

To

THEODORE J. KISIEL

and

WILLIAM J. RICHARDSON, S.J.

Ted Kisiel and Bill Richardson are founding members of the Heidegger Circle and the authors of ground-breaking research into the development of Heidegger's thinking. Their critical investigations of Heidegger's thought and cheerful yet earnest contributions to discussions at the annual meetings of the Heidegger Circle through the years have been a constant source of valued instruction and inspiration to the members of the Heidegger Circle. As a means of paying tribute to what Ted and Bill have meant to the Heidegger Circle and celebrating the lasting legacy of their work, we dedicate this initial volume of *Gatherings* to them.

Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual is a publication of the Heidegger Circle, a group of scholars who have been meeting annually in North America since 1966 to discuss the work of Martin Heidegger. In the Spring of 2010, at the business meeting of the Heidegger Circle, the members present at the meeting voted to produce an annual publication of research on the thought and writings of Martin Heidegger and related themes. The first issue of *Gatherings* was published in May, 2011.

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GATHERINGS

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Astonishing!
Things Make Sense!

Thomas Sheehan

With the appearance of human being, meaning dawned in the universe, and nothing has been the same since. For the first time in the 13.7 billion years of the cosmos, things were no longer just “out there” but instead became meaningfully present (*anwesend*). As far as we know, only human beings can question things, recognize them for what they are in themselves, name them, talk about them in soliloquy or dialogue, and even talk about that talking. Once man is possessed by the Promethean fire of intellect and language, human history begins as a complex unfolding of meaningful lives.¹

Heidegger’s philosophical focus never strayed from *die Sache selbst*, the astonishing fact that with human existence sense irrupts into an otherwise meaningless universe.² Throughout his career he remained fixed on the twofold question of (1) the meaningful presence (*Anwesen*) of things, and (2) above all, what *lets* such meaningful presence happen (*das Anwesenlassen*).³ The latter is what Heidegger called his basic question or *Grundfrage*. If philosophy begins with astonishment, then the ἀρχή—the origin and ordering—of all Heidegger’s thought was the wonder of all wonders: that things make sense.⁴

The back story of this essay has been argued in recent publications and, given the necessary brevity of the present text, cannot be detailed here.⁵ The main point is that Heidegger’s work unfolds with unprecedented clarity, simplicity, and force once one realizes that by equating

Sein with *Anwesen* and by casting his thought in the mode of phenomenology and hermeneutics, Heidegger himself placed the problematic of being squarely within the parameters of meaning.

For example, in 1919, during his first course after the Great War, Heidegger asked what it is we immediately encounter in lived experience. Is it blanched out “beings” that only later acquire the hue of meaning? No, what we first encounter and always live with is:

the meaningful [*das Bedeutsame*]—that is what is first and immediately given to you without any mental detour through a conceptual grasp of the thing. When you live in the everyday world [*die Umwelt*], everything comes at you loaded with meaning, all over the place and all the time. Everything appears within a meaningful context, and that context *gives those things their meaning*.⁶

And in 1924 he remarked:

For a long time, I have been designating the being-character of human existence as *meaningfulness*. This being-character is the primary one in which the world is encountered.⁷

Again in his 1925–26 course on *Logic* he signaled the centrality of meaning to human being:

Because by its very nature existence is sense-making, it lives in meanings and can express itself in and as meanings.⁸

A year later, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger declared that the hermeneutics of *Dasein* was the indispensable basis for the doctrine of meaning (*Bedeutungslehre*) that he presented there.⁹ The center of that doctrine of meaning is being-in-the-world. But the essence of world is meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*).¹⁰ Therefore, we may interpret being-in-the-world (*In-der-Bedeutsamkeit-sein*) as man’s thrown-projective

engagement-with-meaning. In addition, throughout his career Heidegger interpreted the pre-Socratic thinkers as proto-phenomenologists focused on the conjunction (τὸ αὐτό) of meaningful presence (εἶναι) and human apprehension of it (νοῦς). And when it came to Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger read οὐσία, the Greek word for “being,” as παρ-ουσία, meaningful presence in and to λόγος. No λόγος, no παρ-ουσία.

The danger of hypostasizing *Sein*—always a Heideggerian temptation—readily dissolves once we understand that human existence is *for the sake of meaning* (early Heidegger) or is *a priori appropriated into the meaning-process* (later Heidegger). Meaning is the *raison d'être* of human being. “The clearing grants Dasein as such.”¹¹ In this shift to an emphatically phenomenological-hermeneutical way of reading Heidegger, the *Da-sein* / *Sein* correlation is transformed into the *Da-sinn* / *Sinn* conjunction: man as the only “place” where meaningful presence or *Anwesen* occurs.¹² We can read the *Da-sinn* / *Sinn* conjunction from either side: No man, no meaning (Heidegger I), or no meaning, no man (Heidegger II).¹³ The crux of the reversal (*Kehre*) between the earlier and later Heidegger is the recognition that human beings do not generate the space of meaning *sua sponte* but are pulled into it *a priori*. In the final analysis, to fail to see that sense-making is the most basic thing that human being is and does, is to entirely miss the point of Heidegger’s thought.

In this paper I argue that Heidegger’s extensive corpus from beginning to end remained a hermeneutics of *Dasein* or an analytic of human existence, in which Heidegger, like Theseus,

made fast the guiding thread of all philosophical inquiry
at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*,¹⁴

namely, human being. This entails that all the key terms in Heidegger’s lexicon—*Ereignis*, ἀλήθεια, *Lichtung*, even *Seyn*—are existentials precisely in the sense that the early Heidegger gave this term: necessities and abilities that *a priori* determine the human way of being. In Heidegger’s world, apart from the fact of *Da-sinn*/*Sinn*, there is no further, higher level where things like *Seyn* and *Ereignis* carry on their

business. That would be metaphysics in its worst form (even though it is frequently peddled about as “Heidegger’s thought”). Heidegger remained on one level only, that of the man-meaning conjunction, and everything in his corpus is about that. No matter how wide his thinking ranged or how deep it reached, Heidegger never got beyond human being, and never intended to. Nor did he need to. This may be a *scandalum piis auribus*, but so be it. The only *pietas* philosophers should respect is that of thinking *qua* questioning.

The questioning that this essay pursues is twofold, even though I can only sketch out the second part: (I) How do human beings make sense of the things they encounter? And (II) What does this have to do to the basic question (*Grundfrage*) of Heidegger’s thought?

I. HOW WE MAKE SENSE

The first page of *Being and Time* proper offers the clue to why human being is intrinsically and exclusively bound up with making sense of things. There Heidegger designates the first characteristic of human existence as “having to be” (*Zu-sein*).¹⁵ I hope to show that having to be entails having to make sense of things. This requires a number of steps, some of which Heidegger laid out in his 1929–1930 course *Basic Concepts of Metaphysics* under the rubrics of (A) animal life as projected into possibility and (B) human being as world-forming.

A. ANIMAL LIFE AS PROJECTED INTO POSSIBILITY

1. *Life as possibility*

For Heidegger as for Aristotle, life, whether it be the ζωή of plants and animals or the βίος of human beings, is necessarily bound up with possibilities of itself. It is an *Entheben in das Mögliche*: a being lifted up and away into the possible. Life’s actuality is caught up in possibility.¹⁶

In the last analysis, potentiality and possibility belong precisely to the essence of the [living being] in its actuality, in a quite specific sense.¹⁷

In its most basic form, life is a natural drive to be underway to more of itself, an on-going genesis (*Sichzeitigung*) of itself as appearing in a new εἶδος, which in turn generates ever more possibilities.¹⁸ Insofar as life consists in constantly bringing forth something new of itself, it is a natural process of ἀλήθεια, of revealing itself as this or that.¹⁹ The reason? Life is a kind of φύσις, and φύσις is a kind of κίνησις, and κίνησις is a kind of μεταβολή (change whereby something hidden comes to light), and μεταβολή is a kind of ἀλήθεια. Φύσις/κίνησις = μεταβολή/ἀλήθεια, the single process of bringing-forth from itself what was heretofore hidden from view.

But the living being is not thrown or appropriated into just any possibilities. Most basically it is an intrinsic *Ermöglichung*, an enabling *of itself*, in the sense of making itself possible. A living being naturally sets forth its own whereunto (*Wozu*) and sets itself forth *into* it, while always remaining with itself as source of this drive.²⁰ Unlike an implement, which gets its capacity to serve some end from its maker, living beings produce their own ability to achieve their *Wozu*. They are “self-enabling” acts of becoming.²¹

2. *Self-preservation*

Every living being—and not just human being—is stamped with the essential characteristic of *Zu-sein*, not just “having to be,” but having to *become* in order to stay alive. A living thing has its τέλος as self-preservation.²² It is driven to survive, to keep on keeping on, until its ability to supply its own self-sustaining self-empowerment runs out naturally or is cut off accidentally. This also entails that something that is alive is able to die at any moment. This does not refer to the obvious fact that the living being, whether human or animal, moves diachronically into the future in the direction of its demise. Rather, the living being is always *zum Ende, zum Tode*, that is, *ever-at-the-point-of-death*. For something to live is to always live mortality, at the very edge of its ultimate possibility, which is to have no more possibility and so to be dead.²³

All of this, we stress, is structural and essential to life—it is of *a priori* necessity. When we speak of the living being as “thrown” or

“appropriated” into possibility, both of those terms indicate a living being’s “facticity,” that which it cannot not be. (The term “facticity,” like “being-at-the-point-of-death,” applies properly only to human being, but analogically to all life.) Life entails being always more than it is de facto (*tatsächlich*), but never more than it is *faktisch*, never more than the self-possibilizing that it is “obliged” to be.²⁴

3. *Movedness and ownness*

Another aspect of the structure of life is the bivalence of its κίνησις. Living is not only an instinctual movement that is stretched out into possibility (*Hin zu, Weg-von-sich*).²⁵ It also remains one with itself: “an exiting from itself in the essence of its being, yet without abandoning itself.”²⁶ Life is a constant presence to itself, a “retaining itself within itself.” A living thing, Heidegger says,

does not lose itself in the sense that an instinctual impulse to something would leave itself behind. Rather it retains itself precisely in such a drive and remains “its self,” as we might say, in this drive and driving.²⁷

On the one hand, life is bound to its future, a further becoming beyond what its previous becoming has already achieved. On the other hand, it constantly remains with the source of movement that it itself is. This is what Heidegger calls a living being’s “self-like character” or “ownness” throughout change.²⁸ To take the plant as an example: Out of its root and stem emerge the leaves, then the bud, which opens up as the flower, which in turn gives way to the fruit. The plant actualizes new possibilities for itself while still remaining the same plant, the source of its own growth.

4. *Openness and ἀλήθεια*

When it comes to animals, the *a priori* stretch into possibility wherein the animal retains its ownness has a certain (delimited) character of openness about it. As an instinctual drive to more of itself, animal life has

the character of a traversing, of a dimension in the formal sense. . . . Dimension is not yet understood in a spatial sense here, although the dimensional character of drive is . . . presumably the condition of the possibility of the animal's being able to traverse a spatial domain in a quite determinate manner.²⁹

This "dimension" names the animal's very limited openness that "clears the way" for sense perception. In their very different ways of being ψυχή, both animals and humans are "open" and "intentional" in the broadest sense of (1) going beyond any supposedly monadic self-enclosure and (2) being disclosive of what is other than themselves.³⁰ We recall that, for Heidegger, the nature of ψυχή, i.e., of life, is *entbergen*, uncovering something heretofore hidden.³¹ To live is to be beyond any supposed encapsulation, to be open to and disclosive of something other, which in the animal's case is the αἰσθητόν of the corresponding αἰσθησις.³²

5. *Captivation*

Heidegger speaks of the animal, *qua* sentient, as captivated by what it is open to. The sense organs have "no choice," as it were, about their corresponding objects. The eye sees light, no matter what. The alternative to seeing light is not to see at all. We noted that animals as sentient are open, and to that degree alethic, disclosive of their corresponding objects. Or to reverse the trajectory, the senses' objects open *them* up in a process that Heidegger calls *Entthemmung* ("disinhibiting"). However, such sense-openness is restricted to merely taking what the sensible appearances offer and dealing with that within the limitations of instinct. The animal "behaves" (*benahmen*) rather than properly "relating itself to" (*sich verhalten zu*) in the way that human being does. This confinement to behavior is what Heidegger means by "captivation" (*Benommenheit*) and also by "putting aside" (*Beiseitigung*), i.e., the animal does not recognize those appearances *as* what and how they are in themselves. The objects as such remain withdrawn from animal perception,

unable to be apprehended as something intelligible. In that sense, “the animal is separated from man by an abyss.”⁵³

B. HUMAN BEING: HERMENEUTICAL OPENNESS

When we turn to the human being, a vast new dimension of freedom and possibility breaks out, which Heidegger describes with the image of “the open.” By its very essence, human being is the genesis of νοῦς or mind: “The primary openness of human beings is grounded in νοῦς.”⁵⁴ “Mind” as we use it here is neither a subject’s consciousness nor the neurological processes at work when it feels something, knows something, or chooses among options. Rather, it is the condition of the possibility of all of those. It is what allows for the specifically human form of knowing: discursiveness or *διάνοια*, the ability to understand something *as* something. With νοῦς, one is no longer confined to receiving things in perception but is freed to *relate* oneself to them, to take them as they are in themselves and in terms of how they relate to us. Νοῦς ruptures the limitations of the animal’s sense experience and instinctual behavior as well as the constraints of its encircling ring. Human being is now able to make sense of things.

Over the course of his career Heidegger analyzed human νοῦς, understood as the possibility of intelligibility, under a number of rubrics, among them: openness or clearing; world; ἀλήθεια; λόγος; the “as”; *Inzwischen*; *Austrag*; and “time.” I briefly take up each of those in turn.

1. *Open-ended receptivity and the clearing*

Unlike the restricted range of the animal soul, the human is, in Aristotle’s words, πῶς πάντα, which Heidegger glosses as “openness to *everything*.”⁵⁵ We can “become” everything we meet in the universe—not ontically by fusing our identity with the thing, but by understanding the thing’s meaning (“receiving its form”). We understand things in *their* possibilities by taking them in terms of *our* possibilities, whatever they might be.⁵⁶ Thus they become familiar, a part of our “family.” We have learned to live with them. They make sense to us.

Heidegger's preferred image for human openness is that of a clearing (*Lichtung*). By this spatial image, he understands the condition of the possibility of understanding anything at all. The clearing, he writes, is the "open region of understanding"³⁷ into which human being is appropriated by its very nature. This ur-openedness is

the region of unhiddenness or clearing (intelligibility)
wherein for the first time all understanding, i.e., project-
ing, is possible in the sense of bringing into the open.³⁸

By "intelligibility" Heidegger is referring to every kind of accessibility to specifically human experience, whether theoretical, practical, or whatever.

To be sure, man is still a "πάθος, a *being-approached* by the world" through the senses.³⁹ Here Heidegger employs Aristotle's technical term for the structural ability to receive (δέχεσθαι) what the senses convey. But this is not the mere givenness of things to an αἴσθησις-bound and instinct-ruled animal, captivated and merely stimulated by the things in its environment. Drawing on *De Anima* III 5, 430a 15-25, Heidegger says: "The νοῦς παθητικός is possible only through the νοῦς ποιητικός, i.e., a νοεῖν that uncovers the world."⁴⁰ In other words, the aspect of νοῦς whereby we receive things through the senses (νοῦς παθητικός) is possible only because the νοῦς that allows intelligibility to happen at all (νοῦς ποιητικός) has always already done its work such that what we receive through the senses can be known as what and how it is.

2. *The world*

Heidegger writes, "The clearing, and it alone, is world."⁴¹ But world is the matrix of meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*). If things make sense within the open/clearing/world, where does that sense or meaning come from?

In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that the meaning of something is its intelligibility to man.⁴² Meaning is not a property attached to things, nor is it to be found "behind" or "above" them. Meaning is an existiale of human being, and existence alone "has" meaning.⁴⁵

That is, man's *a priori* engagement-with-meaning opens a "region" in which things can be understood as what they are. Thus only human existence is meaningful or meaningless. Other things are meaningful only insofar as they enter the range of human understanding and are "discovered together with human existence."⁴⁴ Only then do they have *Anwesen*—which entails that their *Anwesen* is their *meaning*. Their "being" consists in their involvement in the meaningful context that human being generates *a priori*. "If we say that entities 'have meaning,' this signifies that they have become accessible in their being."⁴⁵

But things come in wholes or sets, not as just one thing by itself nor as an undifferentiated "wall" of things out there. That is because human being is not imprisoned in some kind of monadic subjectivity but is embodied, situated, and contextual. Human being is a hermeneutical field of force that, like a magnet, draws things together into the unities of meaning. World is not a sum total of things—a "what"—but rather is human being itself as appropriated to sustaining the clearing. "As existing, human being *is* its world."⁴⁶ World is human being writ large, so to speak, as the matrix of intelligibility. "World" is another name for the open-ended human *νοῦς* that gathers (*λέγει*) things into unities of sense.⁴⁷

A specific world is a particular lived context within which things can have some meanings but not others. In that sense a specific world is a *restrictive* context: it constrains the range of possibilities in terms of which we can understand something. To cite Heidegger's famous example (1925): At night in the Black Forest, you might mistake a bush for a deer, but you probably wouldn't mistake it for the Shah of Iran. And yet strictly speaking (and at a huge stretch) it is not impossible that the Shah might show up at night in the woods around Todtnauberg; but you would never mistake the bush for the cubed root of sixty-nine.⁴⁸

3. Ἀλήθεια

Another term for the open clearing (*νοῦς*) is "disclosedness as such," *ἀλήθεια* in its primary sense. We must rescue this key term from its general translation as "truth." As Heidegger understands it, *ἀλήθεια* refers most basically not to the correct correspondence between thoughts

and things but rather to *meaningfulness* on at least three analogous levels. Only on the third and most derivative level does it mean “truth” as the conformity of a mental or spoken proposition to a given state of affairs. Heidegger’s interests lie primarily with the first two senses below, and ultimately with the first, ἀλήθεια-1, as the ground for the derivative forms of ἀλήθεια-2 and -3.

1. ἀλήθεια-1: The most basic meaning of ἀλήθεια is human being’s thrown-openness or disclosedness as such, the ability to make sense of whatever one encounters. It is the structure of human existence as “world-open,” both disclosed and disclosive.⁴⁹ This ἀλήθεια-1 marks the *a priori* fact that meaning is ever possible within the world of νοῦς.

2. ἀλήθεια-2: In a second and derived sense, ἀλήθεια refers to the disclosedness *of things* to understanding in our everyday, pre-propositional involvement with them. We cannot encounter anything except under the rubric of meaningfulness. Even if we merely wonder what something is, we have already brought the thing into the realm of possible sense. And unless something were disclosed already, we could not make propositional statements about it.

3. ἀλήθεια-3: The third and most derivative sense of ἀλήθεια refers to that particular (and utterly necessary) state of meaningfulness that we call the “correctness” of a judgment, the agreement of a propositional statement with the already disclosed state of affairs it refers to. Only at this third level do we have truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, a position that goes back through Kant and Aquinas to Aristotle.⁵⁰

It is the first of these three levels that corresponds to the clearing.

