

# “THE ONE WHO MUST BEAR WITNESS TO WHAT HE IS”

## HEIDEGGER ON ATTESTATION AND TESTIMONY

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In present-day philosophy, the notion of testimony plays a crucial role. Following Krämer, Schmidt and Schülein, we may distinguish two important but distinct lines of inquiry in contemporary philosophy.<sup>1</sup> First, it is an indispensable topic in the ever-growing body of work devoted to social epistemology. Second, the difficulties experienced by victims of different forms of violence to make their testimonies be heard are of central import for more ethically and politically engaged philosophical discussions, starting with Lyotard’s reflections in *Le différend* in the 1980s up to the interest in epistemic injustice fueled by the study of the same name by Fricker.<sup>2</sup>

One of the names that is conspicuously absent from most of these analyses, especially from the most recent ones, is that of Martin Heidegger. Given the specific emphasis of the two main lines of inquiry

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<sup>1</sup> Sybille Krämer, Sibylle Schmidt and Johannes-Georg Schülein, eds., *Philosophie der Zeugenschaft: Eine Anthologie* (Münster: Mentis, 2017), 13-17.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Le différend* (Paris: Minuit, 1983); Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007).

in present-day philosophy of testimony, namely epistemology and ethics, this may not immediately surprise us.<sup>3</sup> Yet, it is exactly because Heidegger approaches testimony and attestation differently, namely as an ontological notion, that his explications of testimony and attestation are worthwhile to take into account and to consider what they can offer to a philosophy of testimony. This is the aim of this article.

Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* offers several shattered remarks on *Zeuge*, *Zeugnis*, *Bezeugung* and *zeugen*.<sup>4</sup> Yet, two groups of texts stand out and offer a substantial discussion of these notions. First, and most elaborate, in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger's famous account of *Bezeugung* or attestation and the voice of conscience offer some basic elements to think testimony and discern its specific ontological dimensions.<sup>5</sup> Second, in both "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung" and in the "Vorbereitende Besinnung" of his reading of Hölderlin's hymn "Germanien," Heidegger proposes that the human being can be thought of as the witness of being, "Zeuge des Seyns."<sup>6</sup> In these two texts, being a witness of Being and bearing witness to Being become determining features of human existence and the human's privileged relation with language.

This article is composed of four parts. First, I discuss one of the philosophical contexts in which the question of bearing witness imposes

<sup>3</sup> Especially when dealing with the question of the ethical and political dimensions of testimony, one of the main hesitations in turning to Heidegger concerns his relation to National Socialism, which is in the center of attention once again after the publication of the *Schwarze Hefte*. It is, nevertheless, to this highly contested and complicated task of assessing whether and what of Heidegger's thought does and does not have to offer to a philosophy of testimony, that this article wishes to make a contribution.

<sup>4</sup> In the footnotes of this article, I provide a number of these references.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001<sup>18</sup>), §§ 54-60; note that Heidegger explicitly calls *Bezeugung* also a *Zeugnis*, testimony (267). Translation: *Being and Time: A Translation of "Sein und Zeit"*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997). In the rest of the article, for this and for other texts, when referring to both original and translation, I will use the notation #a/#b, where #a is the page number of the original and #b the page number of the translation.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," in *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, Gesamtausgabe 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981), 33-48. Translation: "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 51-65. The relevant part of the "Vorbereitende Besinnung" of his reading of "Germanien" can be found in Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Gesamtausgabe 39 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993), 59-77 (= § 7). Translation: "Preparatory Reflection" in *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germany" and "The Rhine"*, trans. William McNeill and Julia Ireland (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2014), 56-70.

itself — and I do so in discussion with Heidegger. Second, I turn to some of the passages in *Sein und Zeit* where Heidegger discusses *Zeugnis*, testimony, and *Bezeugung*, attestation. Here, my aim is to highlight and discuss a number of the essential features that Heidegger’s account of attestation has to offer to a philosophy of testimony.<sup>7</sup> Third, I turn to the passages in his reading of Hölderlin in which Heidegger expressly articulates the essence of the human being as “Zeuge des Seyns.” Fourth, I conclude with a discussion of the promissive dimension of testimony and language.

## 1. INTRODUCING THE STAKES OF TESTIMONY: HEIDEGGER ON PLATO’S *PHAEDRUS*

One way to capture the philosophical relevance of bearing witness and testimony is to depart from a critique and an example that Socrates offers of the rhetoric of Tisias and his school in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and which concerns the characteristic scene of testimony in ancient thought, namely that before a court of law. To Tisias and his school, Socrates attributes the following point of view, reiterated a number of times throughout the dialogue:

one who intends to be an able rhetorician has no need to know the truth [...]. No one in a lawcourt, you see, cares at all about the truth of such matters. They only care about what is convincing. This is called “the likely,” and that is what a man who intends to speak according to art should concentrate on. Sometimes, in fact, whether you are prosecuting or defending a case, you must not even say what actually happened, if it was not likely to have happened — you must say something that is likely instead. Whatever you say, you should pursue what is likely and leave the truth aside: the whole art consists in cleaving to that throughout your speech.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A different approach to these sections can, e.g., be found in Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Points essais (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 393-409, where the discussion of attestation is read in a discussion on the role of conscience. Ricoeur uses the contrast between Heidegger and Levinas to demonstrate both what the limits of their respective thoughts on attestation and testimony are and what their reflection on these themes has to offer to the other’s.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 272d-e; Translation taken from Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 549.

In the argument that follows, Socrates insists, *pace* Tisias, that the art of persuasion, *peithein*, depends on knowing the likely, *eikos*, on knowing what is like, *homoiotēs*, truth. Hence, even if the likely can be used to deceive us, it nevertheless refers back to the true, *to alēthēs*. Therefore, according to Socrates, there must be a primacy of the true in the art of rhetoric, as also Heidegger emphasizes in his reading of the *Phaedrus*.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, the likely is not only secondary to the true, it is also the way of appearing of the true; and by appearing as the likely, the true becomes persuasive. Heidegger's translation of *to eikos* as *das Wahr-scheinliche* is striking in this respect: the likely *shines* as the true.<sup>10</sup> It is with respect to this qualification of the likely and the appearance of the true that Socrates's example demonstrates the danger at the heart of the likely's likeness to truth. Sometimes, this example suggests, the true is *das Unwahrscheinliche*, that which does not appear to be true, and even *das Unscheinliche*, what cannot appear and shine out of itself. In these cases, in order to persuade, the rhetorician should abstain from speaking the truth.

