KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH IN POETRY: AN INQUIRY INTO BEING AND LANGUAGE

By

Puja Ghosh

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David Weberman
Thesis Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I propose that poetry is capable of revealing a certain kind of truth and therefore should be considered as a kind of knowledge—a knowledge which requires a paradigm fundamentally different from the ones in which knowledge-claims are traditionally made. For this purpose, I rely on Heidegger's theorization of poetry in the later development of his thought, as well as Advaita Vedanta's treatment of the theme of self-knowledge in the Upanishads. With reference to Heidegger, Being remains the central concept, while for Advaita, the argument incorporates an analysis of consciousness alongside that of Being. In either case, it is through their unique understanding of language and its relation to the world that I will try to make the case for poetic knowledge and truth.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The claim of poetry as something that can express, reveal or access truth has always been received with a certain suspicion within academic discourse, especially philosophy. After all, poets themselves might be careful of making any such claims, and moreover poetry belongs to the domain of the arts and rhetoric. But on second thoughts, we may ask—is poetry merely something peripheral to the question of truth, merely a subject matter of aesthetics capable of inciting noble or beautiful feelings but nothing more? At least one major Western philosopher, Martin Heidegger, has taken issue with such an understanding of poetry, and in the later part of his life provides a formidable critique of such a position. This he does by re-envisioning both the Western notion of truth as well as the Western idea of language and its relationship to the world. In the process, he unfolds a new relationship between thought and poetry that brings the latter closer to what has been traditionally the object of philosophical enquiry and discourse.

Therefore, it is necessary to look at Heidegger's reconceptualization of truth in poetry through his reflections on the poetic works of various poets such as Hölderlin, Georg Trakl or Rainer Maria Rilke. This re-conceptualization will engage with and try to answer some questions such as what constitutes the process of the comprehension of truth, and from where does poetry receive its capacity to produce some sort of knowledge. And what aspects of poetry may contribute towards recognizing it as epistemologically significant. Moreover, if the claim is made that poetic language is somehow capable of generating knowledge, it must be clarified that any such appeal involves a thorough transformation of what is meant by the words 'knowledge' and 'epistemology' in the context of poetry. We must speak of a different order of knowledge that does not subscribe to the traditional model of what usually counts as knowledge. To deal with these questions I will engage with the Heideggerian notion of truth

as *Aletheia* or unconcealedness/ uncovering. It is here that Heidegger reexamines the employment of the word "truth" in philosophical discourse and recommends a more fundamental redefinition of it. The re-conceptualization of truth to address the issue of poetry as a knowledge or as a mode of revelation will require integrating Heidegger's reflections on the nature of language with a discussion of *Aletheia*.

For Heidegger, the enquiry and the question of Being evokes a different response to how truth is revealed in language from the traditional theorizations about it. The ontology that Heidegger constructs and articulates is a mode of encountering the world which does not repeat the conventional structure of subjective structure and objective content. Before unfolding his own position, he undertakes a scathing critique of truth understood in terms of correspondence. Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's poetry is central to his re-visioning of the importance of poetry, and more generally, art. It leads him to the understanding that sentences have the capacity to uncover or reveal, not on account of the correctness of judgments, but rather of discovering and manifesting the essence of truth (which we will try to understand later). Interestingly another philosophical tradition, that of Advaita Vedanta and the Upanishads in India, propounds a similar view of truth, and in fact, accords to language the power, not merely of representing truth, but actually manifesting it, a distinction which will become more clear when we take up these issues in the next chapter. Although there remain some significant differences between the two traditions, their concordance regarding the nature of truth and the function of language has important repercussions for the role of poetry as a means to reveal the truth, and the Advaita tradition articulates the role of the poet in a way that can shed some light on the later Heidegger's treatment of poetry.

Therefore, there is a comparative element to this work. But the comparison of Advaitic and Heideggerian themes will only be attempted so as to strengthen the central claim of the unique kind of knowledge that poetry is capable of generating. In this project, the

two traditions corroborate and complement each other in various ways. And although part of very different philosophical traditions and periods, their thought converges on various points in spite of some obvious differences in the formulation of their problems. Such convergences have been noticed by various scholars such as Natalia Isayeva, John Grimes, Vensus George and others. Thus, for instance, self-knowledge is a central concept in Advaita, while the *Seinsfrage,* the question of Being, becomes central in Heidegger who does not ever speak of self-knowledge as such. Nonetheless, as I will attempt to clarify, the 'self' is the Advaitic word for Being as articulated in Heidegger and has no overtones of first-person subjectivity.

Thus, even self-knowledge in Vedanta, as I will attempt to show, actually points to an understanding of Being that tries to go beyond one's everyday familiarity with it towards a greater transparency. Just as for Vedanta, so for Heidegger, Being is the most familiar yet the most hidden and opaque. In Advaita, the search for a greater transparency takes the form of what we are calling self-knowledge, although Heidegger takes a different route (and the *Seinsfrage* in some way remains unanswered until the end of his life). Yet crucially for both, language is the by-way through which this project is even possible and it is here that the discussion of poetry comes to the fore. The role of language in the constitution of the world is a central motif taken up by both traditions. Thus, for instance, Isayeva observes that "an essential aspect, rather important for both teachings is that of the philosophy of language, of the ontological role of language in the creation and self-revelation of the world."[1] This aspect will be explored in the third chapter in order to explicate the unique role of the poet in the 'self-revelation of the world' and why this self-revelation may be considered as a kind of knowledge (as we see in Vedanta).

[1] Natalia Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 123.

In the case of Heidegger, we will look at his discussion of the origins of a work of art, which will be taken up in the third chapter. This will comprise of an explanation of how truth is manifest through any such work, and how the processes of concealment and disclosure are manifest through it. Heidegger's disillusionment with traditional metaphysics and his search for an alternate way of engaging with the question of Being led him to the phenomenological approach of *Being and Time*. But we find Heidegger's own language becoming more and more poetic in his later writings (that also include extensive meditations on the nature of language and its relationship with Being) which I will analyze by exploring Heidegger's interpretation and understanding of Hölderlin's poetry amongst others.

In my first chapter, I will analyze the term 'truth' and how it undergoes a veritable transformation in the hands of Heidegger. This includes a critique of the correspondence theory of truth, as well as how Heidegger presents his own position by way of that very critique. The critique itself contains the key to what would be a more ontologically fundamental theorization of truth. At the same time, I will consider an important objection to Heidegger's project, that problematizes his unique usage of the word 'truth' seemingly lacking any basis in everyday or even philosophical usages. Moreover, some important points of convergence between Heideggerian and Vedantin trains of thought regarding truth and the nature of Being will be introduced, which will be more fully elaborated in the second chapter. In the second chapter, I will discuss the views of Advaita Vedanta on being and consciousness, and arrive at an understanding of what the tradition means by self-knowledge. This discussion will aim to provide a theoretical basis for the observations about poetry in the third chapter. Here I will move on to the discussion of poetry itself. In engaging with language and poetry, Heidegger already believes that language is disclosure. His motive is to establish not only the importance of art as central to philosophy but also to give a special position to the language of poetry. Here we will encounter and analyze his claim, crucial to the aims of this paper, that

poetry is authentic language as such. What does Heidegger mean by that? What is he opposing authentic language to and what would count as inauthentic language?

Moreover, I will discuss why in order to talk about the importance of poetry, it is important to go through the by-way of language as such—not the poetic language only but the language itself in its essence. I will thus argue that poetry is central to Heidegger's project, although he also talks about painting, sculpture and architecture in many of his works. His, *The Origin of a Work of Art* will be crucial although I will refer to other treatments of poetry in later Heidegger. Here I will also briefly note the relationship between thinking and poetry. Crucial to his development of the themes of poetry, language, and thought is the idea that poetic language is the one that is best suited to reveal Being. But then what becomes of philosophy, Heidegger's own preferred mode of engaging with language? It is crucial to understand the intimate relationship between thinking and poetry and how, in fact, the two cannot be separated from each other. Here we will examine the notion of 'saying' as developed by Heidegger in various lectures in the fifties, by means of which he is able to bring poetry closer to the domain that has traditionally been reserved for philosophy. I thus hope to bring out the significance of poetry in the realm of knowing and epistemology. Heidegger himself does not employ such language (of epistemology or knowledge) in the context of talking about poetry. Nonetheless, in the concluding section I will argue that invoking such language is justifiable in terms of the implications of Heidegger's revisioning of the role and nature of language, as well as through the contribution of Advaita Vedanta to the discussion of the role of the poet, thereby elucidating the term 'knowledge' in the context of poetry.

