

Being Without (Heidegger)

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The question about “future legacies” has stepped beyond the closed walls of the academy. It is no longer a mere *querelle* between Ancients and Moderns or between Analytic and Continental philosophers. It has become a question in and of the world. Moreover, it is a question not only about how a legacy, that is, whether an inherited meaning can have a future, but above all whether the future itself can become a legacy, can be inherited as meaningful.

The question about “future legacies” is a question about the *paradox* of tradition rather than about tradition. Thus, “tradition” does not mean merely preservation of meanings, institutions, and practices but a double transmission – the transmission of meanings, institutions and practices, and the transmission of transmission itself. Because tradition is both preservation and transmission, a keeping of something for itself and a handing over of something to another, it carries within itself the possibility of transformation. Indeed, in the *querelle* between Ancients and Moderns – which has become a tradition of its own – the inexorable bond between the old and the new, between revolution and tradition, has not been taken seriously in its problematicity. Defined as rupture with the past, with the old, with tradition, and thereby as a position *against* the past, *against* the old and tradition, modern concepts of revolution and of the “new,” such as those we can find for instance in Kant, did not pay attention to how their *against* built *again* a tradition, and hence how revolution and tradition go always together as a body and its

shadow. It is in the sense of how a body and its shadow are, at the same time, separated and inseparable that I am speaking here about tradition as a paradox, the paradox of being at the same time preservation and overcoming. Tradition preserves when trying to overcome overcoming and preserving preservation; tradition overcomes trying to preserve overcoming and to overcome preservation.

The paradox of tradition appears today clearer and clearer. The expansion of capitalism in the globe obeys a fundamental law that Marx described as “general equivalence” (*Das Kapital* I). It can be understood in the sense that capitalism can only expand globally insofar as everything becomes whatsoever for the sake of being used, abused and misused as whatsoever, whenever and wherever by whomsoever. This means that, on the one hand, everything becomes anything and, on the other, that anything becomes everything. This means that all things lose their ontological determination and become nothing. However, becoming nothing, they can become whatsoever. Hence, becoming nothing, everything can acquire whatsoever ontological determination and be, let us say, re-ontologized. In short, general equivalence can be seized as the double intertwined movement of dis-ontologization and continuous re-ontologization. A further consequence of this expansive movement of capitalism is that there are no longer traditions but, at the same time, and precisely because of that, all traditions are re-claimed and over-traditionalized. The more globalization dislocates traditions and de-traditionalizes existence, the more it promotes re-traditionalization. Tradition is used both as a critical weapon against global, media-technological de-traditionalization and as a violent weapon against tradition. Today tradition rapes its own tradition. The world is over-hanging on its right wing. The difficult challenge that the violent conservatisms that have emerged in this dynamics of de-traditionalization, re-, and over-traditionalization present is the challenge of being not only without being – this or that – but the challenge of being with the without of being. Today being is without being, and the most haunting question seems to be how to be with the without of being.

Departing from these assumptions, I would like to address the question about “future legacies” proposed by the Heidegger Circle this year as a question about *being with a without*. I will not discuss whether we should or could be with or without Heidegger today and/or in the future, nor what a post-Heideggerian era could mean – not only because it is not certain that a Heideggerian era has ever existed. I will rather present a kind of brief *philological conversation* with Heidegger’s thoughts that are closest to what I am proposing to think in terms of “being with a without.” For Heidegger, the question is rather to think “being without.”

The expression “being with a without” is not an expression used by Heidegger. However, his thought can be seized as a long, sinuous, suffering, obsessive, and erring thought on the ontological-historical condition of being without, a thought that assumes different philosophical figures and textures in his extensive work.

