

Gatherings

**THE
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ANNUAL**

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Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual

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The Point of Language in Heidegger's Thinking: A Call for the Revival of Formal Indication

Lawrence J. Hatab

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger insists that philosophy is not the discovery of free-standing facts or truths that can ground inferences in unadulterated, fixed foundations. Philosophy can only work within already operating elements (practices, social relations, language uses, and inherited traditions) that cannot be put aside in thinking about the world. Philosophical reflection, therefore, is “interpretation” of pre-reflective elements of Dasein’s world-involvement. In section 32 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger calls interpretation the articulation of Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being; and articulation is then fleshed out in Sections 33 and 34, which deal with assertion (*Aussage*), discourse (*Rede*) and language (*Sprache*). Interpretation therefore is essentially a matter of language, and in particular a matter of philosophical language.

For Heidegger, language indicates (*anzeigt*) and points out or shows (*zeigt*) something in the world. In a later work Heidegger tells us that “man is that being who has his being by pointing to what is, and that particular beings manifest themselves as such by this pointing” (GA 8: 153/149). The essence of language is a “saying as pointing,” which cannot be captured by signification, since all “signs” emerge out of this more original indicative showing (GA 12: 242/OWL 123). Philosophical language can exhibit a comparable pointing function with respect to Heidegger’s notion of formal indication (*formale Anzeige*), which I think is one of his great contributions to philosophy.¹

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not offer any explicit discussion of formal indication, yet the importance of this notion for his phenomenology has been made clear by the explicit accounts in lecture courses surrounding the publication of *Being and Time*.² For Heidegger, all philosophical concepts are formal indications (GA 29/30: 425/293), “formal” in gathering the focal meaning of lived experiences, and “indications” in pointing to (*an-zeigen*) engaged circumstances and practices that cannot be fully captured in, or exhausted by, formal concepts. Philosophical concepts themselves arise out of “factual life experience” and then point back to tasks of performance (GA 60: 8–9, 62–63/6–7, 43).³ Formal indications mirror the contingencies of facticity and accordingly are not “exact” but rather “vacillating, vague, manifold, and fluctuating” (GA 60: 3/3). Such notions are therefore shot through with the finitude of existence, and so philosophical concepts cannot be construed as *a priori* necessary structures or fixed universals that can ground thinking for demonstrative techniques (GA 63: 80/62).⁴ A formal indication, such as care (*Sorge*), is a verbal experiment in sense-making that simply *shows* a region of existence, in a manner that does not operate according to traditional conceptual criteria that are presumed to govern or ground thinking (definitions, universals, necessary and sufficient conditions). Rather than *giving* sense to otherwise inchoate experience, formal indications are meant to gather the already implicit sense of factual experience.⁵

Although factual life is both the origin and destination of philosophical thinking, everyday tendencies present obstacles to the emergence of philosophy (GA 60: 15/11). Ordinary understanding is given in moods and practical familiarity, and here things are known by acquaintance (*bekannt*) but unrecognized (*unerkannt*) in their being because we *lack* concepts (GA 3: 232–34/159). The everyday understanding of being blocks philosophical insights because of its pervasiveness, constancy, indeterminacy, and unquestionableness (GA 3: 234–35/160). Philosophy amounts to an illuminating disruption of factual life by interrogation, and philosophical questioning as such does not arise by “argument” but by its own factual experience of

primal moods such as anxiety and wonder.⁶ Such moods present a radical disorientation that nevertheless prepares the possibility of a reorientation through the formation of concepts that 1) articulate the determinate significance of factual experience (that is to say, interpretation), and yet 2) retain the elements of finitude given in factual life and the interrogative openness of philosophy's own inception. In summation, philosophical concepts (*Begriffe*) are "comprehensive concepts" (*In-begriffe*) that comprehend (*begreifen*) – at once – both something "whole" (*Ganz*) and human "philosophizing existence," which comes from being "gripped" (*er-griffen*) by the import of philosophical questions in primal moods (GA 29/30: 9-13/7-9).

It is important to recognize that Heidegger's early phenomenology insists upon both the necessity and the limitations of philosophical concept formation. For Heidegger, "philosophy is something living only where it comes to language and expresses itself," and the language of concepts is the "essence and power" of philosophy (GA 29/30: 422/291). Yet once expressed, concepts are prone to a fundamental misunderstanding. Because of the reflective "idleness" of philosophy, concepts can be taken as something *vorhanden*, as ascertainable entities in and of themselves, rather than formal gatherings of a "specifically determined and directed questioning" having to do with a "transformation of human Dasein" (GA 29/30: 423, 426/292, 294). Heidegger clearly states that "formal characterization does not give us the essence" (GA 29/30: 425/293). The remedy for this problem is to understand formal concepts as indications of the *task* of philosophy that can only be exhibited and played out in life. Traditional philosophy can be diagnosed as fixing on the formal content of concepts without their indicative character (GA 60: 62-63/43), and the danger of this tendency, Heidegger tells us, is a persistent possibility to which *everyone* is prone, including those who, with Heidegger, are trying to expose the danger (GA 29/30: 429, 433-34/296, 299-300).

LANGUAGE AND BEING

Since the essence of philosophy is conceptual language, a key question concerns the relation of language to being. In “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger indicates his conviction in the later thought that language is the “house of being” (GA 9: 313/239), which omits any radical distinction between language and being, since language is “the clearing-concealing advent of being itself” (GA 9: 326/249). Heidegger’s early writings seem less radical in that language in *Being and Time* is presented as *one* of Dasein’s fundamental existential bearings (along with understanding and mood), and since various analyses of assertoric truth seem to differentiate the language of assertions from a more original experience of being-in-the-world. But I am not convinced that such a periodic shift on the question of language is as pronounced as we might think.

In section 33 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger discusses assertion (*Aussage*) as a derivative mode of interpretation. Here he seems to confine the analysis of assertions to the theoretical sense of propositional judgment (*Urteil*). Heidegger delineates three elements of an assertion: pointing out (*Aufzeigen*), predication, and communication (*Mitteilung*), the last of which is called a “speaking forth” (*Heraus-sage*). He then states that assertion is thoroughly embedded in concerned being-in-the-world, the various kinds of factual fore-having that make assertion possible. He reiterates the *zuhanden-vorhanden* dynamic and says that assertions turn *zuhanden* entities into *vorhanden* “objects” of reference. In this way the existential-hermeneutical as-structure of being-in-the-world is modified into the apophantical as-structure of discrete things with properties, cut off from the wider field of concerned involvements (GA 2: 210/SZ 158).

This section of the text immediately precedes the section on language (§34), and even the analysis of assertion in section 33 brings up language in a manner relevant to my discussion. Heidegger writes that *in between* wholly absorbed concerned dealings and propositional assertions about *vorhanden* entities there is a range of “intermediate assertions about the happenings in the environment.” And these spoken

sentences cannot be traced back to theoretical propositions because they have their own disclosive meaning in those contexts (GA 2: 210/SZ 158).⁷ It is clear that language is a pervasive force throughout Dasein's being-in-the-world, because in section 34 Heidegger tells us that only from an analytical standpoint do we *now* come to the question of language, because obviously it had already been operative in all the previous discussions of mood, understanding, interpretation, and assertion. Language as communicative discourse is *equiprimordial* with all other elements of Dasein's disclosedness (GA 2: 213/SZ 161). The hermeneutical as-structures preceding apophantical as-structures cannot be non-linguistic if the hermeneutical is a matter of interpretation, which is a matter of articulation in language. Indeed, not only is language equiprimordial *with* understanding and mood, at one point Heidegger says that understanding and mood are "determined equiprimordially" *by* language (GA 2: 177/SZ 133).

Heidegger reiterates this discussion of language in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (GA 29/30: 492-507/339-49). In line with the intermediate assertions mentioned in *Being and Time*, Heidegger talks of "spontaneous utterances" (e.g., "the board is badly positioned") in which we "speak out of" disclosive "wholes" in everyday contexts of meaning, which function "without any instruction or theoretical reflection," in other words, "specific contexts" of speech that logic and epistemology overlook (GA 29/30: 502-504/346-47). These contexts display Dasein's "pre-logical being open for beings, *out of which* every logos must speak," a "pre-logical manifestness of beings *in the logos*" (GA 29/30: 505/348, em). The ambiguity about language is clearly shown in these two passages: a pre-logical openness to being *out of* which language speaks, together with this openness manifested *in* language. As I read him, Heidegger in *Being and Time* is not radically differentiating language and disclosedness of being, because a more original *orientation* toward language allows for bridging the difference, even and especially with respect to the question of truth, understood as disclosure or unconcealment. If I am right, then Heidegger's espousal of a primal "pre-propositional" truth is *not* something pre-linguistic.⁸

Pre-propositional truth can involve immediate speech acts that are therefore not prior to language, but rather prior to the conversion of living utterances into abstract, theoretical references called “propositions.” This would help explain the mixed messages in Heidegger’s discussion of assertion in *Being and Time*. In a concrete circumstance, the utterance “The hammer is too heavy” gives a primordial interpretation “not in a theoretical statement but in an action of circumspective concern.” Yet this action is something “expressed,” a linguistic act that need not be construed as an “assertion” in a technical propositional sense (GA 2: 209/SZ 157). Heidegger suggests a non-technical sense in referring to an experiential “holding” (*Behalten*) of an assertion that is not a representational procedure, but “is itself a way of being-in-the-world” (GA 2: 83/SZ 62). In direct situations of communicative speech, language can be immediately world-disclosive in a “non-propositional” sense, without our wondering about the relationship between propositions and things. If someone says to me, “This is the right tool to use,” the effect of disclosiveness here does not follow a correspondence-linkage, but rather appropriate showing or pointing out, *in* language.⁹ It helps to notice Heidegger’s claim that *in practice*, language in general and even signs can operate in a *zuhanden* manner of immediate disclosedness (GA 2: 109–10, 214, 296–97/SZ 82, 161, 224).¹⁰ We are told in another early lecture course that linguistic expression (*Sprachausdruck*) “need not be simply theoretical or even object-specific, but is primordially living and experiential [*erlebend*]” (GA 56/57: 117/98).¹¹ Assertions (*Aussagen*) are *acts* of meaning (*Bedeutungsakte*), which are an “expressedness” (*Ausdrücklichkeit*) of lived experiences or comportments (*Verhaltungen*) – *by way of* their meaning (GA 20: 74/56). An example would be an assertion “in and for a practical function” (GA 21: 156/131), as in the tool example above.¹² Accordingly we can summarize by saying that a hermeneutics of factual life includes a pre-propositional dimension of *factual language*. Likewise, formal indication can point not only to factual being-in-the-world but to factual language as well, which I will expand upon shortly.

