

Reiner Schürmann's Phenomenology of Ultimates

Santa Fe Philosophical Society, Sept 14 2025, Revised Sept 1
by Ed Stroupe

By way of conclusion, it will be useful to return to an ambition stated in the General Introduction, namely, to learn more deeply about the conditions of sufferings that humans have inflicted upon themselves on a small and grand scale. Indeed, one can go at it differently, I think, than by inquiring into the facts or invoking their ideas. One can go at it through a phenomenology of ultimates.+

-- REINER SCHÜRMANN¹

Introduction

The late 20th century philosopher Reiner Schürmann (1941-1993) made what I consider to be some profound observations pertaining to the essential weaknesses or flaws contained in the classic philosophical stance that all great understanding must come from some fundamental principle, or some set of such principles.

Historically, says Schürmann in his final work, there were three great Western philosophical eras or epochs, stemming from three fundamental principles: (1) the Greek principle of the *One*, (Oneness), or *Being is One*, (originating with the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides); (2) the Latin principle of *Nature* or *Natural Law* (from Cicero and St. Augustine); and (3) the Modern principle of *Self-Consciousness* or *Subjectivity* (originating with Martin Luther and crystallized in Immanuel Kant).² As Schürmann saw it, not only all philosophical thinking, but all conceptions of Being, Nature, or Consciousness of reality flowed out of such few singular historical principles or ideas, each of which governed an era's thinking. Furthermore, these historical principles were each tied to the native ruling language of their respective era. All ways of being and acting were shaped and limited by such underlying, guiding and ruling principles – or *Arché*.

In today's world, which some like to imagine as “postmodern,” a very few philosophers, notably Martin Heidegger, have striven to move away from the reliance on such archaic conceptions, and to open up new possible ways of being, acting, and relating.³ Schürmann himself, I believe, was one such philosopher. His motive appears to be expressed in the opening quote above.

In this presentation, I am going to attempt to recap a small part of Schürmann's thinking – as best I understand it – taken from his final work and *magnum opus*, entitled *Broken Hegemonies*.

First, a short note on his life and works.

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Preliminary Remarks on His Life and Works

Born in Amsterdam of German parents, Schürmann was Professor and Director of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City from 1975 until his untimely death in 1993. As a Dominican priest, he first studied and wrote about the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart, before becoming a scholar of language, philosophy, the history of philosophy, and Heideggerian philosophy, as well as a writer.* Early in his philosophical career, he met and interviewed Heidegger on at least one occasion. Clearly, he was intrigued enough to devote one book to Heidegger, and Heidegger figured deeply in his final philosophical examination of the modern era.

He was a prolific writer and publisher of articles throughout his career, and he wrote four books, whose titles in English are:

1. *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart and Mystical Philosophy*
2. *Origins*
3. *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*
4. *Broken Hegemonies*

Although a native German speaker, Schürmann wrote and published his works initially in French. He made the fascinating point that writing in a language other than his own native tongue forced or enabled him to think more expansively, powerfully, deeply, and to thus think outside the box. (My words, not his). With the exception of his final work, which was posthumously translated into English by a hand picked Heidegger translator (Reginald Lilly), he himself either co-translated or oversaw the translation of his other books into English and German.

I first learned about him in 2020 from then St. John's tutor Ian Moore, who told me about *Wandering Joy* while I was taking a preceptorial at St. John's on Meister Eckhart. I finally read that book early this year, and became so intrigued by his writing that I read his third and fourth books over the past several months. The only one I haven't read yet is *Origins*, which I understand is an "semi-autobiographical" account of his life growing up in the wake of Naziism, and his attempt to come to terms with a past in which he never participated, but which on many levels gave him a troubled, fractured identity. As he expressed it, he was "born too late to see that war and too early to forget it."⁴

* For a fuller introduction, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reiner_Sch%C3%BCrmann.