CHAPTER ONE: TRUTH, ALETHEIA & THE POET

1.1 THEORIZATION OF TRUTH IN WESTERN THOUGHT

Before we analyze Heidegger's own conception of truth, it is important to go through his critique of the predominant Western characterization of truth, since as mentioned before, the critique itself contains the key to what would be a more authentic theorization of truth. Its key insight is the idea that truth cannot be limited to the level of propositional truth, and therefore to the predicates of 'correctness' or 'falsity', according to traditional conceptions in the history of Western philosophy. Thus it is statements of language that are either true or false and this property depends on their success or failure respectively to correspond with reality, with what is actually out there. This is the correspondence theory of truth, that a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to a particular state of affairs existing externally in the world.

Already in this way of thinking, epistemological concerns as to how knowledge is possible have become dominant, with many alternative theories (such as coherence or pragmatic theories of truth) that explain the generation of truth via language being offered. This may, in part, be due to the epistemological turn of philosophy since the time of Descartes and the Enlightenment, who were seeking the grounds for certainty about the self, world and God. But possibly, for Heidegger, this tradition of thinking precedes modernity and may be traced back to Greek thought and to Aristotle himself who develops his idea of truth on the model of physical nature and natural phenomena and at the same time works out a propositional logic according to which truth or falsity are functions of propositions. Therefore we must question the idea that unless we have found the correct method or means of knowledge, we cannot venture into questions of metaphysics or ontology, an idea that comes to dominate philosophy since the Enlightenment.

The primary justification for this move is the Heideggerian insight that we human beings, by the very fact of existing or being, are always already situated within Being. To even ask the question of Being already assumes a certain familiarity with it, a familiarity that is all too ubiquitous, yet as Heidegger reminds us, deeply mysterious. The fact that we are already within Being suggests that it is not to be sought by some epistemological means. At the same time, the very project of raising the question of the meaning of Being implies that it is not evident to us. Thus it is simultaneously transparent yet opaque, familiar yet unknown. Thus, in speaking of the later Heidegger, George Steiner notes,

> Heidegger meditates on (denkt-nach) Van Gogh's painting of an old, worn-out pair of shoes. It is not some antecedent Platonic knowledge that we have of the nature of such an object that enables us to grasp, to undergo the realization of, Van Gogh's presentiment. On the contrary: it is Van Gogh's canvas that makes it possible for us to experience the integral reality, the innermost quiddity and meaning of the two shoes…Far beyond any pair of shoes we encounter in 'real life', it is Van Gogh's work which communicates to us the essential 'shoeness' , the 'truth of being' of these two leather shapes—shapes at once infinitely familiar and, when we step back from facticity, when we 'open ourselves to Being', infinitely new and uncanny. It is art which allows the later Heidegger to delineate, to make as palpable as he can, the antinomy of truth's simultaneous hiddenness and self-deployment.[2]

We will attempt to unravel the full significance of this passage and where it directs us along our own inquiry regarding poetry and Being at a later stage. For now we must observe the antinomy of 'truth's simultaneous hiddenness and self-deployment' as characterized by Heidegger, in the above quote and how it attempts to subvert the entire epistemological project of modernity and the reduction of truth to a mere function of propositional and linguistic meaning. (In fact, as we will see, it is this aspect of Heidegger's thought that also has interesting resonances with Indian thought, especially Vedantin.) In short, for Heidegger, the way out is not through some discovery of an appropriate means of knowledge that will reveal its

[2] George Steiner, *Heidegger* (London: Fontana Press, 1978), 127-28.

object but by a method that underscores one's situatedness within Being and the existential structures that make Dasein's existence possible.

However, in stating this it must be clarified that Heidegger in *Being and Time* does not outrightly deny the correspondence theory of truth as such. The idea that traditionally truth has been understood in terms of conformity between our judgments and the facts in the world is not simply false according to him; rather it is problematic in that it is not fundamental or primary. Therefore Heidegger claims that the traditional understanding of truth is actually derivative from a more fundamental understanding of truth as self-manifestation, revelation or disclosure. The former still retains a certain validity and usefulness in a variety of contexts, but it is necessary to go further and arrive at a more fundamental and primordial understanding of truth, in which truth must be released from its confinement to propositional correctness. This conception he unfolds through the Greek conception of *Aletheia.*

1.2 TRUTH AS UNHIDDENNESS

Heidegger proceeds to develop his own understanding of truth by appropriating and exploiting various meanings of the Greek term *aletheia*, (*a-letheia*, literally 'not concealed'). In doing so he translates and interprets the term variously as unconcealment, disclosedness, dis-covery, openness etc. As these terms suggest, he wants to interpret truth as the very ground, the presence that makes all knowledge possible and in which it comes into the light. The metaphor of light here is not incidental. It is not merely used as a metaphorical crutch to explain the phenomenon of truth. On the contrary, Being is seen as the very clearing in which all things and existents come into light, into view. Being is the 'open region' that, in a Kantian sense, comprises the very condition of possibility of experience. In his own words, "'Truth' is not a feature of correct propositions that are asserted of an 'object' by a human 'subject' and then 'are valid' somewhere; Rather, truth is disclosure of beings through which

an openness essentially unfolds. All human comportment and bearing are exposed in its open region. Therefore man *is* in the manner of ek-sistence."[3] In questioning the primacy of the propositional truth he comes to suggest that the deeper pre-conditions of truth are experienced in the form of '*discovering'* or disclosure. Therefore he says,

> Comportment stands open to beings. Every open relatedness is a comportment…All working and achieving, all action and calculation, keep within an open region within which beings, with regard to what they are and how they are, can properly take their stand and be capable of being said. This can occur only if beings present themselves along with the presentative statement so that the latter subordinates itself to the directive that it speak of beings *such-as* they are…Speech that directs itself accordingly is correct (true). What is thus said is the correct (true)[4]

That which is opened up, which a true statement corresponds to, is a being that opens up in an open comportment. Thus the opening up lets beings be as they are. It seems that things as they appear to us are somehow related to how human beings comport themselves towards them. This however should not be read as some kind of indifference, as if there are 'things' out there waiting to be discovered by a subject—"to let be means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself."[5] Moreover he further says, "Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as ta alēthea, the unconcealed…if we translate alēthea as 'unconcealment'…this translation is not merely more literal; it contains the directive to rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of statements and to think it back to that still uncomprehended disclosedness and disclosure of beings."[6] Thus we can begin to see the reason behind Heidegger's discomfort with the traditional conception of

[3] Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Basic Writings,* ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 127.
[4] Heidegger, *On the* Essence of Truth, 122.
[5] Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, 124.
[6] Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, 125.

truth. Propositional truth for Heidegger is derivative since it rests on a more fundamental 'disclosedness' of beings in the open region, the Lichtung. Only when beings are already so disclosed or manifest is it possible to measure up the truth of a statement against what is thus objectively given.

For our purposes, it is essential to see the link between truth, unconcealment, *letting be*, and openness, since this will have implications in the subsequent chapters where we will analyze how Heidegger applies these notions to the context of poetry. Heidegger suggests that "truth (discovered-ness) must always be wrested from beings. Beings are torn from concealment."[7] Unconcealment thus seems to be the only way for Dasein to know, to realize its own truth. This is one of the pregnant conceptions of thinking about truth that can make it possible to bring the domain of poetry closer to the domain of truth. When we talk about the relevance of poetic discourse to truth and truth-seeking, the notion that we are appealing to and invoking falls outside the traditionalist conception of propositional truth. It verges closer to the ability of poetry to 'manifest' truth, in the sense of the disclosedness of Being, as we will see in the subsequent chapter. Thus Heidegger carries over into his later thought some very crucial insights, such as truth as disclosedness, in order to talk about poetry, writing and language. Although it is often thought that Heidegger's thinking changed towards the later part of his life, it is evident that even in the later Heidegger, unconcealment seems to only find a new articulation as the 'clearing or opening of being' through art and language.