4. *Zwischen, Austrag*

Heidegger likewise speaks of the clearing as *das Inzwischen*, the “space between” a thing and its meaning that allows for the combination of the two.⁵¹ Further, echoing Aristotle’s ἀφαίρεσις (Latin, *abs-tractio*: *De anima* III 7, 431b 13), he calls it *Aus-trag*, the possibility of distinguishing and uniting a thing and its meaning. With this latter term we begin to see the hermeneutical dynamics of the opening up of the clearing. Heidegger begins spelling this out under the rubric of σύνθεσις/διάφρασις, which is bound up with his analysis of λόγος.⁵²

5. Λόγος and the “as”

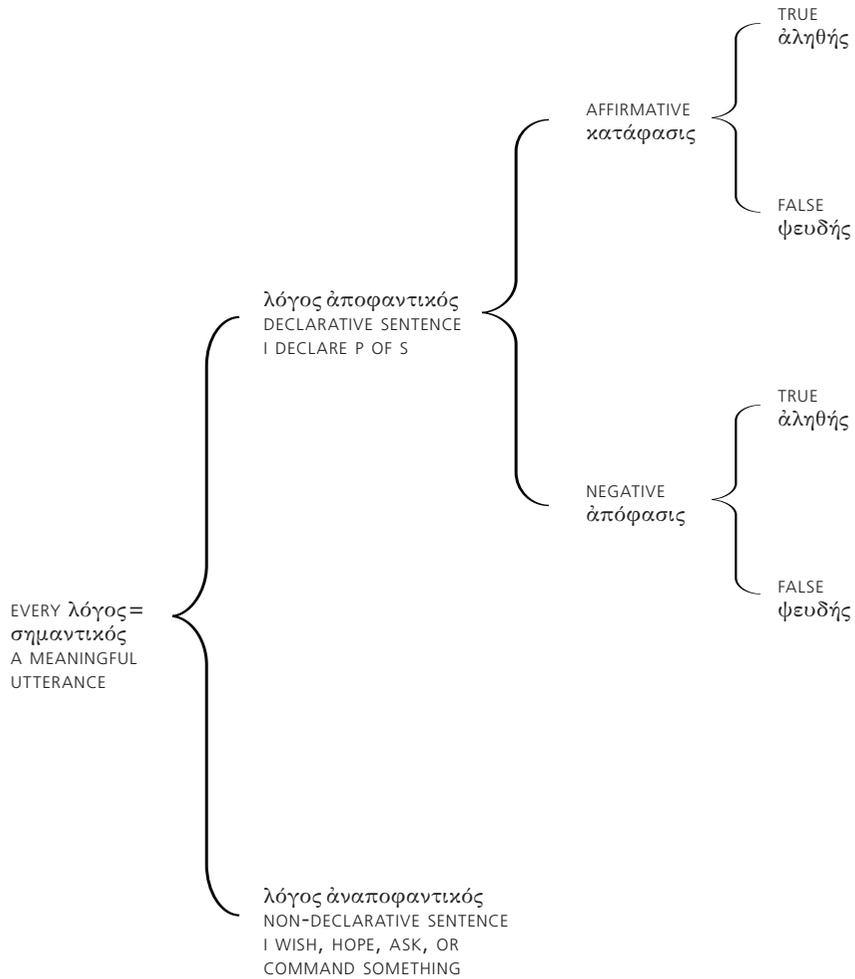
In Heidegger’s interpretation, λόγος is not “speech” but what makes speech possible: the ur-openedness (ἀλήθεια-1) thanks to which something can be disclosed as meaningful (ἀλήθεια-2). To see how this is the case, we take up two different kinds of λόγοι or sentences: one that is meaningful *simpliciter* and another that is *apophantically* meaningful.

Every human utterance—whether “Hello,” “Let’s go,” or “I hope the revolution succeeds”—gives forth something to be understood. However, some sentences go further and make a claim about what they give forth as understandable, a claim that could be either true or false. As regards the first case: If I’m standing in the kitchen and say “Hand me the spatula,” my fellow cook will no doubt understand what the sentence means. I too understand: I need it for the scrambled eggs. This sentence or λόγος gives forth something that people can understand: it is *σημαντικός*, meaningful.

As regards the second case: When I follow up and say “The spatula’s in the drawer,” my statement, in addition to being meaningful, makes a claim. It is a *declarative* sentence insofar as it declares something about the status of the spatula. In this second instance I have made not only a meaningful statement, a λόγος *σημαντικός*, but in addition an indicative one, a λόγος *ἀποφαντικός*. The second, unlike the first, purports to show something (-φάινεσθαι) about (ἀπό-) the spatula itself. A declarative sentence can be in either the affirmative or the negative. But the

important thing is that, to be a declarative sentence, it must necessarily be true or false. It *indicates* something *as*—regardless of whether the indication is right or wrong, or whether I am sincere (I really believe it's in the drawer) or deceitful (I know it's not there).

A further step: When I utter the declarative sentence “Socrates is an Athenian,” I synthesize “Socrates” with the category “Athenian.” However, Socrates does not exhaust the category of “all Athenians.” Therefore, while synthesizing the two, I also maintain a distinction between them. A declarative sentence is constituted by both *σύνθεσις* and *διαίρεσις*—the uniting-*and*-distinguishing of the subject and the predicate. Both together are necessary, *whether* the sentence be true or false and *in order for* the sentence to be true or false. But such *σύνθεσις*/*διαίρεσις* is possible only because of the basic openness or freedom of human being, which in turn generates the interpretative *as*-factor, i.e., the ability to take Socrates *as* one thing (an Athenian) or another (perhaps a Theban).⁵⁵



6. *The existential and the hermeneutical “as”*

For Heidegger, the phenomenon of the “as” functions apophantically in declarative sentences only because it functions existentially as the very structure of human existence. Here Heidegger’s argument reflects the medieval Scholastic axiom *operari sequitur esse*: activities are consonant with and derive from natures; or in the reverse: natures determine activities.⁵⁴ In the present case, one’s sense-making activities follow from one’s *a priori* engagement-with-meaning (being-in-*Bedeutsamkeit*).

In what sense does “as” define the structure of human being? The movedness of human life is analogous to the bivalent movedness of the animal, which we noted above: being stretched ahead beyond itself (*Weg-von-sich*) while ever remaining present to itself (*Bei-sich-sein*). In the case of man, Heidegger calls this movedness a *fortnehmende Zukehr*; a being carried away into itself as possibility (*fortnehmende*) that always returns to and stays with itself (*Zukehr*).⁵⁵

This being-ahead-of-oneself as a returning [*Sich-vorweg-sein als Zurückkommen*] is, if I may put it this way, a peculiar kind of movement that existence itself constantly makes.⁵⁶

Heidegger now reads that movement of thrown-ahead-returning in terms of *existential σύνθεσις/διαίρεσις*.

Projection is this simple, unified happening that can be formally characterized as *σύνθεσις* and *διαίρεσις* both at the same time. Projection is *διαίρεσις* insofar as, *qua* “taking away,” it takes away the one projecting. In a certain sense it stretches him apart from himself, endows him with a stretching forth [*Erstreckung*]. It takes him away into the possible, not so as to lose himself there but rather so as to let the possible, as the possibilizing of the actual, speak back precisely upon the projector himself as binding – uniting and binding: *σύνθεσις*.⁵⁷

In other words, the structural movedness of human being is an existential, world-opening σύνθεσις/διαίρεσις, which in turn serves as the basis for the *apophantic* synthesizing-that-distinguishes. Its bivalent self-presence-while-stretched-ahead generates the “as” of sense-making—in this case the apophantic “as” of declarative sentences. Thus the appropriated projection that is man

is also that happening in which there originates what we problematize as the as-structure. The “as” is the expression for what breaks out in the in-break [of man among things]. . . . Only because we have broken into the dimension of this distinction between the actual and the possible—between being and entities in the broadest sense—do we have the possibility of grasping and understanding something as something.⁵⁸

The as-structure that *is* human being is thus responsible for the as-structure of making sense of things whether predicatively or pre-predicatively. Man is appropriated for sustaining the clearing in such a way that the “as” emerges and discursive meaning becomes possible. This constitutes a new kind of *Ermöglichung*, the enabling that lets human beings make sense of themselves and other things. In Heidegger-code, *Da-sein* as thrown or appropriated is the occurrence of disclosure: *das Grundgeschehnis der Wahrheit*.⁵⁹ In another, perhaps more accessible code, human being is pan-hermeneutical. Our environment—no longer just a natural encircling ring but now an as-structured world—is an open-ended hermeneutical space of mediation in general and of sense-making in particular. Whatever we meet, we meet under the rubric of “is manifest as,” i.e., “is accessible as” and therefore “is meaningful as.” We can make sense of whatever we meet (even if only interrogatively), and if we cannot make any sense of something, we cannot meet it. We are condemned to *ur-ἐρμηνεία*.

7. “Time” as hermeneutical openness

“To exist,” Heidegger says, “might be more adequately translated as ‘sustaining a realm of openness.’”⁶⁰ What is this “sustaining”? How does human being open up and maintain the disclosive realm of νοῦς?

When Heidegger speaks of the genesis of the space of meaning, he describes it in terms of man’s being stretched out into the possible (*Erstrecktheit*). For this he drew on Augustine’s *distentio animi*, which in turn derives from Plotinus’ διάστασις ζώης.⁶¹ In man, being-stretched-forward is man’s already-aheadness in the world of meaning, i.e., in the possibility of sense-making (*schon vorweg sein*). This “carries us away and gives us distance,” i.e., opens up the clearing.⁶² But along with this “distance,” human being also returns to itself and renders things meaningfully present, both itself and others (*Sein bei* as *Gegenwärtigung*). The “actuality” of the human being is its living in possibility, which in turn generates the possibility of making sense of things. We recognize this *schon vorweg Sein bei* as the structure of care (*Sorge*).

Care, in turn, maps on to, and in fact is grounded in, what Heidegger initially called temporality. Temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) is what opens up the field of ur-time (*Temporalität*), which Heidegger later defined as ἀλήθεια-1, hermeneutical disclosure: “The term ‘time’ is a preliminary word for what was later called ‘the truth of being.’”⁶⁵ The structure of ἀλήθεια-1 qua ur-time is discoverable through the structure of temporality, which is *gewesend-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*. This parses out as the *a priori* becoming (*gewesende Zukunft*) that opens a clearing for taking something as something and thus rendering it meaningfully present (*gegenwärtigende*).⁶⁴

Understanding itself and its world ecstatically in the unity of the “open,” factual existence comes back from these horizons to the things encountered within them. Coming back to these things understandingly is the existential meaning of letting them be encountered by making them present.⁶⁵

The conjunction of time/temporality is an early name for what the existential “as” sustains: the clearing.

II. HEIDEGGER’S *GRUNDFRAGE*

What effect, if any, does the above have on our understanding of Heidegger’s basic question, his *Grundfrage*?

A. Μέθοδος

First, a word about the question of μέθοδος—not “method”—but the path to be followed in pursuing the *Grundfrage*. In its most basic form, phenomenological-hermeneutical “method” is a matter of learning how to stand thematically where we always already stand existentially. The upshot of Heidegger’s phenomenological reduction is that we engage with things (1) from a first-personal experiential stance that (2) is inevitably sense-making. Even if I get information about a thing from someone else, it is still *I* who get that information in the first person. (This is the unavoidable truth of Descartes’ *ego cogito*.) And no matter where I get the information from, I cannot *not* make sense of it. (In other words, human being is pan-hermeneutical). This first-person experiential sense-making, whereby what I encounter is ineluctably significant to me, is where I stand prior to any move into the theoretical or the practical.

Someone could deny this basic stance, but that would entail making sense of human being some other way—but still making sense, and doing so from a first-person *jemeinig* stance. Hence, by an argument from performative contradiction or retorsion, the denial can be shown to cancel itself out and to confirm the prior point.

All this means that I have no reality, no “being,” other than that of making first-person sense of things. Take away first-order hermeneutics and I am not left with a remainder, some more basic level of existence as the supposed bottom-line me-ness of me. No, take away sense-making and I’m no longer there. To be human is fundamentally to render things intelligible insofar as existence is thrown open as a space of possible as-structured relations. As such I have always already

enacted the hermeneutical transcendence that bridges the thing and its meaningfulness, what Heidegger referred to above as the difference between an entity and its beingness.⁶⁶

B. HEIDEGGER'S BASIC QUESTION

But to go only this far is merely to have restated metaphysics' question about beings in a phenomenological-hermeneutical framework. One has simply taken the beingness of beings out of its *vorhanden* status of *existentia* and transposed it phenomenologically into its hermeneutical status as the meaningfulness of the meaningful. But what if we took the next step, into the *Grundfrage* itself?

The basic question of Heidegger's thinking concerns how *Sein/Anwesen* comes about, i.e., comes to be disclosed *a priori* in human being. He calls this "the allowing of meaningful presence," *Anwesenlassen* (see note 3 above). In other words, Heidegger's basic question asks for "the essential provenance"⁶⁷ of meaningful presence. In another formulation it asks, "What is the ground for the inner possibility and necessity of the openness of *Sein*?"⁶⁸ Or yet again: Insofar as openness/clearing/*ἀλήθεια* is the "most worthy of questioning,"⁶⁹ the *Grundfrage* becomes "Where does the clearing come from?" *Woher die Lichtung*.⁷⁰ In short: How does meaningful presence occur at all? *Wie west das Anwesen?*

Such an inquiry marks the surpassing of the twofold guiding question of traditional onto-theology: (1) What is the beingness common to all things? and (2) What is the highest instance of such beingness? That is, Heidegger's basic question overcomes the ontological difference between things and their being⁷¹ by asking: What and how is "the disclosure of be-ing and its grounding in human being"?⁷² Or in another iteration: "How does the disclosure of be-ing come about?"⁷³ This question, of course, "forces us into the question of man"⁷⁴ insofar as the *a priori* thrownness or appropriation of existence is what opens up the clearing as the realm of possible intelligibility. To say that the "answer" to the question is *Ereignis* is to point back to man's *a priori* thrown-openness or appropriation whereby the dynamic realm of possible meaning is generated (*zeitigt*). The appropriation of human being

to the meaning-process opens the clearing within which things can be understood and so be meaningful.

In other words, granted the inevitability of the man-meaning conjunction and the pan-hermeneutics that is human being, Heidegger's *Grundfrage* is necessarily changed into "How come meaning at all?" *Wie west die Bedeutsamkeit?* What is the source or provenance of world or clearing? With this question, the meaningful presence of this or that entity is no longer the focal topic but instead yields to the questions: "*Wie aber dieses, das Seyn?*"⁷⁵ How does ἀλήθεια-1 get opened up at all?

The answer forms the center of Heidegger's work: the insight that man is for the sake of meaning or, equally, that meaning is the *raison d'être* of man.⁷⁶ From that center, which is "without why" and remains a mystery, there unfolds all the rest of his thinking.

But after the reversal (*Kehre*), didn't Heidegger give being—i.e., *Bedeutsamkeit*—the primacy over human being? No, that primacy was already established at least from *Being and Time* on, and the reversal merely exfoliated its *a priori* status. We can see the reversal already in the core phenomenon, being-in-the-world, i.e., engagement-with-meaning. Such engagement is designated as "thrown" (*geworfen*) in the early work and as appropriated (*ereignet*) after the reversal. In showing, as we have done here, that meaning τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα of appropriated human being, we have also shown that *Sinn* is the reason that *Da-sinn* exists. Since the clearing is why human being is at all, one need not—in fact, cannot—leave the precincts of Heidegger's central topic, human being in the fullness of its essence.

Notes

- 1 Note: (1) I cite texts by page and line, separated by a period. The line-count does not include headers but does count titles within the text. The numbers that appear after the equals sign indicate page and line/s in the English translations. (2) I use the term “man” as gender-neutral and as referring to human being as such, i.e., *Dasein*.
- 2 GA 28: 236.10–12: “... der Mensch [ist] das Seiende ..., das *den Einbruch in das Seiende* so geschehen lässt, dass dieses *in ihm 'selbst'* offenbar wird.”
- 3 GA 14: 45.28–30 = *On Time and Being*, 37.4–6. The Greek for meaningful presence is *παρουσία*; for *Anwesenlassen*: *παρουσίωσις*.
- 4 GA 9: 247.27 = *Pathmarks*, 189.27 (*ἀρχή*). GA 77: 155.12, “erstaunlich”; also GA 16: 624.6 = “On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,” *Epoché* 14 (2010), 216.23. GA 9: 307.23–24 = *Pathmarks*, 234.18, “Wunder aller Wunder: *daß Seiendes ist*,” and GA 52: 64.24–25.
- 5 Thomas Sheehan, “Facticity and *Ereignis*” in Daniel O. Dahlstrom, ed., *Interpreting Heidegger: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42–68. “The Turn,” in Bret W. Davis, ed., *Heidegger: Key Concepts* (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2009), 82–101. “What If Heidegger Were a Phenomenologist?” in Mark Wrathall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to “Being and Time”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- 6 GA 56/57: 73.1–5 = *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, 61.24–28.
- 7 GA 18: 300.15–17 = *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 203. 27–29.
- 8 GA 21: 151.4–5 = *Logic: The Question of Truth*, 127.30–32.
- 9 SZ 166.2–10 = *Being and Time* (1962), 209.18–28.
- 10 SZ 87.17–18 = 120.23; SZ 334.33–34 = 384.1.
- 11 GA 16: 631.30–31 = 220.31.