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In addition to the four books listed above, there have since been at least two published compilations of some of his lecture series in English: *Modern Philosophies of the Will*, and *Reading Marx*. In addition, the Fall, 2024 publication of *Philosophy Today* was devoted to interpretations of his work.

I have found Schürmann's writings to be among the most challenging to understand of any philosopher I have ever read. Some philosophers have considered his theses at the least questionable, and at most controversial. Regardless of such views, most philosophers seem to have admired his thoroughness and acknowledged the rigor of his thinking.

My invitation today is to listen with an open mind, while I attempt to fathom, at the very least, the gist of a few elements of his thinking. These are necessarily my interpretations. However, I believe that like Heidegger, Schürmann held a strong opinion emphasizing the importance of interpretation as an authentic way of grappling with another philosopher's thinking.

On Hegemonic Fantasms and their Life Cycle

According to Schürmann in his final book, every era in Western philosophical history has been defined by a singular principle around which the people of that era organized their thinking, interpretations, ways of being, and ways of acting. Once an era has passed, it becomes recognized as an epoch. The word "epoch" connotes something that has come to an end. So, for instance, the ancient Greek philosophers belonged to a past philosophical epoch, as did the subsequent ancient Roman philosophers. For the most part, one could argue that you and I belong to the modern philosophical era, which may or may not be thought of as a completed epoch. (Some would argue we are in a postmodern philosophical era, but I personally doubt that contention.)

Within a given era or epoch, this its guiding principle consists of some ultimate notion – an idea or concept that a critical mass of people accept as an ultimate truth, or on the contrary reject as being a truth, but nevertheless grapple with it in such a way that it effectively governs as an ultimate untruth. Acceptance and rejection really amount to the same thing, because that idea or principle governs the terms by or around which all other ideas are expressed or framed. That is what makes the idea "hegemonic." We commonly use the word "hegemony" (pronounced with emphasis either on the second or first syllable, with either a soft or hard "g"), to represent a dominant state or social group, a leadership that has a preponderant authority or influence, or most often

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domination and influence by a political group. In our context here, the domination lies in a concept that claims a kind of final authority.

Speaking linguistically or grammatically, Schürmann characterizes such a principle as a common noun that has been elevated to the status of a sovereign norm, above which there is no further authority. Because this elevated idea is not something that really exists in the physical world – it doesn't have any reality as a distinctive existence except as a concept – he calls it a "fantasm." It is a fantastical notion that was made up by somebody. Furthermore, because it becomes so elevated that enough people are convinced of its radical importance, it becomes hegemonic in its power and influence. Everybody comes to think in those terms, as I said above.

With respect to a given hegemonic fantasm, we can identify one or two founding thinkers. For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides founded the notion of the One, or Oneness, or "Being is One." A couple quotes from Parmenides' poem:

(Fragment 6): %t is right to say and to think that what-is is, for being is,
and nothing is notõ .+

and

(Fragment 8): %what-is is ungenerated and imperishable, a whole of one
kind, unperturbed and complete.+

In other words: (1) What-is is, and what-isn't isn't; and (2) Being (what-is) is One.

By contrast, in a way that would soon become a substantiation of the hegemonic character of the One, his more or less contemporary thinker Heraclitus spoke of everything as becoming and being in flux – the Many. It would be an accurate statement, in my opinion, to argue that the history of Greek philosophy, and perhaps the history of all philosophy since, has consisted of thinkers trying to come to grips with or reconcile the ideas of the One and the Many. The Many is essentially defined as the not One.

In Schürmann's view, every hegemonic fantasm has a life cycle that begins with its original "institution" and concludes with its final "destitution." By "institution," he means an establishment by a thinker or thinkers who first elevate the idea to the status of an ultimate. In the case of ancient Greek philosophy, the One was instituted by Parmenides.