Language and being, therefore, are not separate spheres. Not only does language enact the as-structures that articulate the fore-structures of Dasein's understanding, even an "experience" of something without speaking carries articulation with it if it is a meaningful experience (GA 2: 198-99/SZ 149). Even our "simplest perceptions," Heidegger says, are

already expressed, even more, are *interpreted* in a certain way. . . . What is primary and original here? It is not so much that we see the objects and things but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: We do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what one says about the matter. (GA 20: 75/56)

We can grasp this idea more deeply if we consider child development and language acquisition, which help shape a child's meaningful engagement with the world.¹⁵

THE *KEHRE*

Heidegger clearly takes *Being and Time* to be a philosophical work that aims for a conceptual grasp of the meaning of being (GA 2: 9-10/SZ 7). The famous *Kehre* announcement in "Letter on Humanism" can be understood in the context of conceptualization. The "failure" of *Being and Time* is attributed to its *language* and not its underlying project; and the failure was not exactly its language but its participation in the language of metaphysics (GA 9: 327-28/249-50). Later in the essay Heidegger says something more: *Being and Time* was laboring to draw out a radical "phenomenological seeing," but in order for his work to gain traction and be "understandable for existing philosophy," it could *only* be expressed "within the horizon of existing philosophy and its current use of terms" (GA 9: 357/271). Moreover, he says that the conceptual language of *Being and Time* was attempting a thinking that is "more rigorous than the conceptual" (GA 9: 357/271). But he came to believe that his terminology would lead "inevitably into error," for the most part because the concepts were not "rethought" by *readers* according to the particular *Sache* of the work; the concepts were read

only “according to the established terminology in its customary meaning” (GA 9: 357/271).

Although Heidegger does not say so specifically, it seems clear to me that the *Kehre* in some respects had to do with the failure, not of his early philosophical concepts, but of his effort to have these concepts read as formal indications (as a conceptual language pointing to a “more rigorous” phenomenological apprehension of non-conceptual factual life). Accordingly, one way to understand Heidegger’s account of the “end of philosophy” is his capitulation on the project of formally indicative concepts; and we should recall his early admonition that anyone, including his own circle, can lapse into the seduction of formal concentration at the expense of the indicative force of concepts.

In this light perhaps we can better understand Heidegger’s subsequent path that shifted in the direction of “poetical thinking.” Although poetry and thinking are not identical, they belong together as a reciprocal “Saying” that tries to bring to language the pre-theoretical meaning of human dwelling in a finite world, as well as that which withdraws and conceals itself in the finite advent of being (GA 7: 196–97/218). Thinking takes up where philosophy leaves off and it is intimately joined with the power of poetic imagery to embody a (factual) concreteness that concepts by nature cannot directly express, even if revised as formal indication (could we call poetry “material indication”?). With terms like *Ereignis*, the Fourfold, giving, and thanking, Heidegger experiments with a language of thinking that shifts from conceptualization to poetic resonance.

In the *Protokoll* to the 1962 text *On Time and Being* (GA 14: 33–66/25–54) – which is called an experiment (*Versuch*) meant to open up the *Sache* of the lecture, *Ereignis*, by way of a *conversation* between participants – we hear that ontic “models” in the lecture (e.g., words such as “extending” and “giving”) in relation to the matter of *Ereignis* are “that from which thinking must necessarily take off as a natural pre-requisite,” because “the language of thinking can only start from [*ausgehen*] natural speech” (GA 14: 60/50, tm).¹⁴ The relation between natural language and the language of thinking requires an “essential interpretation” of language (GA 14: 60/50, tm). Heidegger gives priority

to natural language over formalized language, as long as “natural” is understood not naturalistically but according to the self-manifesting character of *phusis* (GA 12: 252/OWL 132). Although language in principle has an ontic character, ontological thinking must use ontic models because it can only make something manifest through words. We need a language that can speak the “simplicity” (*Einfache*) of language, in such a way that “the language of thinking precisely makes visible the limitations of metaphysical language.” Natural language

is not at first metaphysical. Rather our interpretation of ordinary language is metaphysical, bound to Greek ontology. But man’s relation to language could transform itself analogous to the change of the relation to being. (GA 14: 61/51, tm)

Yet one cannot talk *about* this (*darüber reden*). It can only be decided performatively, “by whether such a saying succeeds or not” (GA 14: 61/51, tm).¹⁵ We are told that the lecture on *Ereignis* can only “point” to an *experience* (GA 14: 33, 63/25–26, 54). Heidegger often addresses such a matter as an experience of *language*, which in another text is called a transformation of our *relation* to language, not the creation of new words or phrases (GA 12: 255/OWL 135). Yet appropriate words and phrases can indicatively *point* to the *Sache* of thinking.

LANGUAGE AND THE QUESTION OF BEING

I now want to connect the discussion of formal indication and factual language with Heidegger’s ongoing investigation of the *Seinsfrage*. From early on Heidegger wanted to penetrate and overcome traditional conceptions of being – wherein being was understood as present-centered, as a reified reduction to beings, as captured by rational universals, or as an empty generality – in favor of a more original conception of being understood as the finite temporal emergence of factual meaning. Yet it is important to ask how traditional ontology came to its conceptions. Among Heidegger’s treatments of this question, the most relevant for my purposes is given in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (GA

40), particularly Chapter Two, “On the Grammar and Etymology of the Word ‘Being,’” which has not received much attention in the scholarship, and which will help develop my previous suggestion that formal indication can involve a pointing to factual language.¹⁶

Right before this chapter, Heidegger says: “For us the question about *being* will be most intimately intertwined with the question about *language*” (GA 40: 55/56). Indeed, Heidegger elevates language to such an extent that earlier in the text ontology itself is called “the effort to put being into words” (GA 40: 44/45). At the start of the chapter in question, Heidegger tells us that the grammatical analysis will give a hint or indication (*Hinweis*) of how to understand the history and meaning of philosophical words (GA 40: 56/57). Although grammar has become a regulation and reification of language, an investigation of the word “being” must *begin* with a grammatical account, which is not a barren or irrelevant game, because it leads us to open up the essential relation between being and language, yet in a way that cannot be reduced to grammatical forms (GA 40: 56–58/57–59). The philosophical concept of being, *das Sein*, is the result of converting a verb (which is temporally tensed) into a noun (like *das Gehen*), a verbal substantive derived from the infinitive form (in English, literally “the to be”).¹⁷

The verbal infinitive is crucial for Heidegger’s analysis. Grammatical inflections of verbs and nouns identify and formalize the different facets of word usage that reflect the various ways in which things, actions, and temporality are engaged.¹⁸ The “declension” of verbs names a “decline” or deviation from a standard form (first-person singular) that “stands” as a reference point for grammatical specifications. The infinitive is a unique kind of declension compared to other kinds that can express specific forms of speech (such as person, number, tense, voice, and mood). The infinitive (from the Latin *infinitivus*) expresses no specific form; it is non-finite or in-definite, thereby rendering the general meaning of the verb in the abstract, independent of specific uses (GA 40: 69–73/72–75). The verbal substantive completes the abstraction by identifying a verb (*sein*) as a noun by way of the definite article (*das Sein*).¹⁹ The indefiniteness of the infinitive thus becomes *fixed* in

isolation from the verb inflections and their temporal character (GA 40: 73-74/76). The nominal isolation of the verbal meaning of being provides a linguistic background that made possible the traditional conceptions of being that Heidegger is interrogating – and that adds weight to his own efforts to correlate being and time, since being is originally a temporal (verb) construction.²⁰ The verbal substantive “being” (*das Sein*), as an “object” of inquiry, allows a reification of being and a shift away from particular uses of the verb “to be” that mark its more factual meaning – I am tired, you were wrong, and so on.²¹

Continuing this line of analysis, Heidegger offers an etymological investigation of the word being/*Sein* (GA 40: 75-79/77-81). From Sanskrit and Indo-Germanic roots, Heidegger suggests the original notions of living, emerging, and abiding as three stem meanings of the word being.²² When the verbal substantive fixes and objectifies the abstract character of the infinitive, it affords a covering up (*Verwischung*) of the verb’s “definite modes of meaning,” which completes the evacuation of the three original stem meanings from the word “being.”

In Chapter Three of the text, “The Question of the Essence of Being,” Heidegger’s linguistic venture comes to a head. He asks: Should the abstract “emptiness” of the philosophical word “being” turn us away from it toward particular beings? The answer is no, presumably because that would remain caught in the transformation of the verb form into a nominalization that now can take the name of a “being” (an entity that “is”). The purported emptiness of being stems from a linguistic manipulation, which has shaped the grammatical fate of a *word* “that is worn out, yet remains full” (GA 40: 84/87).