The first philosophical figure and texture of “being without” that we seize in his thinking path is the figure of *destruction*, destruction of the ontological tradition. The discussions about the “destruction of tradition” in *Being and Time* present a very significant insight in the paradox of tradition that, on another occasion, could be brought into a fruitful dialogue with Benjamin, Adorno, and Arendt’s views on tradition and its paradoxes.¹ For Heidegger, “tradition uproots the historicity of Dasein”² insofar as it covers over what it recovers. It is the very recovery accomplished by tradition that covers over tradition. It is tradition that undermines tradition. It is history that kills history. Heidegger acknowledges that if, on the one hand, tradition uproots existence, on the other, it is impossible to exist without tradition.³ That is why tradition is not to be recuperated but to be “destroyed,” indeed, deconstructed, *abgebaut* (GA 24: 31/23), in the sense of being brought back to the originary experiences that oriented a certain interpretation of the world and of being that dominated history and grounded common views of today. In fact, what has to be destroyed, or deconstructed, in Heidegger’s view is not the past – maybe this is what most distinguishes Heidegger’s thoughts on the destruction of tradition. What is

to be destroyed or deconstructed is the very *today*. Heidegger's fight is against the to-day. Moreover, destruction or deconstruction is not the aim of philosophical inquiry but the means and way, that is, the *method* for fighting against the today, which for Heidegger exposes the obscure reign of public universality, embodied in the bodiless "the they," *das Man*. The aim of destruction is to win an insight into the originary experiences that constitute the sources of the dominant explanations of the uncanny up-rootedness of the today and of the world – the sources of the uncanny and uprooting public universality and universal publicity. It is the task of learning to be without what one cannot be without, namely, the today. The today appears as *pierced* and *tattooed* by a *without*, a without ground, without familiarity, without experience and concreteness – in short, a *without being* – a without that structures and constitutes "the they." Speaking about uprootedness, homelessness, and worldliness, Heidegger speaks about how being is today without being, how the universal, conceptual, formal and abstract renders being empty of being. Indeed, he is speaking of how philosophy became the form of an experience of the world without experience and without world. The without appears as *negative without* in the extensive and intensive uses he makes of the prefix *un-* and the suffix *-los* in German. By means of destruction, that is, of deconstruction, what is expected is reaching the possibility of existing – which for Heidegger means thinking – without the without that constitutes the today. Expected is to be *without the without*. Phrasing it in this manner, a *positive without* is also considered. Immersed in tradition – in the complex mechanism of "the they" – existence exists without existing, being is without being. Destruction or deconstruction of tradition is meant to prepare a way to exist without this without. The distinction between a negative and a positive without is only a simplified and hence provisional way to rephrase the paradox of tradition viewed and thought by Heidegger. The figure of thought presented by him is the one about the need to be without the without.

Heidegger's thoughts on destruction reach extreme intensity in the black 1930s and 40s. In the extremity of destruction, "destruction" is thought further in terms of overcoming. In a certain sense, Heidegger's

turn is the turn from *destruction* of the ontological tradition to the *overcoming* of metaphysics. The move from destruction to overcoming corresponds to an inquiry about how “traditional ontology” reveals itself as the fate of Western civilization. For Heidegger, Western civilization is philosophical civilization. The West could only become a civilization insofar as it is grounded on philosophy, on the search for universal grounds and reasons for the entirety of beings. It becomes civilization precisely because this philosophical striving for universalization strives to become universal. Philosophy – the search for universal ground – is for Heidegger itself the ground upon which Western civilization could be built. Philosophy as a search for the first beginning is itself the first beginning of the West. The search for a universal ground for all that is seizes, but at the same time also loses, the event of being, the mysterious fact *that being is*. It takes being for *what* is being, and accomplishes the civilizational grammatical error of taking the infinitive verb “to be” for a substantive, for a thing, for something in itself. It forgets being.