- 12 On *Ereignis* as that conjunction see GA 11: 39.19–21 = *Identity and Difference*, 31.12–14, “übereignet.”
- 13 GA 45: 212.10–11 = 179.29–30: “Wäre der Mensch nicht seiend, dann könnte auch diese Lichtung nicht geschehen.”
- 14 SZ 38.22–24 = 62.33–35. Cf. GA 16: 221.20.
- 15 SZ 42.4 = 67.10.
- 16 GA 29/30: 528.4 = *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 363.19, “Entheben”; 321.26–30 = 220.3–6, “nicht anderes ist als dieses”; 343.22–24 = 235.42, “Fähigkeit gehört zum Wirklichsein.”
- 17 Ibid. 343.18–20 = 235.38–40.
- 18 Ibid. 331.1 = 226.31, “Drängen zu”; 334.1–3 = 228.33–35, “*treibt sich*,” “*Vorgetriebensein*”; 335.25–26 = 230.5–6, “Hineintreiben zu.” “Sich-zeitigung” or “Zeitigung” is never to be translated as “temporalization”; see *Zollikoner Seminare*, 203.7–8 = *Zollikon Seminars* 158.10–11: “Zeitigung als Sich-zeitigen ist Sich-entfalten, aufgehen und so erscheinen.”
- 19 GA 45: 94.9–10 = *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 83.38–39, “Her- vor-bringen heißt Ans-licht-bringen.” This is said properly of hu- man being but applies analogously to all life.
- 20 GA 29/30: 339.17–18 = 232.33–35, “Sich-*vor*-in das eigene Wozu”; 339.35 = 233.6, “Sich-in-sich-selbst-Vorlegen.” GA 9: 258.16–17 = 198.6, “in seine ἀρχή zurückstellen.”
- 21 GA 29/30: 325.11, 16–17 = 222.27–28, 32: “Sie [die Maschine] kann sich nicht selbst auf einen Betrieb einstellen und umstellen, während der Organismus seine eigene Bewegtheit leitet, einleitet und umleitet . . . sich selbst wiederherstellt und erneuert. *Selbst- herstellung* überhaupt, *Selbstleitung* und *Selbsterneuerung* sind offenbar Momente, die den Organismus gegenüber der Maschine kennzeichnen”
- 22 Ibid. 339.23 = 232.38 and 377.22 = 259.34, “Selbst-erhaltung.”
- 23 Ibid. 343.24–26 = 263.1–3: “Nur was fähig ist und noch fähig ist, lebt; was nicht mehr fähig ist, . . . das lebt nicht mehr.” Cf. GA 27: 331.33–332.1–8, “[Dasein] existiert ständig entlang diesem Rande

- des Nicht.” This is said properly of human being but analogously fits animal life.
- 24 SZ 145.32-35 = 185.23-26.
- 25 GA 29/30: 343.2-3 = 235.14-15.
- 26 Ibid. 531.15-16 = 365.36-37. This is said properly of human being but applies analogously to animal life.
- 27 Ibid. 340.29-32 = 233.32-234.2; 342.19 = 235.9, “bei sich selbst einzubehalten.”
- 28 Ibid. 339.34 = 233.5, “Selbstcharakter”; 342.16 = 235.7, “Eigentümlichkeit” (McNeill: “proper peculiarity”); 347.25-26 = 238.40, “Bei-sich-sein.”
- 29 Ibid. 334.9-15 = 229.1-8.
- 30 Regarding animal “intentionality,” see GA 29/30: 350.3-5 = 240.22-24: “... die Bewegung ist in sich selbst eine Bewegung nach ...; ein Greifen nach ... Das Sehen ist das Sehen des *Gesichteten*, das Hören ist das Hören des *Gehörten*.”
- 31 *Zollikoner Seminare* 47.16-21 = *Zollikon Seminars* 37.25-31.
- 32 SZ 33.30-35 = 57.11-17.
- 33 GA 29/30: 384.3-4 = 264.10.
- 34 GA 18: 326.7-8 = 220.26.
- 35 Ibid. 326.12 = 220.30. See *De anima* III, 8, 431b 21.
- 36 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 71, 11, “intellectus noster ... potentiam per potentiam cognoscat.”
- 37 GA 9: 199.21-22 = 152.24.
- 38 GA 16: 424.20-23.
- 39 GA 18: 326.19 = 220.35.
- 40 Ibid. 326.24-26 = 220.39-40.
- 41 GA 9: 326.15-16 = 248.36-37.
- 42 SZ 151.25-26 = 193.6-7, “Verständlichkeit.”
- 43 Ibid. 151.34-36 = 193.11-13, “Sinn ‘hat’ nur das Dasein.”
- 44 Ibid. 151.22-23 = 192.35-36.
- 45 Ibid. 324.33-34 = 371.35-36.
- 46 Ibid. 364.34-35 = 416.8: “Dieses [=Dasein] *ist* existierend seine Welt.”

- 47 GA 9: 279.1-7 = 213.10-15, “zusammenbringen ... In das Unverborgene der Anwesenung.”
- 48 GA 21: 188, no. 3 = 158-159, no. 3.
- 49 GA 21: 164.13 = 137.29, “die Weltoffenheit des Daseins”; GA 27: 135.13, “erschließend erschlossenes”; GA 49: 68.19: “ein geworfener.”
- 50 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 58 = B 82; Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate, quaestio 1, articulum 1, respondeo*; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV 7, 1011b 26-28.
- 51 Cf. GA 29/30: 531.2-4 = 365.26-27: “Das ‘als’ ist die Bezeichnung für das Strukturmoment jenes ursprünglich *einbrechenden* ‘Zwischen’.” For a brief statement on the clearing as hermeneutical space and time, see GA 16: 630.32-631.2 = 221.3-7.
- 52 In what follows I treat only the apophantic as, not the hermeneutical as.
- 53 GA 21: 148.29-149.7 = 125.15-17.
- 54 See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 75, 3, *respondeo, ad finem*: “similiter unumquodque habet esse et operationem.” Or to reverse the direction, “qualis modus essendi talis modus operandi”: a thing’s way of being determines its way of acting.
- 55 GA 29/30: 527.35 = 363.15-16.
- 56 GA 21: 147.23-26 = 124.19-20. I here correct my earlier reading (*ibid.*) of “Zeit” in place of “Dasein.”
- 57 I cite Heidegger’s words spoken in the classroom (Thursday, 27 February 1930) from the typescript of the Simon Moser *Nachschrift*, p. 703.12-13, corresponding to the much abbreviated passage at GA 29/30: 530.23-28 = 365.14-19.
- 58 This text is from the *Nachschrift* (see previous note), 703.28-704.6, corresponding roughly to GA 29/30: 530.30-531.7 = 365.21-30.
- 59 GA 36/37: 178.3-5 = 138.38-40; *ibid.* 178.20-22 = 138.9-10, “Grundgeschehen im Wesen des Menschen.”
- 60 *Zollikoner Seminare* 274.1 = 218.15, “aus-stehen eines Offenheitsbereich.”
- 61 Respectively *Confessions* XI.26.33 and *Enneads*, III, 7, 11, line 42.

- 62 GA 26: 285.18-19 = 221.17-18, “uns entrückt und die Ferne gibt; Wesen der Ferne.”
- 63 GA 14: 36.11-12 = 28.20-2. See also GA 9: 377.4 = 286.13 and GA 69: 95.3-5.
- 64 SZ 326.21-21 = 374.7-8.
- 65 Ibid. 366.14-19 = 417.30-34.
- 66 GA 29/30: 530.33 = 365.22-23, “Unterschied vom Sein und Seiendem.”
- 67 GA 6.2: 304.11-12 (alternately *Nietzsche* II, 338.5-7) = *Nietzsche* 4: 201.13-15, “Wesensherkunft,” “Herkunft von Anwesen.”
- 68 *Japan und Heidegger*, ed. Hartmut Buchner (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorecke, 1989), 201.12-14.
- 69 GA 45: 113.8 = 100.14, “Offenheit,” “Fragwürdigsten”; *ibid.*, 187.16 = 161.21-22.
- 70 GA 14: 90.3 = 73.3.
- 71 GA 81: 348.4-5, “Überwindung der ontologischen Differenz zwischen Sein und Seiendem.”
- 72 GA 66: 420.10 = *Mindfulness*, 371.15, “nach der Wahrheit des Seyns und ihrer Gründung im Da-sein.”
- 73 Ibid. 422. = 373.6-7, “wie west die Wahrheit des Seyns.”
- 74 GA 31: 123.10-12 = *The Essence of Human Freedom*, 85.36, “drängt ... in die Frage nach dem Menschen.”
- 75 GA 66: 146.12-13 = 124. 29-30.
- 76 GA 9: 325.20-21 = 248.11-12: “der Mensch west so, daß er das ‘Da,’ das heißt die Lichtung des Seins, ist.” Cf. GA 69: 101.12-13: “*Die Lichtung-sein* – in sie als Offenes sich loswerfen – das *Da-sein*.”

Meaning, Excess, and Event

Richard Polt

Thomas Sheehan's contribution to this inaugural volume is his latest and perhaps best effort to promote a "paradigm shift in Heidegger research."¹ It is difficult to gauge the trends in the large quantity of such research that is produced every year, so I do not know whether a new paradigm is emerging, but there is no doubt that Sheehan's voice is one that deserves to be heard. With extraordinary erudition and care, always keeping in mind Heidegger's grounding in the ancient and medieval traditions, Sheehan makes a strong case for understanding the "question of being" as a question about *meaning*. This approach has immediate advantages over several others. As opposed to interpretations that immerse themselves only in Heidegger's treatment of this or that particular topic, Sheehan always keeps in view the guiding theme of Heidegger's thought. In contrast to some readers who repeat the shibboleth "being" without ever venturing to interpret it, Sheehan provides a powerful *Vorgriff* that fruitfully opens up the texts. Sheehan's approach is also a salutary counterbalance to quasi-theistic readings that hypostasize "Big Being."² While very few readers explicitly violate Heidegger's warnings against identifying being with God, too many interpretations do seem to speak of being as if it were a supreme entity or extramundane force that acts upon humanity. In Sheehan's reading, being is nothing more and nothing less than the meaningfulness of things in our world—their significant availability, their discoveredness within the disclosure of the open. Heidegger, as Sheehan reads him, attends to this meaningful openness and finds its source not in some

higher and hidden thing, but in our own finite nature as beings who are both thrown and projecting.

While I find Sheehan's paradigm genuinely illuminating, I will make the case here that the paradigm should be expanded in order to address two further elements of Heidegger's question of being: excess and event.⁵

First, Heidegger explores various ways in which meaning stands in relation to non-meaning. He does not simply show us that beings are meaningful; he also recognizes that beings are more than just meaning, and that the threat of meaninglessness lurks just around the corner. Meaning is exceeded by the difference of beings from interpretation and by the possibility of interpretive collapse – and these issues, too, are part of the question of being. I will use the term “excess” to refer to such ways in which the question of being concerns not only meaning but also what is other than meaning, or exceeds it. One main kind of excess is the *existence* of beings: in addition to having meaning, beings *are* (there is something instead of nothing). But since the word “existence” has been used in various more specific senses – from *existentia* as presence at hand to Heidegger's own *Existenz* – that could distract from our present discussion, I will prefer the broader and less freighted “excess.”

Secondly, Sheehan's description of Dasein's nature as involving thrown projection *a priori* does not account for the proposal that Heidegger makes at least in his so-called middle period, the 1930s: *das Seyn west als das Ereignis*, “be-ing essentially happens as the appropriating event,” and more precisely as “the event of the grounding of the there.”⁶ There seem to be a particularity and a founding character in *das Ereignis* that do not fit comfortably with interpretations of the human condition as structured *a priori*. If Dasein is the entity whose own being is an issue for it, we could speak of *das Ereignis* as the event in which our own being *becomes* an issue for us. This event is itself a sort of excess, an excess unlike the existence of beings. *Ereignis* is not itself an entity, but it is not being as meaning either. It is the meaning-less or self-concealing *giving* of being as meaning.

Excess and event are crucial to historicity. Encounters with excess can develop into crisis points, historical events in which meaning is refreshed or transformed; such events open new realms of meaning that, in turn, make it possible for us to encounter excess afresh. From the inconspicuous tremors that make small adjustments in our world to the ultimate event that would found a “momentous site,”⁵ the happening of history cannot be understood purely in terms of meaning.

It has to be said at the outset that just as a scientific paradigm cannot be justified simply by the observed facts, an interpretive paradigm for philosophical texts cannot be justified simply by the words in those texts. Philosophy demands that we think for ourselves about the issues at stake, and that we bring our own thoughts to the texts in order to learn from them. A discussion of a paradigm for reading philosophy is itself already philosophy, and for that reason it can always be contested.

MEANING

Being and Time announces from the start that it is asking about “the meaning of ‘being.’”⁶ But this announcement is rather unclear. Is it simply the *word* “being” that is Heidegger’s topic? Or is his topic the theme that the word indicates? If so, are the quotation marks meant to suggest that the word “being” is less than adequate to this theme? Or is the theme not being itself, but the *meaning* of being? What, then, does “meaning” mean? The thesis of the work, the answer to its question, is that time is the horizon for any possible understanding of being. Is time, then, “the meaning of ‘being’”? But what is time, and what is a horizon?⁷

Heidegger fleshes out some of these formal indications when he explains being phenomenologically: at first and for the most part, being does not show itself—that is, it is not revealed thematically or directly, but lies in the background of the overtly self-showing phenomena. However, being can be thematized: it can be revealed as having already been unthematically showing itself as the “meaning and ground” of the overt phenomena, and as “belonging” to these phenomena.⁸

The term “meaning” (*Sinn*) is not explained until §32, where Heidegger defines it as that in terms of which something can be understood.⁹ Here “understanding” does not primarily mean a cognitive representation, but an ability to discover the possibilities of things in terms of our own possible ways to be.¹⁰ Asking about the meaning of something, then, is the same as trying to understand the thing, to discover it in its own proper possibility. For example, the meaning of a shoe as such is its specific kind of equipmentality, its usability for the protection of our feet. This usability makes it possible for the shoe to show itself to us as a shoe. The shoe’s usability would then constitute its being.

One of Heidegger’s favorite techniques for revealing being is the interpretation of certain overt phenomena as “deficient modes” of a more fundamental phenomenon. For example, the absence of historical research is a deficient mode of historicity; indifference to others is a deficient mode of caring for them.¹¹ These are exceptions that prove the rule: their function is to extrapolate an ontic concept (such as history or care) into an ontological one. Heidegger hopes that his re-description of the ontic negatives (lack of history, lack of caring) as deficient ontological positives will draw our attention to underlying, background phenomena that have always already been making it possible for the overt positive and negative phenomena to show themselves. Then “care,” for instance, no longer refers to a particular state that we may or may not be in, but to the human condition as such, and we may recognize that it is only thanks to this condition that we can become careless, carefree, or uncaring. (A shoe is neither caring nor uncaring, but altogether lacks ontological care.)

So far, Heidegger’s *Sein* seems to correspond most closely to the Greek εἶναι or οὐσία as used to mean a pregiven nature or essence—“being what it was” (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι), in the Aristotelian phrase.¹² But Heidegger understands essence phenomenologically: the essence (οὐσία) of something allows it to *present* itself as itself (παρουσία). The essence makes it possible for the thing itself to be shown as what it is. Since things must be displayed *to* someone, without Dasein there is no

possibility of display, and thus no essence (or meaning or being) in the phenomenological sense.

Accordingly, Heidegger claims that without Dasein, there would “be” no being (more precisely, being would not be given)¹⁵ and that without Dasein, there would be no meaning: meaning is the “framework” of *Dasein’s* disclosedness.¹⁴ Similarly, Heidegger emphasizes that there cannot be anything further that lies hidden “behind” being.¹⁵ Being is not a manifestation of the nonmanifest, but rather what enables the manifestation of beings. If there were no manifestation, then being would not go into hiding, like an undiscovered entity, but simply would not occur at all.

Since being not only enables ontic phenomena to show themselves, but is itself a phenomenon, it too stands in need of a meaning—a context that makes it possible for being to display itself. This is *time* as the “horizon” for being. Time is the ecstatic temporality of Dasein: its pressing ahead into possibilities that are drawn from its factual thrownness, thereby disclosing a world and encountering entities within it. The term “horizon” in *Being and Time* seems to serve as a more technical equivalent to “meaning”: it is that in terms of which something is capable of being understood. When Heidegger calls time a *transcendental* horizon, he implies that it is the *sole* and *necessary* meaning in terms of which we must understand being.¹⁶

The guiding question and thesis of *Being and Time* have now come into focus. To seek “the meaning of ‘being’” and to find the “horizon” of being in time is to reveal, in terms of our temporality, that which is always already allowing us to reveal things as what they are.

So far, Sheehan’s paradigm works very well. The being of an entity is its meaning, that is, the appropriate context that enables us to discover the entity. More fundamental than any particular such discoveries is the disclosure of the world, or the overall context of significance;¹⁷ and that disclosure is made possible by time, that is, the thrown projecting of Dasein—the finite nature of the human condition.

In the present essay, Sheehan draws on Heidegger’s 1929–30 lectures on the being of animals to illuminate our condition. Like (other)

animals, we strive to reach out beyond the immediate. The human projection of possible ways to exist resembles animal drive. In both cases, striving discloses things: the animal's desires reveal things to it as desirable or undesirable; the human projection of possibilities reveals things to us in *their* possibilities. The mystery of being, it seems, is grounded in the humble reality of our living flesh.

The 1929–30 lectures are notable for their sensitive attention to living things other than Dasein and for their respect for empirical science. Sheehan has shown that we still have much to learn from these lectures. However, he presents the phenomenology of animals somewhat more positively than Heidegger does. Without in any way resorting to an evolutionist reductionism, which is all too popular today, Sheehan leaves room for evolution and points out legitimate analogies between humans and beasts. Heidegger, however, calls animals impoverished.¹⁸ His lectures remain true to the suggestion in *Being and Time* that the being of Dasein must be interpreted first, and the being of animals must be interpreted privatively.¹⁹ Their very life is, as it were, a deficient mode. Heidegger concludes that animals are not open to beings *as beings* at all, but only to beings as disinhibiting triggers for drives.²⁰

What is it, then, to be open to beings as beings? Animals do discover beings—but they do not seem able to appreciate the fact that beings are there to be discovered in the first place. An animal can be startled, but not astonished. In astonishment, the familiar loses its self-evidence and becomes surprising—not as something new, but in the very wonder of its original givenness. In part, as Sheehan puts it, astonishment is wonder at the fact that “things make sense!” But there is also wonder at the fact that things *are* there at all—and this experience may actually be provoked most effectively when things *stop* making sense smoothly and we are plunged into an insight into our own ignorance.

Celebration . . . is self-restraint, is attentiveness, is questioning, is meditating, is awaiting, is the step over into the more wakeful glimpse of the wonder—the wonder that a world is worlding around us at all, that there are beings rather than nothing, that things are and we

ourselves are in their midst, that we ourselves are and yet barely know who we are, and barely know that we do not know all this.²¹

This too is part of the question of being: the wonder that *there is* something at all, that *there are* beings instead of nothing, including ourselves, even if the meaning of these beings is fragile or absent. The “being of Dasein can burst forth as a naked ‘that it is and has to be.’ The pure ‘that it is’ shows itself, but the ‘whence’ and the ‘whither’ remain in darkness.”²²

This side of the question of being involves what I will call excess and event. These will prove to be indispensable elements of what, above all, sets humans apart from animals according to Heidegger: history.

EXCESS

The being of an entity, as its essence or meaning, is not itself that entity. This is the famous “ontological difference.” Interpreted phenomenologically, it tells us that meaning enables the self-showing of entities, but those entities are other than meaning, or exceed it. A shoe is not the meaning of a shoe; the meaning of a shoe permits the shoe to show itself both as meaningful and as exceeding meaning. If there were no shoe to be found, then the horizons within which we interpret shoes would be, in Husserlian terms, unfulfilled intentions—meanings without anything that showed up in their light.

In this regard, the ontological difference is linked to the distinction between essence and existence. To explore the essence or meaning of a thing is one project; to determine whether it exists is another. It might seem, then, that we could neatly separate the two issues; the first is ontological and the second is ontic, or the first is a question of meaning and the second a question of fact.

However, in Greek, words such as εἶναι and οὐσία are used in both contexts—both for so-called “essential” questions and for “existential” ones.²³ According to one of the founding doctrines of analytic philosophy, a doctrine that ultimately stems from Kant, this dual usage is

nothing but a confusion.²⁴ Words such as “being” in Indo-European languages are dangerously ambiguous, as they are used both in predication (that is, the attribution of meanings) and in the affirmation of existence. If we clearly separate these logical functions, the “problem of being” as traditionally understood will dissolve.

Although he is no analytic philosopher, Sheehan too strives for a clear, unambiguous focus that will obviate some of the traditional ambiguities in the word “being.” For Sheehan, Heidegger “placed the problematic of being squarely within the parameters of meaning,” so that we can simply replace *Sein* with *Sinn*. Elsewhere Sheehan has even stated that Heidegger’s “focal topic never was ‘being’ in any of its forms.”²⁵

Heidegger does have moments when he loses patience with the word *Sein*, but typically he insists that he is retrieving the ancient question of being, reviving its original impetus in the face of the distortions of the tradition.²⁶ This suggests that Heidegger would prefer to preserve the ambiguities of εἶναι—that he sees the ancient complex of problems as having some integrity that is worthy of thought.