Following Aristotle, Heidegger says that being is not a genus, of which individual beings would count as examples. Yet Heidegger does allow that the word “being” is a general or universal name (*allgemeiner Name*), and understanding the meaning of this word is an “incomparable” task of the highest necessity (GA 40: 86/89). Its generality or universality should not turn us simply toward particulars: “We should remain there, and raise the uniqueness of this name and its naming to the level of knowledge [*Wissen*]” (GA 40: 86/89). This is an important

moment in the text. The grammatical transformation indicated in the word “being” is not rejected or regretted; yet as a *name* it will be redirected back toward its namesake, the verb “to be” and its inflections.

Heidegger tells us that the meaning of being is correlated with the *word* “being” in all its inflections, in a manner that is “essentially different from the relation of all other nouns and verbs in language to the beings that are said in them” (GA 40: 94/96). He illustrates with various sentences: the lecture is in the auditorium; the peasant is in the fields; the book is mine; he is dead; the enemy is in retreat; the dog is in the garden; “Over all the peaks / is peace.” What is evident are the many different *meanings* – from the everyday to the poetic – gathered in the word “is,” which are really evident only if we take the “is” not in a formal manner as having something like a predicative or existential function, but in a concrete manner pertaining to real usage in life (which I earlier called “factual language”). As Heidegger says, the meaning of the “is” in those sentences emerges only if we engage the word “as it actually happens, that is, as spoken each time [*jeweils*] from out of a particular situation, task, and mood, and not as mere propositions and stale examples in a grammar book” (GA 40: 95/97). Heidegger offers that in each of those sentences “being opens up to us in a manifold way” (GA 40: 96/98).²³ Such openings are more in line with the three root meanings of “living,” “emerging,” and “abiding” than with an abstract concept of being. In this respect being is *not* an empty word, because “the ‘is’ evinces in its saying a rich manifoldness of meaning” (GA 40: 97/99). Without our having to meditate on the philosophical meaning of being, the “is” in its manifold meanings “simply wells up in our saying,” and not in an arbitrary manner.²⁴

Then Heidegger asks what he calls a decisive question (GA 40: 97/99): Is the manifold meaning of the “is” based simply on the different meanings expressed in each sentence, or does the “is” – as *being* – itself make *possible* our access to those meanings? He indicates that for now this question can be left open. But it is obvious that the second option is what drives Heidegger as a thinker. At the end of *Being and Time*, after the phenomenological treatment of Dasein’s being-in-the-world, care, being-toward-death, and temporality has been filled out,

Heidegger asks if this has prepared us for an understanding of the meaning of being in general, as that which makes *possible* Dasein's disclosive understanding of being (GA 2: 576/SZ 437). Here Heidegger is following a familiar philosophical agenda of searching for a singular term that can assume some kind of primary, fundamental position.²⁵ For me, this is where the trouble starts.

It was only after I learned about formal indication that *Being and Time* opened up to me in a powerful way. I have never been able to understand why Heidegger did not provide an explicit treatment of formal indication in *Being and Time*, as he did in some of the surrounding lecture courses. In any case, what I have to say may amount to a departure from Heidegger's thinking, but that remains to be seen. I read every basic concept in *Being and Time* as a formal indication. Some concepts are nothing more than indications of something factual, while others gather a focal *meaning* of factual experience. Language (*Sprache*), for instance, simply indicates language uses, while *Rede* gathers the important sense of communicative talk. Care (*Sorge*) likewise carries a focal meaning, particularly the twofold sense of caring and anxious worry (GA 2: 264/SZ 199).

I also want to say that "being" is itself a formal indication, which came to me more clearly reading the two chapters from *Introduction to Metaphysics* treated in this essay. When Heidegger affirms both the verbal substantive "being" and the manifold meanings of the verb "to be" covered up by that grammatical substantive, it seems to me that such a conjunction perfectly fits the notion of formal indication.²⁶ The word "being" can simply *point* to the various uses illustrated in the sentences cited earlier, thereby pointing not only to factual life but factual language as well. Yet this indicative function would not be sufficient because Heidegger's phenomenology always presses on to bring out a deeper meaning of being opened up by temporality, anxiety, and being-toward-death – namely that the meaning of being is radically finite, in the sense of being interwoven with nonbeing, absence, and concealment.²⁷ But any such deepening of the meaning of being would still involve an indicative relation to a factual *experience* of, and *encounter* with, finitude – including factual *linguistic* annunciations of

finitude in real-life uses of the verb “to be” (think of the impact in 1963 of “President Kennedy is dead” – compared to the lifeless logical deployment of the proposition “All men are mortal”).

LANGUAGE, FORMAL INDICATION, AND THE *SACHE*

There is a primal matter for thought, a *Sache*, that runs through Heidegger’s entire course of exploring the *Seinsfrage*, which I would characterize as follows: being understood as the temporal structure of the emergence of meaning, which is finite in being infused with absence, concealment, and limits, which is gathered in language, and which exceeds beings, ourselves included, as the processual environment *in* which human beings find themselves and dwell in disclosive understanding. It is the excessive character of being that prompted Heidegger to look past human subjectivity and announce the processual environment with words like *Ereignis*, *Lichtung*, and *Gelassenheit*. With adequate acclimation to the *Sache*, I think that any of these words will do, even the word “being.”²⁸ I say this because any such word is simply *indicative* of the *Sache*, along with the factual world and experiential engagement that (I would hope) can never be separated from Heidegger’s project of thought, even the most meditative musings in the later writings. In other words, I want to say that any of the keywords mentioned above should be read as formal indications – which means that such notions are *nothing more than words*, understood as “gathering points” that gesture away from themselves toward the full sense of the *Sache* as I have described it.

As noted earlier, Heidegger had warned about the danger of missing the indicative function of philosophical concepts by getting absorbed in formal concepts alone – a warning that applied to his own efforts as well. I want to reinforce this warning with respect to some tendencies in the later Heidegger and in our own posture as Heidegger scholars. Inspired by Heidegger’s grammatical investigations in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, I want to examine the way in which the grammar of Heidegger’s sentences (and our own) can prompt a regrettable divergence from the indicative character of philosophical words.

From the start, Heidegger's investigations insisted on the "ontological difference" between being and beings, which at least in the early phenomenology carried a twofold sense: 1) being pertains to meaning and not entities per se; and 2) meaning is constituted by a negative dimension that exceeds beings and meaning, which shows the radical finitude of being. The ontological difference prompted Heidegger to search for a language that could give voice to the difference, which is named in words or phrases such as "being itself," "being as such," "being as being," and "beyng," followed by later words such as *Ereignis* and *Lichtung*.²⁹ In any case, the difference between being and beings naturally prompts us to put our attention on being as *distinct* from beings. But Heidegger was usually careful to say that whatever can be said of being, it is always the being *of* beings, that being is not some sphere unto itself. The being *of* beings disciplines us to always remain within the sphere of factual existence. Yet the force of grammatical nominalization can encourage or tempt us to ask if being itself "is" in any way something unto itself, or at least to abide with scholarly focus on nominalized terms for the purpose of locating the most original one and laboring over the task of its proper characterization.

It is this domain of thinking that I am trying to interrogate critically. For me, it is the *Sache* described earlier that matters for thought, and as long as the *Sache* is in view it does not matter what term we assign to it, so long as it is appropriately indicative of the *Sache*. Hence I am calling for "term limits," which will warn us against hypostasization or getting bogged down in scholarly arcaneness. But I am especially calling for caution about Heidegger's tendency to talk about being or *Ereignis* making "possible" our access to things, or "giving" or "sending" advents of meaning to us. Unless such notions are significantly restricted in certain (poetic?) ways, I want to resist. For me, being does not make anything possible, or give or send anything. If I am wrong from an exegetical standpoint, then so much the worse for Heidegger. I prefer to say that being or *Ereignis* are *words* that *point* to the *Sache* and its factual significance. Rather than making something "possible," such words can help make something *intelligible*, or gather its meaning, or open us to its radiance.

I am comfortable with a sentence like this from “Letter on Humanism”: “Everything depends on this alone, that the truth of being come to language and that thinking attend to this language” (GA 9: 344/261). I get uncomfortable with sentences like these from *Time and Being*: “The sending of the destiny of being [is] a giving in which the sending source keeps itself back, and thus withdraws from unconcealment” (GA 14: 27/22); “Man belongs to *Ereignis*” (GA 14: 28/23); *Ereignis* is “the extending and sending which opens and preserves” (GA 14: 26/20). To maintain discipline in this matter, it would help to add to, or hold implicit in, any such usage the following construction: “The word (or phrase) X points to *sachlich* condition Y.” So with “Man belongs to *Ereignis*,” we would mean “Human beings belong to what the word *Ereignis* indicates.” Or with “Being itself withdraws from unconcealment,” we mean “The phrase ‘being withdraws’ points to the excess of finitude in every emergence.” Or the phrase “The sending of being is a giving” points to a receptive bearing that can remedy the humanistic myopia of a technological age. I realize that such a maneuver can seem finicky or even a deflation of the power of Heidegger’s language. Yet I worry that some of his sentences display something more than the crucial matters of thought in question or the necessary grammatical modulations required for such thinking. Too often the tenor of Heidegger’s later language sounds more monastic than philosophical, more a dwelling in a precious domain of meditation than an indication of factual existence. Perhaps the disaster of Heidegger’s factual interests in the 1930s caused him to drift into a kind of cloistered disposition – which is the only way I can account for some of his embarrassing talk of the “essence” of something exceeding any factual instance – as in the essence of homelessness versus the need for housing (GA 7: 163/PLT 158–59), or the “essential” sameness of mechanized agriculture and the manufacture of corpses in concentration camps. I confess that I do not readily understand what Heidegger was talking about, but if there is something to learn here, I still don’t see the point.