From the point of its institution, a hegemonic fantasm pervades or orients all subsequent thinking – like the way a magnet will line up iron filings. For example, if you

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read Plato and Aristotle, you will recognize that each thinker grapples with the One (and its distinction from the Many), and often thinks of his own philosophy in terms of the One (sometimes in the form of Unity). Plato devotes an entire dialogue to Parmenides, in which the argument gets gnarly and obscure as he has his main interlocutor repeatedly explain and argue for and against the One, from many angles. Eventually Plato molds his own version of the One in terms of the true *Form* or *Idea* that underlies the perceived multiplicity and changeability of everything around us. The *Idea* is the true unity of an actual one thing, whereas things we encounter in common experience are effectively instantiations of that idea, and thus not actually real.

Aristotle likewise comes to grip with the problem by creating new terms such as *energeia* and *entelecheia* in order to grapple with the phenomenon of motion and to place everything in the universe in terms of making – even the physical that you and I would call “nature.” Eventually, he arrives at the certainty of a prime mover (or in other words a prime maker) – the ultimate One behind and source of all things.

By “destitution,” Schürmann means the dissolution of that idea’s hegemony. Eventually, some thinker or thinkers will break the system, so to speak. A new speaking will arise that contradicts or undermines the original idea so fully that it no longer runs the show. The idea recedes to become just one principle among others. With respect to the hegemony of the Greek One, for example, Schürmann identifies the destituting thinker to be Plotinus. (I cannot say anything about Plotinus simply because I have not studied him. However, I understand that in talking about the One, he ultimately changed the idea in a way that dissolved the grip that the fantasm had previously held.) In the case of the Roman Natural Law, he identifies Meister Eckhart as the destituting thinker.

A second point I will mention on this topic of the life cycle of a hegemonic fantasm is that, according to Schürmann, every such fantasm contains, from its inception, the seeds of its own destitution. This condition, he claims, is rooted in the fundamental conditions of “natality” (birth) and “mortality” (death) in the actual, real world of things, creatures, and human beings – the singular existence from which the fantasm has sprung.

Harkening back to the ancient Greek notion of tragedy, he refers to this condition as the “*tragic*” “*double bind*,” or (borrowing from Wittgenstein) the “*differend*.” Regardless of what idea might get established, no matter how powerful or apparently self-consistent, in the end a fantasm will bring about its own dissolution, because of the internal bind it places upon itself by virtue of its inherent “not” or “other” – the “*singular*” existence upon which the fantasm is originally based, and the fact of its mortality. As examples: the One is undone in real life experience by the singular Many; the Natural is

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killed off in real life by singular instances of the super-Natural (God, actually. More about that in a minute).

In the life cycle of this process of institution and destitution, the destituting thinker opens up the space for a new idea to take over at a later point, whenever such a new idea's time has come, so to speak. The destitution of the ancient Greek hegemonic fantasm ultimately allowed for the institution of a new hegemonic fantasm, which came about in the Latin speaking world. In the case of Roman philosophy, according to Schürmann, the new era was instituted by Cicero, and Augustine subsequently sealed the deal. The Roman hegemonic fantasm took the form of Nature, its lawfulness, and eventually the explanation of everything in terms of Natural Law.

I don't have time to go through it here, but I invite you to notice that, just as with the way that the One and the Many continue to echo their importance in our day, the belief in Natural Law also persists to this day in many forms, although it no longer rules with such an iron fist as it apparently did with the Romans. Eventually, through Meister Eckhart, the Roman hegemonic fantasm of Natural Law was broken- a story too long to dwell on here, but it involved the turn of the Soul to releasement and detachment, allowing the Godhead to emanate through as the highest force that dissolves even the Natural Law to which human beings and animals and plants, etc., previously were exclusively subject.

Note that, while all hegemonic fantasms eventually lose their rank, and thus lose their force as supreme ultimates, they nevertheless maintain an echo of influence on thinking down through future ages. You and I still today argue about unity versus diversity, for example, and we often still think of natural laws as pervading all physical, biological, and psychological systems. (Not to mention mathematical laws.)