Let me briefly make an independent, non-Heideggerian case for that integrity.²⁷ Two main points militate against a complete divorce between meaning and excess, a distinction that would treat these as completely separable issues. (At this point I am concerned primarily with the fact that beings exist, as we would normally say—but as explained above, the word “existence” is over-determined, so I prefer “excess” as a more neutral and broader term for non-meaning.)

(a) Although excess is not meaning, it presents itself to us in terms of meaning: there are *meanings of excess*. There is always some meaningful way in which something is “there” for us or “given” to us. (As Sheehan puts it, “if we cannot make any sense of something, we cannot meet it.”) What is other than meaning *is* for us meaningfully. For example, I find a shoe I was looking for: “Here it is!” Even though the shoe is not a meaning, and the meaning of shoeness in no way guarantees that I will find a shoe, when I find that there is a shoe there, this “is” has a meaning (in this case, something like lying there available and ready). Even the bare and abstract existential quantifier, the $\exists x$

of symbolic logic, has meaning; its meaning is simply kept silent in logic.²⁸ In short, it makes a difference to us that there *is* a being instead of nothing—or rather, it makes a variety of meaningful differences to us that there are beings instead of nothing.

(b) Conversely, the meaning of being always points beyond itself to what exceeds meaning, to what cannot be exhausted by meaning. The differences it makes that there is something instead of nothing point us back to the sheer “that there is.” When I say, “Here it is!” I mean not only that the shoe lies ready, but also that something other than meaning is showing up now—something that is available for me to wear it, name it, and talk about it, but is not reducible to the meaning it has for me. There is an interesting paradox here: “is” carries meaning, but part of its meaning is precisely that what *is* cannot be exhausted by any meaning, but exceeds it. Again, if I say “the hammer is heavy,” to use one of Heidegger’s favorite examples, I am affirming that something other than the mere meanings of hammerness and heaviness, something that exceeds meaning—an actual something that I can call a heavy hammer—is here. Note that this observation is not simply a point about assertions; in nonlinguistic action, when I simply pick up the hammer and feel its heft, I also recognize excess.

In short, excess and meaning bleed into each other: that which is, is (a) meaningful to us, yet simultaneously (b) presents itself as exceeding meaning, and this excess is itself part of its meaning as a being. Beings show themselves as being more than how they show themselves.²⁹ They are meaningfully given as other than meaning.

The question of being should then involve both meaning and excess. This is not to say that meaning and excess are both instances of some overarching category of “being,” but that the problematic of being ought to consider both meaning and excess, in their various relations. Furthermore, if we forget that meaning is entangled with excess and treat it as a self-contained domain of its own, we run the risk of letting it stagnate. While meaning will still serve to let things display themselves, this display is likely to be a stereotyped semblance—a rigid “Egyptianism.”³⁰ An intimation of excess keeps meaning sharp and nimble.

But how does the question of being involve both meaning and excess in Heidegger's own texts? In several ways.

First, Heidegger takes the question of being broadly enough to include "that-being." He often mentions the *Daß* or "that-it-is" as a topic worthy of thought. Often this thought takes the form of exploring the meanings of excess—my point (a) above. "Even 'givenness' already represents a categorial determination," as he puts it in his *Jugendschriften*.⁵¹ "What does *es gibt* mean?"⁵² The meanings of givenness, or excess, have included the medieval *existentia*,⁵³ the "in itself,"⁵⁴ and Kant's *Position* or positing.⁵⁵ Heidegger explores the genealogies of these concepts in order to question meanings that have become calcified and are taken for granted. Once we articulate the meanings of *existentia* and the like, we can deconstruct them. These meanings have remained unnoticed and unthreatened; they have tacitly interpreted excess without letting the excess call them into question. Instead of genuinely acknowledging excess, such concepts surreptitiously impose a concept of being—usually, being as presence at hand.

In order to avoid such calcified thinking, the philosophical project of making sense of being needs to be aware of the limits and fragility of sense. The breakdown of meaning may be a particularly valuable stimulant to thought, as when Heidegger writes that we must let the mystery of Dasein's being emerge so that we can *fail* more genuinely and raise deeper questions.⁵⁶ When significance pales and trembles, when meaning is revealed as contingent and vulnerable, excess hits us and makes us capable of fresher philosophical insight. At such moments, excess shines through within meaning, calling that very meaning into question. "A 'ground' becomes accessible only as meaning, even if it is itself the abyss of meaninglessness."⁵⁷

Accordingly, Heidegger is interested in a variety of situations where meaning falters in the face of excess. In the 1919 war emergency semester, for instance, he considers experiences of *unfamiliar things*. A Senegalese tribesman faced with a lectern might take it as a magical thing, as a shield, or simply as something he doesn't know what to make of (something he can't get started with, in the German idiom).⁵⁸ This raw

experience of “something” is never a sheer absence of interpretation; some meaning must always be operative in order for us to encounter “something” at all. But in these limit situations, when meaning struggles and totters, the sheer “there is” – the difference between something and nothing – comes alive. The *es gibt* is at its most powerful, and life is at its most “intense,” when we shift from one world to another or when we experience a moment passionately, rather than being settled firmly and comfortably within a world.⁵⁹

This is especially the case in regard to the meaning of *one’s own being*. When the sense of my being trembles in anxiety, the excess of my being is disclosed, in a way that makes it possible for me to become deeper or more authentic. Anxiety discloses the naked “that it [Dasein] is and has to be.”⁴⁰ Anxiety allows me to encounter my thrownness, which is ineluctably enigmatic – resistant to meaning.⁴¹ That is, all the possibilities I have for interpreting my thrownness (such as a religious interpretation in terms of creation and fall, or a scientific interpretation in terms of evolution) are possibilities that I project on the *basis* of thrownness, and must remain indebted to the raw experience that “here I am.” This “facticity” is not an ontic fact – which becomes available only *within* an interpretation.⁴² Facticity exceeds all interpretation, all meaning.

Nature’s being as excess can also strike us, in a way that provides a deeper glimpse into the nonhuman than we are usually afforded. In *Being and Time*, nature is primarily considered as material for ready-to-hand entities (timber, leather, etc.) or as a present-at-hand object of scientific fact-gathering. Clearly the former sense of nature is more primordial than the latter, for Heidegger, but that is not to say that it is ultimate. Nature as ready-to-hand is a phenomenon typical of everydayness, and is thus subject to the superficial and clichéd sort of revelation that everydayness promotes. In one passage, Heidegger alludes to a further, more poetic sense of “the *power of nature*.”⁴⁵ Later he proposes that nature can be contrary to meaning (*widersinnig*): natural catastrophes can intrude absurdly into Dasein’s sphere of significance.⁴⁴ While *Being and Time* does not spell out the connection

between poetic and non-sensical nature, I would suggest that poetic interpretations of nature are deeper than the standard practical, technical, and theoretical interpretations precisely because the poet is open to the mystery of nature as exceeding meaning. That mystery cannot be reduced to any interpretation; it shows us its interpreted aspects only the better to hide itself.

As we saw, Heidegger wants us to wonder not only at the givenness of particular beings, at our individual facticity, and at the senselessness of nature, but also at the existence of *what is, as such and as a whole*—its difference from nothing. The most powerful passage along these lines may be the opening pages of *Introduction to Metaphysics*. With Leibniz, Heidegger asks why there is something instead of nothing; unlike Leibniz, he does not seek a ground for all entities in a supreme entity and in the principle of sufficient reason, but takes the question as an occasion for inquiring into the meaning of being. This meaning, however, never becomes simply an exposition of what beings mean, but remains linked to the astonishment at the fact that beings exist in the first place. That wonder at being as excess is essential to keeping being as meaning in question, to challenging the very boundary between what counts as something and what counts as nothing.⁴⁵

On similar grounds, after the publication of the completed portions of *Being and Time*, Heidegger becomes uneasy with that text's emphasis on meaning and understanding. As he sees it in retrospect, the project ran the risk of transcendental thinking⁴⁶—that is, Dasein, like a Kantian subject, seemed to set the limits of what could count as a being for it, so that apart from this set sphere of meaning, nothing could become manifest. To counter this risk, Heidegger now stresses facticity, which he had defined in *Being and Time* as a condition in which a being can understand its own destiny as tied up with the beings that it encounters.⁴⁷ Human beings are plunged not only into a meaningful openness, but into a given opacity; they belong not only to being as meaning, but also to beings, for they themselves are beings. Heidegger first proposes to explore this condition in his suggestive sketch of “metontology” (1928); metontology would fully recognize

that the entity for whom beings have meaning is itself an entity, and finds itself amidst entities.⁴⁸

Heidegger eventually articulates this condition in “The Origin of the Work of Art” as the strife between earth and world. Meaning or illumination (world) always depends on and refers to an uninterpreted excess (earth)—a *λήθη* that shadows *ἀλήθεια*. This is why truth is a “robbery,” a “struggle.”⁴⁹ In the artwork (and at other privileged sites), truth takes place as the clash of earth and world.⁵⁰ It is difficult to define earth precisely, but that is the point: earth is resistance to definition, resistance to discovery, resistance to sense and essence. It conceals itself at the same time as it sustains the world of sense that tries, yet inevitably fails, to interpret it. (This point echoes the reference to nature as *widersinnig* in *Being and Time*. “Earth” is, among other things, the deeper non-sense of nature.) Meaning always has its points of friction with the non-meaning on which it is based. Only when that friction enters our awareness—when the world struggles against the earth and recognizes that it fails—is a culture alive and creative.⁵¹

EVENT

As we have seen, Sheehan identifies Heidegger’s “being” with meaning. But what is Heidegger asking with regard to meaning? What is the *Seinsfrage*? In Sheehan’s reading, the Heideggerian project is not simply to articulate meaning, but to discover its ground. “The basic question of Heidegger’s thinking concerns how *Sein/Anwesen* comes about, i.e., comes to be disclosed *a priori* in human being.”

I have just argued that meaning stands in various relations to non-meaning, and that Heidegger’s *Seinsfrage* is broad enough to include those relations. But, following Sheehan’s paradigm, we can still ask: how does the meaning/excess complex—the whole dynamic of relations between sense and non-sense—come about? I have found this paradigm to be a very helpful guiding thread in interpreting Heidegger’s texts from every period.

However, Sheehan's phrase "comes to be disclosed *a priori*" raises a question. Does being actually *come* to be disclosed, in a happening or event? Or is it disclosed *a priori*—is it always in effect, so that we are looking not for an event but for an essence?

In his present essay, Sheehan uses a good deal of event language. "With the appearance of human being, meaning dawned in the universe." Then things "became meaningfully present. . . . Once man is possessed by the Promethean fire of intellect and language, human history begins as a complex unfolding of meaningful lives."

What sort of beginning is this? Sheehan's discussion of animals suggests that he has in mind the gradual evolution of *homo sapiens*, an evolution that at some point in the distant past brought us to the tipping point where meaning surpasses animal desire. Now that we have passed that point, meaning is a given, and it will be given as long as we remain human. As Sheehan puts it in an earlier essay, "Without us, there is no open at all; but with us, the open is always *a priori* operative. . . . being-open is the ineluctable condition of our essence . . . it is our 'fate,' the way we always already are."⁵² Consequently, "If we can call *Ereignis* an event at all, it is the '*a priori* event' of the opening up of the open."⁵³

In my view this interpretation of *Ereignis* is not "eventful" enough, at least in regard to Heidegger's thought in the thirties. Sheehan has proposed that a proper reading of the *Beiträge* could lead us to demystify Heidegger, to focus on our "always-already-operative . . . openedness," and to eliminate "all the apocalyptic language . . . the cosmic drama, the mystical metaphors, the Teutonic bombast."⁵⁴ But this reading would surely go against the grain of the *Beiträge*—an apocalyptic, mystical, and bombastic text if there ever was one. Whether or not its rhetoric is to our taste, we should consider the possibility that for Heidegger, at least at that stage in his thinking, the rhetoric is necessary in order to do justice to the *Sache selbst*.⁵⁵

What is at stake, then, in the text subtitled *Vom Ereignis*? Twenty-two years after the publication of the *Beiträge*, English-speaking interpreters cannot even agree on whether *Ereignis* should be translated as "event."⁵⁶ Heidegger himself has made the question more difficult

by denying, in several postwar texts, that *Ereignis* is an occurrence (*Vorkommnis*) or happening (*Geschehen*, *Geschehnis*).⁵⁷ But in 1935 he had characterized his development after *Being and Time* as a move *vom Seinsverständnis zum Seinsgeschehnis*,⁵⁸ and the *Beiträge* describe *Ereignis* as “the greatest happening,” “the happening of owndom.”⁵⁹ I have argued elsewhere that, at least in its external presentation, Heidegger’s thought oscillates between emphasizing universal structures (*Being and Time*, some late texts) and emphasizing unique events (the earliest lectures, the *Beiträge* and other texts of the 1930s).⁶⁰ Since Heidegger’s way of presenting his thought may not always be candid, the hermeneutical problem is difficult. But we can at least say that it is not necessarily fair to judge the “middle Heidegger” of the 1930s in terms of the “late Heidegger’s” writings.⁶¹

What, then, does it mean to shift “from the understanding of being to the happening of being”? We can approach this shift in terms of Heidegger’s treatment of time.

Being and Time addresses being through Dasein’s understanding, that is, in terms of Dasein’s temporality as the horizon that allows the phenomenon of being to display itself. Temporality is presented here as an essential structure; the text does not raise the question of how time itself might begin. In fact, it might seem that this very question is a category mistake: how could there be a temporal origin of temporality? As Heidegger says in 1927, “*Time is earlier than any possible earlier* of whatever sort, because it is the basic condition for an earlier as such.”⁶² It would seem that, as Sheehan puts it, “the genesis of the space of meaning” is “the structure of care” – a *structure*, not an event.

But as Heidegger becomes dissatisfied with the transcendental tendencies in his thought, he turns toward a more eventful genesis. “What does it mean here to say that time is a horizon? . . . we do not have the slightest intimation of the abysses of the essence of time.”⁶³ When we stop treating time as transcendental horizon, it becomes possible to seek the event in which time begins. “The primal fact . . . is that there is anything like temporality at all. The entrance into world by beings is primal history pure and simple.”⁶⁴ “Can one ask, ‘How does time

arise?” Heidegger increasingly believes that one can, but he cannot give the traditional metaphysical answer: “through the deformation and restriction of eternity.”⁶⁵

In order to address the question of the origin of time, Heidegger needs a distinction between “beginning” (*Beginn*) and “inception” (*Anfang*). “The beginning is left behind as soon as it occurs, it disappears as the happening progresses. But the inception, the origin, is first manifested in the happening, and is fully there only at the end.”⁶⁶ According to the 1941 text devoted to this theme, *Über den Anfang*, “‘beginning’ . . . means a distinctive position and phase in the course of a process. But . . . here the word ‘inception’ is supposed to name the essence of be-ing [*Seyn*] . . . The inception that seizes is the appropriating event. [*Der An-fang ist Er-ignis.*]”⁶⁷

The inception is the time when time and history come to be. “Ever since time arose and was brought to stand, since then we *are* historical.”⁶⁸ “Why is this sudden moment of ‘world history’ essentially and abysally other than all the ‘millions of years’ of worldless processes? Because this suddenness lights up the uniqueness of be-ing . . . The ‘moment’ is the origin of ‘time’ itself.”⁶⁹

Heidegger is not talking about a process in the distant past when *homo sapiens* emerged; an inception can happen now or in the future. His entry into politics in 1933 was clearly intended to contribute to an inception—the genesis of (genuine) history, (genuine) time, and a (genuine) clearing. As he sees it then, being is not always already granted to “us” as members of a species; it is granted (or genuinely granted) only when we wrestle with *who* we historically are and, by *working out* the meaning of things, do our share in allowing being to happen. “The essence of beings comes to the light of day only when human beings, rooted in their heritage and vocation, *put* essence to *work* [*das Wesen erwirkt*].”⁷⁰

During the course of the 1930s, Heidegger’s enthusiasm for political “work” wanes and sours, but he insists all the more urgently on a founding inception—now thought primarily in *poetic* terms. “Poetry is the basic happening of being as such. It founds being and must found it.”⁷¹ “The poet is the grounder of being.”⁷² Poetry happens at the times

when time itself happens most intensely – moments that Heidegger, following Hölderlin, calls “the peaks of time.”⁷³

In this holding-sway-forward of what has been into the future, which, pointing back, opens what was already preparing itself earlier as such, there holds sway the coming-towards and the still-essentially-happening (future and past) at once: originary time. . . . This originary time transports our Dasein into the future and past, or better, brings it about that our being as such is a transported being – if it is authentic, that is. . . . In such time, time “comes to be.”⁷⁴

The *Contributions* give this inception of time and being the name *das Ereignis*, which is short for “the event of the grounding of the there.”⁷⁵ In this event, we would be seized or appropriated by the emergence of meaning. The appropriating event would take place at a “site of the moment” where “time-space” would open as an “abyssal ground” that would inaugurate a domain of unconcealment, yet would deny this domain any absolute foundation.⁷⁶ We need to put all this in the subjunctive because it is unclear when, or even whether, such an event has happened with the radical depth that Heidegger ascribes to it. It is at least clear that it does not happen constantly: “be-ing is at times” (*das Seyn ist zuzeiten*).⁷⁷

The intent of Heidegger’s spelling *Seyn* is murky both in his texts and in most of the secondary literature. This is where I have found Sheehan’s paradigm to be particularly helpful. We can interpret *Seyn* (a mildly old-fashioned spelling that we can conveniently render as “be-ing”) as the source of *Sein* – that is, *Seyn* is the giving of the meaning/excess complex in terms of which things are manifest to us. The search for *Seyn* is precisely what Sheehan indicates as the basic question of Heidegger’s thought. Be-ing is the genesis of meaning.

When we adopt this paradigm, many of Heidegger’s statements are illuminated – in a way that emphasizes the *event* of the genesis of meaning. *Seyn*, *Ereignis*, and *Anfang* are very closely linked in

Heidegger's private writings of the late 1930s, indicating that meaning originates in a happening. The intricate vocabulary and problematic of the *Beiträge* and related texts emerge from this central thought.⁷⁸ Here I can give only a few examples of how I interpret Heidegger's statements "eventfully."

"Be-ing is what is rarest because it is the most unique, and no one appreciates the few moments in which it grounds a site for itself and essentially happens [*weset*]."⁷⁹ At these unique moments, a community is given its world, its sphere of meaning. History bursts forth at these times. The fact that there is something instead of nothing now makes a difference to this community – a difference that can be both cultivated and challenged.⁸⁰

"All inceptions ... elude the historian, not because they are supratemporally eternal but because they are greater than eternity: *the shocks* of time, which furnish [*einräumen*] being with the openness for its self-concealing."⁸¹ Time-space, or the leeway we have to pursue possibilities for ourselves and other things, originates in a wrenching moment, the moment when meaning and excess come into play. The traditional notion of eternity ossifies meaning while forgetting excess and the inceptive event.

The reference to "shocks" (*Stöße*) brings us to the theme of urgency or emergency (*Not*). "Emergency, assailing us in its essential happening – what if it were the truth of be-ing itself? What if, with the more originary grounding of truth, *be-ing* also came to *happen more essentially* ... as event?"⁸² The inception is the event in which our own being, and being as a whole, becomes a burning issue for us. We are indebted to an event of estrangement – a disquieting event in which we are distanced from ourselves, so that we are faced with the *task* of being ourselves. We then become a "who," a problematic and historical being for whom beings have meaning. "Dasein itself essentially happens as *emergency*, authentically initiates [*setzt*] emergency itself and thus first founds the 'where' of the 'there.'"⁸³ Dasein is not *homo sapiens*; humanity needs to be de-ranged (*ver-rückt*) into the condition of Dasein by an emergency.⁸⁴ ἀ-λήθεια is ἀπο-κάλυψις.