Notes

- 1 Parts of this article are drawn from my essay, “The Hurdle of Words: Language, Being, and Philosophy in Heidegger,” in *The Hermeneutical Heidegger*, eds. Ingo Farin and Michael Bowler (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 262–82.
- 2 In *Being and Time*, Heidegger occasionally uses variants of *formale* and *Anzeige* in different ways, without the precise phrase (GA 2: 237, 417/SZ 179, 315). The specific phrase “formal indication” is used a number of times (GA 2: 153, 307, 415/SZ 114, 231, 313). In one case, when discussing selfhood in terms of the “I,” Heidegger distinguishes between a *merely* formal, reflective awareness of the “I” and phenomenological attention to the function of the *word* “I,” which is to be “understood only in the sense of a non-binding *formal indication*” – especially as this leads in the direction of Dasein’s selfhood understood as a *who* rather than a *what* (GA 2: 155/SZ 116). In a letter to Karl Löwith (August 20, 1927), Heidegger comments on the tacit function of formal indication in *Being and Time*: “Formal indications . . . [are] still there for me even if I do not speak of them now.” He warns against a hasty deployment of expressions from the lecture courses. Yet later in the 1929–30 lecture course (GA 29/30), Heidegger will present one of his most detailed treatments of formal indication (section 70), and something of that sort would have greatly facilitated a comprehension of *Being and Time*. For helpful discussions of formal indication, see Daniel Dahlstrom, “Heidegger’s Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications,” *Review of Metaphysics* 47: 4 (1994), 775–95; John Van Buren, “The Ethics of *Formale Anzeige* in Heidegger,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69: 2 (1995), 157–70; and Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).
- 3 Facticity is not the “factual” in the modern sense of objective reality or causal explanations; it is marked by historical contingency

- and enactment (GA 60: 9/7). Factual life experience is not a “what” but the meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*) of life concerns and *how* such concerns are engaged (GA 60: 11–12/9).
- 4 Heidegger specifically distinguishes formalization from generalization (GA 60: 57–65/39–45): Generalization constructs a set of common properties drawn from ontical procedures of collection and division; formalization is a non-theoretical gathering of the *sense* of specific differences drawn from concerned dealings and geared toward tasks of enactment (see also GA 29/30: 12/9).
- 5 There are other early lecture courses that explain and utilize formal indication. See especially GA 59, which deploys formal indication extensively. Dahlstrom’s article cited in note 2 provides the numerous page references for that text (784n34).
- 6 See “What is Metaphysics?” in GA 9 and GA 45.
- 7 Section 34 actually emphasizes *Rede* (usually translated as “discourse”) over *Sprache*, or language. It is better to take *Rede* in its specific sense of “talk,” face-to-face conversation. *Rede* is connected with *logos* (GA 2: 34/SZ 25) and is called the precondition for *Sprache*, so that “language” is understood as specific expressions of speech as distinguished from concrete practices of talking. Face-to-face talk also includes various “non-verbal” elements of speech, such as gesture, facial expression, intonation, rhythm, silence, listening, and responding (GA 2: 215–16/SZ 162–63).
- 8 A recent account presuming a pre-linguistic sense of truth is Mark Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Ch. 2.
- 9 It is crucial to stress the communicative element of speech here because the cogency of such an example shines in depicting speech *partners* pointing-out, speaking-out (*aussagen*) to each other in immediate circumstances of disclosive conversation. *Rede*, as the practice of communication, is therefore always an understanding-with (*Mitverstehen*), in line with the *Mitsein* character of being-in-the-world (GA 2: 215/SZ 162). For a helpful essay on language

- and communication in Heidegger, see Jeffrey Powell, “Heidegger and the Communicative World,” *Research in Phenomenology* 40 (2010), 55–71.
- 10 *Zuhandenheit* should not be restricted to mere instrumental conditions because it covers the full range of Dasein’s immersion in pre-reflective engagement with its environment, including things like house and yard, even natural phenomena such as sunlight and heat (GA 24: 152–53, 431–45/108, 303–13). See also GA 2: 90–102/SZ 66–76 and GA 20: 259–69/191–98.
- 11 One way to understand unconcealment in relation to correspondence is that the normal functioning of speech presupposes a tacit *trust* in appropriate disclosure (“truth” is etymologically related to “trust”). Correspondence cannot capture this tacit functioning, but can come into play once the trust in speech is broken or disrupted in various ways. Without such background functioning of disclosive trust, human existence could never get off the ground, and Heidegger’s concept of unconcealment as disclosure is meant to indicate this background.
- 12 In GA 21 Heidegger indicates that formal propositions of the kind “S is P” are withdrawn from lived involvement and concerns (GA 21: 153–58/129–33). With the spoken assertion “This chalk is too scratchy,” it is not a matter of describing an object with properties; its meaning is that there is an *obstacle* to writing.
- 13 See my discussion in *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 33–34.
- 14 All translations from *Time and Being* are my own.
- 15 At one point in *Being and Time*, Heidegger acknowledges the circularity of his own text as interpretation: It cannot engage in “proof,” but only an “allowing to come into words” of an understanding of being, from which readers can discern for themselves whether the text’s “formal-indicative sketch” is disclosive of understanding or not (GA 2: 416–17/SZ 314–15). In other words, there is no free-standing measure for the success of a text.

- 16 One significant treatment is Gregory Fried, “What’s in a Word? Heidegger’s Grammar and Etymology of ‘Being,’” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s “Introduction to Metaphysics,”* eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2001), 125–42.
- 17 The English word “being” is a gerund, a verbal noun that is not inflected, as in “My being here is a mistake.”
- 18 As Heidegger says in an early lecture course, “the categories of grammar in fact originate in those of living speech, in those of the imminent speaking of life itself” (GA 61: 83/63).
- 19 The same procedure is found in the Greek *to einai*.
- 20 In *Being and Time*, language itself is constituted by temporality (GA 2: 462/SZ 349–50).
- 21 As Heidegger indicates (GA 40: 68/70), the grammatical objectification of language was made possible by writing (in Greek, *grammata* referred to written letters), where words become fixed in space as stable entities, as opposed to the impermanent flow of speech. Factual language is best understood in its oral aspect rather than its written form. Note Heidegger’s remark in the Preface: “What is spoken no longer speaks in what is printed” (GA 40: xi/xiv). The way in which the orality-literacy distinction contributes to the questions at hand is a significant area that has not received much attention.
- 22 Fried indicates that modern linguistics supports Heidegger’s account (Fried, “What’s in a Word?” 131).
- 23 In the “Protocol” to *Time and Being* (GA 14: 47–49/38–40), a set of poetic lines from Trakl and Rimbaud are cited as instances of “simple language” that can better show the force of “is” and “there is” (*es gibt*): for example, “It is a light that the wind has extinguished,” and “There is a clock that does not strike.”
- 24 For a helpful sketch of how Heidegger’s account compares with familiar approaches to the function of the word “being” (e.g., as a copula), especially how a “veridical” sense advanced by Charles Kahn overcomes the claim that ontology is only a matter relative to particular languages, see Fried, “What’s in a Word?” 136–41.

- 25 Denis McManus provides a useful analysis of Heidegger's search for a unified conception of being, along with the difficulties faced in such a project in the light of standard philosophical constructions. See his "Ontological Pluralism and the *Being and Time* Project," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51: 4 (2013): 651–73. There is a sense in which Heidegger's ontological agenda compares with that of Aristotle, who saw the need to articulate the meaning of being in a primary sense, or being understood *as* being. Unlike Plato, for Aristotle being (*ousia*) is not a genus or a universal. It has a referential unity in the manner of its "focal meaning" (*pros hen* equivocity), where the word *ousia* gathers the different kinds and modes of being without unifying them according to some common characteristic (see *Metaphysics* 1003a33–1003b19). But there *is* a "metaphysical" sense of *ousia* with respect to the causal function of the unmoved mover. See Enrico Berti, "Multiplicity and Unity of Being in Aristotle," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 101: 1 (2001): 185–207. Short of the unmoved mover, the focal meaning of being is like the hub of a wheel that gathers different spokes together while giving each spoke its own space – which in my estimation carries an "indicative" function.
- 26 In GA 61 Heidegger provides a grammatical analysis of the nominal term "life" as a formally indicative gathering of factual uses of the verb "to live" (GA 61: 79–99/61–75), which is also conjoined with the concept of being (GA 61: 84/64), thus forecasting the association of being and living in *Introduction to Metaphysics*.
- 27 In Chapter Three of *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger notes that one way in which being can exhibit a kind of definiteness as opposed to empty generality is in its relation to nonbeing (GA 40: 83/85).
- 28 Richard Capobianco has argued that the question of being runs through Heidegger's entire career. See his *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012). I owe some of my characterization of the *Seinsfrage* to his formulation on pages 4 and 50. My review of the book is published in *Gatherings* 1 (2011):

86–93. There is even a sense in which the later Heidegger remained within the sphere of his own version of phenomenology. See GA 15: 288, 301, 305, 320–22/11, 19, 22, 31–32.

- 29 The later terminology seems to go further than being, as that which “gives” being. Yet Capobianco has suggested that here “being” names metaphysical conceptions of the beingness of beings, and that something like *Ereignis* is still within the orbit of primal being. See his helpful organization of this point in *Engaging Heidegger* (8–9).