The West is the civilization of the oblivion of being, of being without being for being exclusively with beings. The West is a civilizational experience of a certain fate of being – the one of giving itself as being, withdrawing in beings. This way of *self-donation in self-withdrawal* defines metaphysics for Heidegger. The history of the West is the history of metaphysics, of this way of donation, which is performed as the striving for universalization of this striving for universalization. Western civilization is the universalization of the philosophical striving for universality by means of the expansion of its power. This expanding universalization grows and intensifies in different moments of history, through different forces and figures, not only Roman Latinity and Christianity but also Judaism or Jewry, which in the *Black Notebooks* becomes the figural embodiment of Modernity and of the bodiless “the they,” of publicity and universality. Heidegger’s anti-Semitism is anti-Platonic, anti-Christian, anti-modernist insofar as Platonism, Christianity, Judaism and modernity are names for the intensification of the striving for universalization as a result of the oblivion of being. History as the movement of intensification of the oblivion of being is the core

of Heidegger's concept of the onto-historical, of *Seynsgeschichte*. Crucial in this concept is, however, how the metaphysical fate of being – the fate of showing itself as being while withdrawing in beings, the fate of being as *self-donation in self-withdrawal* – shows itself. It shows itself at the point of its own saturation, at the point of its plenitude, at the point of its *end*.

Heidegger is obsessed with the idea that the “Western revolution,” which means the beginning of philosophy as metaphysics, is the beginning of an end that is still ending. In the black 1930s and '40s, Heidegger writes a kind of testament of the *ending* of the world, as I have suggested in another article.⁴ In the *Black Notebooks*, he seems sometimes to be writing down the *ending* of the world. Here, the distinction between “end” and “ending” is crucial. He writes and thinks under the threat – and sometimes even the desire – that the end should come as soon as possible. The trance of transiting shows itself as the ecstasy of the apocalypse of time itself. At stake is a turn in being itself, a revolution of being, an ontological revolution, so to speak.

The black 1930s and '40s present the intensification of this ending, where the possibility of a total end of Western civilization is at stake; world war means for Heidegger not only the possibility of the end of the world, but the risk of the end of being itself. As such, however, even the end would end. Heidegger speaks about the “eschatology of being.” Heidegger’s “history of being” is an apocalyptic narrative that also reveals the “apocalyptic tone” of the whole history of philosophy (recalling Kant’s and Derrida’s discussions of this tone).⁵ Heidegger seizes the *ending* of the first philosophical beginning of the West as a “between,” as a *Zwischen*. The ending is a between in the sense of an end that does not cease to end, in the sense of an endless end. It is a between also because in this ending of the first philosophical beginning of the West another beginning can, however, be surmised. The thought of the “other beginning” developed by Heidegger in this period is perhaps the most extreme formulation of modern ideas of revolution. Thus at stake is not simply a beginning anew, or a transformation, or even a metamorphosis of a former beginning. Instead what is meant is

the impossible thought of another beginning of the beginning itself, a reset of being itself. As such, the other beginning cannot be compared to whatever has ever been, but precisely by virtue of its being absolutely incomparable, the only way to embrace its presentiment is by comparing the incomparable – that is, by comparing it to the first beginning by means of *listening* to the echo of what is far-away-still-not-yet-here in what has been since the beginning.

The thought of the “history of being” is the thought of how the event of being and the events of history are “intertwined,” or *verstrickt*. The moment of dark clarity in which the fate of the truth of being as self-donation in self-withdrawal is itself given is the long moment of an ending that did not end to end. It is the long moment of a “transition” (*Übergang*) from which the experience of an “overcoming” (*Überwindung*) is thought. “Between,” “transition,” in which another beginning can be surmised through the echo of its not yet in the already and the having been – these are descriptions of a being without a way out of the first philosophical civilizational beginning. Rather than a thought of being with the without, these descriptive figures propose a thought of *being within the without*. They propose a thought of the immanence, of the within, a thought capable of describing from within being in transition, in between, in the meanwhile.