Thanks for hanging in with me on this so far. What I want to focus on for the rest of this discussion is the modern era. The modern era is unique, because most of us still see ourselves as in it! So, I am going to speak with a familiarity to modernity as an insider, using many of my own words and examples.

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On the Institution of Modernity – Kant with Luther

The modern age begins when self-consciousness is established as the source and measure of all laws. This is not to say that the moderns discovered it. It is one thing to have a discourse, as old as Homer, which treats self-consciousness as one phenomenon among others; it is quite another thing to have a discourse that promotes this self-consciousness into an ultimate referent, into the source of the phenomenality for all that can become a phenomenon, into the dominant fantasm of an age..

We've all heard, and you and I have always been told by the history of philosophy, how Descartes launched the modern era with his famous dictum, "I think, therefore I am." Out of this soon flowed the idea, conceptually articulated by Immanuel Kant, of the transcendental subject, the objectivity of other objects (things conceived in terms of the concept of object), and subjectivity as the foundation of all knowledge. For example, his famous quote from the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "The conditions of the possibility of experience are the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience." Soon after Kant, in the early nineteenth century, Hegel sealed the deal by tying subjectivity to the Absolute, and even naming the new era "modernity."

Schürmann gives a surprising tweak on this story by tracing the origin of the modern (note, German) hegemonic fantasm to Martin Luther. The modern hegemonic fantasm isn't just subjectivity – not just the justification of a subject by virtue of the "I think" – but rather Self-Consciousness. What instituted this hegemonic fantasm?

To begin with, Martin Luther, circa 1545, turned the tide of previous thinking a century or so before Descartes, when he pointed to the Christian idea of salvation through not only grace, but through turning one's heart to a *particular affirmative speaking about one's self*. Prior to Luther, salvation was considered a function of performing good acts, confession of evil acts, and penance for sin. For Luther, it's not one's actions that matter for salvation, but rather how one holds and sees one's self in one's heart in relation to God. To put it in other words, self *conscience*.

This initial turn on the part of Luther grows to institute what Schürmann refers to as the "regime of passive consciousness." The event of salvation was structured from within through effects of the Word – the relationship of the human being to the Word, through acts of hearing, listening, hearkening, and speaking. The hegemony of this new consciousness was a partial, heteronomous event, dependent upon: (1) an outside force (God's law spoken to man in the form of the Word – effectively saying "You must"), combined with (2) man's listening to that Word (an active receptiveness that effectively

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hears "You can"), and culminating with (3) an alteration in man's own awareness of himself (effectively coming into existence by his own saying, "I obey").

As Schürmann points out, Luther's institution required three "sites": (1) one stable pole of identity – the "I"; (2) one constitutive human act – hearing (and listening); and (3) one medium capable of being modified – self-understanding. It is a multiply linguistic turn, in which consciousness of self – this self conscience – arises and becomes the guiding spirit underlying all action. It was from within the space opened up by Luther's turn that Descartes stepped back into his own reflection to come up with his famous "I think."

A couple centuries later, Kant brings home the bacon (or perhaps more aptly expressed, "fully cooks the bacon"), by turning the tide of Luther's self consciousness in embryo into what Schürmann refers to as the "regime of spontaneous consciousness." Kant declares: "Self-consciousness in general therefore is the representation of that which is the condition of all unity, and is itself unconditioned."⁶ This places self-consciousness into a condition of autonomy, whose sole dependence rests upon the receptivity of a subject to sensory experience, and yet whose facility for understanding then actively posits the concepts in which man comes to understand the world and take action.

With Kant, all reality is now seen in relation to the subject, so that reality becomes an issue of, and a reflection of, consciousness or self-consciousness, which becomes the determining factor of all intuition, space and time, the governing factor behind the positing of things as objects, which are now available to us through appearance only, and are unable to be seen as things "in themselves." This subject-object relationship becomes the determining paradigm through which all truth and knowledge can exist, and of course all science. Furthermore, in contradistinction to Luther, with Kant:

Modernity comes to enfranchise reason, to give autonomy to man, to emancipate people. The rational subject, spontaneously prescribing its laws to nature just as it does to itself. now here we have the legislating agent who succeeds where beliefs have only failed, namely in centering the ensemble of phenomena upon a simple focal point such as an intuition. My act, the I think, is originary because it does not refer me to any referent other than myself.