The Disunity of Factical Life: An Ethical Development in Heidegger's Early Work

Derek Aggleton

In Heidegger's essays and lecture courses prior to the publication of *Being and Time*, it is apparent that Heidegger is exploring his signature ontological question about the being of beings. Through his sustained interpretation of Aristotle's analysis of factical life, he develops the senses in which the human being is the kind of being that is concerned about its being. Yet Heidegger also subtly shows that this is a being concerned about the *unity* of its being. In fact, this driving concern should not be ignored by any inquiry into fundamental ontology because the finitude of existence prevents any one mode of unity from being perfected and complete. However, the finitude of existence does not prevent this being from acting *as though* a prevailing sense of unity has managed to transcend the possibilities of ignorance and errancy. Attempts to exceed the finitude of factical life, which are commonplace and remarkably varied, indicate the fact that Dasein develops particular ways of handling its own unity and, importantly, its disunity. As I intend to show, Heidegger's early ontological investigation of how Dasein handles the relationship between unity and disunity informs his later understanding of ethics. Prescriptive normativity, which he critiques in his *Letter on Humanism*, tends to objectify values and thereby act as though disunity were not constitutive of finite existence.

In his early lecture courses, Heidegger's understanding of how Dasein handles the unity and disunity of factical existence is guided by

Aristotle's sense of human life as uniquely self-moved. In his WS 1921–22 lecture course, Heidegger shows that the ontological movements by which Dasein makes sense of itself in the world, namely, prestructure and relucence, are what determine the unity and disunity of existence. His analysis of ontological movement leads him to interpret the relationship between unity and disunity in much the same way that he comes to recognize the intimacy of truth and untruth. In this lecture course, an analysis of ruinance (*die Ruinanz*) helps to explicate the often underprivileged or ignored movement of disunity. My aim in this essay is to show how Heidegger's development of the relationship between disunity and unity, which takes place in an engagement with Aristotle, positions his 1946 proposal of an originary ethics (*ursprüngliche Ethik*). In particular, I will examine the originary ethical dimension of his method of formal indication and his interpretation of Aristotle's *hexis*.

ONTOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

In Heidegger's WS 1921–22 lecture course, the question of ontological movement takes shape in Part III after he orients the investigation by establishing how his phenomenological method grants access to the situatedness of factical life.¹ The influence of Husserl's sense of intentionality on how Heidegger understands situatedness can be seen in the way that he introduces three categories of relationality, i.e. inclination, distance, and sequestration, in order to explicate factical life.² The categories themselves “can be understood *only* insofar as factical life itself is compelled to interpretation” (GA 61: 87/66). The exclusive connection to the interpretation of factical life is essential because Heidegger does not want us to think of these as logical categories in an epistemological ontology. Kant's categories of relation are *a priori* synthetic concepts whereby the understanding makes sense of the manifold of intuitions in its experience. But Heidegger is not focused on the achievement of a substantial or causal understanding of objects, rather only on the basic intentional relatedness of a being to its there. Heidegger develops the categories as “interpreta” of life, not as transcendental structures of the understanding.³ Clarifying his approach, Heidegger remarks, “The

categories are not inventions or a group of logical schemata as such, 'lattices'; on the contrary, they are *alive in life itself* in an original way: alive in order to 'form' life on themselves. They have their own modes of access, which are not foreign to life itself, as if they pounced down upon life from the outside, but instead are precisely the preeminent way in which *life comes to itself*" (GA 61: 88/66). To say that the categories are "alive in life" is to say they are the ontological movements of life as it "comes to itself." As we will see, Heidegger insists that the only way to understand the unity of these categories is to look at them as iterations of the categories of movement. Yet Heidegger also says that caring (*Sorge*) is "*the* basic relational sense of life in itself" through which "a concrete approach to the categorical explication [of factual life] becomes possible" (GA 61: 89/67). Care is the basic intentional character of ontological movement and reveals the specific way that the categories are alive in life.

I will review Heidegger's account of the categories of relationality and movement in 1921–22 not in order to trace their evolution into the existentials of *Being and Time* in 1927, though this is a worthwhile project, but rather for two reasons. First, the way that he relates these two sets of categories amounts to Heidegger's basic understanding of the unity of life, an understanding that I would argue does not substantially change through 1927. In particular, three senses of unity will emerge from this analysis. In turn, these forms of unity will help make it clear that ontological movement is Heidegger's way of setting the structure of factual life in motion so as to accord with the finitude of existence. More specifically, that ontological movement is a formal indication of Dasein's continual effort to make sense of existence in the world. Second, each description of the categories includes considerations that we would not hesitate to call ethical in other contexts. Drawing out the ethical content of these descriptions, which largely involve the inauthenticity of everyday life, reveals the intimate connection between ontology and ethics in Heidegger's work.

The first relational category is inclination (*Neigung*), which "imparts to life a particular weight, a direction of gravity, a pull toward

something” (GA 61: 100/75). But Heidegger is very clear that this weight is not a gravity pulling from the outside. Rather, the particular ontological movement of one’s own life itself forms a weighty inclination toward some thing or event. For its actualization, life can take up and develop the inclination that is alive in a relation. Much of Heidegger’s explanation of this category focuses on a particular development of inclination, which he calls proclivity. He says, “This proclivity impels life into its world, rigidifies it, and brings to maturation a petrification of the directionality of life. Life genuinely finds itself where its own proper proclivity fixes it” (GA 61: 100–101/76). The rigidification, petrification, and fixity of proclivity is the bane and boon of inclination. On the one hand, life “genuinely finds itself” in that which it is inclined to work on with dedication. This is how life takes hold of itself. On the other hand, the dogmatic petrification of a pursuit can lead to obsessive and tyrannical acts that refuse to alter course even in the face of legitimate opposition or refutation. In his analysis Heidegger continually tries to balance the inclusive opening up of and the exclusive focusing in on the weight of relations. For instance, he says that “inclination opens up and provides, from its world, meaningful things as possibilities for the development of worldly distantiations,” but then afterwards he explains that “proclivities, in which factical life becomes set in its ways, offer nutriment and opportunity for an exaggerated, preferential judgment as to what is important” (GA 61: 125/93). In other words, inclination as proclivity both opens up meaningful possibilities and, when it becomes exclusively sustained, closes others off with preferential judgments.

The second category of relationality is distance (*Abstand*), which is to say, having something before oneself. If inclination has to do with the draw of the weight of the meaningful, distance has to do with the manner of comportment toward what is meaningful. Distantiation is situating oneself at a certain distance from that which is meaningful, which allows for certain possibilities of relating to the world and disallows others. Digging deeper, Heidegger says, “Living in proclivity and dispersion, life does not maintain distance; it commits an oversight. . . . In oversight with regard to distance, life mis-measures itself” (GA 61:

103/77). In dispersed distantiation, one mis-measures the distance one should have to things, abolishes distances, and immerses oneself in worldly relations. The caring upsurge toward things “commits an oversight” that is “hyperbolic,” which we might think of as a kind of gluttony for meanings; “multiplicity itself becomes a mode of meaningfulness. . . care that this multiplicity is always available, does not run out, is present in ever new modes” (GA 61: 103/77, 104/78). In these descriptions of the category of distance Heidegger is developing an understanding of everydayness that will reach a certain level of maturity in his conception of *das Man* in *Being and Time*.

Entanglement in always renewing everyday meanings is presented as a kind of frenetic but restricted set of movements in which one nevertheless believes oneself to be free. Speaking more concretely, Heidegger remarks that life, in its mis-measuring care, is “intent on rank, success, position in life (position in the world), superiority, advantage, calculation, bustle, clamor, and ostentation, whether these be sought by thrusting oneself forward crudely and noisily or with refinement and grandiloquence” (GA 61: 103/77-78). Typically, life strives to narrow distances and bring itself into contact with the possibilities of rank, success, and so forth in the one-upmanship of a ‘refined’ conversation no less than in the posturing of a fistfight. What matters in the relation of distance is the how of positioning possibilities for being before-oneself.

The third and final category of relationality is sequestration (*Abriegelung*). In the distancing of comporting myself toward something that I care about, the “me” that it is before me is also experienced. In everyday proclivity and dispersion, the “before” of care is deferred and its relationality is attenuated. Nevertheless, from out of this obscurity, the relationality of “my” factual life becomes visible and speaks.⁴ Although Heidegger does not mention it in this early lecture, we can imagine that his analysis of *Angst* from *Being and Time* might be a further articulation of such a moment. The immersion in hyperbolic dispersion, where multiplicity itself has become meaningful, collapses into the anxiety of nothing having any meaning at all. Through the collapse of meaningful relations, the relationality of life itself becomes

painfully visible. Yet this possibility of coming before oneself as relational can be deferred by re-immersing oneself. Explaining sequestration, Heidegger says, “In being transported by the meaningful things in the world, in the hyperbolic development of new possibilities of experiencing and caring for the world, factical life constantly eludes itself as such. . . . In caring, life sequesters itself off from itself and yet in doing so does precisely not get loose of itself” (GA 61: 106/80). Sequestration increases care about the world so as to not genuinely care about itself; life remains “unworried” or “carefree” in order to flee the anxiety of facing itself without falling back on its usual stock of meanings.

Having reviewed inclination, distance, and sequestration, we must notice the manner of Heidegger’s explications: inclination is used to explain distance; inclination and distance are used to explain sequestration. It is not the case, however, that the latter builds up from the former as a derivative from its function or ground. At the outset of discussing distance, Heidegger says, “The task is now to set in relief a further structure of the relationality of life (caring), one which is equiprimordial with the category of inclination. . . .” (GA 61: 102/77). Ontologically, the categories of relation are equiprimordial. This has two basic meanings. The first is hermeneutic: each category can and should be used to interpret the others. Heidegger employs precisely the same method in *Being and Time* when discussing attunement, understanding, and discourse. There he says, “Attunement is *one* of the existential structures in which the being of the ‘there’ dwells. Equiprimordial with it, *understanding* constitutes this being. Attunement always has its understanding, even if only by suppressing it. Understanding is always attuned.”⁵ Just as equiprimordiality allows distance to be explained in terms of inclination within the categories of relationality, it allows understanding to be explained in terms of attunement. The co-explanatory approach of equiprimordiality remains unaltered between the lecture course of 1921–22 and the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927.