After the war Heidegger follows these thoughts, connecting even more intensively thoughts on transition and between-ness with the thought of overcoming. In this connection, the desperate thought of being without a without turns more into a thought that is closer to what I am calling a “being *with* the without.” In the essay “Overcoming Metaphysics” – which should be read, I think, as a kind of summary of the difficult thoughts developed during the 1930s and 40s rather than as their “overcoming” – the need to “leave” (*überlassen*) metaphysics for itself becomes central. To step beyond metaphysics is discussed mainly in terms of a stepping into metaphysics so that metaphysics can be left to itself. Overcoming is conceived as *Verwindung*, “enduring,” in the sense of someone who endures a suffering. Being *with* the without, this *with* I am somehow *inflicting* here upon

Heidegger, is seized however as a *within*, as a within the without. Heidegger's thoughts on "enduring" are thoughts on *being within the without*. This "within" is not a place or really a preposition. It is rather a kind of verb, a verb conjugated in a middle voice, that is neither active nor passive but both at once. This is the heart of Heidegger's thoughts on "leaving," *lassen*, expressed in the terms *Gelassenheit*, *einlassen*, *zulassen*, *überlassen*, and its other variants.

It is also the heart of Heidegger's thoughts on "poverty" (*Armut*) pronounced in a talk held just after the end of the war in June 1945,⁶ and briefly recalled in the "Letter on Humanism" in 1946. In this talk poverty is defined as the poverty of being. It is neither privation of the necessary nor loss of property and ownership. It is poverty in the sense that there is nothing missing except the non-necessary. "Necessary today is the non-necessary" – this Heideggerian formulation presents the thought of the *Not der Notlosigkeit*, the "plight of a lack of sense of plight," which was already formulated in the *Contributions to Philosophy (On the Event)* from 1936–1938 (GA 65: §4). In this sense, poverty is being within the without. Poverty is treated by Heidegger as being within the without and not only as being without. The difference between being without the without and being within the without is the difference of the awareness of the truth of being. Thus what is at stake here is how being appears not only in its own withdrawal but *while* withdrawing. The difference lies in the focus on this *whiling* to which Heidegger will become even more attentive after the war. It is the focus on the whiling and abiding, on *Weilen*, *Verweilen*, *Während* – which is to say, on the spatio-temporality of the *within* – that enables Heidegger to think *Ge-stell*, enframing, composition as a "pre-form" (*Vorform*) and "prelude" (*Vorspiel*) to the "event," or *Ereignis* (GA 11: 46/36–37); to think the *Enteignis*, dis-appropriation as a prelude to *Ereignis*, appropriation; to see how in danger grows what saves, recalling the verses by Hölderlin that Heidegger repeatedly quotes almost as an ontological prayer. With this, another motive, namely the motive of the need to overcome the need to overcome, also appears.

In the 1945 talk on poverty, Heidegger recasts the heroic tone of revolution and overcoming in the tone of poverty. (Both Lacoue-Labarthe

and Trawny comment on this talk, the latter connecting it to Hegel's ideas on property.⁷) He proposes this meaning of poverty as the richness of needing nothing except the non-necessary as a path for the transformation of the West. He no longer speaks about "the Germans" but about "the Western people." However, the thought about poverty as the richness of needing nothing but the non-necessary opens up a thought of being *without*, *ohne*, and of serenity, *Gelassenheit*. Not-willing appears as the only path toward the serenity of being *ohne warum*, or without reason or ground, as the rose is in its being. In the 1957 *The Principle of Reason*, the articulation between "being without reason" or "ground" – *ohne Warum* – is discussed in a deep articulation of the experience of listening. Here, Heidegger re-reads himself, confessing what he had not "listened" to before and professing the need to change the "tonality" (*Tonart*) of thought. He presents the thought of the "sleep of being" (*Schlaf des Seins*) and of how "being properly still sleeps" (*Sein eigentlich noch schläft*) and is "dreamt in advance of its own dream" (*vorausgeträumt*) (GA 10: 97/54). Sleep is indeed an experience of being with the without. It is also in relation to a without that Heidegger formulates his later thoughts about the "constellation" between being and the humans. He states, for example, in the important lecture from 1962, *Time and Being*, that "time is not without the human being" and inquires into the meaning of this "not without," of being "not without" (GA 14: 21/16).

