# Approaching the Sustainment with Heidegger: The Voice of Sustainment

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## The Voice of Sustainment

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Do we find anything like a thought of the sustainment in Heidegger? I am not sure. Yet granted that the sustainment is not a ready-made concept of whose content we are assured in advance, but rather names, prefiguratively, a task of thinking, I suspect that this task might fruitfully be unfolded in dialogue with a certain moment in Heidegger's thought.

I am thinking in particular of what may be intimated by the difficult – that is, never entirely translatable – term *der Austrag,* a term that we find not only in some of Heidegger's later work on language, but that also marks a pivotal moment in the dynamic and challenging meditations on the history of 'beyng' recently published under the title *The History of Beyng*.[1]

The 'history of beyng' names a happening of being that would no longer be under the sway of the metaphysical determination of being instigated by philosophy itself in the first, Greek beginning, and still approaching its end and culmination as the absolute rule of technological presencing. Being as the sway of technological presencing

is itself sustained by a more concealed, yet never entirely hidden or unthinkable, happening of being ('beyng,' as Heidegger names it archaically to differentiate it from 'being' as determined by the first beginning), and if Heidegger's intimations are correct, this more concealed, sustaining eventuation (*Ereignung*) already approaches us from within technological presencing itself. It does not lie somewhere outside technicity in a 'beyond' that would be altogether separate or separable.

In section two of *The History of Beyng* Heidegger writes:

> [*The History of Beyng...*] to be told only in the simple word, as told by the in-between which, transforming all relation to being, bears abyssally the sustainment [*Austrag*] in a way that humans are in general able to sustain within the realm of such beginning.

The in-between, the open yet prefigurative realm between the rule of the first beginning and the incipience of an other beginning, that of the history of beyng, according to this word *transforms all relation to being*, in carrying or bearing (abyssally, without a metaphysical foundation or ground) the sustainment in a manner fitting for human beings. It is not primarily our relation to beings or things that is transformed in the sustainment, but, primarily and before that, our relation to being, to the ontological dimension, or what Tony Fry more appropriately characterises as 'the facticity of the ontological direction,'[2] that is, being or technological presencing as already inscribed and inscribing.

I am not sure that 'the sustainment' is the best or most appropriate translation for der Austrag here. That German word itself carries – one might say, sustains – a whole range of resonance that we might consider here, all of which plays into what demands to be thought as the sustainment or *der Austrag*.

The root of *Austrag* is *tragen,* to carry, to bear, to sustain; the prefix *aus* means 'out', suggesting directionality, an extending, a forward movement, an opening out. In the phrase *zum Austrag kommen* the word can name something that remains to be settled or decided, something initiated or set into play, as in the holding or staging of a competition or conflict. The verb *austragen* can mean coming to terms with a question, task, or problem. Yet it can also mean to deliver, as in to deliver mail, and thus carries a sense of something being handed over, almost dispensed or apportioned. But further, it can mean carrying a child through to the full term of a pregnancy, suggesting maturation, coming to fruition. Finally, as though to counterbalance the sense of coming into being, of arrival and approach implied in all these resonances, the verb can also imply the removal or canceling out of something (as in removing one's name from a list or canceling a reservation), thus, departure, removal, leaving something behind.

How best to translate *der Austrag?* I have found no single term in English that would open up this range of resonance that sounds within and from out of the German word. But perhaps this range of resonance can help us approach and begin to think what might need to be thought as the sustainment.

## Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns*. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 69. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1998.
2. See Tony Fry, *Why Philosophy* in this issue.