In a certain sense, this discussion confronts us with one more version of the problem of being and appearing. The (re)presentation of the true in rhetorical discourse runs the risk of betraying the true. Yet, we encounter here a rather poignant, exceptional version of this problem. In this case, the difference between being true to the true and betraying it is not simply a matter of distinguishing between an adequate and a distorting representation. Rather, Socrates's example suggests that there might be cases in which the true is in a more fundamental sense at odds with the rhetorical practice of persuasion.

According to the protocols drawn up by his students, Heidegger describes the basic aim of rhetoric as follows:

The people should be guided in their relation to things by speech. Guidance means here that that, about which is spoken, is brought before them in such a

<sup>9</sup> "Wenn auch nichts als das *eikos/pithanon* angestrebt wird, so kommt es doch auch hierbei auf das *alēthes* an, wenn anders das *legein* ein *technē legein* sein soll." Martin Heidegger, *Seminare Platon – Aristoteles – Augustinus*, Gesamtausgabe 83 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2012), 372-73.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Seminare Platon – Aristoteles – Augustinus*, 141.

way that the compelling view of the subject matter convinces the listeners in such a way that they relate in the same way to it. When such a soul-guiding speech convinces someone else of something, it produces in their soul.<sup>11</sup>

Although I have not yet spoken of testimony or bearing witness, in the German language the verb *zeugen* is already present in this quotation in the verbs *überzeugen*, to convince, and *hineinzeugen*, to engender or generate in(side) — Plato himself speaks of cultivating. To convince others of something is to guide their soul to a compelling understanding of a subject matter. This guiding speech engenders understanding in the soul of the addressee. Interestingly, when Heidegger discusses the passages from the *Phaedrus* in which the art of persuasion has severed its commitment to the true, he does not use the verb *überzeugen*, to convince, but rather *überreden*, to persuade.<sup>12</sup> The speeches of lawyers also effectuate a persuasion in the souls of those who listen, but it is a persuasion that distorts the true and, thus, leads the soul astray and does not lead to understanding. Heidegger here reserves terms related to *zeugen* to those forms of rhetoric that remain committed to truth.

Possibly because he lacked the time to do so, Heidegger does not discuss the specific *incapacity* of certain instances of the true. When the true is unlikely, *unwahrscheinlich* or *unscheinlich*, the true is marked by a particular phenomenological poverty: it cannot show itself out of itself; it cannot be (re)presented in language as convincing.

To say that something is likely and thus has the power to convince or persuade an audience, is therefore not unequivocally a characteristic of the true. Sometimes what happens is unexpected, as Arendt notes: “reality has the disconcerting habit of confronting us with the unexpected, for which we were not prepared.”<sup>13</sup> Even though the proverb guarantees us that “truth

<sup>11</sup> My translation. “Die Menschen sollen in ihrem Verhalten zu den Dingen geführt werden durch das Reden. Führung bedeutet hier, daß das, worüber geredet wird, so vorgeführt wird, daß zwingende Einsicht in die Sache den Hörenden so überzeugt, daß er dann auch dazu steht. Wenn solche seelenleitende Rede einen anderen von etwas überzeugt, so zeugt sie in dessen Seele hinein.” Heidegger, *Seminare Platon – Aristoteles – Augustinus*, 313.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g.: “Phaidros erwidert auf die Leitfrage des Sokrates, daß es bei der Rede auf *peithein* (260a4), ‘Überreden’, ankommt, nicht auf Wahrheit, d. h. er antwortet im Hinblick auf das, womit man mit der Rede Erfolg hat.” Heidegger, *Seminare Platon – Aristoteles – Augustinus*, 318.

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Crisis of the Republic* (London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1972), 6-7.

will out,” the future tense of the proverb implies a deferral in the disclosure of the truth. This delay is caused by the phenomenological poverty of the true; it does not shine and appear as the true; time and effort is required to let it appear as the true. This is not simply a matter of the true being withheld. If somebody tells us a most unlikely course of events, we will not easily be persuaded by this testimony. It is easier to persuade an audience if we depart from their expectations and their convictions of what is likely to happen and likely to be true, as Arendt also notes in the context of the above quotation. Therefore, the rhetorician who aims for immediate persuasion alone, should speak out of the audience’s framework or horizon of expectation. By contrast, the mode of speech that speaks out of its concern for and commitment to the true has to confront this “disconcerting habit” of reality. Namely that, at crucial moments, it tends not to conform to our horizon of expectations and it tends not to be the likely.

In this context, the question of testimony imposes itself for two reasons. First, if we consider the commitment to and concern for the truth in the context of Socrates’s example, we notice that rather than the lawyer, it is the witness who is committed to the truth. We can even discern this in our everyday use of these terms. A lawyer who merely aims to persuade in order to win a case for his or her client, is never called a false lawyer. By contrast, a witness who lies or distorts the truth is rightly called a false witness. Hence, in a court of law, it is the witness who is supposed to speak up for the truth and remain committed to it. Second, when the true is incapable of speaking for itself, it *needs* someone to speak for it, *who can answer for it*; they need someone who is their *safeguard* and *guarantee*, who *protects* them and *preserves* them, in a context or discourse that only tends to understand and tends to be convinced by the order of what is expected and what is likely. The witness offers itself as the *Platzhalter* or *lieu-tenant* of the true in a context where the true cannot convince of and by itself.<sup>14</sup> Without a witness, *Zeuge*, who actually speaks for the true and generates in the soul of the

<sup>14</sup> As Heidegger writes in his reflection on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*: “Woran liegt es beim Sprechen, daß wir als Hörer den Redenden als solchen nehmen, der *selbst* für die Sache, die er vertritt, Zeugnis ablegt? Worin liegt es in ihm selbst, daß er *mit seiner Person* für die Sache spricht, abgesehen davon, was er sagt, von den sachlichen Argumenten, die er für etwas beizubringen hat?” Martin Heidegger,

listeners a genuine understanding of the true, the truth remains mute, distorted or hidden.