A more persistent criticism of the notion of *aletheia* must be considered here. It has been argued that as a concept of truth it fails, since it cannot reckon the difference between truth and falsity, and any concept of truth must provide an explanation of falsity. Let's take up Tugendhat's criticism of disclosedness along these lines. In William Smith's formulation,

[7] Martin Heidegger, *Being And Time*, ed. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 204.

the question is as follows—insofar as unconcealment or disclosedness is normally understood as the condition for the possibility of propositional truth rather than truth itself, what does it mean to say—as Heidegger does—that disclosedness is the ‘‘primordial phenomenon of truth’’ and what justifies that claim?[8] Thus, the idea is that this specific sense of truth at the propositional level is lost in Heidegger’s reconceptualizing of it in terms of disclosedness or unconcealment. And moreover such an idea of unconcealment would have no recourse to any normative criterion that would be able to account for differentiating between success and failure of particular “uncoverings” or “disclosures”. Heidegger himself, in his talk *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, states that “the question about aletheia, about unconcealment as such, is not the question about truth. It was inadequate and hence misleading to call aletheia, in the sense of the clearing, truth.”[9]

Does the criticism point to a verbal disagreement of the usage of the word ‘truth’? For, in reply to such a criticism, it may be asserted that it presupposes the notion of propositional truth as the only valid meaning of truth. Secondly, Heidegger is not even thinking in terms of propositional truth, and rather, aims at ‘unconcealment’ or ‘uncovering’. Thus he is in no way indebted to or reliant upon the notion of truth in terms of truth and falsity. If Tugendhat argues that truth must be opposed to falsity, where is the evidence or self-evidence of that? However, as William Smith points out, one would not be fair to Tugendhat’s critique by offering the above response and the force of his criticism would be lost, namely the problem of what justification does Heidegger have in choosing the word ‘truth’ of all words to refer to this other phenomenon of uncovering or disclosedness, and what is its significance. In short, what justifies the use of this very word. Smith refers to the notions of self-responsibility and resoluteness. Thus he redefines truth as ‘being true to oneself’ as opposed

[8] William H. Smith, *Why Tugendhat's Critique of Heidegger's Concept of Truth Remains a Critical Problem*, Inquiry, 50, no. 2 (2007): 156-179.
[9] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 446-47.

to 'getting it right' in terms of correspondence. In this way he tries to justify the use of the word truth for Heidegger's notion of "uncovering" and at the same time is able to provide a criterion of success and failure—the authentic or inauthentic being of Dasein with respect to his taking up self-responsibility.

Whether this response is able to address the questions raised by the criticism or not, I am of the opinion that Heidegger is deliberately attempting to stretch the meaning of the word 'truth' beyond its usual domain of usage in order that truth be understood existentially. Smith himself, appeals to a concept of Heidegger in order to resolve the problem. But what justifies such an extension of the term "truth" is simply the fact that philosophy has always sought for a deeper ground for truth and existence, and thinkers and philosophers have indeed attempted to re-articulate truth in more existential terms. Such a line of thinking would eventually take us to a discussion of the genealogy of the term 'truth' itself as it has come to us from ancient times, which is beyond the scope of our discussion. But it would be problematic, in my opinion, to assume that the term has always carried a single, definite sense of correspondence to reality and nothing more, since nothing justifies this assumption historically. Although this way of thinking may have come to dominate Western thought, it can by no means be taken as pre-given.

1.3 THE TRUTH OF THE KAVI OR SEER

Is it possible to find some kind of corroboration of this notion of *aletheia* beyond the thinking of Heidegger? Has truth been conceived in a similar way, as being almost synonymous or equivalent with Being itself, as the clearing and the open space that gives being to all entities. And, most importantly, what relevance may such a concurrence have for the present thesis about the importance of poetry as a means to knowledge? In dealing with these questions it may be worthwhile to cast a glance at another philosophical tradition obsessed

with the question of Being, though not quite in exactly the same manner as Heidegger—the philosophy of the Upanishads and Vedanta. *Sat, satyam, sattā* are the words around which such a discourse revolves, cognate with the *est* or *is* of the European languages, meaning simultaneously—and interestingly for us—both.

To begin with, the seers and philosophers of the Upanishads are often referred to as *kavis,* that is, poets. What does this convergence suggest for us in the context of the relation between poetry and truth, or even poetry and philosophy? On the one hand, the thought of the Upanishads is highly metaphysical, speaking of *sat* as the ultimate ground of all being, and that in which everything has its birth, subsistence and destruction. This *sat,* also referred to quite often as *Brahman,* is supposed to be the sole reality which lends itself to everything else, thereby giving them being. *Es gibt,* says Heidegger, of Being—that which gives.[10] Likewise it is Brahman that lends itself to the possibility of creation and manifestation within it. On the other hand, such metaphysical thinking is closely aligned with the poetic—it is the poet, the *kavi,* who is the philosopher par excellence, the *dūrdarśī,* one who sees afar, who sees what no one else can see. What does the Upanishadic poet see what none else can see? Before philosophy in India began to systematize itself into various schools and began to rationalize or debate the revelatory words and teachings of the Upanishadic seer/sage/poet, it was less concerned with rightness than with insight—the insight into the ātman, the self of all. Let us note a few points of convergence with respect to this *ātman.*

Firstly, although generally standing for the first-person, the word *ātman* in the Upanishads carries a very different understanding of self and selfhood. It is what constitutes the very nature, the being of a thing. Thus, for instance, we may say that the *ātman* of a wooden table is wood, of a pot is clay and so on. Thus *ātman* is Brahman itself, the impersonal basis

[10] Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. Willliam McNeill (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992).

of everything, and itself is not another thing, not another genus, even if it were the widest and the most accommodative one. It itself lacks *thinghood,* although deploying it to everything else. This *ātman* is the *sat*, it is Being itself. In the world of Upanishads and Vedanta, this is the only meaning of 'true' or the Sanskrit '*satyam'.* Although the latter generally or colloquially means 'what is true' or a true statement, proposition etc, it comes to be synonymous with *sat* in Vedantic literature, thereby mirroring Heidegger's understanding of truth as Being.

Secondly, and again echoing a previous theme, it is repeatedly asserted in the Upanishads that Brahman or ātman, although never available to the senses, is in some sense already the most familiar and intimate. It is spoken of as the nearest of the near.[11] And yet its presence is most uncanny. Although one always lives in the familiarity of Brahman, in fact one exists as Brahman, it is not a clear and articulated knowledge. Nor does the poet/seer attempt to make it more articulate or cognitively accessible. Rather, their approach emphasizes a greater passivity on the part of the thinker, allowing Being to disclose itself by its own accord. This is possible, however, only when the question of Being as such has not divorced from the issue of my own being. This is because, according to Vedanta, the former cannot really disclose itself except in and through the latter. Moreover, since in a certain sense we are already intimate with Being even before we set out to discover or explain what it is, this approach does not attempt a 'reaching out' to the truth, by means of words, but insists upon a 'turning back' to oneself, to one's own being to which one is no stranger. Therefore, it insists on an act of acknowledgment of Being, an owning up to something which is passed over owing to its own self-evidence, ubiquity and proximity. To make an effort to understand Being is to already alienate oneself from it. Such an effort rests on the assumption that Being is an unknown. Yet what could be more familiar? Though at the same time, it must also be acknowledged, so distant and nebulous?

[11]Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 140.

But if the question of Being can only be authentically approached by yielding oneself to it, how is this 'yielding' or 'turning back' to be accomplished? Certainly no cognitive procedures should be of any use, since no new knowledge is to be gathered from the outside. Rather somehow attention has to be turned towards that which is already there available and in close proximity. It is here that art or poetry may come to serve a useful function. As we will explore, art and poetry may serve to direct our attention to that which is passed over in everyday experience, but reconfigured or transfigured by an aesthetic procedure that makes us take notice of the familiar in an original and fresh comportment towards it. Thus poetry gives knowledge by un-concealing what lies concealed within our everyday attitudes towards the world. It does not claim to bring about any new knowledge of the world, nor does it comprise any cognitive act on the part of the subject, as I will attempt to show. We will examine the role of poetry within the Advaita context in more detail later on. For now it is important to dwell on its conception of truth, as well as what constitutes knowledge. Then we may be able to proceed in our task of analyzing the poetics latent within the ontologies of both Heidegger as well as the Upanishads, and justify the claim of how poetic discourse can claim for itself a certain domain of knowledge.