As Schürmann points out, both Luther and Kant wrap their systems of thinking inside the Aristotelian concept of causality:

The two philosophers. Aristotle and Kant. who alone, perhaps, knew what they were doing in deploying a hegemonic fantasm, both set it to

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work in the service of causality. As for Kant, he is awakened from a dogmatic slumber. In order to make an attempt in a reverse direction in discovering that no inherent necessity to things obliges us to link two events with the relation of cause to effect; this link and its necessity come rather from us. Thus, among the principles, causality is the only one governing both human action and natural processes.*

What is the resulting significance of Luther and Kant in Schürmann's theses regarding modernity?

With Luther and Kant, self-consciousness comes to exercise a regime. For an entire epoch, which is hardly past, it will govern the manner by which every object of experience must be constituted. Self-consciousness thus finds itself promoted to an ultimate referent, constitutive of phenomenality as an ultimate authority. a hegemonic fantasm.*

The end result, from the different perspectives of each thinker individually, was a declaration of emancipation for human beings, perceived from two differing perspectives, one following and enhancing the other. At the same time, it presented a mixed result. Referring to this with respect to Kant's theses, Schürmann points out:

The grand project of emancipation sees our legislative spontaneity as independent of nature. Self-consciousness, the condition of universal legislation, does not know how this very consciousness. the consciousness that I have of existing singularizes us as well.*

Kant, with his ideas of the transcendental, lays the groundwork for Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel to lay out all reality in relationship to consciousness, and for the Spirit to become the foundation for all History, as a dialectical history of the movement of consciousness from and to the Absolute, whose governing principle in turn becomes the dialectical logic of the Absolute Idea, whose attainment in turn resides in the movement from Being, to Essence, to Idea, and finally, once again in full circle, to the Absolute.

When we consider modern history from within this interpretation, consciousness and self-consciousness subsequently become the foundation for all modern science, even through Einstein and Heisenberg, whose relativity and uncertainty principles rely upon the observer in order to take on any meaning or efficacy. What once was simply Natural Law is now transformed into a further kind of lawfulness, founded in a lawfulness of

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consciousness in recognition of itself, and its mathematical relation to space, time, matter, and energy. Consciousness assumes the role of intermediary between a fantasmic subject and an equally fantasmic object.

And, just to reemphasize an earlier point, the shift by Luther to the examination of the conscience and the transcendental idealism of Kant, passing on through the German idealists, then give rise to the rebellion against the hegemony by Marx, the “dialectical materialist”, and eventually Nietzsche, the nihilist. In parallel to these, the turn to self-consciousness also led, by virtue of Schelling's postulation of the unconscious, to Freud the psychoanalyst, and all the various shapes that arose in the fields of psychology, sociology, etc.

(Not to mention hippie consciousness raising, with which many of us are personally familiar!) (Not to mention the great shifts in literature and art, such as the stream of consciousness of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the Dadaism of Salvador Dali and others.)....

In short, for modern man, always and in everything, there reigns the hegemonic fantasm of Consciousness, driven by Self-Consciousness (or vice-versa).

Before moving on, I will confess that in the last few paragraphs, I have been riffing off Schürmann. His discussions of the institution of the modern fantasm in *Broken Hegemonies* is far more in depth in relation to Luther and Kant, and far less free associative than my few points. But hopefully you get his points through mine.

But just as all good hegemonic fantasms must come to an end through one or more destituting thinkers, so must Self-Consciousness. For Schürmann, that is an inevitable, predictable event. What internal self-contradiction lies in the foundation of modernity as defined by the hegemony of Self-Consciousness?