Thus, at the limit of these reflections on rhetoric and the likely, the question of testimony imposes itself on us. Socrates’s concern for the danger intrinsic to the rhetoric capacity of language to distort and to hide, brings us in close proximity of a fragment from one of Hölderlin’s letters, of which Heidegger offers an interpretation: “That is why language, the most dangerous of goods, has been given to man ... so that he may bear witness to what he is. ...’ (IV, 246).”<sup>15</sup> To prepare a discussion of this fragment and its implications for our understanding of testimony, let us first turn to *Sein und Zeit* and elucidate some basic characteristics of testimony and attestation in this text.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. THE QUESTION OF BEARING WITNESS IN *SEIN UND ZEIT*

In order to capture what Heidegger’s account of testimony and attestation has to offer to a philosophy of testimony, let me first make three preparatory comments. First, consider the following “playful” etymology.<sup>17</sup> In German, the verb *zeugen* is etymologically related to the verb *ziehen*, which means to draw or to pull.<sup>18</sup> In its most basic sense, this means that the witness, *Zeuge*, is the one who is drawn before the court. By extension, however, this sense of being drawn (in)to and being involved in — *einbezogen* — is characteristic of the original scene of testimony before a court. The witness is drawn before the course because he or she is somehow involved in the case or subject matter — *die Sache* — at issue

*Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*, Gesamtausgabe 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), 165.

<sup>15</sup> “Darum ist der Güter Gefährlichstes, die Sprache dem Menschen gegeben ... damit er zeuge, was er sei ...’ (IV, 246.)” Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, 33/51. The same passage is also discussed in Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,”* 60-62.

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, 34. The same passage is also discussed in Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,”* 60-62.

<sup>17</sup> Playful or “in einem Spiel des Denkens,” as Heidegger notes in a different context, see Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Gesamtausgabe 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann), 115.

<sup>18</sup> A similar etymological relation exists in Dutch between *getuigen* and *trekken*: *tuigen* means *trekken*.

in court. The witness witnessed something relevant to this case and by testifying makes something known to the tribunal which, up to the moment of the actual enactment — *Vollzug* — of testimony, remains withdrawn — *entzogen* — from the tribunal. In this sense, testimony generates — *zeugt* or *erzeugt* — a new understanding of the case and involves (*bezieht ein*) its addressees in the subject matter it discloses.

Second, to my knowledge, Heidegger does not explicitly develop this link between *ziehen* — as well as the chain of words related to it such as *Entzug*, *Bezug*, *Bezogenheit*, *Vollzug*, *Einbezug* — and *zeugen*. However, he does propose this connection at least once: “*Einbezogen! Bezeugung als Einbezug! // Entwurf* — als Eröffnung des Einbezugs — der *Unumgänglichkeit*.”<sup>19</sup> (A possible translation, which does not retain the relation between *zeugen* and *ziehen*, would read: “*Involvement! Attestation as involvement! // Project* — as opening of involvement — of *in-escapability*, of *what cannot be passed by*.”) This comment is found in a note with the title “*Die Durchbrechung des Verstehens*,” the breaking through of the understanding of Being that breaks apart the everyday understanding. Although this note might seem somewhat enigmatic at first, the way it connects *Bezeugung* and *Einbezug* is still rather telling. Attestation is apparently a form of involving us in Being. Moreover, this form of attestation is related to Heidegger’s conception of understanding as *Entwurf*, project: this *Entwurf* is the very opening, inauguration and constitution of our involvement in Being. Attestation is not concerned with conveying information or a certain belief or knowledge about Being, but it rather generates — *erzeugt* — our involvement in Being. Moreover, this *Entwurf* is of such a nature that this involvement is ineluctable, *unumgänglich*: this involvement is binding, we cannot pass it by, and what is disclosed to us is now our concern and in our care.

Third, somewhat less playful, the first basic insight that this relation between *ziehen* and *zeugen* offers a philosophy of testimony is that testimony is never a matter of conveying information or of transferring a belief about a certain state of affairs. The act of testimony involves its

<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, Gesamtausgabe 73.1 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2013), 617.



addressees in its subject matter: if the addressee accepts the testimony, he or she is involved in this subject matter and, even though the addressee did not witness what the witness witnessed, it is now also in his or her care. At this point, it might be helpful to contrast the act of testimony to what is ordinarily called a performative. A common performative generates only expected and foreseen effects; and it is clear beforehand who is in the — subject — position to generate this effect. For instance, when a civil servant says the words: “Now I pronounce you husband and wife,” and with these words inaugurates the married state of these two people, this effect is anticipated by all; and all those present know beforehand that, in this particular situation, only the words of the civil servant have this effect. In the case of bearing witness, by contrast, we do not know beforehand who will be in the subject position of the witness. Often, the witness has to step forward him or herself and make him or herself known as a witness: “I was there, so I can testify.” Moreover, we do not know beforehand what a testimony will announce concerning a subject matter and we cannot anticipate its effects on the situation in which the witness testifies. Hence, testimony may have unexpected results and may affect and transform the discourse or horizon of understanding of the hearers and open it up to *unforeseen* possibilities. In reference to Socrates’s example discussed in the first section, this unexpectedness is grounded in the very unexpectedness of, for instance, the unlikely or even unimaginable course of events of which a witness speaks.

With these distinctions and connections in mind, let us turn to Heidegger’s comments on *Zeugnis* and *Bezeugung* in *Sein und Zeit* and see how he analyses them by first identifying the subject matter, enactment, witness and addressee of this specific attestation as well as Heidegger’s understanding of them.

