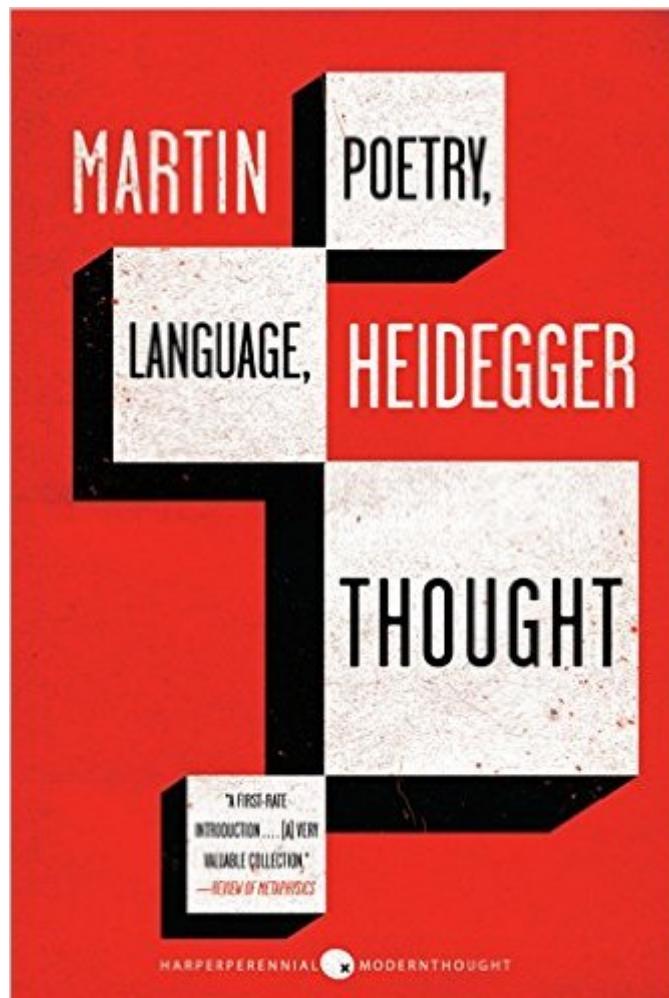


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Poetry, Language, Thought (Harper Perennial Modern Thought)



Synopsis

Poetry, Language, Thought collects Martin Heidegger's pivotal writings on art, its role in human life and culture, and its relationship to thinking and truth. Essential reading for students and anyone interested in the great philosophers, this book opens up appreciation of Heidegger beyond the study of philosophy to the reaches of poetry and our fundamental relationship to the world. Featuring "The Origin of the Work of Art," a milestone in Heidegger's canon, this enduring volume provides potent, accessible entry to one of the most brilliant thinkers of modern times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Heidegger does not address the issue of poetry and truth from the vantage point of a traditional or academic art historian; nor does he employ conventional terms and classifications. Instead, he arrives at his subjects experimentally and tangentially and firmly grounds them on the approach of "ontological knowledge" which has made him famous. His highly idiosyncratic style, however, often playing with the cognate forms of the words of the original German, and which eludes translation, may make his arguments seem imprecise and willfully obscure. Though "Poetry, Language, Thought" is a collection of essays collected from Heidegger's miscellaneous later writings, it is no less formidable than "Being and Time", his masterpiece of ontological enquiry, published in 1927. The most beautiful formulation in the book is that truth is, by its very nature, poetic and this for Heidegger, does not imply a polarity between verse and prose, but actually includes prose as well.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art", he defines the truth of the art work as being the setting-up of the art work in relation to the undisclosedness of Being, a conclusion which he argues up to at great length and with much skill and profundity. Like Wittgenstein and Derrida, Heidegger is not a philosopher in the traditional sense who aims to provide an all-embracing theory that would explain ultimate reality. He does not pretend to a First Philosophy which is based on some abstraction such as Reason, the Proletariat or the World Spirit. Rather, he is something of an exegete and experimentalist, probing the assumptions behind people's habits of speech and thought in a way of clarifying central misconceptions and errors. The volume also includes essays titled "What are Poets For?

Heidegger's writings are difficult, though this is a good introduction to some of his ideas. While many of the terms he seems to use casually are not defined, a thorough read will help the reader get a greater grasp on Heidegger's thoughts. The poems he cites are central, and the poems at the beginning of the work are virtually incomprehensible without a full knowledge of what Heidegger means by this. Some important words, such as the "turning" are left undefined in this book. While this is a good introduction, *The Question Concerning Technology*, and *Other Essays* is helpful for anyone looking for the relationship between technology and art (*techne*) and also the subject-object relationship and the relationship of the world to the so-called "worldview." Anyone serious about Heidegger will have to reread and cross-reference between his works, so when advised to read this book first, it doesn't mean there is any fast track to understanding Heidegger. At best, it is slightly less difficult. *Being and Time* might wisely be saved until later. The book being reviewed here is the most accessible of his writings. Heidegger's discussion of the "void" inside a jug being what does the holding parallels Taoist discussions on emptiness.

Poetry, Language, Thought is a collection of seven of Heidegger's essays collected from other works originally written or delivered as lectures between 1935 and 1951. These essays all revolve around "art" in the broadest sense possible -- Heidegger meditates upon the poetry of Rilke and Holderlin and the paintings of Van Gogh. These purposes shouldn't be understood, however, as art or literary criticism. These essays serve as examples of Heidegger's broader project of the investigation of Being in a totalizing sense. He sought to understand Being in the sense that it is common to rock, trees, animals, and people by an examination of the human mode of being, *Dasein*, being that questions the nature of its own being. Heidegger believed we have so completely forgotten about being that we have even forgotten that we have forgotten -- and as a result, we

need to pay special attention to the times when Being, via our Dasein, calls attention to the fact of its own hiddenness. In everyday human experience this can happen through the experience of anxiety or boredom or, in the case of Poetry, Language, Thought, it can happen through art. Heidegger examines art in this collection of essays as it unveils the hiddenness of Being. As you can see from my brief description, a bit of a background in Heidegger would be helpful before reading this book. If you're really interested, read his Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics first (Indiana University Press). Then read Being and Time. If you still want to read Heidegger after that, then turn to Poetry, Language, Thought as an application of his philosophy to the understanding of art, to how we are to understand art and what we should allow it to reveal to us.

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