CHAPTER TWO: BEING & SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN VEDANTA

2.1 KNOWING IN VEDANTA

To discuss the Advaitic conception of truth, we must go into its analysis of the conception of self, since Advaita ends up equating the two in its peculiar usage of the word 'self' as we will see. Thus we will discuss the topic of the self in Advaita, knowing fully well that Heidegger himself does not go in that direction or employ similar vocabulary. But as I will try to show, there are clear resonances between Heidegger's conception of Being and Advaitic conception of self (which in the Upanishads actually means 'Being' itself.) It is a peculiar notion of Vedanta that Being itself is conceived of as the self, although its peculiarity seems to vanish when we understand that by the word 'self' it refers to the 'nature' or 'reality' of something. Corresponding to this is the claim that the self can never be known. Just as Heidegger's analysis of Being in *Being and Time*, that Being is all too familiar yet opaque, and moreover that, although it is self-evident, it is still indefinable[12], so we find in Advaita that the pervasiveness or self-evidence of the self does not prevent it from escaping the bounds of definition or conceptualization. What is the reasoning behind this resistance to definition in the case of Vedanta? Shankara, in his commentary to the *Kena Upanishad*, captures this insight in his explanation that "the knower cannot be known by the knower, just as fire cannot be consumed by the consuming fire."[13] The knower simply cannot assume the status of the known. Because in doing so it will have to simultaneously be both—the knower and the known. How will this simultaneity be accounted for? It may be possible to argue that it is indeed possible, but still Advaita has in mind a particular understanding of self, assuming which it makes the case that

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 44.
[13] Shankara, *Kena Upanishad– With the Commentary of Shankaracharya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram , 2003), 27.

the self is unknowable. Thus we have to first know what Advaita means when we refer to the self. How we understand the word 'self' determines whether such knowledge is possible. If, for instance, I understand the self in terms of my physical existence or in terms of the inner life of the mind, then there can be no *a priori* objection to the possibility of having knowledge of the self. Or if I take the interpersonal existence of the self in the social sphere as a crucial aspect of the self, then too the possibility of such knowledge remains open. Whether the self can be known, therefore, is a question that hinges upon what we understand by it.

However, if I already possessed such understanding, if I already knew the precise referent of 'I' then what more would remain to be known? That is precisely what we are in ignorance of. But if we are ignorant then, in that case, how do we know which way to go or whether the effort is worthwhile at all? Heidegger also considers this objection in *Being and Time,* with reference to Being. In the *Meno*[14], Socrates faces the same paradox put up by his friend. He argues that if I already knew what I am enquiring about, what is the need to enquire? And if I do not already know what I am enquiring about, then how can I even take the first step? I wouldn't even know what I am looking for or which direction to go in. Therefore it is not possible to enquire at all. The common-sensical response to this apparent paradox, not different from Socrates's own reply, is that I already possess an implicit or partial understanding about what I am looking for. And I intend to seek a more explicit and fuller understanding of it on the basis of what I already know. For our own purpose too, the very first step should be to clarify the object of our enquiry on the basis of our pre-existent familiarity with it. But where can we even begin to look for a suitable starting point for investigating into the self? Only when we have gained sufficient clarity on this point can the enquiry receive a suitable direction.

[14] Dominic Scott, *Plato's Meno* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

At a very fundamental level we know ourselves to be somewhat different from the world we find ourselves in. My sense of self separates me from this world. I know myself to be a part of the physical universe and yet, somehow, I consider myself free from its causal inexorability and materiality. Each of us possesses a sense of self-identity, which sharply demarcates us from our surroundings. It is natural for the self to identify itself with all kinds of things that may, at first, be foreign to it; thereby reducing the non-self, the other to itself. For instance, I may come to form a strong identity with a cat that I adopt, which is now 'my' cat and not just another cat on the street. The cat becomes a part of my circle of identity to the extent that I can say that my 'self' is now extended to another being. If the cat is in pain, then it is a cause of discomfort to me. Just as the self identifies itself with something, by the same process it may alienate itself from something else. In this way the self constantly creates the Other and negotiates with it, sometimes appropriating something from its domain and sometimes relegating something back to it. However, in this constant negotiation with the Other, the lines never blur. The domain that the self has appropriated for itself is special, intimate to itself. Now given the fact of self-identity, there are some who claim themselves to be absolutely or somewhat ignorant of their selves. The very fact that they consider the question significant implies that they do not think their normal sense of self-identity to constitute their real self. What kind of knowledge about oneself assures one that one knows oneself? Normally one is likely to receive an account of how one appears, what he/she thinks or believes in, what are the things he/she likes or enjoys doing and so on.

But why is such an answer unlikely to persuade some and why does the question 'Who am I?' remain an open question even when all of the above are well known and understood? I, who raises the question about my own self, ought to be looking for something more than just a complete account or description of everything I think, do or possess. But what could this 'something more' that I seek be like? We may understand this in the light of our

previous discussion. The point is that I do not simply wish to know what it is that I have identified myself with. Rather my real concern is to find out what is it that is always identifying itself with the things (listed previously) in the daily course of my life. That is, the process of identification presupposes something that is the subject or ground of the identification, in whom and by whom the process is carried out. Therefore, my enquiry is directed at the very source of my being, the ground on which all the structures of bodily and psychological identifications stand. There must be something already existent *by virtue of* which I am able to have such experiences and *in* which these experiences occur. There must be something in my nature as a conscious being that allows for the possibility of any experience or identification. Therefore, the nature of the evidence that we must rely upon cannot be empirical. Thus the *Kena Upanishad* says, "Willed by whom does the directed mind go towards its object? Being directed by whom does the vital force that precedes all, proceed? By whom is this speech willed that people utter? Who is the effulgent being who directs the eyes and the ears?" [15] Therefore, the mind and the sense-faculties, infact one's entire subjectivity must itself be grounded in some being for and on the basis of which they function. And as Vedanta claims, 'knowing' this being must be of a very different order of knowledge.

2.2 KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The assertion that the notion of knowledge must be revised before we can analyze the role of poetry in it can also be approached through the idea that this knowledge cannot belong to a shared communal space of knowing/knowledge. Any discourse or theory assumes the prior existence of language, natural or artificial, as the shared communal framework of meaning and understanding. Language is the medium of thought. But, as the common medium of

[15] Shankara, *Kena Upanishad– With the Commentary of Shankaracharya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, 2003), 1.1.

sense and understanding, it is essentially public. If so, all theory and discourse must presuppose the existence of such a shared domain. Thought itself ought to presuppose this shared domain. Any mediation into an inquiry about the self can only occur at the level of thinking, whether it is in the form of a theory or a direct interpersonal discourse or dialogue. Any contribution, therefore, to an understanding of the self is only possible via the mode of thought. But this implies that any knowledge of the self will always be communal in nature. It will be mediated through meanings that derive their significance by virtue of being mutually agreed upon by the collective. Therefore, such understanding would necessarily be public in nature because understanding must be intellectual i.e. it must be in terms of thought. And thought presupposes language, which in its turn, presupposes the public space as the creator and dispenser of meaning. Therefore I will inevitably publicize any self-understanding the instant I begin to enquire into the self. Does this imply that an enquiry into the self, just like any other enquiry, can only occur on the assumption of a public space and a linguistic framework of meaning? For if, in principle, it is possible to meaningfully engage with the question, as defined in our enquiry, in the realm of the collective domain of meaning, then in a way that is crucial to us, it won't be possible to set such knowledge apart from other kinds.