Attestation intervenes in Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s self-understanding. Initially, the mode of everydayness determines Dasein’s self-understanding: humans tend to understand the world and themselves from their dealings with innerworldly beings and from “the they,” *das Man*. With respect to this initial appearance and understanding of Dasein’s own being, the genuine ground and sense of this existence, is withdrawn from Dasein. Heidegger formally names this genuine and

withdrawn ground of existence *das eigentliche Seinkönnen*, the “own proper potentiality-of-being.”<sup>20</sup> This proper potentiality-of-being is the subject matter of the attestation at stake in *Sein und Zeit*. Dasein can only attune itself to this exceptional phenomenon by means of the fundamental attunement, *Grundstimmung*, of anxiety or *Angst*, which is “an exceptional disclosedness of Dasein.”<sup>21</sup> Here, I prefer to translate “ausgezeichnet” as exceptional rather than as eminent in order to emphasize that this attunement or mood is indeed an exception to what is disclosed to us in the mode of everydayness. This exceptional state is beautifully captured in the following comment: “When *Angst* has quieted down, in our everyday way of talking we are accustomed to say ‘it was really nothing.’”<sup>22</sup> In the horizon of the initial appearance of existence, the mode of everydayness, the mood that discloses us to the ground and sense of everydayness appears as “it was really nothing.” In this horizon, this potentiality-of-being and the mood that discloses it, are *unscheinlich* and *unwahrscheinlich*, they appear to be nothing. Moreover, this exceptional phenomenon lacks persistence. Even when it is disclosed, it falls back into withdrawal; it cannot maintain itself as disclosed — “it was really nothing.” Consequently, the announcement of Dasein’s proper potentiality-of-being requires that the everyday horizon of understanding is broken down and that another understanding breaks through; that is to say, a fundamentally other understanding needs to be generated, *erzeugt*, so that Dasein can be involved in its own proper potentiality-of-being.

At this point, Heidegger introduces the notions of *Bezeugung* and *Zeugnis*: the particular disclosure that generates a new understanding that is understood as a testimony. The issue is, as Heidegger concludes § 53: “to what extent *at all* and in what way Da-sein *bears witness*

<sup>20</sup> I prefer to translate “eigentlich” neutrally as “own proper” rather than the ethically charged “authentic”; “own proper” retains both the reference to what is one’s own as well as the meaning of *eigentlich* as adjective, namely “true” or “real.”

<sup>21</sup> “eine ausgezeichnete Erschlossenheit des Daseins.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 184/172. Translation slightly altered.

<sup>22</sup> “Wenn die Angst sich gelegt hat, dann pflegt die alltägliche Rede zu sagen: ‘es war eigentlich nichts.’” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 187/175. See also Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, Gesamtausgabe 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 112.

[*Zeugnis gibt*] to a possible *authenticity* [*Eigentlichkeit*] of its existence from its ownmost potentiality-of-being, in such a way that it not only makes this known as *existentielly* possible, but *demands* it of itself.”<sup>23</sup> Dasein in its mode of everydayness is the addressee of this testimony.<sup>24</sup> According to this citation, Dasein itself is also the witness; yet, its testimony comes from its own proper potentiality-of-being, that is to say, it comes from a domain that is withdrawn from the mode of everydayness in which Dasein finds itself. Hence, testimony is seen as the privileged mode of discourse — *Rede* — that is capable of making known what is fundamentally other than and an exception to the horizon of understanding from which Dasein understands itself as well as everything it encounters in the world. Moreover, the citation speaks of *fordern*: testimony is not simply the announcement of a possible mode of existence, but it makes a *demand*: it is a demand on the addressee to become involved with a subject matter which he or she considers to be nothing, insignificant or meaningless.

That indeed the subject matter lies beyond the confines of the addressee’s horizon of understanding can be traced in Heidegger’s comment that Dasein “*fails to hear*”; it does not and cannot hear anything related to its own proper mode of existence.<sup>25</sup> Dasein understands itself in a distorted way because it listens to the wrong voices and the wrong discourse, namely that of the they. The discourse of the they, idle chatter or *Gerede*, is the shared discourse and horizon of understanding from which Dasein tends to understand itself. By belonging to — or listening to (*hören auf*) the they — this shared discourse, the phenomenon of one’s own proper potentiality-of-being remains mute and inaudible for Dasein in its everydayness. Yet, if the hearer of attestation lacks

<sup>23</sup> “inwieweit *überhaupt* und in welcher Weise das Dasein aus seinem eigensten Seinkönnen her *Zeugnis gibt* von einer möglichen *Eigentlichkeit* seiner Existenz, so zwar, daß es diese nicht nur als *existentiell* mögliche bekundet, sondern von ihm selbst *fordert*.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 268/246.

<sup>24</sup> “Weil es [das Dasein] aber in das Man *verloren* ist, muß es sich zuvor *finden*. Um *sich* überhaupt zu finden, muß es ihm selbst in seiner möglichen *Eigentlichkeit* “gezeigt” werden. Das Dasein bedarf der Bezeugung eines Selbstseinkönnens, das es der *Möglichkeit* nach je schon *ist*.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 268/248.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 271/250.

the capacity to hear it, how can the call and demand of attestation reach such a hearer?

Heidegger gathers these elements in order to emphasize that testimony is a mode of speech that *can* interrupt and break one's attachment to a fixed horizon of understanding by *generating* new possibilities of hearing. At this point, Heidegger clearly also uses *zeugen* in the sense of to engender or generate: the enactment of testimony has a generative power. Consider the following citation:

This listening [to the they] must be stopped [*gebrochen*], that is, the possibility of another kind of hearing that interrupts that listening must be given by Da-sein itself. The possibility of such a breach [*Bruch*] lies in being summoned [*Angerufenwerden*] immediately. Dasein fails to hear itself, and listens to the they, and this listening gets broken by the call if that call, in accordance with its character as call, arouses [*wecken*] another kind of hearing ... .<sup>26</sup>

Attestation is a call. The basic characteristic of this call is that it can *break* the everyday horizon of understanding and that another understanding can *break through*: it arouses a new hearing in Dasein by which Dasein can hear something it could not hear before. We may, perhaps, compare it to a call for help that draws my attention when I'm working: the call tears my attention away from my work, interrupts my work, draws me to and thereby involves me in the helpless situation of the one who calls. The call as a mode of discourse is a "jolt" and an "abrupt arousal."<sup>27</sup> Every testimony that confronts us with a subject matter beyond our horizon of understanding includes such a call: it cannot convey its subject matter to us before calling us and generating "the possibility of another kind of hearing." Every testimony is a call that insists, summons and demands: "Listen to me! You cannot ignore me! Hear me out!"