The reason that hermeneutic equiprimordiality endures during a time when so much of Heidegger’s terminology and methodology are undergoing discovery and revision is because of the second basic

meaning of equiprimordiality, which is ontological. Here there are two aspects. First, equiprimordiality is a description of the fundamental relationship between whatever is equiprimordial. It is a mistake to think merely that two separable, discrete things are ‘equally primordial.’ Equiprimordial things are in an intimate relationship of having each other – “Attunement always *has* its understanding” – which is also ontological – “Understanding *is* always attuned” (GA 2: 190/SZ 142–3, em). There is a codependence at work: understanding is not possible without an attunement disposing Dasein toward something to be understood and inclination toward something is not possible without a distance that determines the relation. In this way, equiprimordiality indicates a unity in which no one thing has an ontological priority or hermeneutic authority over another. Instead, everything depends on how each thing holds together with the others. Heidegger says, “The phenomenon of the *equiprimordiality* of constitutive factors has often been disregarded in ontology on account of a methodologically unrestrained tendency to derive everything and anything from a simple ‘primordial ground’” (GA 2: 175/SZ 131). The term “equiprimordiality” describes the specific kind of unity in which its parts are not derived from a more fundamental ground and the unity itself is not grounded in any particular part. For this reason, when we soon turn to the categories of movement, we must recognize that it would be an error to think that movedness will be such a ground for the unity of being-there. Instead, movedness is that unity becoming manifest; the fact that ontological movements hold together as a being is nothing other than the phenomenon of that being’s unity. This does not logically preclude the fact that each constitutive factor of being-there can contribute its own manner of movement to a unified phenomenon of movedness. Indeed, Heidegger says that each equiprimordial factor “is interpretative in relation to life in its entirety” (GA 61: 89/67). This suggests not only a hermeneutic potency but also a complex layering directly constitutive of the unity of a set of equiprimordial elements; this is what Heidegger preserves intact between 1921 and 1927.⁶

The hermeneutic potency and complex layering of the equiprimordial relational categories only deepens as we move forward in the lecture course. Heidegger makes a decisive claim in working out the unity of the categories. Referring back to equiprimordiality, he says:

The peculiar inseparability, noted earlier, of the three basic categories of the relationality of care (in general, their coexistence rather than their succession in order) as well as, at the same time, the possibility of their cohering together in a reciprocal movement that would serve to interpret them and determine their sense – both of these now become visible in the fact that, as is the case with inclination, so also the abolition of distance, no less than sequestration, can all be characterized as relucant and prestructive in their movedness, each for itself and all together. (GA 61: 121/90)

Heidegger follows the three categories of relation with two categories of movement: relucant and prestructive movement. In this passage Heidegger claims that the equiprimordiality of inclination, distance, and sequestration becomes visible insofar as they have a “reciprocal movement.” In other words, the inseparable unity of the relational categories must be sought in movement because their unity is itself the reciprocation of their movement. Paving the way for his interpretations of Aristotle’s notions of *ousia*, *echein*, and *kinesis*, Heidegger is demonstrating in his own way that reciprocating ontological movements are together the unity of factical life.

The connections between the categories of relationality are exposed by an understanding of movement, the purpose of which is to elucidate the “fullness, wholeness, and strict unity” of relational life (GA 61: 118/88). Yet a further clarification is introduced into the particular sense of unity being developed. The fact that the three relational categories each share in the two categories of movement means that the unity of these categories is analogical. This sense of unity has been picked up by various Heidegger scholars, and among

them Thomas Sheehan is one who has recognized the connection to movement. He writes:

When Heidegger speaks about the meaning of being (or, equally, about the time-character or truth or clearing of being), he is simply naming the analogical unity of the intelligible structure of entities, and not some super-thing that plays hide-and-seek with philosophers, revealing itself to some and hiding itself from others. Moreover, that intelligible structure is, for Heidegger, intrinsically kinetic, and it is bound up with the kinetic structure of man, which Heidegger originally calls ‘temporality.’⁷

In Sheehan’s use of the term “analogical unity” we can notice, simultaneously, his sensitivity to the equiprimordiality of the analogical structures. There is no “super-thing” orchestrating the connections between these structures and thereby producing a meaning for being. Instead, it is an analogical sharing of movement that grants access to the phenomenon of being. It is notable that Sheehan refers to the kinetic structure as temporality. He sees in Heidegger that the analogical unity of life is not, as traditional ontology would have it, a matter of logically duplicating predicates, an operation which rests upon a foundation of permanence and presence. This kind of attribution cannot adequately take into account the way that life gathers together in itself what it is not yet and what it is no longer. It is the same traditional logic that tends to exclude movement when thinking about the unity of being. The structures of relationality do not lend themselves to the predication of a common movement, but rather suggest an ontological movement that is more primordial than the ontic movement that predication indicates.

Heidegger describes two kinds of movement: reluctance and pre-struction. He explains the former as follows: “Life, caring for itself in this relationality [i.e., inclination], reflects light back on itself, which produces clarification of the surroundings of the currently immediate

nexus of care. As so characterized, the *movement of life toward itself within every encounter* is what we call *relucence*" (GA 61: 119/89). The movement of relucence is the way in which worldly encounters reflect back the meaning of existence. Because one cares about something and deals with it, one is, in fact, moving toward the meaning of oneself. Thus, the meaning of one's life shines back in whatever one encounters as meaningful, even in the case of something like the fearful. Life 'has' meaning, and an analysis of the movement of relucence articulates life's basic mode of appropriation and possession through encounter. Prestruction builds on what is encountered: "from the relucent world, life makes its claims and measures itself. Life begins to build out from this world and for it" (GA 61: 119-20/89). Life does not merely receive meaning, but projects itself into the world, and in this way always pre-possesses itself. "In caring, life is always projecting, beginning to be built; in being relucent, life is at the same time *prestructive*" (GA 61: 120/89). The "at the same time" of this passage is an indication that relucence and prestruction are themselves equiprimordial. Life measures itself relucently, but such relucence has always already been informed by prestructure, and life organizes itself prestructively, but only out of what it has discovered relucently.

Heidegger briefly explains relucence and prestructure, but then traverses backward to repeat his analysis of inclination, distance, and sequestration in terms of these movements in order to establish the unifying role of the categories of movement. This procedure explicitly demonstrates movedness acting differently but in common over the whole range of the categories of relationality. Heidegger is after the idea that the relationality of a factical being is held together by the concert of its movements; in other words, movedness provides an analogical unity to the equiprimordial senses of relationality. Behind these considerations we can hear Heidegger thinking through Aristotle's understanding of life as self-movement. Heidegger makes allusions to this, saying: "The articulation of prestruction and relucence, however, introduced for the first time a sense of movedness into the respective movedness of each relational category viewed in isolation.

Thereby the ‘how’ of the movement in question was clarified in a certain respect, a ‘how’ characteristic of *self*-movement, movedness in itself” (GA 61: 126/94). Yet, in the context of relational categories that constitute part of Heidegger’s destruction of traditional subjectivity, “self-movement” needs to be understood without the baggage of a subjective agent standing against an objective world. Heidegger clarifies several pages later: “In the categorical structure of movedness, as it is exhibited here, the movedness of factual life now has the character of a special autonomy, an auto-motion, which is precisely its *own* in the fact that life *lives outside of itself*” (GA 61: 130/96–97). Concretely, the self-movement of life is ecstatic. Here Heidegger offers a glimpse of the ecstatic sense of self-movement that will be more explicitly developed later in *Being and Time*.

The character of ontological movement, which we see now as the ecstatic self-movement of prestructure and reluctance, *is* the movement of making sense of existence. Heidegger’s work phenomenologically examines how meaning is shaped by the finitude of factual life. Prestructure and reluctance are categories of *making-sense* that Heidegger uses in 1921–22 as a formal indication of the way Dasein shapes what he will later call the clearing (*die Lichtung*) where disclosure takes place. This conclusion supports the thesis of Thomas Sheehan’s recent book, *Making Sense of Heidegger*, where he claims, “To the degree that Heidegger’s work is phenomenological (and to the end of his life he insisted it was), it was solely and exclusively about *meaningfulness and its source*.”⁸ The connection that I am proposing between the clearing and the ontological movements of prestructure and reluctance demonstrates that in the winter semester of 1921–22 Heidegger was already investigating existence as the disclosive movements of making-sense.⁹ If Sheehan’s thesis is right, and I do believe it has strong merit, this connection is a formative development in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. As Sheehan says, “The clearing is the very reason that existence ex-sists at all. . . . As the *telos* of ex-sistence, the clearing *structurally determines* what and why ex-sistence is at all. But the clearing is not different from ex-sistence.”¹⁰

DISUNITY AS RUINANCE

On the one hand, we have seen three kinds of unity emerge out of Heidegger's categorical analysis, namely equiprimordial, analogical, and ecstatic unity. In all of this, Heidegger is adamant that movement is essential to the unity of a factical being. Yet on the other hand, he explains that "the movedness of factical life can be provisionally interpreted as *unrest*. The 'how' of this unrest, in its fullness as a phenomenon, determines facticity..." (GA 61: 93/70). A restlessness is at work determining the descriptions of the categories, e.g., the proclivity toward rank and success, the gluttonous dispersion into a multiplicity of meaning, and the 'carefree' flight from oneself of sequestration. Much as we see in the analysis of the inauthenticity of *das Man* in *Being and Time*, the 1921-22 lecture course works out the idea that everyday movedness is characterized by the hyperbolic movement of unrest. Heidegger follows up the categorical analysis of factical life with a lengthy discussion explicating ruinance precisely because he needs to draw out the implicit work that disunity has been doing already in the unity of relationality. This is important in two ways. First, the kind of unity brought to the relational categories by movement is not pure cohesion but rather a living relation between unity and disunity. For a finite being, no one form of unity can ever be perfect, complete, and infallible. Second, this intimate, living relation is at the heart of both ontology and ethics. The ontological dimension of his project is explicit as Heidegger develops his analytic of Dasein in the 1920s, but the ethical dimension needs to be drawn out of his analyses of phenomena like ruinance.

