skill in its place. The violence that originally creates the paths engenders its own mischief of versatility, which is intrinsically issueless, so much so that it bars itself from reflection about the appearance in which it moves.

All violence shatters against *one* thing. That is death. It is an end beyond all consummation [Vollendung], a limit beyond all limits. Here there is no breaking-out or breaking-up, no capture or subjugation. But this strange and alien [unheimlich] thing that banishes us once and for all from everything in which we are at home is no particular event that must be named among others because it, too, ultimately happens. It is not only when he comes to die, but always and essentially that man is without issue in the face of death. Insofar as man *is*, he stands in the issuelessness of death. Thus his being-there is the happening of strangeness. (For us this happening of a strangeness must be initially grounded in human being-there.)

With the naming of *this* strange and powerful thing, the poetic project of being and human essence sets its own limit upon itself.

For the second antistrophe does not go on to name *still* other powers but gathers those already named into their inner unity. The concluding strophe carries the whole back to its basic line. But as we have stressed in the first phase, the basic line of what is actually

at the center of the song (the *deinotaton*) resides precisely in the unitary relation between the two meanings of *deinon*. Accordingly the final strophe, in summary, names three things.

1. The power, the powerful, in which the action of the violent one moves, is the entire scope of the machination (*Machenschaft*), *machanoen*, entrusted to him. We do not take the word "machination" in a disparaging sense. We have in mind something essential that is disclosed to us in the Greek word *technē*. *Technē* means neither art nor skill, to say nothing of technique in the modern sense. We translate *technē* by "knowledge." But this requires explanation. Knowledge means here not the result of mere observations concerning previously unknown data. Such information, though indispensable for knowledge, is never more than accessory. Knowledge in the authentic sense of *technē* is the initial and persistent looking out beyond what is given at any time. In different ways, by different channels, and in different realms, this transcendence [*Hinaussein*] effects [*setzt ins Werk*] what first gives the datum its relative justification, its potential determinateness, and hence its limit. Knowledge is the ability to put into work the being of any particular essent. The Greeks called art in the true sense and the work of art *technē*, because art is what most immediately brings being (i.e. the appearing that stands there in itself) to stand, stabilizes it in something present (the work). The work of art is a work not primarily because it is wrought [*gewirkt*], made, but because it brings about [*er-wirkt*] being in an essent; it brings about the phenomenon in which the emerging power, *physis*, comes to shine [*scheinen*]. It is through the work of art as essent being that everything else that appears and is to be found is first confirmed and made accessible, explicable, and understandable as being or not being.

Because art in a pre-eminent sense stabilizes and manifests being in the work as an essent, it may be regarded as the ability, pure and simple, to accomplish, to put-into-the-work [*ins-Werk-setzen*], as *technē*. This accomplishment is a manifesting realization [*Erwirken*] of being *in* the essent. This superior, realizing opening and keeping open is knowledge. The passion of knowledge is inquiry. Art is knowledge and therefore *technē*. Art is not *technē* because it involves "technical" skill, tools, materials.

Thus *technē* provides the basic trait of *deinon*, the violent; for violence [Gewalt-tätigkeit] is the use of power [Gewalt-brauchen] against the overpowering [Überwältigende]: through knowledge it wrests being from concealment into the manifest as the essent.

2. Just as *deinon* as violence collects its essence in the fundamental Greek word *technē*, so *deinon* as the overpowering is manifested in the equally fundamental *dikē*. We translate it as Fug.¹ Here we understand Fug first in the sense of joint and framework [Fuge und Gefüge]; then as decree, dispensation, a directive that the overpowering imposes on its reign; finally, as the governing structure [das fügende Gefüge] which compels adaptation [Einfügung] and compliance [Sichfügen].

If *dikē* is translated as "justice" taken in a juridical, moral sense, the word loses its fundamental metaphysical meaning. The same applies to the interpretation of *dikē* as norm. In all its realms and dominions the overpowering, in respect to its domination, is Fug. Being, *physis*, as power, is basic and original togetherness: *logos*; it is governing order [fügender Fug]: *dikē*.

Thus the *deinon* as the overpowering (*dikē*) and the *deinon* as the violent (*technē*) confront one another, though not as two given things. In this confrontation *technē* bursts forth against *dikē*, which in turn, as Fug, the commanding order, disposes [verfügt] of all *technē*. The reciprocal confrontation is. It is only insofar as the strangest thing of all, being-human, is actualized, insofar as man is present as history.

3. The basic trait of the *deinotaton* lies in the interrelation between the two meanings of *deinon*. The sapient man sails into the very middle of the dominant order [Fug]; he tears it open and violently carries being into the essent; yet he can never master the overpowering. Hence he is tossed back and forth between structure and the structureless, order and mischief [Fug and Un-fug], between the evil and the noble. Every violent curbing of the powerful is either victory or defeat. Both, each in its different way, fling him out of home, and thus, each in its different way, unfold the dangerousness

¹Heidegger is particularly free to define the word "Fug" as he wishes because the word does not occur in modern literary German except in the combination "mit Fug und Recht"—"with F. and justice," where it conveys no precise meaning but suggests "proper order," "fitness." This is why I have preferred to introduce the word in German. [TRANS.]

of achieved or lost being. Both, in different ways, are menaced by disaster. The *violent one*, the creative man, who sets forth into the un-said, who breaks into the un-thought, compels the unhappened to happen and makes the unseen appear—this violent one stands at all times in venture (*tolma*, line 371). In venturing to master being, he must risk the assault of the nonessent, *mē kalon*, he must risk dispersion, instability, disorder, mischief. The higher the summit of historical being-there, the deeper will be the abyss, the more abrupt the fall into the unhistorical, which merely thrashes around in issueless and placeless confusion.