<sup>26</sup> "Dieses Hinhören [auf das Man] muß gebrochen, das heißt es muß ihm vom Dasein selbst die Möglichkeit eines Hörens gegeben werden, das jenes unterbricht. Die Möglichkeit eines solchen Bruchs liegt im unvermittelten Angerufenwerden. Der Ruf bricht das sich überhörende Hinhören des Daseins auf das Man, wenn er, seinem Rufcharakter entsprechend, ein Hören weckt, das in allem gegenteilig charakterisiert ist im Verhältnis zum verlorenen Hören." Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 271/250-51.

<sup>27</sup> "In der Erschließungs-tendenz des Rufes liegt das Moment des Stoßes, des abgesetzten Aufrüttelns." Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 271/251.

Beyond the specific context of *Sein und Zeit*, we expect a testimony to convey some content. However, what Heidegger’s analysis teaches us here is that if we reduce testimony to the communication of content, beliefs or facts alone, we reduce and distort its particular mode of discourse: it is a call.<sup>28</sup> It may speak of something that the addressee is not capable of understanding or hearing, therefore it generates possibilities of understanding by summoning the addressee to another mode of hearing and understanding. The account developed in *Sein und Zeit* implies that, ultimately, the generative power of testimony is capable of changing the addressee in its very mode of being. This offers us a rich phenomenological description of testimony that allows us to understand the stakes, limits and nature of the epistemological and ethical dimensions of testimony.

Although the attestation calls, demands and summons “unequivocally” (*eindeutig*) and that “the direction it takes is a sure one” and has a deep impact (*eine sichere Einschlagsrichtung*),<sup>29</sup> this does not mean that deceptions are not possible:

“Deceptions” occur in conscience not by an oversight of the call (a mis-calling) but only because the call is *heard* in such a way that, instead of being understood authentically, it is drawn by the they-self into a manipulative conversation with one’s self and is distorted in its character of disclosure.<sup>30</sup>

On the side of the addressee, deception and distortion remain possible. By negotiating with (*verhandeln*) the call and letting it be contaminated by the horizon of the they, the call gets distorted. Differently put, the hearer does not sufficiently affirm the call and involve him or herself with that to which the call calls. A translation to more common testimonies is not difficult: if a witness tells something unheard of to tell and calls for the addressee’s attention or support, it is not a given that the addressees will respond willingly, acknowledging the impact

<sup>28</sup> As Heidegger writes: “Das Rufen is ein Modus der Rede.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 269/249.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 274/253.

<sup>30</sup> “Die “Täuschungen” entstehen im Gewissen nicht durch ein Sich-versehen (Sichver-rufen) des Rufes, sondern erst aus der Art, wie der Ruf *gehört* wird — dadurch, daß er, statt eigentlich verstanden zu werden, vom Man-selbst in ein verhandelndes Selbstgespräch gezogen und in seiner Erschließungstendenz verkehrt wird.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 274/253.

and the truth of that which the witness has to say. The addressee can try to reduce the unheard-of story to a story that for him or her is understandable and belongs to the horizon of what can be expected.<sup>31</sup> In the context of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger therefore introduces the notion of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*): the disclosure or *Erschlossenheit* of attestation requires from the hearer resoluteness or *Entschlossenheit* in order to affirm the call unequivocally and in order not to let it be contaminated by or reduced to the mode of everydayness from which the hearer is called. Using the image of the horizon, one might say that at this point, Heidegger does not propagate a Gadamerian-like fusion of horizons because such a fusion might, in fact, turn out to be the reduction of the foreign subject matter to the horizon of everydayness. Rather, he emphasizes the importance of a resolute attitude to keep on hearing the call of attestation that breaks with the everyday horizon of understanding.

Let me conclude this exploration of attestation in *Sein und Zeit* with one point of concern. For Heidegger, the attestation is unequivocal and possible distortions are due to the hearer who remains too much invested in the horizon of the they. In the common practice of testimony, however, also distortions from the side of unreliable witnesses are possible. It is exactly this possibility that makes the assessment of everyday testimony such a difficult and arduous task. *Sein und Zeit* does not pay any attention to this aspect of testimony. One might therefore say that, for a philosophy of testimony and despite the aforementioned important contributions, Heidegger's account of attestation in *Sein und Zeit* does not offer the means to address the notions of trust, trustworthiness and truthfulness and its importance for testimony.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Some very disturbing examples of such a reduction and the distortion it implies, can be found in Kelly Oliver, *Carceral Humanitarianism: Logics of Refugee Detention* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2017), 28-34.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida's analysis suggesting that attestation is concerned with the question of faith, seems to miss the specific absence of trustworthiness of the one who speaks in Heidegger's analysis; the reference to faith only makes sense from the perspective of the addressee, see Jacques Derrida, *Foi et savoir: Suivi de Le siècle et le pardon* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 89-92. I have developed this in more detail in Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2020), 167-69.

### 3. THE WITNESS OF BEING AND THE TRUTH OF TESTIMONY

In *Sein und Zeit*, attestation is understood as a mode of discourse; in fact, Heidegger even calls attestation “an exceptional discourse of Dasein.”<sup>33</sup> The linguistic character of testimony is further developed in Heidegger’s reading of a fragment of a draft of one of Hölderlin’s letters, which explicitly mentions the verb *zeugen*. In both “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung” and in the “Preparatory Reflection” to his reading of “Germanien,” Heidegger discusses the following fragment:<sup>34</sup>

that is why the most dangerous of goods, language, has been given to man, so that creating, destroying and perishing, and returning to the everliving, to the mistress and mother, he may bear witness to what he is / to have inherited, learned from her, her most divine gift, all-sustaining love.<sup>35</sup>

In “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung,” he opens his interpretation as follows:

Who is man? He is the one who must bear witness to what he is. To bear witness can signify to testify, but it also means to be answerable for what one has testified in one’s testimony. Man is *he* who he *is* precisely in the attestation of his own existence. This attestation does not mean a subsequent and additional expression of man’s being; rather, it forms a part of man’s existence. But what should man testify to? To his belonging to the earth. This belonging consists in the fact that man is the inheritor, and the learner of all things. [...] The attestation of man’s being, and thus his authentic fulfillment, comes from freedom of decision. Decision takes hold of what is necessary, and places itself in the bond of a highest claim. Man’s being a witness to his belonging among beings as a whole occurs as history. But so that history may be possible, language has been given to man. It is one of man’s goods.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> It is “eine ausgezeichnete Rede des Daseins.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 277; my translation.