In Heidegger's discussions about being without, *ohne*, being within the without, not being without, about the poverty and sleep of being, a thought about the overcoming of overcoming is at stake. A thought about the "need" to transform the very meaning of transformation is sketched out. Being within the without is understood as a learning not of another way to be and to think, but rather of an unlearning. We could recall here a verse by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, who speaks about the need to *aprender a desaprender*, "to learn to unlearn." For Heidegger there is such a need "to learn to unlearn" in order to think further the paths of this overcoming of the overcoming, which has defined the philosophical beginning of the West as metaphysics.

Thus what does the Greek word “metaphysics” mean if not literally “over-coming” (meta-physics)? To be learned is to unlearn the grammar of the intertwining of *being and time* in which temporal being is understood as a coming from ... over to ..., and transformation as the passing from one form to another – keeping, however, untransformed the movement of transformation itself. The language of being coined by the Greeks and condensed into a nugget in the Parmenidean formula τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι, “The same is to think and to be,” needs to be unlearned. This “need” haunts the late Heidegger. This “need” haunts us as well.

In contrast to philosophical thoughts on transformation based on a metaphysics of forms and formations, Heidegger will propose in his later years a thought of the *tautology of Being*. This late thought is described again as a listening, but more specifically a listening to what Heidegger called the *tautophasis* and *phenomenophasis* of being.⁸ In its tautology, being says itself in such a way that the same is already another, sounding other and otherwise. The same of being is “sameother,” *selbander*; a term used by Heidegger in late notes from the 1970s. However, in all these attempts to overcome overcoming, Heidegger remains prisoner of the arche-teleology implied in the idea of transformation qua overcoming.

Being without Heidegger. Is that the claim, the desire, the imperative? For many it is very much so. But this means above all being without being, or to put it less rhetorically, being without the language of being. Heidegger himself did try to say being in a way that could express the experience of being within the without, being within the ending and transition of a philosophical civilization. *Sein* written with “y” (*beyng*), being scratched over with an X, being as nothing, as poverty, as sleep, as “event” instead of being, being as danger, as turn, as pain, as serenity, as gathering – all these attempts not to say being when saying being indicate how Heidegger’s language of being comprehends itself as a language within the without of being itself. To be without Heidegger, without the language of being, to write against being or not to say being – to think with, against, despite Heidegger – these

attempts would, however, not free us from the sediment of the apocalyptic structure and tones of a long tradition of thoughts about overcoming and being-without that accompanies both dreams of revolution and the disenchantment of the so-called post-historical times. Indeed, the problem lies in the apocalyptic tonal structure of philosophy and the difficulty – the human, too human difficulty – of *leaving*. The question concerning how the meaning of “leaving-off,” “abandoning,” *lassen* is intertwined with the “leaving-off,” or abandoning, of meanings remains a question, and with it the task of unlearning the apocalyptic structural tone of thoughts on leaving-off, separation, and crisis.⁹

Today, we see this apocalyptic tone becoming more and more widespread. We hear it everywhere, stated with different accents and pronunciations. The sentiment of the world is the one of finding itself in the middle of a race speeding to its end: no longer the end of art, of history, of philosophy, of the human being, but now the end of all resources pertaining to the world, the earth, the planet. In all those dimensions of the ending that has occupied Heidegger intensively, and in the intense debates and excess of writings about the “end of,” about the “post” – post-modernism, post-history, post-colonialism, post-post, and so on – and further about “being and coming after,” about “afterness,” the question about “future legacies” has not ceased to haunt contemporary existence. Today, the question about “future legacies” emerges as a very dangerous question, as the very question of danger itself; thus the world experiences today the war of legacies, and the distressing question of whether the future itself can be or become a “legacy.” In the age of the politics of memory in which we now live, it seems more than ever necessary to think what it means to be with the without – without the need to speak in the name of a past or of a future. To be without this need would mean to take seriously another need, namely the need to “give ourselves to nature before she takes us,” as Hölderlin put it in the mouth of a dying Empedocles, as well as to listen to the voices of plurality who scream unheard in the powerful monochord of the global One. What is left is the task of reading rather than interpreting, in order to thereby discover that *archi-reading* is the condition of possible and impossible interpretative writings.