One last point about *Ereignis*: if it is the event in which meaning is given, then *das Ereignis* itself does not have meaning—it is the ultimate *excess*. The giving of the sense of givenness cannot itself be given, as it is not subject to that sense. The origin of significance cannot itself be significant. This is to say that *Ereignis* cannot be understood, revealed, or interpreted in the way beings and their meaning can. It remains intrinsically opaque, or at least resistant to ordinary comprehension. “The excess [*Über-maß*] is ... the self-withdrawing from all appraisal and measurement. But in this self-withdrawing (*self-concealing*), be-ing has its nearest nearness in the clearing of the there, in that it appropriates being-*there*.”⁸⁵ If *Ereignis* were a structure, it would be a meaning that could be brought out through phenomenological interpretation. But as the event that grants meaning, it is ineluctably esoteric. We can glimpse it only indirectly, and can think of it only through delicate and tentative efforts, even though it founds and sustains our every effort. To risk an ontic analogy, thinking of *Ereignis* is like inferring the presence of a black hole from the activity at its event horizon. But *Ereignis* is not a hidden yet present entity; it is the excessive event at the still-resounding inception of meaning. And it does not lie in distant space, but lurks as an intimate obscurity at the heart of our own thought and experience.

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If Heidegger’s thinking involves excess and event, this does not invalidate Sheehan’s paradigm—it simply means that the paradigm ought to be expanded into a still more fruitful interpretive approach. Heidegger does draw our attention to the phenomenon of meaning, but also to its points of friction with excess, and in this way his thought incorporates the range of problems and tensions that the term “being” has traditionally brought with it. Heidegger does seek the basis of meaning, and does find it in our thrown projection, but he also tries to think of the event in which such thrown projection first gets established. Yes: Heidegger finds the source of meaning in human finitude. More fully: he finds the source of the complex of meaning and excess in the finite condition of

having one's own being as a problem—a condition that might arise in a unique, excessive event, the inception of history.

If Heidegger comes into better focus through this paradigm, his limitations will also come into view more clearly. For example, the Levinasian critique now proves to have missed some important features of Heidegger's thought, but ultimately to be in the right. Heidegger is not a thinker of totality; he does not envelop all beings in the meaning of being, but allows meaning to be exceeded both by the givenness of beings and by the enigmatic giving of meaning itself. But Levinas is right to argue that Heidegger does not do justice to the face of the other. Heidegger acknowledges the excess of my own being, of nature, of beings as a whole, and of the inceptive event—but the excess of the other individual who faces me, and the event of the encounter with that other, do not get adequately articulated in his thought. This flaw plays a part in his atrophied ethics, his misunderstandings of the political sphere, and his tendency to judge all human phenomena from an impersonal and remote point of view. However, the excess and event in Heidegger's thought can help us learn from him as we develop ways of thinking of being that respect human beings.⁸⁶

Notes

- 1 Thomas Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 183–202; "Kehre and Ereignis: A Prolegomenon to *Introduction to Metaphysics*," in *A Companion to Heidegger's "Introduction to Metaphysics"*, ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 3–16. See also the more recent publications Sheehan cites in note 5 of his article in the present volume.
- 2 Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift," 189.
- 3 In this essay I can discuss excess and event solely in the context of Heidegger's work, and not as these concepts have been developed in French philosophy after Heidegger—for example, in Jean-Luc Marion's studies of the excess of "saturated phenomena," or Alain Badiou's theory of the event as a "multiple" that cannot be represented in terms of a particular order of being.
- 4 GA 65: 183, 247. These translations will be justified below.
- 5 *Augenblicksstätte*: e.g. GA 65: 387.
- 6 SZ 1. I will generally follow the Macquarrie and Robinson translation, but will not capitalize "being." In this case, Macquarrie and Robinson omit the quotation marks around the word.
- 7 On the ambiguities of "the question of being" as raised in the opening of *Being and Time*, see Jean Grondin, "Why Reawaken the Question of Being?" in Richard Polt, ed., *Critical Essays on Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 15–32.
- 8 SZ 35.
- 9 SZ 151.
- 10 SZ 143–5.
- 11 SZ 20, 121.
- 12 The "was" here is not to be understood simply as a reference to an earlier time, but as indicating ontological perfection: see Thomas Sheehan, "*Geschichtlichkeit/Ereignis/Kehre*," *Existentialia* 11:3–4 (2001), 241–51. Sheehan argues that, similarly, Heidegger's

Ereignis is not an event in time but “the structure of the ontological movement that enables all being-significant” (ibid., 249). But as I will explain below, I do not think it is feasible to divorce *Ereignis* from temporal events, at least in Heidegger’s middle period.

13 SZ 212.

14 SZ 151.

15 SZ 35–6, 152.

16 SZ 41. If time, in turn, can be understood, does time itself then need a further horizon in terms of which it can display itself? For a discussion of this problem, with its threat of an infinite regress, see GA 24: 396–7, 437–8, 462–3. Heidegger’s turn to *Ereignis* will stop the infinite regress because *Ereignis*, as we will see, is not horizontally understood; it is self-concealing. The same problem of an infinite regress of horizons is raised in the 1945 “Triadic Conversation on a Country Path,” GA 77: 93–5. Again, the problem points to a non-horizontal ground for all horizons—here, the “region” that both resists and enables all representation.

17 SZ 87.

18 GA 29/30: 309–10, 389–96.

19 SZ 50.

20 GA 29/30: 497–8, 509. However, this is not Heidegger’s last word on animals. See Andrew J. Mitchell, “Heidegger’s Later Thinking of Animality: The End of World Poverty,” 74–85 in the present volume.

21 GA 52: 64.

22 SZ 134.

23 For example, in a crucial passage in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates argues that the soul does not use the sense organs to grasp “the being [of the hard and the soft] and that they are” (οὐσίαν καὶ ὅτι ἐστὸν, 186b). Does the καί mark a distinction or an elucidation? In the anachronistic terms of medieval philosophy, it is not clear whether οὐσία here means essence as contrasted with existence, or whether it embraces existence as one of its dimensions. Heidegger’s

- commentary on this passage favors the more inclusive option and renders the phrase as “being, the what-being and that-being and so-being” (GA 34: 228).
- 24 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 598A/626B: “*Being*’ is obviously not a real predicate.”
- 25 Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift,” 187. For other arguments against this claim see Richard Capobianco, “The Fate of Being,” chapter 1 of his *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Michael Steinmann, “Phenomenological Perspectivism: The Interweaving of Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Ontology in Martin Heidegger,” in *Proceedings of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Heidegger Circle* (Marquette University, Milwaukee, 2011), 38–52.
- 26 For Heidegger’s final, insistent appeal to the question of being, see his 1976 letter to the tenth annual meeting of the Heidegger Circle, translated by Richard Capobianco in *Engaging Heidegger*, 31–32.
- 27 I make a more extended argument in “Traumatic Ontology,” in *Being Shaken: Ontology and the Event*, ed. Michael Marder and Santiago Zabala (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, forthcoming).
- 28 According to Frege (who did not use a separate symbol for the existential quantifier but nevertheless laid the groundwork for modern symbolic logic), an existential claim asserts that a concept is “realized” or “not empty”: “On Concept and Object,” in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), 49. Compare Kant’s term *Position* (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A598–9/B626–7).
- 29 Compare Sartre’s concept of the “transphenomenality of being”: *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, section II.
- 30 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §1; *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, Band 6 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 75–76.

- 31 GA 1: 318.
- 32 GA 56/57: 67.
- 33 GA 24: 108–71.
- 34 The “in itself” is a kind of meaning and thus depends on Dasein: SZ 212. Heidegger’s suggestion that this meaning is rooted in the experience of the reliability of useful things is one of the less plausible, or at least less developed, claims in *Being and Time*: SZ 75–6.
- 35 GA 24: 35–107; “Kants These über das Sein,” in GA 9.
- 36 SZ 148.
- 37 SZ 152. As Steinmann puts it, “Sense itself opens the difference to what is not sense, without transforming it into another piece of sense”: “Phenomenological Perspectivism,” 48. On the fragility and finitude of Heideggerian *Sinn*, cf. Robert B. Pippin, “Necessary Conditions for the Possibility of What Isn’t: Heidegger on Failed Meaning,” in *Transcendental Heidegger*, ed. Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 199–214.
- 38 GA 56/57: 72.
- 39 GA 56/57: 115.
- 40 SZ 134.
- 41 SZ 135.
- 42 See SZ 56 and 135 on factuality and facticity. Factuality is a flat set of “data” that are interpreted in terms of an unquestioned meaning of being. Meaning cannot be built out of or added onto putatively meaningless facts—there are no such things. But meaning can be stimulated by an encounter with the non-meaning of facticity.
- 43 SZ 70.
- 44 SZ 152.
- 45 See especially *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 155. On the senses of “nothing” in this text see Richard Polt, “The Question of Nothing,” in Polt and Fried, *A Companion to Heidegger’s “Introduction to Metaphysics,”* 57–82.

- 46 E.g. GA 65: 250; cf. Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's "Contributions to Philosophy"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 47–9, 145, 158.
- 47 SZ 56.
- 48 GA 26: 199–202.
- 49 SZ 222; GA 36/37: 118.
- 50 E.g. GA 65: 349, 391.
- 51 One could read Heidegger's newfound emphasis on primordial silence in the 1930s as another aspect of this awareness of excess. See GA 36/37: 106–114; GA 65: 78–80; Richard Polt, "The Secret Homeland of Speech: Heidegger on Language, 1933–34" (forthcoming from Northwestern University Press in a volume on Heidegger and language edited by Jeffrey Powell).
- 52 Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift," 194.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 198.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 200–201.
- 55 I do not take the *Beiträge* as the single authoritative solution to the Heidegger riddle. In my view the text is, as its epigraph says, a serious attempt to express deep currents in Heidegger's thought that he had long hesitated to follow—but it is not the final word. However, for my current purposes, it is enough to show that Sheehan's interpretation does not yield a convincing reading of this particular significant text and its close kin.
- 56 Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly claim that the word "event" is grossly inadequate in the introduction to their translation of the *Contributions*, but the new translation by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu uses "event" (rightly, in my view). Many interpreters, such as Miguel de Beistegui, seem to try to square the circle, so that *Ereignis* is "a primordial and forever recurring event": *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 112. This sounds more like an essence than an event to me.
- 57 "The Way to Language," in *On the Way to Language*, 127; "Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture 'Time and Being,'" in *On Time*

- and Being*, 20; “The Principle of Identity,” in *Identity and Difference*, 36.
- 58 GA 40: 219.
- 59 GA 65: 57, 320.
- 60 Richard Polt, “*Ereignis*,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, eds., *A Companion to Heidegger* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 375–91.
- 61 Heidegger claims in a little-known 1964 letter to Dieter Sinn that all of his postwar publications, with the exception of the essay “The Thing,” are couched in the language of metaphysics: Dieter Sinn, *Ereignis und Nirwana: Heidegger–Buddhismus–Mythos–Mystik; Zur Archäotypik des Denkens* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991), 172. Since metaphysical language privileges structure over event, my own inclination is to trust the more “eventful” private texts of the 1930s as a better clue to Heidegger’s deepest impulses. For example, in the Greek interpretation of language as present at hand, “the emphasis is on exhibiting what is at all times the most constant and the most simple and enduring fundamental structure, in the sense of the Greek conception of Being”: GA 36/37: 102–3 = *Being and Truth*, 81. Heidegger wants to transcend that conception, or rather get behind it to the event that gives all conceptions. This is why he rejects the *a priori*: GA 65: 222–3.
- 62 GA 24: 463 = *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 325.
- 63 GA 29/30: 219–20 = *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 146.
- 64 GA 26: 270 = *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 209.
- 65 “Unbenutzte Vorarbeiten zur Vorlesung vom Wintersemester 1929/1930: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit*,” *Heidegger Studies* 7 (1991), 9.
- 66 GA 39: 3–4.
- 67 GA 70: 9–10.
- 68 “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” in *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 57.
- 69 GA 66: 113–14.
- 70 GA 36/37: 86–7 = *Being and Truth*, 70.

- 71 GA 39: 257.
- 72 GA 39: 33.
- 73 GA 39: 52, 56.
- 74 GA 39: 109.
- 75 *Das Ereignis der Dagründung*: GA 65: 183, 247. One can also translate *das Da*, with Sheehan, as “the open”; see “A Paradigm Shift,” 193. I prefer the sense of particularity that the word “there” conveys. The *Da* is not an indeterminate clearing, but a historically specific site for meaning, rich in heritage and potential.
- 76 GA 65: 379–88.
- 77 GA 70: 15. See GA 65: 492 for the provocative statement that “man has never yet *been* historical.” On the “future-subjunctive” tonality of Heidegger’s thinking in these texts, see Polt, *The Emergency of Being*, 98–107, 216–27.
- 78 GA 65: 58: “The inception—inceptively conceived—is be-ing itself . . . as event.” The present interpretation of the *Beiträge* depends on my reading in *The Emergency of Being*. See pp. 49–87 for an interpretation of the central slogan of the text, *das Seyn west als das Ereignis*. See Chapter 2 for the demands that the central thought places on our way of thinking; see Chapter 3 for various ramifications or “straits” of the issue.
- 79 GA 65: 255.
- 80 Was there not always history already—albeit in a deficient mode—before this authentic moment? This is certainly how *Being and Time* would have presented the issue, but in his middle period, for better or worse, Heidegger is deliberately avoiding the search for phenomenological essences.
- 81 GA 65: 17.
- 82 GA 65: 46.
- 83 “Die Unumgänglichkeit des Da-seins (‘Die Not’) und Die Kunst in ihrer Notwendigkeit (Die bewirkende Besinnung),” *Heidegger Studies* 8 (1992), 7.
- 84 GA 65: 372.

- 85 GA 65: 249. On the self-withdrawal of be-ing see Polt, *The Emergence of Being*, esp. 140–146.
- 86 For their comments on this essay I am indebted to Philip Chevalier and Gregory Fried. I also benefited from a lively discussion on the Heidegger Circle Forum in summer 2010—in particular from comments by Bret Davis, Charles Guignon, Lawrence Hatab, Theodore Kisiel, Reginald Lilly, and François Raffoul.

The Transitional Breakdown of the Word: Heidegger and Stefan George's Encounter with Language

Jussi Backman

Poetry holds a particular position among the arts.
It alone knows the secret of arousal [*erweckung*]
and the secret of transition [*übergang*].¹

In 1928, one year after the publication of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, a volume of poetry was published by Stefan George (1868–1933), the aging poet who, as master of the extremely influential literary and academic George Circle (*George-Kreis*), had become one of the intellectual leaders of early 20th-century Germany.² The volume, which was to be George's last one, bore an ominous title: *Das Neue Reich*, “Kingdom Come,” or, “the New Realm,” “the New Reich.” It contained poems written during and after the First World War and voiced a disappointment, shared by many German artists and intellectuals, with the forms of political and cultural modernity dominant in the Weimar Republic. With an evocative emphasis on themes like war, visionary leadership, and artistic and military heroism, the first part of the anthology heralds the coming restoration of a German Reich—not so much as a political form of government but rather as an intellectual and spiritual realm,

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based on the guidance of the visionary poet-artist. In a poem entitled “Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren” (“The Poet in Times of Confusion”), a title reminiscent of Hölderlin’s famous question, “whereto poets in meager times?” (*wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*),³ George proclaims the following task for the poet-bard:

er holt aus büchern
Der ahnen die verheissung die nicht trägt
Dass die erkoren sind zum höchsten ziel
Zuerst durch tiefste öden ziehn dass einst
Des erdteils herz die welt erretten soll . . .
er heftet
Das wahre sinnbild auf das völkische banner
Er führt durch sturm und grausige signale
Des frührots seiner treuen schar zum werk
Des wachen tags und pflanzt das Neue Reich.

he [the bard] retrieves from books
Of ancestors the pledge that does not fail
That those selected for the highest aim
First drag through deepest wastelands; that the world
Shall once be rescued by the continent’s heart . . .
he attaches
The true symbol to the popular banner
He leads through storm and daybreak’s dismal signals
His loyal troops and sets them to the work
Of sober day and plants the Realm To Come.⁴

Given its title and its thematic emphasis, it is no wonder that this work by George, who was already regarded as a national hero, also attracted the attention of the National Socialist movement, keen on identifying the “New Reich” with the Third Reich. Soon after Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, George was offered the presidency of the Prussian Academy of Poetry (which he declined) and was warmly greeted on his 65th birthday by the new Reich Minister of Propaganda,

Joseph Goebbels, himself an ardent admirer of George's work. While apparently not without some sympathies for the "national movement," George did not want to become associated with the new regime. His death in December 1933 spared him from experiencing the full reality of the new German Reich, but also made him unable to prevent the exploitation of his work by Nazi cultural politics; at Goebbels' behest, the German national book award was (temporarily) renamed the "Stefan George Prize."⁵ In the long run, however, George's aristocratic ethos and aestheticism turned out to be ill-adapted to a totalitarian mass ideology. One of the principal conspirators in the July 1944 plot against Hitler's life, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, was a former member of the George Circle. According to some accounts, Stauffenberg's last words at his execution invoked George's "secret Germany," the spiritual Reich, as a symbol of resistance.⁶

Of the numerous volumes of poetry published by George, *Das Neue Reich* was the one that caught the attention of Heidegger who, even after his quick personal disillusionment with National Socialism, was careful to lecture mainly on works and authors considered politically acceptable in the Third Reich.⁷ In his 1939 seminar on *Herder's Treatise on the Origin of Language (1772)*, attempting a radical reflection on the concept of language prevalent in Western metaphysics and its unthought foundations, Heidegger also makes some inconclusive remarks on *Das Neue Reich*,⁸ declaring enigmatically: "George speaks, barely intimating it, in a transitional way [*übergänglich*]."⁹

What does Heidegger mean by "transition" (*Übergang*) and "transitional?" These expressions gain special significance in the posthumously published *Contributions to Philosophy* from 1936–38. Here he speaks of a transition from the "first beginning" (*der erste Anfang*) of Western thinking to its *other* beginning (*der andere Anfang*).¹⁰ This transition is a historical process that characterizes the presently unfolding philosophical—or rather, post-philosophical—epoch: "The *Contributions* enact a questioning along a pathway which is first traced out by the transition to the other beginning, into which Western thinking is now entering."¹¹

For Heidegger, the “first beginning” is the point of departure that provides the guiding framework for the development of Western philosophy, all the way from the Presocratics and Plato up to Nietzsche. The thinking that remains within the sphere of the first beginning – by Heidegger’s definition, Western metaphysics as such – is primarily occupied with Aristotle’s fundamental ontological question concerning beings *qua* beings (*to on hê on*), in other words, the pure *being-ness* of determinate beings as specific instances of “to be.” According to Heidegger’s seminal claim, the implicit ideal and standard of beingness in Greek metaphysics is *constant presence*, i.e., permanent and self-identical accessibility to immediate awareness – for him, the concrete sense of Aristotle’s *ousia*.¹²