<sup>34</sup> See Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, 35-38, and *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,”* 59-72.

<sup>35</sup> “darum ist der Güter Gefährlichstes, die Sprache dem Menschen gegeben, damit er schaffend, zerstörend, und untergehend, und wiederkehrend zur ewiglebenden, zur Meisterin und Mutter, damit er zeuge was er sei / geerbt zu haben, gelernt von ihr, ihr Göttlichstes, die allerhaltende Liebe.” Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, 35/54.

<sup>36</sup> “Wer ist der Mensch? Jener, der zeugen muß, was er sei. Zeugen bedeutet einmal ein Bekunden; aber zugleich meint es: für das Bekundete in der Bekundung einstehen. Der Mensch ist *der*, der er *ist*, eben in der Bezeugung des eigenen Daseins. Diese Bezeugung meint hier nicht einen nachträglichen und beherlaufenden Ausdruck des Menschseins, sondern sie macht das Dasein des Menschen mit aus. Aber was soll der Mensch bezeugen? Seine Zugehörigkeit zur Erde. Diese Zugehörig-

First, Heidegger notes that bearing witness is a form of *Bekunden*; it is a showing, expressing or giving evidence of. In the German language, the verb *bekunden* is closely related to *kundgeben*, to make known or to announce — this is an important verb for Heidegger to recalibrate the nature, scope and task of hermeneutics<sup>37</sup> — as well as to *verkündigen*, to proclaim, and to *künden*, which simply means to give evidence or to testify. Each of these verbs relate to the adjective *kund*, known. All these words are thus related to making something (publicly) known. This is a characteristic of testimony in general. When witnesses witness something, it is in private or in an isolated group; what they witness is not generally available; if it would be, testimony would be dispensable. Without making known, what was witnessed remains withdrawn and concealed from those who are not witnesses themselves. This is why others depend on testimony to know what was witnessed.

Second, Heidegger notes that bearing witness is a qualified form of *Bekunden*. The witnesses are themselves answerable for their testimony and what they make known. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger introduced *Entschlossenheit* as the attitude of Dasein who receives attestation: the one who is called should be resolute in the attitude to hear and not mishear the call. Here, by contrast, Heidegger describes the attitude of the witness: the witness is answerable for his or her testimony and can only offer him or herself as the guarantee for what he or she make known by testimony.

As in *Sein und Zeit*, the subject matter of this testimony is the human being's own mode of Being. Here, however, the stakes are determined in a different way: rather than the Dasein's possibility of being a whole, the human being's *Zugehörigkeit*, the belonging and the bond to the earth and to "das Seiende im Ganzen," beings as a whole. The human

keit besteht darin, daß der Mensch der Erbe ist und der Lernende in allen Dingen. [...] Die Bezeugung des Menschseins und damit sein eigentlicher Vollzug geschieht aus der Freiheit der Entscheidung. Diese ergreift das Notwendige und stellt sich in die Bindung eines höchsten Anspruchs. Das Zeugesein der Zugehörigkeit in das Seiende im Ganzen geschieht als Geschichte. Damit aber Geschichte möglich sei, ist dem Menschen die Sprache gegeben. Sie ist ein Gut des Menschen." Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, 36/54.

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger uses in particular *Kundgabe*, announcement, to capture the essence of a more original sense and significance of hermeneutics, see *Sein und Zeit*, 37; and *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 115.



being belongs amidst and is part of the totality of beings. Yet, compared to other beings, the human being is exceptional because humans are capable of witnessing that and how they belong amidst. They are involved with the other beings and are capable of bearing witness to this belonging in language; this capacity comes with a specific demand on the human being, because it is only by bearing witness that the human belonging to other beings *is*.<sup>38</sup> For this very reason, language is of special importance to the essence of the human being: it grants the human being its determining capacity to bear witness of their place among other (human) beings, that is, to think Being.<sup>39</sup>

Let us consider this in some detail. In *Sein und Zeit*, the call of attestation demands. The structure of such a demand returns in the long citation above in the form of the *Anspruch*, a claim or demand made on the human being: “[diese Bezeugung] stellt sich in die Bindung eines höchsten Anspruchs.” Although we tend to translate *Zugehörigkeit* in English as belonging-to, it could also be translated as bond; that is, *Zugehörigkeit* should be heard here together with *Bindung*, which is a bond to which we are bound. To bear witness is thus to place oneself in, adopt the bond of and being bound to a highest claim made on the human being.

In addition to the specific context in which Heidegger uses testimony here, this reflects a more general characteristic of testimony: the subject position of the witness is not determined in advance, but every witness rather has to adopt their position as witness. More precisely, by witnessing the subject matter, witnesses are already involved in it. Yet, to become a genuine witness, they have to adopt this involvement — *Einbezug* — and take it upon themselves by starting to speak and to bear witness to that which they witnessed. The first involvement in the subject matter, the sheer fact of having witnessed it, binds the witness to a particular claim that he or she has to take upon him or herself. It is this

<sup>38</sup> As he writes elsewhere: “(Diese Zugehörigkeit aber *ist* nur, indem wir sie bezeugen. Diese Bezeugung aber geschieht nur als Da-*sein*.)” Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), Gesamtausgabe 42 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), 97.

<sup>39</sup> “Kraft der Sprache ist der Mensch der Zeuge des Seyns. Er steht für dieses ein, hält ihm stand und fällt ihm anheim.” Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,”* 62.

structure that Heidegger transposes to the ontological task of the human being to listen to the call of being and to bear witness to their place among other human beings. In this way, the human being is a witness to being and is called to bear witness — “Zeuge des Seyns.”

In its most profound sense, this is the very essence of human history, for Heidegger. History is the human testimony of the involvement in all that is. This relation to history and remembrance, which Heidegger elsewhere discusses under the heading of *Andenken*, allows us to address another dimension of testimony. To witness and to bear witness means not only to make known, but also to preserve or protect (*verwahren*) in language beings as such, (*das Seiende als solches*) as well as our involvement amidst beings.<sup>40</sup> Essentially, language is not about expressing one’s ideas or will or communicating one’s thoughts. Rather, in language, the essential possibility of bearing witness is offered and therewith, the possibility of safeguarding and preserving, *verwahren*, being.

