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A Psychological Task of the Historian

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Abstract. This article employs the philosopher Martin Heidegger's juxtaposition of being and language to highlight a very difficult and often ignored task of the historian.

There are the usual tasks of the historian: establishing (1) what happened behaviorally, (2) what happened phenomenally, and (3) what happened causally. These tasks are interrelated and have been and are subject to much historiographical analysis.

A more unusual task of the historian is to confront a challenge presented by the juxtaposition of being and language. The phenomenology of the historian as constituted by language is that historian's being. This being is all the historian brings to historiography and is subject to evolution from the distant past; modification from the recent past and present; and self-change mechanisms bearing on a phenomenology of the past, present, and future.

Heidegger's notion that history is a continuous succession of words of being suggests that historiography essentially is an improbable task. One's being almost hopelessly constrains and impedes a phenomenal awareness of a past being--perhaps any other being regardless of time. The one exception to this -- according to Heidegger--might be the philosopher.

What Heidegger seems to suggest is that the unknowability of another's phenomenology may be breached through apperceiving the being-language juxtaposition--i.e., through discovering, realizing, and expressing another's being through language. However, a historiographical manual of breaching unknowability was not developed by Heidegger. Instead, Heidegger seems to provide incantations based on primordial magic.

Although Heidegger does not provide a workable or even understandable solution, he has advanced a problem--a psychological task that cries out for analysis by psychohistorians more than common applications of psychodynamic models to sterile historical descriptions. As Heidegger wrote, "language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells." The psychohistorian must develop the key to enter. (See Faimberg, H. (1995). Misunderstanding and psychic truths. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 76, 9-13; Feigenberg, E.I., & Asmolov, A.G. (1996). The cultural-historical concept and possibilities of using nonverbal communication in reconstituting the personality. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 34, 24-34; Heidegger, M. (1993). *Basic writings* (D.F. Krell, Ed. and Trans.). Harper; Mos, L.P. (1998). On methodological distinctions: Nomothetic psychology or historical understanding. *Theory and Psychology*, 8, 39-57; Lepper, G. (1996). Between science and hermeneutics: Towards a contemporary empirical approach to the study of interpretation in analytic psychotherapy. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 13, 219-231; Lowenberg, P. (1996). Psychoanalytic ego psychology and object relations and their uses for the historian. *Psychohistory Review*, 25, 21-46; Rouet, J-F, et al. (1997). Studying and using multiple documents in history: Effects of discipline expertise. *Cognition and Instruction*, 15, 85-106; Steiner, G. (1991). *Martin Heidegger*. University of Chicago Press.) (Keywords: Heidegger, History, Interpretation.)