To be sure, ruinance is just one example of the movedness of factical life that the categorical analysis can elucidate. However, much like *Angst* turns out to be more than a mere example in the argument of *Being and Time*, namely an existential that has an essential disclosive capacity, so too does ruinance have its own essential disclosive capacity. Heidegger's very first paragraph on ruinance is most instructive:

This movedness of factical life (a movedness which as such is produced by the world of factical life), as it

develops itself in this way and as it thereby intensifies, in procuring for itself, can be called “collapse”; it is a movement which by itself forms itself – and yet not by itself but by the emptiness in which it moves; its emptiness is its possibility of movement. Thereby we acquire a basic sense of the movedness of factual life, a sense we can fix in the term “ruinance” (*ruina* – collapse). (GA 61: 131/98)

Heidegger begins by identifying an intensification of movedness, a “procuring for itself,” that he calls collapse and at the end names “ruinance.” Yet something cryptic but important takes place in the middle of the passage: Heidegger says that collapse is a kind of self-movement – “it is a movement which by itself forms itself” – but then immediately he doubles back on that claim, saying that the movement is formed “not by itself but by the emptiness in which it moves.” We can understand this ambiguity by remembering that the movedness of life is relucant and prestructure. The emptiness that makes ontological movement possible is not merely an internal emptiness into which life collapses, nor a physical space in which the body moves. His comments are scarce, but I would say that the emptiness of collapse is the clearing, *die Lichtung*. The sense in which the clearing has been formed both by itself and not by itself expresses the double movement of ecstatic prestructure and reluctance.

In the particular case of ruinance, we must understand why the prevailing meanings that are disclosed in the clearing collapse into emptiness. Ruinance is an intensified procuring of oneself for oneself. In the fervor and focus of such intensification, this comportment can radically constrict openness to the possibilities available to life. If this intensity matures, a finite being will move through clearings evacuated of new possibilities. As we know from Nietzsche’s critique of Judeo-Christian morality, ideas and values help determine the field of available possibilities for living. When specific ideas and values are held as absolute and unchanging, any possibility of rethinking or reevaluation is prohibited. Nietzsche recognized this comportment as unhealthy for

the individual and potentially a great danger to society.¹¹ Choking off vital possibilities that might otherwise show themselves leaves a barren emptiness that is the condition for collapse.¹² Trying to care for itself in a ruinant way, life “becomes in the end, openly or not, frantic over itself and confused” (GA 61: 140/104). Within the franticness and confusion of ruinant life, the disuniting of life from itself reverberates. The distinct disclosive capacity of ruinance is that life can discover the need to establish a better relationship between unity and disunity.¹⁵

I should be clear: Heidegger never directly labels ruinance as *Un-einigkeit* in the WS 1921–22 lecture course. However, careful interpretation keeps us on the scent of the question of unity and disunity and ultimately leads to the conclusion that factical life cannot be adequately investigated without taking into account the intimacy of disunity and unity. Speaking of his categorical analysis, Heidegger writes, “Insofar as it is factical life...that is to be brought into a safe-keeping that brings-forth, this life renounces – with the originality of the interpretation – the possibility of rootedly possessing itself, *of being itself*” (GA 62: 369/56). This passage is from *Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation*, which was written during the same year that the WS 1921–22 lecture course ended. Heidegger is saying that one investigating factical life must renounce possessing oneself through that procedure, which is nothing less than renouncing the possibility of a complete self-unity. The factically attuned categories embrace disunity *at the same time* that they try to make the factical unity of life transparent.

In an essay on ontological movement, Sheehan explains how Heidegger interprets Aristotle’s notion of *kinesis*. For Aristotle, natural entities are ontologically kinetic insofar as they are “fraught with absentiality.”¹⁴ In fact, it is absentiality, *steresis*, which allows an entity to be kinetic. Beings move into presence, but do so imperfectly and with untapped potentiality. Sheehan points out that in 1928 Heidegger “translated *dynamis* as *Eignung*, and *kinesis* as *Ereignung*, and he referred both terms, tentatively, to the word *Ereignis*, the event of an entity’s autodisclosure.”¹⁵ Sheehan is exposing Heidegger’s insistence on the privative presence that is in the event of each coming to presence.

Our discussions of ecstatic unity and ruinance have revealed disunity to be the absentiality in the movement of coming to presence. In the phenomenological attitude, factual life renounces possessing itself because there is a recognition that the absentiality of disunity is constitutive of its becoming present to itself.

Rather than renounce possession of itself, ruinant Dasein clings to a particular sense of unity by making antagonists out of its unity and disunity. Heidegger makes a similar point with respect to truth and untruth in *On the Essence of Truth*. Truth is the freedom of letting-beings-be, which is a comportment of resolutely remaining open within the primordial concealment, untruth, of beings. Yet Dasein errs when it tries to close itself off from the mystery of the concealed and instead insists on replenishing the meaning of the world with what is already easily available. In other words, Dasein takes into itself, as its own meaning, the particular sense of unity upon which it insists. Heidegger says, “They are all the more mistaken the more exclusively they take themselves, as subject, to be the standard for all beings” (GA 9: 91/149-50). What Dasein fails to realize is that flight from the mystery of untruth into the apparent security of a stable truth is really a flight from itself as an ecstatic, finite being. Insofar as ruinance is a flight from the disunity of one’s own ecstatic being, the same relationship holds between truth and untruth as it does between unity and disunity. This alignment is not meant to reduce one set to the other, but rather to help us to rethink unity and disunity from the ground up. Just as it is a mistake to take correspondence to be the essence of truth, so too is it a mistake to take any static sense of structure to be the essence of unity. The intimacy of truth and untruth is the same kind of kinetic intimacy that exists between unity and disunity in a finite being. The essence of unity is freedom of movement, but when disunity disrupts any particular unified movement, new possibilities for free movement become available so that Dasein can recompose (and hopefully rejuvenate) its relational life in the world.

INDICATIONS OF ORIGINARY ETHICS

Heidegger's early work on ontological movement explains why it is that a human being, as finite, is a being that is concerned about the unity and disunity of its being. I would argue that Heidegger's ethics, which he explicitly introduces in his 1946 *Letter on Humanism*, is concerned with what it means to take responsibility for finitude understood in this way. The connection is particularly apparent in his critique of the normativity of traditional values. Since disunity is the disruption of a prevailing sense of unity (in this case, one formed around normative valuation), attempting to exclude disunity is tantamount to attempting to exclude the possibility of change. Because disunity is constitutive of making-sense, the effort to claim that a particular set of values is objective (and therefore unchangeable) is really an effort resisting a dimension of existence itself. Heidegger writes, "Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid – solely as the objects of its doing. The bizarre effort to prove the objectivity of values does not know what it is doing" (GA 9: 179/265). When action is dominated by subjective valuations taken to be objective prescriptions, the way in which action itself is an effort to make-sense of the world can become dangerously constricted. In terms of the ontological movements of making-sense, normative valuation makes the prestructure of meaning excessive while the reluctance of meaning becomes deficient, thereby restricting the discovery of new possibilities for action. When normativity is allowed to hobble the making-sense of action, Dasein has failed to take responsibility for its finitude.¹⁶

Heidegger's ethics is an "originary" ethics because it attempts to reset the focus of ethics, aiming it toward understanding the ontological conditions that make normative valuation possible. In an essay on Heidegger's ethics, Jean-Luc Nancy writes: "It isn't philosophy's job to prescribe norms or values: instead, it must think the essence or the sense of what makes up *action* [*l'agir*] as such; it should think, in other words, the essence or sense of what puts action in the position of having to choose norms or values."¹⁷ Nancy rightly argues that the comportment

of remaining open for unconcealment, letting-be (*Sein-lassen*), is the very “essence of action” and originary in Heidegger’s ethics.¹⁸ In the passage from the *Letter on Humanism* above (GA 9: 179/265), Heidegger contrasts letting-be and normative valuation. This indicates that instead of an excess of prestructure (or reluctance, for that matter), letting-be finds a balance between these dimensions of making-sense. This balance or mean is not prescribed but rather discovered through an attunement, in each situation, to the finitude of being-there in the world.¹⁹

Rather than continue an analysis of the *Letter on Humanism* or turn to other relevant texts from that period, my aim here is to continue to retrieve insights from Heidegger’s early lecture courses, insights that can be interpreted as ethical developments by using the framework that I have established above. Two further steps will be ventured below, both related to letting-be. First, the comportment of letting-be was first a development in Heidegger’s phenomenological practices that took shape as he worked out his methodological access to factual life. This means that the method of formal indication (*formale Anzeige*), which is developed throughout Heidegger’s work in the 1920s, ought to exhibit signs of this particular ethical sensitivity. Second, Heidegger’s SS 1924 lecture course further develops, implicitly, the categories of relationality and movement while interpreting Aristotle’s sense of factual life. In particular, Heidegger is concerned with the comportment that handles experiences that disrupt our composure. In this context, he reinterprets *hexis* as a way that we can relate to the role of letting-be in his originary ethics.