To close, two quotes, one from Hölderlin in the *Death of Empedocles*:

Oh, give yourselves to nature, before she takes you! –
[...]
So, dare it! your inheritance, what you've earned and
learned,
The narratives of all your fathers' voices teaching you,
All law and custom, names of all the ancient gods,
Forget these things courageously; like newborn babes
Your eyes will open to the godliness of nature [...]¹⁰

and the other, "Autumn Day" by Rilke:

Lord: it is time. The summer was so immense.
Lay your shadow on the sundials,
and let loose the wind in the fields.

Bid the last fruits to be full;
give them another two more southerly days,
press them to ripeness, and chase
the last sweetness into the heavy wine.

Whoever has no house now will not build one anymore.
Whoever is alone now will remain so for a long time,
will stay up, read, write long letters,
and wander the avenues, up and down,
restlessly, while the leaves are blowing.¹¹

NOTES

- 1 See here Theodor Adorno, "On Tradition," *Telos* 94 (Dec 1992): 75–82; Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1961); Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" in *Selected Writings, vol. 4: 1938–1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Boston: Belknap, 2003), 389–400.
- 2 As Heidegger writes, "the tradition that hereby gains dominance makes what it 'transmits' so little accessible that initially and for the most part it covers it over instead. What has been handed down is handed over to obviousness; it bars access to those original 'wellsprings' out of which the traditional categories and concepts were in part genuinely drawn. Indeed, it makes us wholly incapable of even understanding that such a return [the return to it] is necessary" (GA 2: 29/SZ 21).
- 3 On this point Adorno is quite close to Heidegger when he writes: "There is no tradition today and none can be conjured, yet when every tradition has been extinguished the march toward barbarism will begin." Adorno, "On Tradition," 78.
- 4 Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, "Heidegger, die Juden, Heute," in *Heidegger, die Juden, noch einmal*, eds. Peter Trawny and Andrew J. Mitchell (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015), 117–44.
- 5 Immanuel Kant, "On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy" (1786), trans. Peter Heath in *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and "The End of All Things" in Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George DiGiovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," trans. John P. Leavy, *The Oxford Literary Review* 6:2 (1984): 3–37.
- 6 Martin Heidegger, "Die Armut," *Heidegger Studies* 10 (1994): 5–11. English translation: "Poverty," trans. Thomas Kalary and Frank

- Schalow, in *Heidegger, Translation, and the Task of Thinking: Essays in Honor of Parvis Emad* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 3–9.
- 7 See *La Pauvreté / die Armut*, trans. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Ana Samardzija (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2004) and Peter Trawny, “Die Armut der Geschichte: Zur Frage nach der Vollendung und Verwandlung der Philosophie bei Heidegger; Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann zum 65. Geburtstag,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 53: 3 (Jul–Sept 1999), 407–27.
- 8 See Martin Heidegger, *Auszüge zur Phänomenologie aus dem Manuskript “Vermächtnis der Seinsfrage,”* Martin Heidegger Gesellschaft Jahresgabe 2011–12 (Stuttgart: Offizin Scheufele, 2012).
- 9 The thinking of Reiner Schürmann gives us thoughtful insight into these questions.
- 10 Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles: A Mourning-Play*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 90.
- 11 Rainer Maria Rilke, “Autumn Day,” in *The Essential Rilke*, ed. and trans. Galway Kinnell and Hannah Liebmann (New York: Ecco Press, 1999), 5.