The self in Kant no more coincides with the formal I than it does in Luther. Instead it is the consciousness of a process I . [Quoting CPR] I am conscious of the identical self I which amounts to saying that I have consciousness of the originary, synthetic unity of apperception. (B 134) In contradistinction to what occurs in Luther, I am authentically myself not in receiving myself, free from the effects of the law, but in freely giving myself laws I . With the act of originary legislative enunciation, we have the transcendental self. #1

But in fact, there is a givenness in Kant upon which the transcendental self resides. This is the givenness of sensation in intuition. There is an inherent contradiction between the

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ego as “given” in the unity of apperception, and the self as “spontaneity” in acting – i.e. the Kantian givenness (experience of the I-am as ego) and spontaneity (invisibility of the I-act as the transcendental self).

To receive, as one recalls, is to posit (actively) the transcendental condition for letting oneself be touched (passively) by an intuited singular. It places the I-am under the double bind of legislation and givenness.^{#2}

The tragic double bind – the modern differend – lies in this:

The I-think shines . determines and rules . but it lacks the immediacy of being. The I-am is given . for determining and ruling . as a neighboring being so as to secure ontological anchoring, but it lacks the spontaneity for making the law. Henceforth, it is not self-presence that is sovereign, but the differend in self-consciousness, a shattered measure, broken between thetic normativity and proximity to pain.^{#3}

On the Diremption of Modernity - Heidegger

Those of us who have studied or read enough of Martin Heidegger's prolific writings, lectures, seminar notes, and monographs will recognize that Heidegger placed little stock in the notion of the subject-object worldview. In his lifelong pursuit of the question of Being, through its many forms, and following a number of twists and turns, he grappled with an articulation of Being that extended, not only to the constitution or structure of the individual human being – the “being-there” (or *Dasein*) of being in the world - but to the larger and even more elusive question of what gives us beings and beingness, period. Being as such, time and temporality, thinking and meaning, language, and the ontic-ontological structures of technology that dominate and characterize modernity – all of these were themes and paths of investigation for him in his late work.

In *Broken Hegemonies*, Schürmann postulates (and argues) that Heidegger's thinking has not only launched or forwarded a destitution of the modern hegemonic fantasm, but that it is bringing about in philosophy a complete diremption of the future efficacy of hegemonic fantasms in general.

What comes to pass for us is not the destitution of one fantasm after another, but a diremption that deprives us henceforth of any fantasmic recourse.^{#4}

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This is, indeed, a claim of huge proportions – one that we will probably never be able to prove or disprove, at least in our lifetimes. But what does this really mean? Of the word “diremption” he says:

By diremption I only mean secondarily the will not to want to posit, which is only another posture of the will. Diremption means first of all an expiration has happened, the annihilation of normative acts that cleanses the tragic condition. If there is a task and a possibility of thinking today, it can only be that of letting normative consciousness collapse . not by putting a stop to philosophy but by learning not to have wholehearted faith in semantic maximization itself (which is the temptation in any Western philosophy).⁴⁵

How does Schürmann demonstrate that Heidegger's work effects the destitution of the modern hegemony of Self-Consciousness, let alone an entire diremption of fantasm-making?

To support his thesis regarding this diremption of modernity, Schürmann provides a deep and rigorous interpretive analysis by tracing many passages from Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. The *Contributions* was a monograph written from 1936 to 1938 that was only first published in German in 1989, the hundredth anniversary of Heidegger's birth, and fully two years after Schürmann's earlier book on Heidegger was already written.

The *Contributions* itself came at a turning point in Heidegger's own thinking, a few years after his disastrous foray into, and awkward withdrawal from, the Nazi movement. Schürmann sees the contents of the *Contributions* to be not only the working reformulation of Heidegger's entire philosophical thinking – often referred to as his famous “turn” – but also a backlash to, and perhaps embarrassing retreat from that political hegemonic fantasm that had captured the minds and hearts of the German people, and had eventually led to so much global destruction. (Indeed, much of the *Contributions* rails against Naziism and the Nazi regime, in sometimes subtle and other times not so subtle words.)