In Heidegger’s historical narrative, the Western metaphysics of presence unfolds through several historical phases. Whereas the Greeks conceived of presence as the givenness of beings to the primarily receptive sense perception (*aisthêsis*) and intuitive apprehending (*nous*), modern, Post-Cartesian metaphysics increasingly discovers the ideal form of presence in the *cogito*, the indubitably certain presence-to-itself of self-conscious human subjectivity.¹³ Heidegger asserts that this metaphysics of subjectivity finds its culmination in the fundamental notions of Nietzsche’s philosophy – for him, the eternal recurrence of the same as the inherently meaningless basic nature of reality and the will to power as the value-creating and endlessly self-enhancing driving force behind subjectivity – which exhaust the last possibilities for thinking implicitly contained in the Greek beginning, thereby bringing about the completion and end of the metaphysical tradition.¹⁴ With Nietzsche, we enter an epoch in which the initial Greek receptivity and openness of thinking to the spontaneous self-givenness of beings, *physis*, is increasingly superseded by the active domination of reality in the form of positive techno-science.¹⁵

With Nietzsche’s metaphysics, philosophy is completed. That means: It has gone through the sphere of prefigured possibilities. Completed metaphysics, which is the ground for the planetary manner of thinking,

gives the scaffolding for an order of the earth that will supposedly last for a long time. . . . But with the end of philosophy, thinking is not also at its end, but in transition to another beginning.¹⁶

The eventual release of thinking from the confines of the now oversaturated Western metaphysics would require a profound transformation, a transition to another point of departure. Techno-scientific modernity, the outcome of metaphysics, focuses its attention on rendering reality more and more purely present, available, and controllable as material for the productive purposes of human subjectivity. Transitional thinking, in its turn, entails an awareness of the way in which the meaningful givenness of something as present is dependent upon and refers back to a multidimensional background context that is, as such, *not* a determinate thing and therefore *not* immediately present, unaccessible, un-wieldy – *no-thing*. It is the differentiation of *something* from a context of no-thing-ness that “gives” beings as meaningful *in* a singular context, *in* a concrete temporal situation; thus, the meaningfulness of presence is no longer regarded as an accomplishment of the meaning-giving activity of subjectivity, but rather as a finite and temporal *gift* that man receives.¹⁷

The only name the later Heidegger would consistently give to this still largely virtual and only gradually emerging postmetaphysical possibility of thought is “Being-historical” or “Being-destinal” (*seyns-geschichtlich*) thinking. Being-historical thinking experiences Being (*Seyn*, now with the archaic spelling to distinguish it from *Sein* in the metaphysical sense of beingness) in terms of a historical “destiny” (*Geschick*) that “dispatches” (*schicken*) meaningfulness to the human being in historically changing configurations, as an “event” or a “taking-place” (*Ereignis*) that overtakes and appropriates (*ereignet*) human being to be its situational and contextual “place” (the *Da* of *Da-sein*, now conceived of as an essential historical *possibility* of being-human).¹⁸ We begin to sense a profound kinship between Heidegger’s postmetaphysical “other beginning” and George’s vision of a post-modern, poetic New Realm, of “a younger generation, measuring man and thing / Once more with

proper measures.”¹⁹ In a Heideggerian reading, this “proper measure” would be one that does not forge man and thing into two poles of a technical process of manipulation, but is rather given to us by the reciprocal interaction between the spontaneous disclosure of meaningful presence and the human capacity to experience and articulate meaning.

Since this capacity is essentially discursive and linguistic, the transition to another beginning would also entail a profound transformation in the human being’s relationship to language in the sense of discursive meaningfulness, *logos*. In Heidegger’s reading of the Heraclitus fragments—especially fragment B 50, “When you have heard not me but discursive articulation [*logos*] itself, it is well-advised to agree with it [*homologeîn*]: All is One [*hen panta*]”²⁰—*logos* originally means the discursive articulation of meaningful reality as an articulated, differential, and oppositional but still ultimately unified and consistent totality. *Logos* is therefore Heraclitus’ name for Being as such. In this initial sense, it is something that the human being does not possess but must instead hearken and consent to.²¹ Already in Aristotle, however, *logos* becomes first and foremost a human *attribute*: man is defined as *zôon logon echon*, the living creature that *disposes of* discursivity.²² In the seminal book of Western logic, Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*, *logos* is defined as a complex vocal utterance signifying something; its ideal mode is *logos apophantikos*, the declarative proposition that predicates something of something.²³

In Heidegger’s formulation, the human being’s relationship to language has since Aristotle been dominated by *logic* in the broad sense of a theoretical and normative account of linguistic and discursive meaningfulness.²⁴ In modern times, this approach gradually develops into a formal calculus of language that aims at abstracting, from the contingencies and ambiguities of the historically situated and developing “ordinary language,” a universal and unambiguous system that could then be used to further the lucid, coherent, and efficient transmission of information.²⁵ Language is understood as an instrument of communication that can be perfected through grammatical and syntactic calculation, based on the model of a simple declarative

proposition consisting of subject and predicate. Certain liberties are, of course, granted to poetic language; in the Romantic paradigm, poetry is not declarative but performative, i.e., it does not purport to convey information concerning external facts but rather serves the poet's emotional self-expression and self-assertion as a creative subject.²⁶ However, in this case as well, language is seen as an instrument of subjectivity, as a means subjugated to a purpose.

In the Heideggerian transition, the instrumental view of language, as well as the entire metaphysical view of language as a system of material signs, spoken words or written symbols equipped with a declarative meaning, begins to falter. What is ultimately called into question here is the notion of linguistic discursivity as a means that the human being has at her disposal for communicating pre-given ideal meanings. From the transitional perspective, language is rather experienced as something that "has" the human being, as the basic meaningful articulation of reality into a relational whole which, precisely because of its relational and referential structure, is at once both unified and differentiated. Language is not an entity that could be possessed, but rather the discursive articulation of meaning that always "precedes" the human being, in the sense that we are always born into an already prevailing language.²⁷

It is obvious that this articulation is not universal but always tied to the historical and cultural world that we enter at birth. Indeed, the language we are born into *is* our culture, it *is* the historically developed interpretation of reality that we must adopt and that must adopt us; for it is not until we learn to speak that we truly enter our community. As Heidegger puts it in his 1936 Rome lecture on "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry":

Language is not just a tool which man possesses alongside many others; rather, language first grants the possibility of standing in the midst of the openness of beings. Only where there is language, is there world Only where world holds sway is there history. . . . Language is not a tool at man's disposal but rather the event

[*Ereignis*] which disposes of the highest possibility of being-human.²⁸

This experience of language is one that has perhaps, to some extent, always been familiar to poets—the ones who most constantly expose themselves to language. Heidegger’s readings of poetry concentrate on those modern poets whom he considers “transitional,” that is, poets whose work calls into question metaphysical notions of language and remains on the lookout for a new dimension of ultimate meaning—a divinity or holiness—beyond the reach of techno-scientific control. For Heidegger, the first and foremost “transitional” poet is Hölderlin, the “poet’s poet,” acutely aware of the absence of the holy.²⁹ Nonetheless, he also had high regard for turn-of-the-century German poets such as Trakl, Rilke, and George, all of whom Hölderlin strongly inspired.³⁰

In a long meditation on language, a cycle of three lectures from 1957–58 entitled “The Essence of Language,” as well as in the shorter 1959 lecture “The Word,” Heidegger studies George’s poem “Das Wort” (“The Word”) from *Das Neue Reich*. This poem is, for Heidegger, an account of a transitional encounter and experience (*Erfahrung*) with language—an encounter in which the Romantic notion of expressive poetic language is unexpectedly shattered and supplanted by the acknowledgement of another essence.

Das Wort

Wunder von ferne oder traum
Bracht ich an meines landes saum

Und harrte bis die graue norn
Den namen fand in ihrem born—

Drauf konnt ichs greifen dicht und stark
Nun blüht und glänzt es durch die mark ...

Einst langt ich an nach guter fahrt
Mit einem kleinod reich und zart

Sie suchte lang und gab mir kund:
"So schläft hier nichts auf tiefem grund"

Worauf es meiner hand entrann
Und nie mein land den schatz gewann ...

So lernt ich traurig den verzicht:
Kein ding sei wo das wort gebricht.

The Word

Wonder or dream from distant land
I carried to my country's strand

And waited till the twilit norn
Had found the name within her bourn –

Then I could grasp it close and strong
It blooms and shines now the front along ...

Once I returned from happy sail,
I had a prize so rich and frail,

She sought for long and tidings told:
"No like of this these depths enfold."

And straight it vanished from my hand,
The treasure never graced my land ...

So I renounced and sadly see:
Where word breaks off no thing may be.⁵¹

The short poem, consisting of six two-line stanzas and so simple as to appear almost naïve, recounts two homecomings of the narrator-poet. The poet returns twice from a distant land, i.e., from a region beyond his domain and sphere of control, to his own country. On both occasions, he brings something back home with him: first a "wonder or a dream," then a "prize" or "treasure." But in order to be brought into the poet's country, these hitherto unidentified presents must first be

poetically named, for otherwise they can gain neither stable identity nor permanence—in Hölderlin's words, "but what endures / is established by poets" (*Was bleibet aber / stiften die Dichter*).⁵² The naming takes place at the "strand," i.e., at the limit of the poet's domain; here an old Germanic goddess of fate, the *norn*, retrieves names from the bottom of her well. Upon the poet's second homecoming, however, the *norn* fails to discover any name for the singular treasure he is now carrying, and instantly the treasure vanishes from his hand. The poem ends in a renunciation (*verzicht*): the poet recognizes that "where word breaks off no thing may be." Without a naming word, the frail and ephemeral treasure cannot become a *thing*, i.e., a self-identical and stable being.

Heidegger reads this poem very carefully and minutely, laying great weight even on the scanty punctuation. However, in the wider context of his thought, it is not hard to see the core issue here: for Heidegger, George's poem recounts a transformation and transition in the poet's relationship to language.⁵³ At first, the poet's assumed task is to conquer and appropriate new property through the naming use of language; the *norn* and her well are freely at his disposal for this function. But the disappointment on the second occasion, the unexpected unavailability and breakdown of the word and the subsequent loss of the treasure, force the poet into a resignation that marks a profound change in his attitude.

Firstly, the poet now realizes his own dependency on language. It is language itself and not the poet that grants beingness—stable meaning and identity—to beings. To rephrase Wittgenstein: the limits of the poet's country are the limits of his language. But the second, more important discovery is that there is something for which there is no word, something that cannot be captured and made into a thing through naming. Heidegger stresses that we must not take the breakdown of the word in the second part of the poem as a contingent failure in which no suitable word simply happens to be present. The evanescent treasure must be something which *cannot* as such be named.

What is this treasure that essentially evades naming? For a hint we must look to the title of the poem—the Word. The treasure for which

there is no word is the *word itself* in its essence as language.⁵⁴ The word that is experienced here is not a thing, a signifier that is somehow semantically related to a meaning, a signified. Rather, it is the functioning of *logos*, the very articulation of a thing into a determinate meaningful thing. As Heidegger compactly puts it: “The word makes [‘be-things,’ *bedingt*] the thing into a thing.”⁵⁵ Language as *logos* is the dynamic context for discursively constituted beings, the background event that can never itself become a being, resisting all objectification. In the words of the “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” it is the “house of being.”⁵⁶ Language can never be simply a tool for the creative subjectivity of the poet, but the poet is always dependent on the language that precedes him and is constituted as a poet only by and through language.

Heidegger thus arrives at his famous chiasmus: “*The essence of language: the language of essence.*”⁵⁷ The lectures started off with the question concerning the essence of language; an attempt to answer this question turns it around. The essence, *Wesen*, the way in which language prevails and takes place, is precisely in articulating, constituting, and thus rendering possible stable and definite identities of things. The essence of language is thus to be the very becoming-essential of essences, the event whereby beings become beings, linguistically articulated, nameable entities, and which cannot itself be similarly captured in a name. The purpose of Heidegger’s reading of George is to show the impossibility of what the title “The Essence of Language” might have led us to expect: a theoretical grasp or formal definition of language as an entity.⁵⁸ The poetic subject of George’s poem is compelled to accept with sadness and resignation that language as such, the becoming-speakable of things, is itself unspeakable.

However, Heidegger emphasizes that this resigned discovery is not, in spite of its sad mood, a failure.⁵⁹ It is an important experience that results in a decisive change of attitude. George’s encounter with language fruitfully inverts the attempt to speak the essence of language into a silent experience of the essence of language as the unspeakable eventful origin of speakability and, thus, of essentiality. Even though the poet “fails” to capture the essence of language in a name

or concept, this essence is indirectly disclosed—and thus “brought to word”—in the way in which the word works in naming and thereby granting relative permanence. Accordingly, Heidegger’s lecture is not primarily a discourse *on (über)* the essence of language, but rather allows an indirect encounter with this essence by drawing our attention to the way discoursing takes place *from* and *on the basis of (von)* language. This is what Heidegger means by “experience,” *Erfahrung*, in the emphatic sense: a journey (*Fahrt*) along the path of language as an event.⁴⁰

The poet’s resignation or renouncement is a positive one—it is the first step in the transition from the modern ideal of a subjectivist and technological mastery of reality towards a wholly other approach. The resignation involved here corresponds to the attitude or mood that Heidegger, following Master Eckhart, calls *Gelassenheit*—“serenity” or, more literally, “releasement,” “surrender,” “having-let-go,” “letting-be.”⁴¹ For him, this expression signifies a transformation of the relationship to things and to oneself predominant in modernity—namely, willing, more precisely characterized by Nietzsche as *will to power*, in which things are ultimately disclosed as means or material for the boundless self-enhancement of subjectivity. However, “releasement” does not mean simply a passive submission to a higher, divine will; it is “beyond the distinction between activity and passivity.”⁴² Like the concept of “resolve” (*Entschlossenheit*) in *Being and Time*, “releasement” rather signifies a release from an exclusive concentration on things as present and a receptivity to their contextual background, which the later Heidegger calls *Gegend* or *Gegnet*, “region” or “country”—that against which (*contra, gegen*) things are encountered as present.⁴³

With regard to the contemporary technological framework, “releasement” means simply accepting that whereas the meaningfulness of things is normally and first and foremost constituted to us in terms of usefulness, instrumentality, and controllability, *the fact that it is so constituted is not* itself of our own making or under our control.⁴⁴ The historically determined and contextual articulation of meaning—i.e., Being in the postmetaphysical sense—is not “subjective,” it is rather

what makes us into the “subjects” that we are. As this discursive articulation is precisely the essence of language, “releasement,” in the case of language, means recognizing that the language we have grown into, the way of discussing and addressing things and their mutual relations prevalent in the specific historical world we live in, is not dependent on our will. Instead, it is we who are dependent upon the linguistic and discursive framework that precedes us. In the first instance, it is language that “speaks”; the human being speaks only insofar as she “responds” or “corresponds” (*entsprechen*) to language, i.e., conforms to a linguistic framework and makes use of its finite resources.⁴⁵ The human being is first and foremost a recipient and correspondent of language. With regard to language, releasement means letting meaningfulness show itself in the event of its discursive articulation and accepting that this event itself remains inarticulate. The event of Being cannot be studied as something that is; nor can the happening of language be discussed in the same manner as linguistically articulated meanings.

Whereas naming words always more or less inevitably direct our attention to the beings that they name, the breakdown of the word makes us receptive to the unnamable “is,” the event of Being that lets beings be present. Thus Heidegger translates the last line of the poem to say, in a positive manner: “An ‘is’ arises where the word breaks down.”⁴⁶ The breakdown of the word signals the discontinuity, the rupture or “leap” (*Sprung*)⁴⁷ entailed by the transition from metaphysics to another beginning—a transition that opens up a new experience of the “is,” of Being itself in its full dimensionality. The new realm disclosed by the breakdown is the uncontrollable background dimension of meaningfulness on which we ultimately depend, even though the full extent of this dependency is yet to be elaborated in Western thought.

A comparable experience of a neglected and concealed background and of an unknown dependency is suggested by the work of Stefan George, in whose words I conclude:

Kehr in die heilige heimat
Findst ursprünglichen boden
Mit dem geschärfteren aug
Schlummender fülle schooss
Und so unbetretnes gebiet
Wie den finsteren urwald ...

Turn back to the holy homeland
Find the original soil
With an eye now grown sharper
The bosom of slumbering fullness
And a district as unexplored
As the murkiest forest ...⁴⁸

Horch was die dumpfe erde spricht:
Du frei wie vogel oder fisch –
Worin du hängst · das weisst du nicht.

Hear the earth's roar from below:
You who are free like birds or fish –
Your dependency · you do not know.⁴⁹

Notes

- 1 Stefan George, “Über Dichtung II” [1895] in *Werke: Ausgabe in zwei Bänden*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Düsseldorf: Helmut Küpper, 1968), 531 [hereafter, SGW 1]. My translation. Note George’s unusual—and not thoroughly consistent—practice of spelling even nouns in lower case, contrary to the normal German orthography.
- 2 I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for an immensely helpful comment on this paper.
- 3 From Hölderlin’s elegy “Brot und Wein” (“Bread and Wine,” 1800–01). Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Wozu Dichter?” [1946] in *Holzwege*, 269–320 = “What Are Poets for?” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 91–142.
- 4 Stefan George, “Der Dichter in zeiten der Wirren: Dem Andenken des Grafen Bernhard Uxkull” [1921] in SGW 1, 418. My translation. Translated as “The Poet in Times of Confusion” in *The Works of Stefan George*, trans. Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), 363–65.
- 5 On George’s relationship to National Socialism, see Robert E. Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 722–46; Ritchie Robertson, “George, Nietzsche, and Nazism” in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. Jens Rieckmann (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 189–205.
- 6 See Michael Baigent, *Secret Germany: Claus von Stauffenberg and the Mystical Crusade against Hitler* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), 66–67.
- 7 The most extensive study of Heidegger’s readings of Stefan George is Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Die zarte, aber helle Differenz: Heidegger und Stefan George* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1999). See also Dieter Thomä, “Die späten Texte über Sprache, Dichtung und Kunst: Im ‘Haus des Seins’: eine Ortsbesichtigung” in *Heidegger-Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, ed. Dieter Thomä (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 320–21.