The fact that thought is an indispensable means to an investigation seems a less unquestionable premise. To question it is to question the fundamental means by which man comes to understanding. Yet it is necessary to dwell on this point, to ask certain questions of the nature and scope of such knowledge. Now the question must be asked as to what it means when someone says that she/he *knows* something. Certainly what I claim to know ought to be true. The other characteristics of knowledge need not concern us for the moment. What does it mean for something to be true? Within the conventional model, which has been questioned, it often means a certain correspondence of the meaning of the proposition with fact, with a state of affairs. And it implies a certain framework of subject-object or knower-known within

which any knowledge occurs. This model must already be set aside from the point of view of Heidegger's characterization of truth as *aletheia*, as well as Advaita's characterization of self or Being, since both are pointing to a phenomenon (if it can be called that) which precedes and make possible the subject's knowledge of an object.

We can also distinguish the poetic paradigm of knowledge by appealing to the notion of an explanation and why the latter must fail to serve its function in this paradigm. A deeper probe into the truth about an entity usually takes the form of an explanation. Now there are various kinds of explanation suited for explaining various kinds of facts. In the scientific method, an explanation usually involves a causal account of the entity. Explanations can also be psychological, teleological and historical. Philosophical explanations often attempt to go further than causal, psychological or behavioral accounts to provide transcendental or *a priori* explanation on the one hand or linguistic ones on the other, in which case language actually begins to introspect. What kind of an explanation will suffice for providing an understanding of the self? It seems that explanation can never yield the understanding that I seek with respect to my 'self', my being. Why? We know that explanation normally assumes a certain parallelism with its object. Explanation, even though it is a highly abstract and specialized form of discourse, is grounded in the reality that it seeks to explain. Being a function of language, it refers outside itself to a fact that guides and shapes the form and content of the explanation. And usually the truth or validity of an explanation is judged on the basis of its consistency with facts.

Now what is it over and against which I can judge the truth or validity of a theory or explanation of the self? We may say, nothing whatsoever. This is because the self is never available as an object of thought or perception. And this is so because the self is the very subject of experience according to Vedanta. Whatever is essentially perceptible or knowable cannot be the self because the self is the very perceiver and the knower of everything. And

hence it is impossible to compare any proposition about the self with the self in order to judge its worth. The impossibility of any significant discourse or explanation of the self points to the eternal unavailability of the self as a referent of any sign or symbol.

It is the pre-ontological familiarity with my own self that I seek to understand more fully and I cannot possibly do so by the means of rational inquiry which inevitably reduces the self to the status of an entity and which is founded on the very thing it seeks to explain. It is this very problem that emerges in the culminating verses of the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyi in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The dialogue, which is said to contain the ultimate teaching of the *Upanishads*, closes, not with the revelation of some great secret, but with a question- "By what means can one perceive him by means of whom one perceives this whole world? Look- by what means can one perceive the perceiver?"[16] Shankara, in his commentary on the above verse, elaborates:

> When one sees something, through what instrument should one know that owing to which all this is known? For that instrument of knowledge itself falls under the category of objects. The knower may desire to know, not about itself, but about objects. As fire does not burn itself, so the self does not know itself, and the knower can have no knowledge of a thing that is not its object. Therefore through what instrument should one know the knower owing to which this universe is known, and who else should know it? And when to the knower of Brahman who has discriminated the Real from the unreal there remains only the subject, absolute and one without a second, through what instrument, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower?[17]

Is there no way by which we may proceed with our investigation of the self without falsifying or distorting the object of our enquiry? In looking for an answer to these questions it may be worthwhile to acknowledge a significant fact about the kind of self-knowledge that

[16]Patrick Olivelle, trans., "Brihadaranyaka Upanishad," in *The Early Upanishads* (India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1998), 4.5.15.

[17] Shankara, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad- With the Commentary of Shankaracharya* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, 1992), 261.

we are seeking. It is that self-knowledge cannot comprise the intake of any new information. It cannot be something that I learn or absorb from outside. Anything new can only be grasped or become known through the faculty of mind but since self-knowledge, as we have tried to show, cannot be mediated through thought, it follows that it cannot consist in something I already did not know. There is no other way out. But if I already knew everything worth knowing about myself, why would I begin an enquiry at the first place? Does this mean that the self-knowledge that we seek, fundamentally different from the conventional framework of knowledge, is not really possible and that our ideal is unreachable? To clarify this point it may be helpful to take a little detour through a dialogue found in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. It tells of a conversation between Narada and Sanatkumara. Narada tells Sanatkumara:

> I have studied the Rigveda, sir, as also the Yajurveda, the Samaveda, the Atharvana as the fourth, the corpus of histories and ancient tales as the fifth among the Vedas, ancestral rites, mathematics, soothsaying, the art of locating treasures, the dialogues, the monologues, the science of gods, the science of the ritual, the science of spirits, the science of government, the science of heavenly bodies…All that, sir, I have studied. Here I am, a man who knows all the vedic formulas but is ignorant of the self. And I have heard it said by your peers that those who know the self pass across sorrow. Here I am, sir, a man full of sorrow. Please, sir, take me across to the other side of sorrow.[18]

The self, according to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*[19], signifies eternal peace. It is a fact universally observable, and acknowledged in Vedanta, that man may give up, renounce or abdicate absolutely anything in creation but the desire for happiness, peace or contentment. When a human being aspires for something, it is for the sake of happiness. And when she/he decides that she/he wants it no more, out of excess or out of frustration of not having

[18]Patrick Olivelle, trans., "Chandogya Upanishad," in *The Early Upanishads* (India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1998), 7.3.2.

[19]Patrick Olivelle, trans., "Taittiriya Upanishad," in *The Early Upanishads* (India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1998), 3.2.1.

achieved it, it is again for the sake of his happiness. It is because such a state constitutes our very nature, it is reasoned, that we all possess such an indefatigable desire for it. If peace and happiness were not already inherent in our nature, then why would we, each and every one of us, seek it in some form or degree? Now the argument appears contradictory. If I already am something, then how can I possibly have an aspiration for it? Obviously, aspiring or seeking something implies that I do not already possess it. Vedanta's response to this logic is straight-forward. It points out the only possible motivation behind aspiring for something I already possess- I am simply unaware of the fact that I possess it. The often heard metaphor of the maiden who searches for her necklace everywhere, forgetful that all the time it lay on her neck describes the situation well. Transposing this argument to the question of knowledge, we can see that the paradigm of knowledge towards which we are slowly proceeding, which is the idea that poetry does not give any new knowledge but only points back to what is already known, familiar. Yet we still call it a 'knowledge' because the familiar was not acknowledged as such, that it was somehow looked over.

2.3 CONCLUSION

Let us summarize the essential points about Vedanta's theory of truth and knowledge with reference to our own question. Firstly, the knowledge of the self that we have sought has led us towards a certain paradigm of knowledge. Though we cannot anymore call it 'knowledge' in the usual sense of the word, it does not lose its efficacy in leading us to our aim in light of the evolved understanding that it has brought—"fundamentally and primarily, knowledge is Pure Consciousness. When it is expressed through a mental mode it is called by courtesy, knowledge."[20] This is because pure consciousness for Vedanta is of the very nature

[20] *Mountain Path*, '*Sakshi*'. Vol.45, No.3, Sri Ramanasramam, 2008, p. 51.

of knowing, it can never be in a state of not knowing. It may at times cease to cognize particular things, but it still rests in its nature of illumining. It is the principle of light and revelation that lights up all experience or even its absence. That is why it may be termed as a more fundamental knowledge than particular cognitive acts.

Secondly, self-knowledge also demands a fundamental transmutation of our notion of truth. As I have tried to argue in this chapter, the truth about the self is not dependent upon the notion of correspondence or any other kind of propositional truth. It is just not the property of words. Truth is that which is; as opposed to what is not yet somehow seems to be. The true, therefore, does not represent the actual—it is the actual. The two are one and the same. And its 'knowledge' does not necessitate any representation through word or symbol because the actual i.e. my own self or being, can be directly perceived. Thirdly, the knowledge we are seeking is in a sense already available and familiar. Moreover, it is important to note that whatever has been discussed in the context of the Vedantin discussion of 'self' equally well applies to 'Being' since the two are really the same in its view. Self-knowledge not only leads us to the answer of the question 'Who am I?' but also to the question 'What is?'. Although the self and Being are two different notions for Heidegger, we have seen that Vedanta's discussion of the self brings it closer to the Heideggerian concept of Being. We are not using here the everyday sense of the word 'self' or even what Heidegger takes it to be, but how Vedanta shifts its meaning from personal subjectivity to Being as such. The points are listed below:

1. Knowledge of Brahman/Being/Self does not belong to the order of a subject-object dualism.

2. Such knowledge is not mediated via correspondence or verification, but is an intrinsic characteristic of Brahman itself.