The shape Schürmann gives to what he believes to be this diremption is one of a movement from ruling principles to an-archy. (He is not using “anarchy” in the political sense of the word, but as a kind of dismemberment of the hegemonic rule of fantasms – a deconstruction of all *archai*.) In a nutshell, Schürmann traces Heidegger's development of the notion of Being – away from the traditional paradigms of substance, universality, the common denominator of all beings or things in the world, or, as considered by Hegel

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and others, the emptiest of all concepts – and toward Being as “Event” or “Event of Appropriation” – *Ereignis*. In this conceptual shift, Heidegger undermines or strips away the previous construct of Being as “beingness.” He effectively rips out the scaffolding previously erected by Western metaphysics, whereby all philosophical objects were propped up as some sort of linguistic (including mathematical) conception of reality by a controlling, interpreting subject.

Said another way, Being is not a universalization or generalization of any concept, idea, or principle, but instead is, in each and every moment, a unique *occurring*. The time-space of every moment of unique occurrence is an arising or emerging, always in *this* place and at *this* moment. Heidegger writes of this new idea as being most urgent – what another contemporary philosopher refers to as the “emergency” of being.¹⁶ (Perhaps his tone of urgency reflects what he was sensing at that time of the upcoming catastrophe in World War II.) Being is that which “gives” occurring, or perhaps more rigorously stated, the giving of occurring. For the human being, this implies a logical movement away from the modern view of a substantial subjectivity of the human being, and “self” consciousness as the ultimate arbiter of all things human.

To draw an analogy, think of the always emerging, always changing, emanation of things we see and experience in the natural world, including not only those things outside of ourselves, but also those perceivings, feelings, thinkings, wishings, willings, theorizings, and hopings that arise for us in what we sometimes call our “internal states.” Each of these is a uniquely *singular* occurring, specific to the here and now, born into existence (*natality*) and destined for death (*mortality*), all of which, for Heidegger, is not to be reduced to some generalized concept of sameness or explainability, let alone a definable cause and effect.

Being is not a thing – not a being of any kind. It is not an object. Grammatically speaking, it lives more in the character of a verb, or perhaps even better, a noun-verb. Being *isn't*. Also, Being *isn't nothingness* either. In the late Heidegger's formulation, it is an Event. In Schürmann's interpretation, it is anarchic expression. The goal of Heidegger's *Contributions* was to get beyond the metaphysical interpretation that came out of the historical “first beginning” – the “inception” of Western philosophical thinking – and to arrive someday at an “other beginning,” in which seeing the world in this new paradigm allows for a new kind of Being for human beings – a truer “Being-there” (*Da-Sein*). This event-like happening is the essential occurring of Be-ing (*Seyn*). If there is an ultimacy in it, it is that of an ultimate ineffability.

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But, to repeat the question above: How does Schürmann demonstrate that Heidegger's work effects the destitution of the modern hegemony of Self-Consciousness, let alone an entire diremption of fantasm-making? I can only give a sketchy outline in the space of this limited presentation.

Schürmann lays out three component steps of analysis: (1) displaying the condition that he calls the "historical differend"; (2) utilizing a method of topology to identify the "conditions of non-referential thinking"; and (3) laying out the potential that the "discordance of times harbors" in Heidegger's Being as Event.¹⁷ I will briefly condense these based upon my continued grappling with an understanding of his points at this time. Any misinterpretation is entirely mine.