- 8 GA 85: 61, 69-72 = *On the Essence of Language*, 51, 59-62.
- 9 GA 85: 72 = *On the Essence of Language*, 62; tm.
- 10 GA 65: 166-224 = *Contributions to Philosophy*, 117-75.
- 11 GA 65: 4 = *Contributions to Philosophy*, 3; tm.
- 12 SZ 25-26; *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 154 = *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 216.
- 13 *Nietzsche* II, 363-438 = “Metaphysics as History of Being” and “Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics” in *The End of Philosophy*, 1-54 and 55-74.
- 14 GA 65: 107-66 = *Contributions to Philosophy*, 73-115; *Nietzsche* I, 425-32 = *Nietzsche* 3, 3-9; *Nietzsche* II, 177-80 = *Nietzsche* 4, 147-49.
- 15 “Die Frage nach der Technik” [1953] in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 9-40 = “The Question Concerning Technology” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 3-35.
- 16 “Überwindung der Metaphysik” [1936-46] in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 79 = “Overcoming Metaphysics” in *The End of Philosophy*, 95-96; tm.
- 17 “Zeit und Sein” [1962] in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, 16-24 = “Time and Being” in *On Time and Being*, 16-23.
- 18 Cf. GA 65: 3 = *Contributions to Philosophy*, 3; GA 66: 68-80, 89-94, 333-61 = *Mindfulness*, 55-65, 74-78, 297-321; GA 69: 86-88, 115, 165-73. Cf. Alejandro Vallega, “‘Beyng-Historical Thinking’ in Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy*” in *Companion to Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, ed. Charles E. Scott and others (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 48-65; Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, “*Contributions to Philosophy* and Enowning-Historical Thinking” in *Companion to Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, 105-26.
- 19 Stefan George, “Der Dichter in zeiten der Wirren” in SGW 1, 418: “Ein jung geschlecht das wieder mensch und ding / Mit echten maassen misst.” My translation.
- 20 Heraclitus, Fragment 22 B 50, in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und deutsch*, 6th ed., ed. Hermann Diels and

- Walther Kranz (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1951). My translation.
- 21 See GA 55: 185–402; “Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)” [1951] in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 199–221 = “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)” in *Early Greek Thinking*, 59–78.
- 22 Aristotle, *Politica*, ed. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), I.2.1253a7–10.
- 23 Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, ed. Lorenzo Minio-Paluello (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), chapters 1–6.
- 24 GA 17: 13–41 = *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, 9–31; GA 21: 127–61 = *Logic: The Question of Truth*, 107–35; GA 29/30: 416–507 = *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World-Finitude-Solitude*, 287–349; GA 55: 186–237; “Der Weg zur Sprache” [1959] in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 244–45 = “The Way to Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 114–15.
- 25 “Das Wesen der Sprache” [1957–58] in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 160 = “The Nature of Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 58–59; “Der Weg zur Sprache” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 263–64 = “The Way to Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 132–33.
- 26 On poetry from a “logical” point of view as the non-propositional expression of a “feeling of life,” cf. Rudolf Carnap, “Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache” [1931–32], *Erkenntnis* 2 (1931–32): 239–40; “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language,” trans. Arthur Pap, in *Logical Positivism*, ed. Alfred J. Ayer (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 78–80.
- 27 GA 65: 177 = *Contributions to Philosophy*, 124; GA 85: 56–57 = On the Essence of Language, 46–47. Cf. Daniela Vallega-Neu, “Poietic Saying” in *Companion to Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, 66–80.
- 28 “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung” [1936] in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 37–38 = “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” in *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 55–56; tm.

- 29 “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung” in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 34 = “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” in *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 52.
- 30 On the relationship between Hölderlin and George, see Stefan George, “Hölderlin” in SGW 1, 518–21. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Hölderlin und George” [1971] in *Gesammelte Werke*, 9: *Ästhetik und Poetik II: Hermeneutik im Vollzug* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993), 229–44; “Hölderlin and George” in Dieter Nisgeld and Graeme Nicholson, eds., *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 93–109. It should be noted that the first complete edition of Hölderlin’s collected works was begun in 1912–16 by a close disciple of George, Norbert von Hellingrath (cf. Heidegger’s “Das Wesen der Sprache” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 182 = “The Nature of Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 78.)
- 31 Stefan George, SGW 1, 466–67. English translation by Peter D. Hertz in Heidegger, “Words” in *On the Way to Language*, 140. Translated as the “Word” in *The Works of Stefan George*, 408. For related readings of the poem, see William Waters, “Stefan George’s Poetics” in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, 46–47; Michael M. Metzger, “In Zeiten der Wirren: Stefan George’s Later Works” in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, 119–20.
- 32 From Hölderlin’s poem “Andenken” (“Reminiscence”); cf. “Das Wesen der Sprache” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 171–72 = “The Nature of Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 68; “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung” in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 41 = “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” in *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 58.
- 33 “Das Wesen der Sprache” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 184–85 = “The Nature of Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 79–81.
- 34 “Das Wesen der Sprache” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 192–93 = “The Nature of Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 86–88; “Das

- Wort" [1959] in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 228–36 = "Words" in *On the Way to Language*, 146–54.
- 35 "Das Wort" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 232 = "Words" in *On the Way to Language*, 151.
- 36 "Brief über den 'Humanismus'" [1946] in GA 9: 313 = "Letter on 'Humanism,'" *Pathmarks*, 239.
- 37 "Das Wesen der Sprache" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 200 = "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, 94.
- 38 "Das Wesen der Sprache" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 174–76 = "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, 70–72.
- 39 "Das Wesen der Sprache" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 169 = "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, 66–67; "Das Wort" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 235–36 = "Words" in *On the Way to Language*, 153–54.
- 40 "Das Wesen der Sprache" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 159–62, 168–70, 174–80 = "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, 57–60, 65–67, 70–76; "Das Wort" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 223–24 = "Words" in *On the Way to Language*, 143–44.
- 41 "Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit: Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken" [1944/45] in GA 13: 37–74 = "Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking" in *Discourse on Thinking*, 58–90; "Gelassenheit" [1955] in GA 16: 517–29 = "Memorial Address" in *Discourse on Thinking*, 43–57.
- 42 "Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit" in GA 13: 41 = "Conversation on a Country Path" in *Discourse on Thinking*, 61.
- 43 "Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit" in GA 13: 63–64 = "Conversation on a Country Path" in *Discourse on Thinking*, 81.
- 44 "Gelassenheit" in GA 16: 527–28 = "Memorial Address" in *Discourse on Thinking*, 54–55.
- 45 "Die Sprache" [1950] in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 32–33 = "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 216.
- 46 "Das Wesen der Sprache" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 216 = "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, 108; tm.

- 47 On the transitional “leap,” see GA 65: 225–89 = *Contributions to Philosophy*, 159–203.
- 48 Stefan George, “Geheimen Deutschland” in SGW 1, 426. My translation. Translated as “Secret Germany” in *The Works of Stefan George*, 371–74.
- 49 Stefan George, “Horch was die dumpfe erde spricht” in SGW 1, 463. My translation. Translated as “The brooding earth decrees below” in *The Works of Stefan George*, 406. Cf. GA 85: 61, 72 = *On the Essence of Language*, 51, 62; “Das Wesen der Sprache” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 184 = “The Nature of Language” in *On the Way to Language*, 79.

Heidegger's Later Thinking of Animality: The End of World Poverty

Andrew J. Mitchell

Discussions of the Heideggerian thinking of animality are overwhelmingly considerations of his 1929–30 lecture course *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where the animal is famously presented as “world poor” and trapped within a “disinhibiting ring.”¹ The focus on this course is surely understandable as it is his most extensive treatment of the matter anywhere in his corpus, but it is not the only one. In the 1953 text “Language in the Poem,” Heidegger rethinks animality no longer in terms of containment, but instead in terms of exposure to world. A more radical break with the earlier course is hard to imagine. Here what comes to the fore is a new relation between mortality and animality, problematizing the distinction between the two. After presenting Heidegger’s later view of the animal, I will briefly address what it has to offer for questions of Heidegger’s purported “ontotheological anthropocentrism.”²

The consideration of the animal in the 1953 Trakl essay “Language in the Poem” arises out of a thinking of departure and wandering. Beginning from Trakl’s line: “The soul is a stranger on earth,”³ Heidegger explains that “strange” (*fremd*) derives from the Old High German *fram*, which means “on the way to”⁴ The soul that is a stranger on earth is one that has set out on the way to somewhere else. It has left any domicile behind for paths on the way somewhere, without yet having reached any destination. The soul that is underway is thus “between”

places. The soul is defined by this being underway, so much so that it is not even the source or “origin” of its own movement, but is “called” out along the paths it traverses. Heidegger asks, “to where is the stranger called?” and answers, in accordance with Trakl’s poem, that the stranger is called “into the downfall [*Untergang*].”⁵ This *Untergang*, however, is not so much a downfall or even a “going under,” rather it is, translated just as literally, a “going among” or “going amidst” (*unter zu gehen*). The soul is called to go among the things of the world, which is to say, it is called into this between.⁶ If there is any downfall or demise to be had here, it is solely that of the self-centered and encapsulated subject that would imagine itself at home, master of the world, regarding it from on high.

Indeed, Heidegger describes this *Untergang* in just such terms of dissolution: “It is losing oneself in the spiritual twilight of blueness.”⁷ To set out underway, to enter the between, is to enter this spiritual twilight of blueness. It is “spiritual” insofar as Heidegger follows Trakl in understanding spirit as a flame capable of offering inviting warmth at a hearth as well as burning everything to ashes in conflagration. Spirit as flame is never wholly one or the other of these, always in between. The loss of oneself by entry into the between occurs at “twilight” (*Dämmerung*), the crepuscular transition of the day. It is not simply the end of the day, but likewise the dawn of morning. “Morning, too, has its twilight [*dämmert*].”⁸ Twilight is always between the end and the beginning. Lastly, the between is a spiritual twilight of “blueness” insofar as blue is the color of twilight, of the time that is neither day nor night. Blue is the color of the trace, of what remains light in the dark and dark within light. As Heidegger puts it, “The brightness sheltered in the dark is blueness.”⁹ In all of these aspects, the loss of self is revealed to be an entry into the between of relationality.

No longer at home and not yet at its destination, the wandering soul finds itself on the way somewhere. On these paths between enclosures, it wanders exposed. The essence of this soul as a stranger means that it is never at home, not even with itself. It is not defined by being in place, but by being underway, neither here nor there. Having left the closure

of the home behind, it is exposed to what comes. This being underway is thus a condition for encounter, for seeing and being seen. Out among the blueness of twilight, the wanderer is caught sight of by a blue deer (*das blaue Wild*). Heidegger's rethinking of animality unfolds in his reading of this recurrent figure in Trakl's poetry.

Let us note at the outset that the animal in question is a deer, a game animal or wild beast, a *Wild*. The etymologically attested connection with the wilderness, *Wildnis*, should not be missed. But just as the wilderness is understood by Heidegger as a "garden of the wilderness,"¹⁰ indicating the ineluctable relationality of the human such that the wild is never untouched, a similar understanding informs the thinking of the deer (*das Wild*). The deer will not be so wild as to remain completely foreign to us. There is a relation between wanderer and blue deer operative here. Trakl's deer is the "blue deer" (*das blaue Wild*), where blue once again names the slippage of the between, the blurring of just such oppositions as the wild and the civilized, for example, and the appeasement of the antagonisms that they establish. In fact, Heidegger follows Trakl in thinking of the *Wild* as the "shy deer," the "gentle animal."¹¹

But the blue deer must enter the twilight, just as the wanderer must leave home. Heidegger follows Trakl in tracking this transformation of animal (*Tier*) into the deer (*Wild*). The transformation begins with Trakl's depiction of "... An animal's face / transfixed before blueness, blue's holiness."¹² Heidegger elaborates the consequences of this exposure to blueness:

In sight of the blue and at the same time brought to self-restraint [*Ansichhalten*], the animal's face is transfixed and transforms into the countenance of the deer [*Antlitz des Wilds*] ... In being transfixed, the face of the animal comes together. Its appearance gathers itself, composing itself, in order to look towards the holy.¹⁵

The transformation of the animal into the deer is coincident with the look out towards the holy, which we can provisionally sketch as the

space of grace, or arrival. The animal is not some self-contained creature harboring an essence or species-being. The animal is instead what it is on account of a relation that carries the animal out past itself to situate it in the between, to transform it into the blue deer.

Exposed in the blueness, the deer is open for what comes and stands as a witness to it. The deer observes what takes place along the twilight paths of the between:

For a blue deer always follows
these darker paths,
an observer among the twilight trees¹⁴

Trakl calls on the deer to assume this role of witness in regard to the wandering of the stranger.

the steps of the stranger
rang through the silver night.
Would that a blue deer were to remember his path¹⁵

Heidegger asks, “who is the blue deer that the poet calls out to? An animal? Certainly. Only an animal? By no means. For it is supposed to remember [*gedenken*].”¹⁶ The remembrance of the deer is a looking past the present in two ways, first by remembering what it has seen, and second by seeing what is not simply present, but what is instead drawn out into the between along these twilight paths as well. This memory, this capacity for witnessing, makes the blue deer something other than an irrational animal. The deer is past the present in its recollection and this redefines its animality: “The blue deer is an animal, whose animality presumably does not rest in the animalistic, but in that observing recollection.”¹⁷ The animal becomes the deer in looking beyond itself, certainly past any “disinhibiting ring” that would confine it.

To be sure, the transformation in question is a break with all manner of confinement for the animal. Heidegger's new understanding of the animal is on the basis of its exposure to blueness, i.e. in terms of the between.¹⁸ This means breaking with the traditional abstractions and oppositions of metaphysical animality whereby it is set against the

rational and intelligible. In the Trakl interpretation, this animal-rational diremption is thought of as a “curse” that has befallen us, though Heidegger is quick to explain that “not duality [*das Zwiefache*] as such, but rather discord [*die Zwietracht*] is the curse.”¹⁹ Duality and difference are the gift of existence for us, modes of relating. Concomitant with that gift, however, is the curse of discord. The differences all too easily reify into antagonistic oppositions, not simply dividing the separated parties but urging them on to their utmost extremes. Animality becomes sheer wildness, with Heidegger observing that “due to this [the discord] each of the clans [*Geschlechter*; sexes, races, generations, tribes] is drawn into the unbridled uproar of the always isolated and sheer wildness of the wild beast [*bloßen Wildheit des Wildes*].”²⁰ Discord isolates each pole of the opposition it institutes—animality against rationality, for instance—such that the poles are deprived of all contact with each other. Animality is opposed to the rational and becomes sheer wildness and revolting brutality. “Out of the uproar of blind wildness it [discord] carries each clan into a diremption [*Entzweiung*], and thereby casts it into unbridled isolation.”²¹ The segregation of the animal from the rational has led to the animal being understood as the brute wild beast.²² It is isolated and quarantined within itself. Like a dog on a leash inciting the very behavior it would remedy, the isolated animal is caught within a sameness to self that drives it mad.

The transformation of animality likewise promises a transformation of humanity insofar as the antagonism between the animal and the rational has been written into the definition of the human as *animal rationale*. This dirempted being has not yet made its way into the indeterminacy of the blue. Invoking Nietzsche, Heidegger accordingly observes: “This animal, namely the thinking one, the *animal rationale*, the human, according to a word of Nietzsche’s, is not yet established.”²³ But for Heidegger this does not mean that the animal has not been sufficiently determined—indeed, he mentions that the contemporary human is all too decisively constituted and determined—rather that “the animality of this animal has not yet been made firm, i.e. ‘brought home,’ brought into what is native of its veiled essence.”²⁴ The home for this human animal

is out among the twilight paths. Its only home is on the way to . . . What is not yet established for it is no further determination, but the dissolution of these in the blue. The animality of this animal has not yet been allowed to remain veiled, indeterminate, so as to essence.

The diremption and exacerbation of oppositions dissolves in the blue twilight. Heidegger writes that “the countenance of the deer in sight of the blue takes itself back into the gentle [*das Sanfte*]. For the gentle is, according to the word itself [Grimms’ dictionary derives it from *sammeln*, to gather²⁵], the peaceful gathering. It transforms the discord in that it converts [*verwindet*] what is injurious and scorching of the wild [*der Wildnis*] into an appeased pain.”²⁶ In the blue, the animal is no longer forced by its confinement to be ever only brute and wild animality. Rather than being endlessly goaded into ever purer forms of self-sameness, ever more extreme expressions of its irrationality, the animal in the blueness is able to be calmed and become gentle. The appeased and calmed pain remains a pain, but the discord of it is “converted” (*verwindet*). The discord is not forgotten as though it never happened, instead it is understood as dependent upon a prior field of relations from which it was an abstraction. The discord that arose from a drive to purity (of the animal, of the rational, of the space between them) is understood as dependent upon a preceding context of non-oppositional relations, a deformation of the between.

With the appeasement of discordant opposition, a new sense of animality can emerge. Heidegger refrains from trying to define it any further. Indeed, in some sense this would be impossible, insofar as the animal is now understood as essentially connected through its look with what it is not, and thus not simply present-at-hand for an assessment and evaluation. In Heidegger’s words, “this animality is still far off and scarcely to be sighted. The animality of the animal here intended thus vacillates in the undefined.”²⁷ Let us note, however, that this animality is not unseen; there are traces. And if this new animality is as we have said, then it could never be fully present for the viewing anyway. It could only be sighted by a vision that likewise occurred within the between, one not constrained to the simply present, an observing recollection once again.

What then does this tell us about the relationship between humans and animals? The stakes of this question are high, since Heidegger is often taken to be a “metaphysical humanist” who inserts a strict divide between the human and the animal, keeping each side in its purity free from contamination by the other.²⁸ One of the grounds cited in support of such a claim is precisely the distinction between “dying” and “coming to an end” that plays a strong role in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, but which is also to be found in *Being and Time* as well as in later texts like the Bremen lectures.²⁹ The current analyses allow us to respond to such claims.

The transformation of the human in blueness would parallel that of the animal that is transformed into the blue deer. The human would become the mortal—a stranger to itself, and one defined by what lies most outside it, something that it can never possess and which keeps it open and disposed towards the world, i.e. its death. This is surely a shift from a thinking of the living being (*Lebewesen*) to that of the beings that can die (*die Sterblichen*), but it is a shift that is not automatically the privilege of the human. In “The Danger,” the third of the Bremen lectures where Heidegger first develops the role of the mortals within the fourfold, he intones that “the human is not yet the mortal.”³⁰ Mortality is not something simply pre-given as a distinction to the human against the rest of life. It marks a kind of transition out of the living being, out of humanity itself: “From the rational living being, the mortals must first become.”³¹ Mortality is something that humanity does not possess.

A consequence of this is that it is not only the animal that does not die. It is the human, too. Heidegger makes this brutally clear in notorious lines from the same lecture:

Hundreds of thousands die in mass. Do they die? They perish. They are put down. Do they die? They become pieces of inventory of a standing reserve for the fabrication of corpses. Do they die? They are unobtrusively liquidated in annihilation camps. And even apart from such as these—millions now in China abjectly end in starvation.³²

These are harrowing words, to be sure, and what they express is the fact that death is nothing pre-given. More, death is something that can be taken from another. No one may be able to die my death for me, but they are in the position to take that death from me, it would seem. Humans do not die, they come to an end. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that in the wake of the war this purportedly essential marker of a difference between the human and the animal would waver, if not give way altogether. The idea that only humans would die and that this would ground an essential, even ontological, distinction from the animal for Heidegger must be surrendered.

Despite this, objectors might respond that Heidegger's conception of the "mortals" is precisely what is at stake and that here, far from abolishing his anthropocentrism, he only inscribes it all the more fully. The idea of mortality by this account would be one more strategy of seclusion and quarantine to protect Heidegger's privileged version of "subjectivity" from contamination. Heidegger would be responding to the recognition of a disturbing similarity between animal and human. His response would take the form of a still more drastic flight away from this proximity into a shielded realm of purity. Now it would only be a cadre of human elite who achieve mortality and death, leaving the rest of humanity to end with the animals. Not every human is mortal, they might say, but only humans are.

And yet, what is mortality but a matter of exposure? Mortality is not a privilege of the human. In fact, mortality for the human is only possible through a liberation of animality, a rethinking of the animal, our relation to animals, and the animality of ourselves. Mortality is not at all a privilege of the human, and Heidegger notes this himself. "The name 'blue deer,'" Heidegger writes, "names the mortal."⁵³

The animal, like the wanderer, belongs to the between. It exists beyond itself and this means it requires that beyond to be what it is. All that appears (essences) marks the world around it, perhaps even finding it remarkable, memorable. What appears takes part in the reciprocal relation of exposure. Whatever appears in the blue between, like the blue deer, offers the relations of support and witnessing that bear the world and make it bearable in turn. Such is our mortality.