3. This knowledge is not a new cognitive act, but is somehow already available in all acts of perceptual cognition and empirical knowledge.

4. Understanding knowledge first and foremost as consciousness itself (which is Brahman) allows us a glimpse into this paradigm of knowledge.

5. Thus such knowledge demands a different paradigm of knowledge from the one that usually constitutes the meaning of the term.

Which of these points can be said to be also present in Heidegger? It seems that Heidegger wants to stress similar insights, not with reference to knowledge (or self-knowledge) as is the case in Vedanta, but with regards to truth and Being. But as I have explained previously, the self of Vedanta borders very close to the articulation of Being in Heidegger. Secondly what is theorized in terms of consciousness in Vedanta is articulated in terms of the Lichtung and disclosure in Heidegger, both serving as the respective principles of illumination and manifestation in each of the two discourses. This culminates the discussion of truth, being and knowledge within the context of Vedanta as a way to provide a philosophical basis for the arguments of the next chapter, at the same time seeing Vedanta's resonance with certain aspects of Heideggerian ontology. Such a foundation will be necessary in order to justify the claim that poetry can be a kind of knowledge, as well as understanding the precise role of the poet or the *kavi.* As we will see, the words of a language are deployed by a poet in such a way that they turn our attention to the already familiar, already known. This is also why the Vedic seers referred to such knowledge as *prāptasya prāptihi,* that is, 'attaining what is already attained'. And at least one major Indian aesthetic-theoretical tradition influenced by Vedantic thought, that of Abhinavagupta, in fact sees the function of poetic and even artistic discourse exactly as that which produces *brahmajñānam*—knowledge of Brahman, thereby suggesting the link between poetry and ontological knowing. Moreover, in this

aesthetic, the pleasure derived from such an experience is likened to the bliss equivalent to that of religious salvation, the only significant difference between them being that while religious salvation is permanent, the bliss achieved through aesthetic experience is transient, although being of the same quality.

Thus we will see that not only does such a conception of the role of poetry necessitate a revision of traditional notions about truth, as we have already seen, but also a revision of the nature and function of poetry itself. In the following chapter we will explore the links touched upon in this section through a different route—that of language—to illumine the capacity of poetry to reveal the truth. We still have to see how poetry comes into the picture in mediating the kind of knowledge whose characteristics have been summarized above. This will be the task of the third chapter. However, as we begin the next chapter, we will also see the way in which Vedantic philosophy doesn't always quite map onto Heideggerian thought, although the role accorded to the poet in both discourses appears to be similar as I will try to argue. But at the same time, we will also see what allows us to apply the epithet of 'knowledge' to poetry by taking the route of Vedantic thought, a possibility that may already be latent in Heideggerian discourse.

CHAPTER THREE: POETRY AS A KNOWLEDGE

3.1 THE TRUTH IN/OF POETRY

At the very outset it might help to observe that Heidegger himself does not indulge in a discourse about self or consciousness, in the manner that we have seen in Vedanta. All talk of Dasein is through the discussion of Being. Even in the later Heidegger, the theme of consciousness does not come into view in his discussion of the relationship between language, thinking and Being. All this may be due to Heidegger's wariness of a certain psychologism latent in talk about consciousness, a legacy he does not want to carry over from Husserl (and Descartes), and which is deeply criticized by him. Thus he eschews all talk about consciousness. To this extent, despite their similarities, Heideggerian discourse does not go where Vedantic discourse claims to go in its analysis of the being of an individual. But at the same time, it is not necessary that any discourse about consciousness is necessary psychologistic or that Vedanta carries the same assumptions about subjectivity and transcendence of the self that Husserl does. In fact, man's being as consciousness ought to be a critical dimension of Dasein and eschewing all discourse about it may result in an impoverished understanding of the complete being of man. In fact, we may sense the unavoidability of such discourse in Heidegger's own discussion of the clearing and *Lichtung,* which seem to resonate with motifs in Vedanta's discourse about consciousness. For the latter, light is often used as the best and the closest metaphor to talk about consciousness and many discussions seem reminiscent of the theme of *aletheia* in Heidegger. It may be helpful to keep this in mind as we go on to discussing the nature and role of poetry in the thought of Heidegger.

It is appropriate to begin with Heidegger's discussion of art in the seminal text *The Origin of the Work of Art,* although poetry itself is not its primary subject matter. Heidegger discusses the theme of art as such, whose observations and conclusions equally well apply to

poetic discourse. Not only that, as we will see, Heidegger in this work itself speaks of poetry as the consummate example and paradigm of art, as something more foundational than the arts (painting, sculpture etc). This has to do with poetry being situated within the ambit of language itself, as an art of words themselves. This will become more transparent as we proceed. Heidegger here is concerned with one central question: What constitutes the *thingness* of a thing? What makes a thing what it is?

In trying to answer this question, he surveys three ways this question has been answered within mainstream Western thought. Firstly, to conceive of a thing as a bearer of properties and traits, assuming a substance-attribute distinction. Secondly, to conceive it in terms of the distinction between matter and form. And lastly, a thing as the unity of manifold sensations. All these three ways are, for him, an 'assault' on the thing itself, not letting the thing emerge on its own accord. For this to happen, we must situate ourselves at a certain distance from the thing and let it speak for itself. This, for Heidegger, is crucially negotiated through the intervention of an artwork—the work of art lets us bear witness to the *thingly character* of the thing. Heidegger takes the example of the well-known painting of a pair of worn-out boots by Vincent Van Gogh. It is through the artwork that we 'know' what the shoes are in truth. How? This knowledge of course does not belong to the order of propositional or subject-object knowledge that has already been set aside earlier. Rather, such a knowledge is lived, experienced in the emergence of the being of the pair of shoes through their depiction in the work of art. Their being goes unnoticed outside the frame of the painting; their *thingly character* is typically never seen for what it is except through the work of art. In all their everyday familiarity, they resist the revelation of their full being. Thus knowledge of their being coincides, is in fact synonymous with, their disclosure as what they are. Knowledge does follow after the fact, as a record of an extra-linguistic fact. It co-substantiates the emergence of the thingy character of the thing as such. Its emergence is only

made possible through the being of Dasein that is nothing but openness or disclosure, or rather, the clearing in which any disclosure takes place.

Thus Heidegger says, "Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. The entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being. The Greeks call the unconcealedness of beings aletheia. We say 'truth' and think little enough in using the word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work."[21] Already Heidegger is uncoupling the notion of truth from the traditional theories about truth. Truth is a truth-making activity in the sense of truth happening in a work. Truth occurs. And in the knowing of this truth alone does a thing fully come into its own and emerge "in the steadiness of its shining."[22] Thus we see that Heidegger is questioning the basic assumption within philosophy that truth belongs to logic, while beauty is reserved for aesthetics. For him a work of art reveals, makes known, the general essence of the thing—"The work, therefore, is not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be present at any given time; it is, on the contrary, the reproduction of the thing's general essence."[23]

But what precisely is the process by which a work reveals this essential being of a thing? How does truth happen as unconcealedness in a work of art? Heidegger explains that before there is a world, before there is anything (before but to beyond), something else happens. As he says, "In the midst of beings of beings as a whole, an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting." [24] But, thought of with reference to what is, to the beings, this clearing *is* in a greater degree than are beings. "This open center is therefore not surrounded by what

[21] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 34.
[22] Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art,* 35.
[23] Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art,* 36.
[24] Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art,* 55.

is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know."[25] But although the same process is at work in all things and all creation, it is through a work of art that it is made transparent. Art is the privileged manifestation of truth, that which makes manifest the Being of beings,