Oftentimes, Heidegger understands the truth of language in terms of *alētheia* or *Unverborgenheit*, unconcealment: language makes something known (publicly) by wresting it from concealment. Testimony is definitely a paradigmatic case of this truth: it makes what is experienced or witnessed by an individual publicly available and announces it to all who are willing and capable of receiving this testimony. Occasionally, to stress this specific sense of unconcealment, Heidegger notes that the meaning of the German word *Wahrheit* is bound to the Latin sense of *verum* and *veritas* and therefore does not offer the resources to think of truth as unconcealment.<sup>41</sup> In “Der Spruch des Anaximander,” however, he suggests another approach to the German words of *das Wahre* and *die Wahrheit*: “One day we shall learn to think our exhausted word for truth [*Wahrheit*] in terms of the preserve; to experience truth as the preservation [*Wahrnis*] of Being; and to understand that, as presencing,

<sup>40</sup> “Der Sprache ist aufgegeben, das Seiende als solches im Werk offenbar zu machen und zu verwahren.” Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> More precisely, the German language has borrowed the opposite of *wahr*, namely *falsch*, from the Latin *falsum* and, consequently, the meaning of *wahr* is determined by the opposite of *falsum*, namely *verum*; see, e.g., Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 68.

Being belongs in this preservation."<sup>42</sup> The task set here to thinking is that of reviving the German *Wahrheit* by thinking its relation words such as *verwahren* and *bewahren*, to preserve, to guard, and to take into protective care.

In the context of the previous quotation from "Der Spruch des Anaximander," Heidegger brings into play the famous figure of the "Hirt des Seins," the "herder" or "shepherd" of being. What guides Heidegger to this figure is the sense of protective care: the shepherd cares for and protects his or her sheep. Yet, to say that the human being is a shepherd of Being, which Heidegger also implies in this context, might give rise to associations that are not really appropriate or convincing: does the human being indeed guide Being in any sense and does it make sense to say that the human being protects Being as shepherds do their sheep? It seems to me that the figure of the witness, as explored in Heidegger's reading of the draft of Hölderlin's letter, offers a much more convincing and adequate figure. In their testimony, witnesses preserve and protect that which they witnessed. Their testimony saves it from being lost and forgotten. Their testimony grants it a hiding place in language where it can emerge and be heard even when that to which it bears witness is no longer present itself. Even though their testimony may be misunderstood or ignored, by insisting on their testimony and by continuing to bear witness, witnesses demand from their listeners not to be ignored or to be understood differently.<sup>43</sup> Testimony is also a paradigmatic case of truth in the sense of protective care and preservation. The suggestion arising from Heidegger's discussion is therefore to understand the truth of testimony as both making known (publicly) or announcing and preserving in its protective care what cannot or no longer speak for itself and what perhaps does not even exist anymore.

<sup>42</sup> "Eines Tages werden wir lernen, unser vernutztes Wort Wahrheit aus der Wahr zu denken, und zu erfahren, daß der Wahrheit die Wahrnis des Seins ist und daß das Sein als Anwesen in sie gehört." Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Gesamtausgabe 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 348. Translation: *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 36.

<sup>43</sup> Also in "Der Spruch des Anaximander," the specific sense of demand can be traced in the form of the *dictare*: thinking listens to the dictation of the truth of Being and preserves this truth in the words it speaks; in turn, these words dictate the listener.

In the case of Heidegger's attention to Being, the last part of the previous sentence may not make much sense. However, it is clear from as early as *Sein und Zeit* that, for Heidegger, Being itself is an exceptional phenomenon because it is marked by a particular phenomenological poverty:

it is something that does *not* show itself initially and for the most part ... is *concealed* ... But what remains *concealed* [*verborgen*] in an exceptional sense, or what falls back and is *covered up* [*Verdeckung*] again, or shows itself only in a "*distorted*" [*verstellt*] way, is ... the being of beings.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, it requires language to be made known and, in the terminology employed in "Der Spruch des Anaximander," be preserved. It is in this sense that, for the human being, language is the greatest good.

At the same time, Hölderlin describes language as "the most dangerous of goods." For Heidegger, language is indeed the most dangerous because it offers both the possibility of being the witness to Being and the possibility of the decay or betrayal of this possibility. The problem of Being and Appearing that Plato's Socrates discerns in *logos* as discussed in the first section, are rediscovered here by Heidegger:

In language, there occurs the revelation of beings — not just a post facto expression of what is already unveiled, but the originary unveiling itself — yet for this very reason a veiling also, together with its preeminent derivative, *semblance*.<sup>45</sup>

With language, truth as the disclosure of Being and untruth as the concealment or mere appearance of Being are given at the same time, they are intertwined. This ambiguity is present *par excellence* in testimony: the involvement of the witness in the truth of Being is never given without a relation to and a struggle with the untruth, that is, without the possibility of the witness being a "false" witness, even if it goes against his or her

<sup>44</sup> "Offenbar solches, was sich zunächst und zumeist gerade *nicht* zeigt, was gegenüber dem, was sich zunächst und zumeist zeigt, *verborgen* ist [...]. Was aber in einem ausnehmenden Sinne *verborgen* bleibt oder wieder in die *Verdeckung* zurückfällt oder nur "*verstellt*" sich zeigt, ist nicht dieses oder jenes Seiende, sondern [...] das *Sein* des Seienden." Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 35/31.