Notes

- 1 A reliable recapitulation of the course, along with critical commentary, is found in William McNeill, “Life Beyond the Organism: Animal Being in Heidegger’s Freiburg Lectures, 1929–30” in *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, ed. Peter H. Steeves (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 197–248. Didier Franck’s provocative essay “Being and the Living” treats the 1929–30 lecture course while calling attention to overlooked passages in *Being and Time* where biological and physiological aspects of Dasein are mentioned or discussed. His consideration of anxiety is particularly intriguing; see Didier Franck, “Being and the Living” in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, eds. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), 144–45.
- 2 Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 30.
- 3 In citing the works of Georg Trakl, I will refer to both the German text of Georg Trakl, *Dichtungen und Briefe*, 2nd Edition, *historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, vol. 1, ed. Walther Killy and Hans Szklenar (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1987), hereafter abbreviated “HKA,” and, after a slash, to the English translation, *The Poems of Georg Trakl*, trans. Margitt Leibert (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2007). Here, “Frühling der Seele,” HKA 141/160, tm; cited at GA 12: 35/*On the Way to Language* (hereafter “OWL”), 161.
- 4 GA 12: 37/OWL 163; tm.
- 5 GA 12: 47/OWL 171; tm.
- 6 I have discussed this going among the things in Trakl’s poetry in “Entering the World of Pain: Heidegger,” *Telos* 150 (Spring 2010): 83–96.
- 7 GA 12: 47/OWL 171; tm.
- 8 GA 12: 38/OWL 164.
- 9 GA 12: 40/OWL 165; tm.

- 10 GA 9: 423/*Pathmarks* 320.
- 11 “Kindheit,” HKA 79/95, “An den Knaben Elis,” HKA 84/100; tm, cited at GA 12: 40/OWL 165.
- 12 “Nachtlied,” HKA 68/85; tm, cited at GA 12: 40/OWL 166.
- 13 GA 12: 40–41/OWL 166; tm. One of the arguments in Lawlor’s *This Is Not Sufficient*, following Derrida, is that such gathering is denied to animals: “In any case, and this is the central point, animals do not have access to the ‘as such’ or gathering.” See Leonard Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 50.
- 14 “Passion,” HKA 125/142, tm.
- 15 “Sommersneige,” HKA 137/155, tm, cited at GA 12: 39/OWL 164.
- 16 GA 12: 41/OWL 166; tm.
- 17 GA 12: 41/OWL 166; tm.
- 18 Calarco views part of Derrida’s concern with the animal to be that “working through the question of the animal at this level, at the level of proto-ethical exposure, will challenge the metaphysical grounding of modern ethics and politics and reorient thought along alternative lines” (Calarco, *Zoographies*, 119–20). We believe the observing recollection of the blue deer to have gone no small distance along these same lines.
- 19 GA 12: 46/OWL 170; tm.
- 20 GA 12: 46/OWL 170; tm.
- 21 GA 12: 46/OWL 170–71; tm.
- 22 It has also turned rationality into unimaginative calculative planning. See “Overcoming Metaphysics” on the instinctual nature of planning, GA 7: 92–93/*The End of Philosophy*, 105–6.
- 23 GA 12: 41/OWL 166–67; tm. For Nietzsche’s claim, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 81 and vol. 11 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 125.
- 24 GA 12: 41/OWL 167; tm.
- 25 Grimm and Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. “sanft.”
- 26 GA 12: 41/OWL 166; tm.

- 27 GA 12: 41/OWL 166; tm.
- 28 The 1928–29 lecture course *Introduction to Philosophy* devotes a few pages to the nature of childhood (more specifically to Dasein in both its early [*frühzeitliche*] and young [*frühmenschliche*] forms). Heidegger immediately specifies young Dasein, noting that “essentially different without further ado it is not, even if it is to be understood otherwise than as human” (GA 27: 123). Heidegger then worries over the methodological question of how to conceive of such a Dasein, deciding that it can only be pursued in something of a “privative manner, i.e. in departure from a positive foundational conception of Dasein” (GA 27: 123). The similarities with the treatment of the animal are striking. And just as the animal operated in a ring of behavedness (*Benommenheit*) which has connotations of a kind of captivated daze, so too is the child said to be in a “semi-conscious state [*Dämmerzustand*]” (GA 27: 125). Most importantly, however, the child does not simply comport to beings, rather “Some being is already open to the child, although still no comportment to this being follows” (GA 27: 125). As Heidegger explains, “the semi-conscious state in which such a young Dasein is, does not mean that there would be still no relation [*Verhältnis*] to beings, but rather only that this self-comporting to ... [*Sichverhalten zu ...*] still has no definite goal. The being with the beings is to a certain extent still clouded over, not yet illuminated, such that this Dasein can still make no determinate use of the beings” (GA 27: 126). So let us simply note that even at the time of fundamental ontology, there is recognition of a distinction between the adult and the child, that the human is not simply human. The category that is supposed to be preserved against contamination by an animal other, for example, is already compromised. Not all humans are alike.
- 29 See GA 29/30: 388/267; GA 2: 320/*Being and Time* (2010), 232; and GA 79: 17–18.
- 30 GA 79: 56.
- 31 GA 79: 18; cf. GA 7: 180/*Poetry, Language, Thought* (2001), 176.

32 GA 79: 56.

33 GA 12: 42/OWL 167; tm. Obviously such a view calls into question the supposed anthropocentrism of Heidegger, a central tenet of the interpretations of animality in Heidegger. Calarco, as one instance among many, claims: “The problem is rather that Heidegger uncritically accepts two basic tenets of ontotheological anthropocentrism: that human beings and animals can be clearly and cleanly distinguished in their essence; and that such a distinction between human beings and animals even needs to be drawn” (Calarco, *Zoographies*, 30). With the mortality of the blue deer, this no longer seems the case.

BOOK REVIEW

Richard Capobianco. *Engaging Heidegger*.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. 182 Pages.

Reviewed by Lawrence J. Hatab

Richard Capobianco's impressive book, *Engaging Heidegger*, tackles some fundamental questions in Heidegger's thought, and does so in a remarkably clear and pointed manner. In this brief review I address the following salient topics covered in the text: the status of the *Seinsfrage* in Heidegger's later thought, particularly in relation to *Ereignis*; the question of homelessness and being-at-home; and the position of *Angst* in some of Heidegger's writings after *Being and Time*.

In his first two chapters, Capobianco challenges some readings of Heidegger that see the later writings moving beyond or supplanting the centrality of being in the early works. The primary example of this supposed shift is the focus on *Ereignis*, understood as that which "gives" being (as in *es gibt Sein*). Capobianco makes a thoroughly convincing argument that the being-question remains the fundamental *Sache* in Heidegger's thought through to the end (well documented in the late text, *Four Seminars*). This argument is trenchant as long as being is shown in its "difference" from beings and metaphysical constructs drawn from beings—a difference named in such words as *Seyn*, *Sein selbst*, *Sein als solches*, and *Sein als Sein*. Being is then different from beings (*Seiendes*) and from the metaphysical "beingness" (*Seiendheit*) of beings. In Capobianco's analysis he draws these distinctions quite effectively. Yet he is careful to maintain that being is always the being

of beings and that something like Dasein's ecstatic dwelling in, and correspondence with, being never recedes in Heidegger's thinking. Capobianco then shows how various focal words in the course of Heidegger's work—e.g., unconcealment, presencing, the freeing, letting, or giving of beings, *Lichtung*, and *Ereignis*—are variations on the primal theme of being. There is a very helpful chart (*Engaging Heidegger*, 8–9) that organizes the different ways in which Heidegger expresses the being-of-the-beingness-of-beings (drawn in terms of being itself), metaphysical beingness, beings, and human responsiveness.

Capobianco also does a great service in his attempt to render the features of being itself that can be tracked in Heidegger's thought, which I will cull from different passages (*Engaging Heidegger*, 4 and 50) as follows: Being as such is the temporal-spatial, finite and negated, appearing of beings in their beingness, which calls forth from Dasein a cor-responsence in language that allows both what appears and appearing itself to become manifest. According to Capobianco, being itself in this sense is the “same” as key words in the later writings, including *Ereignis*. Capobianco concedes that Heidegger's language in the 1950s and 1960s was not always careful on this matter—for instance, the idea that *Ereignis* is that which “gives” being. Yet through a meticulous analysis of various texts, and especially the four seminars given between 1966 and 1973, Capobianco is able to show convincingly that the *Seinsfrage* was the single question animating Heidegger's entire thought, and that *Ereignis* gives the *beingness* of beings, not being itself, for which *Ereignis* is “another name” (see the summary discussion in *Engaging Heidegger*, 43ff).

I have no criticism of Capobianco's work in these first two chapters; I am in complete agreement with their contents. But I would like to offer what I think is a supplement to his argument by considering how we should understand the language of Heidegger's core words. As with any thinker, we are prone to look for the fundamental terms, what these terms mean, and whether any change in terms is a change in the thought. Capobianco is warning us against asserting the latter notion, and his account of being itself that I culled earlier is an impressive

articulation of what seems to persist throughout Heidegger's thinking (with duly noted variations or shifts of emphasis, of course). With such an articulation of *die Sache selbst*, I don't really care what we call it, although care *is* called for when selecting or considering the resonances of a focal word or phrase.

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger called ontology "the effort to bring being into words."¹ For me, Heidegger's thinking, from beginning to end, was an "experiment" in bringing the question of being *into* words, not in the typical philosophical manner of canonical terms meant to govern thought, but an attempt to gather in language a resonant response to the enabling *environment* of language and thought, which as such cannot be exhausted by language and thought. For this reason I think we should recognize "term limits" with respect to Heidegger's focal words, or to paraphrase his remark about the *Gesamtausgabe*, we should attend to "ways, not words."

I draw these remarks from my understanding of Heidegger's early notion of formal indication, where philosophical concepts arise out of concerned dealings in factual life and then point back to the task of factual enactment. Formal indications are consequently shot through with the finitude of existence and consequently they cannot be construed as *a priori* necessary structures, generalizations, universals, or essences—all of which are meant to "govern" what can be said of things. Such constructs are drawn from the presumption of reflection upon objectified entities. Formal indication is responsive to what is already operating *before* reflection and objectification—hence concepts such as *Zuhandenheit*, *Befindlichkeit*, care, etc. This is why philosophy, for Heidegger, is hermeneutic phenomenology, because it can only engage in the *interpretation* of what is "already" showing itself in factual life. The point is that philosophical concepts are self-limiting *indications* that can only be "fulfilled" in factual experience. The "hermeneutic circle" is a circulation between language and lived experience that cannot presume to offer fixed truths or objective explanations. At one point in *Being and Time* Heidegger acknowledges the circularity of his own text as interpretation; it can engage, not in "proof," but only in

“allowing to come into words” an understanding of being, from which readers can discern for themselves whether the text’s “formal-indicative sketch” is disclosive of understanding or not.² In other words, there is no free-standing measure for the success of a text, only what I would call an experiment calling for “reader response.”

I find a similar notion even in the later text *Time and Being*. Heidegger begins and ends this essay with a warning about its presentation in “propositions” (*Aussagesätzen*), which are an obstacle to addressing the *Sache* of the text, which is an *experience* of *Ereignis*.³ The *Protokoll* of the lecture appended to the main text is called an experiment (*Versuch*) that attempts to open up an experience of *die Sache* of the text by way of a conversation between participants in the lecture.⁴ Thinking deploys notions such as “extending” and “giving,” in order to work from them (*abarbeiten*) and to perform and consummate (*vollziehen*) the *Übergang* to the experience of thinking. Such an ambiguous relation between language and *die Sache* is not something we can talk about (*darüber reden*). It can only be decided performatively, “by whether such a saying succeeds or not.”⁵

My point is that we should avoid the hypostasization of any fundamental terms in Heidegger’s thought. *Die Sache selbst* is a continuing circulation between thoughtful language and the factual environment “giving” language—which is measured not by the “right” words but by whether words succeed in resonating with listeners, in eliciting the finite field of being that Capobianco has articulated so well.

In Ch. 3 of his book, Capobianco does a wonderful job of trying to navigate the changing ways in which Heidegger deployed the terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, referring to being and not being at home. The course of this deployment seems to be as follows: In *Being and Time* the *unheimlich* is “more primordial” than the *heimlich*, in that *Angst* lurks beneath, and then disrupts, Dasein’s everyday familiarity. In the 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Sophocles’ ode from *Antigone* sets a clear divide between the *unheimlich*, transgressive character of the creator and the protective hearth of the normal world. In the 1942 *Der Ister*, Heidegger seems to offer a different reading of the ode, wherein

humans can become at home in being, but in the mixed sense of das *Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein*. In this and other reflections on Hölderlin, Heidegger speaks of the joy in coming to terms with the finitude of being as one's true home, rather than the fleeing absorption in beings. Finally, in the 1955 *Gelassenheit* and the 1961 Messkirch Address, Heidegger emphasizes the "rootedness" of the homeland (*Heimat*), contrasted with the *unheimlich* character of technicity and calculative thinking. Being at home can now be accomplished in the calm of meditative thinking and letting-be, rather than the constant assault of technological machines and controls.

Capobianco is right to see this course of thinking as complicated and apparently conflicted, and he makes a noble effort to chart the movement. He is also right to question how the last sense of being at home—which is at rest and even "gladsome"—can be squared with earlier insights about engaging the disrupting finitude of being. I learned a lot from Capobianco's account and I concede the difficult complexity in this topic. But I want to question some of the terms of his analysis, not to discount it entirely, but to revise it. For one thing, I wonder if the kind of circumspection Capobianco provides on the supposed shifts from the *Seinsfrage* might be appropriate here too, at least in some respects.

I am not sure that the different treatments of home and homelessness are as distinct or divided as Capobianco suggests. Take the rootedness-*unheimlich* contrast in *Gelassenheit*, where variations of *Wurzel* are employed. It turns out that variants of *entwurzeln* were used in *Being and Time* to describe Dasein's everyday absorption in beings.⁶ This seems to mean that Dasein's authentic existence sparked by the *Unheimlichkeit* of *Angst* is a kind of "rootedness," and so the primordially of the *unheimlich* can imply some sense of being at home. Although Heidegger does not spell this out clearly in *Being and Time*, I do not think that everyday being *heimlich* in the world and the *unheimlich* character of *Angst* should be sharply divided. We should remember that the "unity" of care also joins the "double meaning" of *Sorge*—concernful devotedness and worriedness—as a *single* phenomenon,⁷ a twofold disposition that could be said to mark authentic existence. Authenticity is not a

departure from, but rather a modification of, inauthenticity,⁸ where Dasein “exists finitely”⁹—which I have always taken to mean *embracing* the *unheimlich* dimension of existence, given the “unshakable joy” that Heidegger connects with Dasein’s anxious potentiality-for-being.¹⁰ So I am not sure Capobianco is right when he contrasts the *unheimlich* in *Being and Time* as a “destination” with the *unheimlich* as a “passage” to joyful dwelling in the Hölderlin essays (*Engaging Heidegger*, 64).

Capobianco wonders if Heidegger’s later musings on *Heimat* by-passed earlier (and preferable) *heimlich-unheimlich* blends, and he may be right. But the later *unheimlich* absorption in technicity may recall the uprootedness of everyday Dasein in *Being and Time*. Since technicity is marked by securing and controlling the earth, it would seem that some kind of disorienting break with technicity would be called for. Perhaps Heidegger’s late writings try to stress the positive aspects of dwelling, but such things are not absent in earlier treatments. The “rest” and “calm” that Capobianco finds in later texts may indeed be strikingly different, but we should recall the calm that Heidegger attributes to *Angst* in the 1929 “What is Metaphysics?”¹¹ We should also not discount the possibility that the apparent quietism in later works was symptomatic of his own withdrawal after the disaster of his earlier politics.

In Ch. 4, Capobianco examines another possible transition in Heidegger’s thought: from *Angst* to astonishment, where a disrupting sense of *Angst* gives way to more positive senses of wonder (*Wunder*), awe (*Scheu*), and astonishment (*Erstaunen*) in later works. Here again I would call for some caution. Capobianco is certainly right in tracking these shifts, and in showing how *Angst* in “What is Metaphysics?” (and in the 1943 Postscript and 1949 Introduction) seems different from *Being and Time*. My sense of this, however, is that the “What is Metaphysics?” trilogy begins to articulate “being itself,” for which *Being and Time* was preparatory. The disruption of *Angst* in *Being and Time* sets up, I think, the structure of being and nothing in “What is Metaphysics?” As *Angst* opens up the possibility of authentic existence in *Being and Time*, *Angst* in “What is Metaphysics?” opens up the structure of the *being* of beings—*by way of* the experience of *das Nichts*.

Capobianco rightly shows that wonder and awe, rather than *Angst*, are emphasized after the 1920s. But I think that “What is Metaphysics?” shows a link. In the 1943 Postscript, *Angst* “guarantees the enigmatic possibility of experiencing being,” which is “close by” *Angst* and designated as “the wonder of all wonders: *that* beings are.”¹² Yet the original 1929 essay has *Angst* connected with the “nihilation of the nothing,” in which beings as a whole are shown in their “heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other—with respect to the nothing.” In *Angst*, “the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings—and not nothing.”¹³ In 1929 *Angst* seems necessary for evoking wonder, which arises *only* because of the nothing.¹⁴ Does *Angst* in 1943 still retain some essential role in wonder and awe, “guaranteeing” them, as it were? In any case, I’m not sure that *Angst* is exchanged for wonder and awe, and here’s why: The absorption in beings requires disruption to open up the meaning of being; *Angst* and *das Nichts* present this disruption, which nevertheless makes *possible* the awe over being itself: that beings *are—not* nothing. For this reason I question Capobianco’s apparent conjunction of the nothing and being itself (*Engaging Heidegger*, 75). In 1929 Heidegger does call them “the same,” but in the sense that they “belong together.”¹⁵ How? Not in being indeterminate (as in Hegel), but because “being itself is essentially finite,” which I take to mean: the *being* of beings can be shown only “out of” the experience of the nothing, in that beings are *not* nothing.¹⁶

Finally, Capobianco shows how the 1949 Introduction seems to link *Angst* with the oblivion of being in the modern age, such that (if I read Capobianco correctly) *Angst* no longer opens up being but covers it up. Yet Heidegger simply says we need to “endure anxiously” this oblivion.¹⁷ Can we conclude from this remark that *Angst* is now something different from its meaning in 1929 and 1943? If it is, I don’t understand, and perhaps Capobianco can say more about how this is so.

In any case, the foregoing survey of the three selected issues hopefully underscores just how highly illuminating and provocative *Engaging Heidegger* is.

Notes

- 1 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 43.
- 2 SZ 314-15.
- 3 *On Time and Being*, 2, 5, 24; tm.
- 4 *On Time and Being*, 25-26; tm.
- 5 *On Time and Being*, 51; tm.
- 6 See SZ 170, 173, 177, 222.
- 7 SZ 199.
- 8 SZ 129.
- 9 SZ 329.
- 10 SZ 310.
- 11 *Pathmarks*, 90.
- 12 *Pathmarks*, 234; tm.
- 13 *Pathmarks*, 90.
- 14 *Pathmarks*, 95.
- 15 *Pathmarks*, 94.
- 16 *Pathmarks*, 95.
- 17 *Pathmarks*, 281-82.

TEXTS OF HEIDEGGER CITED AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

The letters 'tm' in footnotes stand for 'translation modified by the author of the footnote.' Where possible, English translations are indicated following the reference to the original German and a slash '/' or equal sign '='.

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