> Thus in the work it is truth, not only something true, that is at work. The picture that shows the peasant shoes, the poem that says the Roman Fountain, do not just make manifest what this isolated being as such is— if indeed they manifest anything at all; rather, they make unconcealedness as such happen in regard to what is as a whole. The more simply and authentically the shoes are engrossed in their nature, the more plainly and purely the fountain is engrossed in its nature— the more directly and engagingly do all beings attain to a greater degree of being among with them. That is how self-concealing being is illuminated. Light of this kind joins its shining to and into the work. The shining, joined in the work, is the beautiful. Beautiful is one way in which truth occurs as unconcealedness.[26]

The prolific use of the vocabulary of light—unconcealedness, manifestation, disclosedness, clearing, illumination etc—already hints at the subject-ive dimension of the setting of work of truth. These are exactly the words and principles that the Upanishads use with reference to the light of the self, and which Vedanta theorizes in the explication and unfoldment of its theorization of consciousness. We have seen that Heidegger himself does not explicitly discuss man's being in terms of consciousness or awareness, partially due to the problems associated with its theorization in Husserl which he first pointed out. What precisely was the problem? It may be worthwhile to point out the specifics of the issue. It is from a phenomenological analysis of what is given to experience that Husserl aims to discover the structures of knowledge and ultimately 'save the appearances' by formulating a theory of

[25] Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 51.
[26] Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 54.

essences that attempts to arrive at the objectivity and reality of the external world, which, for all methodological purposes, lies in a metaphysical suspension or *epoché.*

For our purposes let us observe that existence has been compartmentalized into a conscious subject and a problematic object-domain that exceeds what is immediately given to experience. And it is the first-person stance that is supposed to open up access to the realm of immediate experience. Reactions to this whole way of thinking tend to assert that what is given to experience is indeed the external world itself, thereby rejecting both representational as well as phenomenological formulations of the problem. Heidegger completely eschews discussion of *Dasein* from the point of view of consciousness due to the above-mentioned problems. His skepticism of the presuppositions and motives of such a project prevent him from developing a possibly crucial dimension of *Dasein*'s existence. Not only does he finds problematic, the idea of an inner picturing of an outer world, but, more crucially, what is at stake is the dualism of inner-outer that haunts the entire western conceptualization of consciousness. Consciousness, as the prerogative of the knowing subject, is interpreted as an inner faculty of the self and something absolutely fundamental to it by virtue of which it is aware of internal and external phenomena. This is naturally problematic because the self has been separated from the world into its own cocoon, while for Heidegger, Dasein is always already engaged in the world.

3.2 KNOWLEDGE, DISCLOSURE & MANIFESTATION

But is it not possible to speak of the structures of consciousness without falling into the trap of any of the above problems? The discourse of Vedanta, which has been explained in some detail in the prevailing section, may be an alternative way to bring consciousness back into ontological discourse; at least in a more explicit way than it is already inevitably present in the thought of Heidegger. Picking up the traces of this discourse and making it ex-

plicit may help us to negotiate the path between Heidegger's conception of poetry as the place where truth sets itself to work and the Upanishadic vision of the *kavi* as the one who has self-knowledge. Already we can ask whether Heidegger's prolific use of similar motifs and principles (of light and manifestation) suggest something.

In the context of Vedanta, the nature of the self as consciousness has often been explained by employing notions of manifestation/un-manifestation, light, illumination and so on. Its literature abounds in the use of light as a metaphor for consciousness. Interestingly light here does not show much flow in a vertical path from 'higher' to 'lower' (as for instance in Christian mysticism) as it does from the 'inner' to the 'outer' since divinity is within, not above. *Ātma-jyoti* or the light of consciousness, flows from the self out to the world. Though it illumines the world, it is self-illumining on the analogy of the flame of a lamp that does not need another lamp to illumine itself. Thus it serves a dual function. It is transparent to itself always, as a lamp is not needing another light to illumine it. But in its self-transparency it illumines the other as well—it makes the world manifest. Moreover, ultimately this is only a heuristic device, as it is shown that ultimately there is no subject-object dichotomy, and that consciousness is not a privileged inner presence within subjectivity. In fact it is synonymous with Being itself. The *ātman* is the space (clearing) in which everything comes into light or manifestation, and thereby attains a greater degree of being.

What then is self-knowledge in Vedanta? It is to realize the self as the ultimate principle of illumination, but at the same time the ultimate ontological ground of all things. Thus, as it is often mistakenly characterized (as a variety of subjective idealism), Vedanta is neither 'subjective' nor 'idealistic'. Consciousness as the ultimate principle of illumination is absolutely impersonal. Moreover it is one with Being itself. Brahman, in one word, captures this dual aspect of disclosure-manifestation. Self-knowledge implies understanding one's own being, as well as the being of everything else, as that which is neither determined being (enti-

ty, thing, body) nor a Platonic 'beyond' surpassing all determinations, but as the clearing within which the world comes to be. It is conceiving one's being as an impersonal personality. Although this is not quite the characterization of Dasein, by the time we come to the later thought of Heidegger some of the themes bear a resonance, as we have seen in the text discussed above. It may be useful, for this purpose, to bring to mind the salient points made at the end of the last chapter. We have seen that for Heidegger, a work of art makes known what an entity is in its truth. How can we characterize such knowledge? As in the case of Vedanta, such knowledge is prior to any subject-object dualism that is presupposed in all other forms of knowing. Moreover this knowledge, as before, does not comprise the acquisition of some new fact or piece of information. Rather it comprises the manifestation of a thing as what it is; it's coming into full being. Knowledge is thus associated with the notions of disclosure and manifestation.

It is knowledge so understood that the poet helps to realize and make possible. For if art is one privileged manifestation of truth, as we have seen, then poetry is the very essence of all art. This will become eventually clear. "All art, of the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, essentially poetry."[27] Heidegger speaks of poetry as the 'illuminating projection', as the Open which poetry lets happen. At another instance he says, projective saying is poetry. Here we come to an important motif regarding the nature of poetry—the idea of poetry as a Saying. This has to do with the fact that poetry alone, for Heidegger, is authentic language. Its authenticity is due to the fact that the use of words in poetry is not practical, meant to serve this or that particular function within society, of communicating, making truth claims, expressing emotions and so on. Rather it consists in the building of the world that we inhabit, in the *letting be* of things, and as seen before, in the constitution of a

[27] Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 70.

thing's general essence. These themes are developed in the many other works he dedicates precisely to poetic discourse. In the *Origin* he says,

> Language is not poetry because it is the primal poesy; poesy takes place in language because language preserves the original nature of poetry. Building and plastic creation, on the other hand, always happen already in the Open of saying and naming. It is the open that pervades and guides them. But for this very reason, they remain their own ways and modes in which truth orders itself into work. They are an ever-special poetizing within the clearing of what is, which has already happened unnoticed in language.[28]

There is no real difference between the terms 'poesy' and 'poetry' themselves, often the two being synonymous, but it seems that Heidegger wants to use the former word in this passage in order to distinguish poetry as authentic language from poetry in general. If poetry is making claims to knowledge, such a privilege rests only with a certain kind of poetry (the kind that Heidegger also takes up) and not the broader poetic genre as such.

We can gather the importance of poetry as the art par excellence from the above verse. It has this status because it deals directly with words and with language. Thus, the poet serves a special function. If poetry is truth setting itself to work, it is the poet who does the work of making truth happen, of letting the world be—by his Saying. Earlier while speaking of the fountain in the poetry of Hölderlin, we saw that for Heidegger, the poet 'says' the fountain. What does this mean? Let's look at the following passage from a later essay *What Are Poets For*:

> Being, as itself, spans its own province, which is marked off by Being's being present in the word. Language is the precinct (templum), that is, the house of Being. The nature of language does not exhaust itself in signifying, nor is it merely something that has the character of sign or cipher. It is because language is the house of Being, that we reach what is by

[28] Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 74.