Arrived at the end of the second phase, we may wonder what purpose can be served by a third.

The third phase. The central truth of the song was set forth in the first phase. The second phase has led us through all the essential realms of the powerful and violent. The final strophe pulls the whole together into the essence of him who is strangest of all. Certain details might be considered and elucidated more fully. But this would provide a mere appendage to what has already been said; it would not necessitate a new phase of interpretation. If we content ourselves with what the poem directly says, the interpretation is at an end. Actually it has just begun. The actual interpretation must show what does not stand in the words and is nevertheless said. To accomplish this the exegete must use violence. He must seek the essential where nothing more is to be found by the scientific interpretation that brands as unscientific everything that transcends its limits.

But here, where we must restrict ourselves to a single poem, we can undertake this third phase only from a limited point of view imposed by our main task, and even here we must confine ourselves to a few steps. Bearing in mind what has been said in the first phase, we start from the results of our explanation of the final strophe in the second phase.

The *deinotaton* of the *deinon*, the strangest of the strange, lies in the conflict between *dikē* and *technē*. The strangest is not the extreme rectilinear intensification of the strange. It is specifically the uniquely strange. The conflict between the overwhelming presence of the essent as a whole and man's violent being-there creates the possibility of downfall into the issueless and placeless: disaster. But

disaster and the possibility of disaster do not occur only at the end, when a single act of power fails, when the violent one makes a false move; no, this disaster is fundamental, it governs and waits in the conflict between violence and the overpowering. Violence against the preponderant power of being *must* shatter against being, if being rules in its essence, as *physis*, as emerging power.

But this necessity of disaster can only subsist insofar as what must shatter is driven into such a being-there. Man is forced into such a being-there, hurled into the affliction [Not]² of such being, because the overpowering as such, in order to appear in its power, *requires* a place, a scene of disclosure. The essence of being-human opens up to us only when understood through this need compelled by being itself. The being-there of historical man means: to be posited as the breach into which the preponderant power of being bursts in its appearing, in order that this breach itself should shatter against being.

The strangest (man) is what it is because, fundamentally, it cultivates and guards the familiar, only in order to break out of it and to let what overpowers it break in. Being itself hurls man into this breaking-away, which drives him beyond himself to venture forth toward being, to accomplish being, to stabilize it in the work, and so hold open the essent as a whole. Therefore the violent one knows no kindness and conciliation [Güte und Begütigung] (in the usual sense); he cannot be mollified or appeased by success or prestige. In all this the violent, creative man sees only the semblance of fulfillment, and this he despises. In willing the unprecedented, he casts aside all help. To him disaster is the deepest and broadest affirmation of the overpowering. In the shattering of the wrought work, in the knowledge that it is mischief [Unfug] and *sarma* (a dunghill), he leaves the overpowering to its order [Fug]. But all this not in the form of "psychic experiences" in which the soul of the creative man wallows, and still less in the form of petty feelings of inferiority, but wholly in terms of the accomplishment itself, the putting-

² The dictionary meanings of the German word "Not" are need, want, anguish, distress, affliction, peril, necessity. Insofar as one meaning can be disengaged from the whole, Heidegger's primary meaning is "need," because he has used this word "Not" as a translation for *chre* in the sixth fragment of Parmenides. But the word as used in German speech and poetry carries the primary implication of distress, trouble, affliction. [TRANS.]

into-the-work. As history the overpowering, being, is confirmed in works.

Thus the being-there of the historical man is the breach through which the being embodied in the essent can open. As such it is an *in-cident* [Zwischen-fall, a fall-between], the incident in which suddenly the unbound powers of being come forth and are accomplished as history. The Greeks had a profound sense of this suddenness and uniqueness of being-there, forced on them by being itself, which disclosed itself to them as *physis* and *logos* and *dikē*. It is inconceivable that the Greeks should have decided to turn out culture for the benefit of the next few millennia of Western history. In the unique need of their being-there they alone responded solely with violence, thus not doing away with the need but only augmenting it; and in this way they won for themselves the fundamental condition of true historical greatness.

We shall fail to understand the mysteriousness of the essence of being-human, thus experienced and poetically carried back to its ground, if we snatch at value judgments of any kind.

The evaluation of being-human as arrogance and presumption in the pejorative sense takes man out of his essential need as the incident. To judge in this way is to take man as something already-there, to put this something into an empty space, and appraise it according to some external table of values. But it is the same kind of misunderstanding to interpret the poet's words as a tacit rejection of being-human, a covert admonition to resign oneself without violence, to seek undisturbed comfort. This interpretation might even find some basis in the concluding lines of the poem.

One who is *thus* (namely the strangest of all) should be excluded from hearth and council. But the final words of the chorus do not contradict what has previously been said about being-human. Insofar as the chorus turns *against* the strangest of all, it says that this manner of being is *not* that of every day. Such being-there is not to be found in the usual bustle and activity. There is nothing surprising about these concluding words; indeed, we should have to be surprised if they were lacking. Their attitude of rejection is a direct and complete confirmation of the strangeness and uncanniness of human being. With its concluding words the song swings back to its beginning.