1. First, the historical differend stems from what I referred to in the preceding section as the "modern differend" – the internal contradiction between the given ego and the active I from Kant's formulation. The ruling by a conscious, reflexive, rational subject amounts to an "illusory reign." In opposition to the traditional ego, the self arises in an emergent manner, and whether it is of an individual person or a collective, it is temporary and founded upon an "abyss." Its illusory nature consists in the joint illusions of commonality and universality, existing for human beings only in language and speech. In short, it doesn't have real "being." "For the phenomenologist of Being, there is nothing other than singulars."¹⁸

2. Second, from there, Schürmann holds that Heidegger employs a "topological" method, as opposed to a "logical" one. This method topographically provides: (1) a *recapitulation* of the "fracture in being" that the instituted discourses of each epoch repressed; (2) a *critical* revealing of the transition thinking taking place in the move from the first beginning to the envisioned "other beginning"; and (3) an *anticipation* of the "historical locus" in time-space where beings no longer will be elevated to the status of hegemonic *archai*. This time-space he refers to as the "deferred there" (i.e. the *Da* in *Da-Sein*, the There in Being-There). For Heidegger, possibility is always higher than actuality – it is the possible future that gives the human being its being in the present, not the past. The possibility for humanity is that of an other beginning for thinking – an historical break with the first beginning. "Now, in the *transition* to the other beginning:" (1) the question moves from what are beings to what is the essence of being; (2) truth moves from truth about beings to the truth of being; (3) movement of the human being from not-there to there.

3. Third, time and temporality once again take the stage for Heidegger, with time re-interpreted as "temporal essencing" of the Event. "In the other beginning, the truth of

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being is named 'time'." Every momentary site is a singularized occurring out of the Event of Being. Being is no longer a steadfast beingness, but a fissuring of time-space in time. The self is no longer an entity of some kind, but a recursive relation that names itself out of its appropriation by the Event. Singularity is the "singularity of being to which it belongs." Every fantasm is undone by this singularity of being.

The bottom line for me is the importance of recognizing that our propensity for, fascination with, and need for maximizing some particular idea, based on some singular being or experience, elevated to a principle, only leads to an ultimate fantasm that is destined in the long run to suffer its own death. Let's face it. As all men are mortal, so are all fantasms.

Concluding Remarks

Heidegger's *Contributions* itself is a profoundly challenging text to read – so difficult that I postponed reading it more than a decade. However, one doesn't have to read the *Contributions* to be able to recognize some familiar themes that resonated and echoed throughout Heidegger's later works.

Likewise, confronting Schürmann's similarly challenging text, I decided this year to eat both apples at one time, and I'm glad I did. I would not recommend either to someone with a casual interest, unless your intellectual appetites demand you do so. On the other hand, I found them so provocative that I am still digesting, and probably will continue to be digesting for a long time to come.

To conclude this brief exposition, I think Schürmann's interpretation of Heidegger's intentions, meanings, and significance in relation to the evolution of philosophical thinking are stimulating and powerful, while at the same time controversial and dubious. Other philosophers have spoken out against his interpretations, although I have not been convinced either way.

For the purpose of discussion, I think Schürmann's ideas naturally conjure up a lot of questions or objections, among which could be:

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- Could it even be possible to identify a single hegemonic fantasm (or principle) that speaks for an entire age? Why not more than one, if not many?
- Even if his notion is correct, did he even identify the right ones?
- What does it mean for a fantasm to contain the seeds of its own destruction?
- Likewise, how is this related to the "tragic"?
- In the end, has our experience of the world over the last 35 years indicated Schürmann to be on the right track or not, especially concerning a diremption of all hegemonic fantasms?
- Also, to get down to practicalities, since you and I are living in the modern era, what are ways that you see self-consciousness or subjectivity to be (or not to be) an idea through which you automatically interpret (or don't interpret) yourself and the world?

End Notes

¹ Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, "Conclusion" p. 621.

² Ibid, "General Introduction".

³ Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*.

⁴ Schürmann, *Origins*, forward to the English edition.

⁵ *Broken Hegemonies*, p. 356.

⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A401.

⁷ *Broken Hegemonies*, p 447.

⁸ Ibid, p. 391.

⁹ Ibid, p.367.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.448.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 458.

¹² Ibid, p.496.

¹³ Ibid, p.510.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 514.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being*.

¹⁷ *Broken Hegemonies*, p. 528.

¹⁸ Ibid, chapter 5, pp 529-552.