> constantly going through this house. When we go to the well, when we go through the woods, we are always already going through the word "well", through the word "woods" even if we do not speak the words…All beings…each in its own way, are *qua* beings in the precinct of language.[29]

Language, therefore, mediates the one's experience of the world; in fact, it founds the very world we inhabit. Language, elsewhere, is characterized as the 'world-moving saying'[30], that which gathered the world, in its fourfold, and unites it in itself. Heidegger uses the example of a pouring jug to speak of this gathering. The pouring jug becomes a symbol of the gift. In this gift of the outpouring jug—earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell together at once. The jug essences as thing; in it the earth, sky, gods and mortals are united "in the single fold of the unifying fourfold."[31] That is, the jug itself comprising of the four elements partakes of the four-fold—it is composed of the earth, yet containing space within itself (sky), owing to which it is able to nourish the mortals and thereby constitute a spectacle for the divinities. The concept of the four-fold is said to be a somewhat more mystical aspect of the later Heidegger and we cannot go into it at length here. Suffices to say that for Heidegger, upon each of them (the fourfold) is reflected (*mirroring*) the essence of the rest. Mirroring here implies the illumination of each of them in the fourfold, each of them thereby gaining their own essence. Thus, in the essay *Language* he says that

> …this gathering, assembling, letting-stay is the thinking of things. The unitary fourfold of sky and earth, mortals and divinities, which is stayed in the thinking of the things, we call— the world. In the naming, the things named are called into their thinking. Thinging, they unfold world, in which things abide

[29] Martin Heidegger, "What are Poets For," in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 106.
[30] Martin Heidegger, "What are Poets For," in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 107.
[31] Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 171.

> and so are the abiding ones…thinging, they, gesture, gestate the world.[32]

Thus it is clear, through a description of the four-fold and the *thinging* that poetic discourse is what lets us dwell in the world. This it does by building—"Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building."[33] This leads us back to the one major point of convergence between Advaita and Heidegger regarding their philosophy of language and the ontological role of language in the creation and self-revelation of the world, thereby attesting to the unique function of the poet. The poet is not only a truth-maker, in the sense discussed before, but simultaneously the one who contributes in the self-revelation of the world by his poetic activity.

[32] Martin Heidegger, "Language," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 197.
[33] Martin Heidegger, "Poetically Man Dwells," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 213.

CONCLUSION

As we have tried to show in the previous chapter, poetry is nothing short of authentic language itself, and the poet is not someone who conjures up fancy images or metaphors or who arouses our feelings a certain way, but someone who lets us have an experience with language. This 'experience' is nothing less than the experience of the wording of the world, the way in which things come to be and dwell as they are. The poet makes manifest, he makes known; he makes known by making manifest. That is why the first speakers of a language were, for Heidegger, all poets. They experienced language as the intimate relationship between the word and the thing, and not as a system of signs used to 'represent' or convey an outside, objective state of affairs. A very similar concept is evoked in Vedantic discourse, in terms of the unity of the name and the thing— *nāma* and *rūpa.* The two, in fact, are inseparable. As Heidegger discusses the being of a jug, the Chandogya Upanishad[34] likewise takes up the example of a clay pot, to show that the being of the pot is interwoven into its linguistic signification.

Thus although, in a sense already elaborated at length while discussing Vedanta, language cannot reveal Being in the sense of representing or depicting it in words, it is still the mode by which Being itself manifests. Isayeva observes that "indeed one cannot, according to Shankara, 'see the witness of being or think the essence of thinking'. And still there is something inherent in the very nature of language, something that helps to reveal reality without giving it an exhaustive definition." [35] Pointing to a similar attitude in Heidegger he further remarks that

[34] Swami Nikhilananda, trans., "Chandogya Upanishad," in *The Upanishads* (New York: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 6.1.

[35] Natalia Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy (*Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 120.

> …the word should be regarded as an indication, as a pointer, oriented towards the eternally elusive Being, and not as a label…A radical turn made by Heidegger in respect to language, which is regarded now not as a determination of reality, but as its own self-revelation…demands from a person— and not only from a poet but also from a philosopher— an ability to listen and to hear what is being prompted and suggested by language. Perhaps, one should also see in a different light the Vedic sayings of *pārmārthika* level relating to the identity of ātman and Brahman.[36]

The 'Vedic' sayings referred to above are nothing but the final teaching of the Upanishads which assert the constitutive role of language in the manifestation or creation of the world, and the identity of self (ātman) and Being (Brahman). This is what the Kavi is able to understand by 'hearing' and 'listening' to what language has to say. This is not simply waxing eloquent or sounding poetic. A distinction must be made between man himself speaking and language speaking through man, and it is the latter that gets fulfilled in the activity of the poet.

As would be evident, this aspect corresponds to the discussion in the second chapter about the unavailability of the self to all linguistic significations, as its very mirror image. As seen before, it would be incorrect to say that Being is available to signification by language, that Being can be signified and captured in words. Rather, the whole discussion in this chapter suggests that Being itself manifests as a *languaging.* It is the condition of possibility of any experience with language. Thus the fact that the self is unavailable to language, description or explanation, as we saw in the case of Vedanta, this very unavailability, this *concealedness* makes possible the unity of the play of the name and thing, *nāma* and *rūpa.* In this self/Brahman, the world worlds. Poetry is the experience that accompanies this worlding.

[36] Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy,* 122.

This is as far as Heidegger goes. But Vedanta does not hesitate to go further from calling it just an experience, and actually construes it as a kind of knowledge, that is, self-knowledge.

This is due to the fact that knowledge, under the revised understanding we have attempted, comes closer to consciousness as such. As we saw, for Vedanta, fundamentally and primarily, knowledge is pure Consciousness. When it is expressed in particular acts of knowledge, perceptual or cognitive, it is a secondary kind of knowledge. It may be problematic to apply this term to consciousness, given that this will be an unusual application of the term not seen in the usual contexts in which the word 'knowledge' is usually used. However, the Sanskrit word for knowledge—jñānam—is a word that has always been used traditionally in Vedanta to refer to consciousness, and in fact for the very purpose of not separating or distinguishing the two senses. Although the word '*caitanyam'* is the more common word reserved for talking about consciousness, Vedanta never fails to point out that this *caitanyam* or consciousness is none other than *jñānam* or knowledge itself as we know it, in its most realist or empirical sense. This is because the latter is derivative of the former, consciousness being the fundamental ground that makes possible all particular acts of knowledge. This is not the place to discuss by what means Vedanta attempts to unify knowledge as such with consciousness, a crucial aspect of Advaita epistemology. But in doing so Vedanta manages to speak of knowledge, so understood, in the non-dual and fundamental sense we explored earlier—as lacking subject-object duality, as being the very condition of all particular acts of knowledge and therefore as something already present or available, and finally as the very principle of the manifestation of all objects.

These 'attributes' of knowledge so understood bring the Vedantic understanding of self/being close to the understanding of truth as disclosure and unconcealedness, with all the descriptions and vocabulary of the latter easily transferable to the Advaitic self (as pointed out before). Moreover, it is the poet who leads others to 'an authentic experience with lan-

guage' as Heidegger says. What is referred to as 'experience' for the poet becomes 'knowledge' proper for Vedanta. The poet sees his role as the co-creator of the world, via the building-possibility latent in language itself. That things, the whole world, come to their full unconcealedness via poetry or poetry-as-world-making only means that knowledge—as unconcealedness—rests within this fundamental world-making activity of the poet. All other knowledge, that is, particular knowledge, assumes this unconcealment.

This is not to say that all poetry assumes this status. In fact Heidegger would be very skeptical of such a claim. Only sometimes is poetry capable of reaching or attaining this status. Secondly, Heidegger may only be referring to a certain kind of poetry (in line with the tradition of poets he wrote about) as opposed to the numerous genres and styles that are constantly redefining what it even means for a passage to count as an instance of poetic discourse. Further, although we cannot go into the details of this point, Heidegger will not be equally enthusiastic for other literary genres (like novels) to have the same status as poetry, not in the least because such genres are 'fictional' in the sense in which poetry is not. Their function will seem to exceed the truth-making activity of the poet so as to serve other literary purposes. Notwithstanding these qualifications, we have presented an interpretation of the poet's activity as a kind of knowing, if only one amongst others, but nonetheless a significant one—a knowing that is at the same time a truth-making.

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