<sup>45</sup> "In der Sprache geschieht die Offenbarung des Seienden, nicht erst ein nachdrücklicher Ausdruck des Enthüllten, sondern die ursprüngliche Enthüllung selbst, aber eben deshalb auch die Verhüllung und deren vorherrschende Abart, *der Schein*." Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, 62/57.

own intentions. Interestingly, Heidegger elaborates this danger intrinsic to testimonial language in terms of a difference between, on the one hand, "das wesentliche Wort," the essential word, that allows something to appear purely, for the first time, in its uniqueness and newness, and, on the other hand, the common understanding of this essential word, which requires that the word becomes a common and shared word: "Indeed, even the essential word, if it is to be understood and so become the common possession of all, must make itself common."<sup>46</sup> The common, shared word is not the word that singles out, but one that is always already repeatable. By contrast, the essential word says a being in its non-recurrent-ness (*Einmaligkeit*), in its singularity and in its particular and fecund newness (*die Erstlinge der Sprache*), which, however, decays and wears out in the everyday, common use of this word.<sup>47</sup>

Testimonial language offers a paradigmatic case of this ambiguity. On the one hand, the experience of witnessing is singular, non-recurrent and the witness tries to find the words that express this non-recurrent-ness that introduces something utterly new in the horizon of understanding of the addressees. Yet, on the other hand, the same utterance is meant to share the witness's experience and make it common and publicly known. A testimony that has to achieve this runs the risk of fading out in a common and shared word — for instance, can the words of a refugee's testimony preserve and make known the refugee's experiences? Heidegger's answer would be: yes and no. That is to say: yes, they can, but these words are also always exposed to the risk of concealing rather than disclosing, of failing rather than preserving. The awareness of this danger intrinsic to language confronts the human being with the continuous task to wrest the essence of language, that is, its capacity to make known and preserve what is, from its non-essence.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> "Ja das wesentliche Wort muß sogar, um verstanden zu werden, sich gemein machen." Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zur Hölderlins Dichtung*, 37/55. See also Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein,"* 62-63.

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein,"* 63. See also Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, Gesamtausgabe 54 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1992<sup>2</sup>), 18.

<sup>48</sup> "Das Unwesen der Sprache kann so als Gefahr und Widerstand ergriffen werden, als Zwang zur ständig neuen Bewährung des Wesens gegen das Unwesen." Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein,"* 64.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE PROMISE OF LANGUAGE

We have seen what Heidegger's comments on testimony and related terms have to offer to a philosophy of testimony and how its specific focus on the question of Being suggests that testimony is not simply an additional or accidental aspect of human existence, but rather concerns an essential and crucial feature of what makes us linguistic beings.

At the same time, as I noted in passing, Heidegger's account of testimony does not seem to grant the issues of trust, truthfulness and trustworthiness the specific place they deserve. Some qualifications are needed here, however. On the side of the listener, he does point to the importance of resoluteness in listening to the call made upon addressee. On the side of the witness, he does point to the fact that the witness is answerable for his or her testimony.

Yet, there is another aspect related to that of trust and trustworthiness that we did not come across in Heidegger's considerations of testimony. Authors such as Derrida and Ricoeur suggest that the witness is not only the one who demands to be heard, but who always also, implicitly or explicitly, *promises* the addressee to speak the truth.<sup>49</sup> One might even argue that the demand to be heard is grounded in and only makes sense thanks to this promise: "You have to believe me *because* I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." The addressee, in turn, has the content of testimony only in the earthen vessel of the witness's promise and not in any other form of certainty.

The witness's promise does not seem to be a genuine concern in Heidegger's reflection on language and testimony. The question of false testimony is, for him, not a matter of a witness who willfully distorts the truth. Yet, as we have seen, this does not mean that decay and betrayal are not a threat. In another sense and on another level, there is a question of the promise in testimonial language for Heidegger. Thinking is assigned a task it has not yet completed and for which it is still trying to find the proper words. It is exactly at this point that

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Poétique et politique du témoignage," *Herne* 83 (2004): 521-39 (p. 527); Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Points Essais (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 205.

thinking depends on a primordial promise; trust in this promise is the element of the enactment of thinking. Let me provide one example from “Des Wesen der Sprache” that suggests as much.<sup>50</sup> To understand the condition of thinking, Heidegger there determines thinking as “das Hören der Zusage,” as listening to the promise of language that tells thinking what it can think and say.<sup>51</sup> In language, thinking perceives and hears the promise to be granted the words to think what it is assigned to think. Thus, one might say that, beyond the everyday question of the trustworthiness of witnesses, Heidegger stumbles upon a more primordial promise, leading up to the question of whether language indeed grants the words that it promises, *zusagt*. As he writes of the poet: “He receives primal knowledge [*Ur-Kunde*; original tidings] of what task is assigned to the poetic saying, what sublime and lasting matters are promised [*zugesagt*] to it and yet withheld [*vorenthalten*] from it.”<sup>52</sup> The poet perceives an original tiding that tells him or her of the task assigned to poetry, the completion of which is promised but as yet withheld from the poet. This, one might say, is the specific mood of poetry in its inceptive moments.

Similarly, for the task of bearing witness — of Being or otherwise — all depends on the question of whether language grants the necessary words. In the inceptive moments of bearing witness, these words are not yet granted; they are only promised. At the decisive moment when they begin to speak, witnesses have the words they need to speak, sometimes to speak the unspeakable, only *as promised*. This promise is the element of testimony, allowing the witnesses to adopt their task and begin to bear witness — if, at least, they dare to place their trust in this promise of language.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 147-204.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 165-70.

<sup>52</sup> “Er vernimmt die Ur-Kunde dessen, was dem dichterischen Sagen aufgegeben, als das Höchste und Bleibende zugesagt und doch vorenthalten ist.” Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 159. Translation is taken from *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 66.

KEYWORDS: Martin Heidegger, philosophy of testimony, attestation, witness, language.

#### SUMMARY

Martin Heidegger's analyses of testimony and attestation are conspicuously absent from many of the most recent contributions to a philosophy of testimony. Yet, Heidegger's ontological account of testimony and attestation offer much to think about for a philosophy of testimony, which nowadays seems divided by epistemological and ethical approaches. This article aims to show this in four steps. First, it discusses one of the metaphysical contexts in which the question of bearing witness imposes itself. Second, it turns to some of the passages in *Sein und Zeit* where Heidegger discusses *Zeugnis*, testimony, and *Bezeugung*, attestation. Here, the aim is to highlight and discuss a number of the essential features Heidegger's account of attestation has to offer to a philosophy of testimony. Third, it discusses the passages in Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin in which Heidegger expressly articulates the essence of the human being as "Zeuge des Seyns." Fourth, it concludes with a number of brief remarks concerning the promissive dimension of testimony and language.