1. In Heidegger’s WS 1921–22 lecture course, the categories of relationality and movement are formal indications. This method is a response to the fact that Heidegger himself is determined by his factual limits as he tries to gain access to factual life as such. His sense of access should be understood in terms of Aristotle’s notion of *echein*, which he discusses in terms of the famous phrase *zoon logon echon*. The reliance upon predication in the logic of traditional metaphysics allows for the misinterpretation of *echein* as possession, specifically that of a subject ‘having’ properties. Yet in discussing *echein*, Aristotle says, “what obstructs something from moving or acting by its own impulse is said

to have hold of it, as columns have hold of the heavy things that press down on them. . . . And in this way too what is continuous is said to hold together what it connects, as though it would be separated by each part's own impulse."²⁰ *Echein* can be thought of as a holding together of parts that each have their own tendencies of movement which nonetheless belong together in a continuity. Rather than possession or predication, this passage suggests the equiprimordial, analogical, and ecstatic ways in which ontological categories hold together.

In the human being, the holding together of *echein* is twofold. First, what is held together are the categories of relationality that each have their own equiprimordial tendencies of movement but which analogically share in the same categories of movement. Second, *echein* is a matter of how an ecstatic being conducts itself beyond itself, kairologically, in human praxis. In particular, Heidegger is concerned about how the phenomenological mode of knowing conducts itself. Not only does Heidegger develop the intellectual conduct of formal indication in order to phenomenologically preserve the tendency of movement of *that which is accessed*, but by the time of *Being and Time* both of these senses of *echein* help configure the relationships between the existentials in *the one who gains access*. As John Van Buren writes, quoting Heidegger's notes, "The formalizing method of formal indication 'springs from' and 'goes back to' 'one's own concrete life.'"²¹

Formal indication defines Heidegger's phenomenological method and his hermeneutic retrieval of Aristotle, but only does so through an ethical posture. As an indication, formal indication is a "departure" that is directed toward content but, as formal, resolutely holds itself back from its own inclination to determine content in advance.²² In other words, it holds itself in a kind of potentiality, *Möglichkeit*. Heidegger explains: "The understanding that follows the genuine way of approach is not in the full sense a grasp of the ontological meaning but is precisely determined by the approach – only by that but precisely by that. To be on the point of departure; to set out resolutely!" (GA 61: 34/27). The inclination against which the departure-character of formal indication resolutely stands is the desire to fix the content of the

phenomenon in question *before* the moment of encounter, which would be an ‘actualization’ before actuality. When a formal indication directs the understanding toward the object of concern, a prohibition deters or restrains the understanding.²⁵ Heidegger develops the method of formal indication in order to resolutely see past the hermeneutic obscurity of the ‘certainty,’ ‘self-evidence,’ and ‘obviousness’ of the traditional interpretations of Aristotle’s basic questions. The seductive yet false security of having determined the meaning of an encounter in advance is one of Heidegger’s fundamental objections to habits of atemporalizing fixity in Western metaphysics and its prescriptive ethical maxims. The categories that Heidegger formally indicates remain possibilities for being rather than fixed structures precisely because this approach *lets* the concealment of beings remain intimate with their unconcealment.

The basic danger of prescriptive ethical systems is that they do not let beings be in their situation, and although formal indication appears methodologically prescriptive, its approach is designed to avoid this ethical problem. The ontological problem of determining the being of beings in advance and the ethical problem of determining one’s conduct toward beings in advance have the same root in being closed off from the situatedness of being. Formal indication is kairologically attuned, therefore, to the situated relationship between the unity and disunity in the movedness of ecstatic beings. An originary ethics shares in the same kind of attunement by resisting the impulse to rely upon content determining maxims at the expense of the situated concealment and unconcealment of beings.

2. The categories of relationality and movement from the WS 1921–22 lecture course, which allow Heidegger to work out an understanding of factual unity and disunity, play forward into his SS 1924 lecture course. These categories strongly influence Heidegger’s manner of interpreting Aristotle’s notions of *pathos*, *doxa*, and *logos*, which in turn help to construct the existential characteristics of Dasein in the 1927 publication of *Being and Time*, especially attunement (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*), and discourse (*Rede*).²⁴ In 1924, Heidegger is particularly interested in how the transition is made from one form

of unity or composure – that is, one configuration of ontological movements – to another. If we look, for example, at his discussions of *pathos*, he says that “*hexis*, in relation to the *pathē*, is to be our clue to the more precise conception of the being-structure of the *pathē* themselves” (GA 18: 194/131). Aristotle’s *hexis* is interpreted in terms of *echein*: the continuous holding-itself-together in going after definite being-possibilities. Refusing to be limited by the traditional translation of *hexis* as habit, Heidegger understands *hexis* to be a mode of conduct that is essentially related to the possibility of being knocked out of one’s composure. It is the genuine being-composed of being-there in the moment when a *pathos* occurs, that is, when one might undergo a transposition and become-otherwise.²⁵ Heidegger points out that *aretē* must be understood in terms of *hexis* because one can cultivate *aretē* only by enduring risky situations in which we are in danger of losing our composure.²⁶ Analyzing the relationship between maintaining, losing, and regaining composure is Heidegger’s way of continuing his investigation of the unity and disunity of factical life. Consider the following passage:

The *pathē*, are the sort of thing that occurs *in the soul*, the sort of thing that is *in living-being*, and that means more precisely *being-taken*, *losing-composure*, *kineisthai*, which aims at the genuine being of living things, being-in-a-world...Being-out-of-composure *is in itself related to being composed*, *hexis*. We are taken in an average and everyday way; we move ourselves within parameters in relation to which there is a being-composed. (GA 18: 242/162)

Hexis has to do with how one handles the event of the *pathē*, namely, how one is moved by the inevitable event of becoming-otherwise. However, *pathos* and *hexis* are not two opposing forces, one standing for change and the other against it. On the contrary, Heidegger’s analysis of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* shows that, if one cultivates *aretē*, it is consistent with *hexis* to go along with change, to *let* oneself be moved by others in a mindful way. Aristotle’s ethical concerns speak to how

one maintains or regains composure even as one undergoes fundamental shifts in how one moves through the world. In this way, the disunity of being-out-of-composure shows itself to be an integral part of the ethical life of a factual being.

If we take seriously the work Heidegger did in his WS 1921–22 lecture course, which is meant as a preparation for reading Aristotle, then we can consider augmenting Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle in his SS 1924 lecture course accordingly. Heidegger's interpretation of *hexis* can be understood as how one handles being knocked out of composure, that is, how one handles the relationship between one's own unity and disunity. When *hexis* has *aretē*, one is able to find a kairologically appropriate balance between unity and disunity. In this way, letting-be and *hexis* have an analogous originary structure: letting-be is concerned with how prestructure and reluctance relate to each other, and *hexis* is concerned with how unity and disunity relate to each other. Moreover, letting-be has the same kind of *aretē* as *hexis*, namely finding a kairologically attuned balance between the two dimensions of making-sense. If I am right, we can retrieve this understanding of *hexis* from Heidegger's early lecture courses and place it alongside letting-be as an originary ethical comportment. The *aretē* of both comportments is then nothing less than how a finite being takes responsibility for its own finitude.

Notes

- 1 Theodore Kisiel briefly analyzes the WS 1921–22 lecture course in his groundbreaking work *The Genesis of Heidegger’s “Being and Time”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Yet after discussing formal indication, Kisiel dismisses the rest of the lecture course: “In view of the chronologically compromised character of the published edition, much of the analysis of this verbose, baroque, and turgid course can, for our purposes, be put off... This course is caught up in the turmoil of transition, complicated even in its actual delivery... In fact, the period initiated by this course is characterized by a further degeneration of style, a loss of the simplicity of expression in which some of the discoveries of the prior two years had been cast, a kind of scholarizing of older insights” (*The Genesis of “Being and Time,”* 235). While in many ways Kisiel is right about Heidegger’s language, this lecture contains insights into the ontological movement of making-sense that Heidegger does *not* abandon in subsequent years, even if he does continue to transform his language. One can take as a starting point a key statement that Kisiel makes in his last paragraph: “The problem of facticity is a ‘*kinesis*-problem” (*The Genesis of Heidegger’s “Being and Time,”* 238).
- 2 In the fourth chapter of Scott Campbell’s *The Early Heidegger’s Philosophy of Life*, he lays out four categories of relationality. In the lecture course, it is true that a section on “the easy” (*das Leichte*) follows immediately after the first three. Yet Heidegger ends this section by referring to the “three basic categories” of the “relationality of caring” (GA 61: 109/82). He then lists inclination, distance, and sequestration, but puts “making things easy” in parentheses afterwards. This may well be ambiguous on Heidegger’s part, but definitive proof comes when he subsequently repeats an analysis of only the three relational categories in terms of the two categories of

movement. This is not a significant point of contention, but for the sake of clarity I would suggest that Heidegger means “making things easy” to be a tendency within *each* of the three categories of relationality rather than its own category. See Scott M. Campbell, *The Early Heidegger’s Philosophy of Life: Facticity, Being, and Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

3 Cf. GA 61: 102/ 76–77.

4 Cf. GA 61: 105–6/79.

5 GA 2: 190/SZ 142–3.

6 Explicit reference to equiprimordiality is also present in the SS 1924 lecture course, to which we will be turning shortly. However, even though a methodological sensitivity to equiprimordiality is certainly present functionally in the lecture course, Heidegger has not yet taken the time to explain it with care. Here is the most significant passage in the lecture course: “We will come to understand that the determination of being-with-one-another is *equiprimordial* with the determination of speaking-being. It would be altogether wrong to deduce one from the other; rather the phenomenon of the being-there of human beings as such possesses *equiprimordially speaking-being and being-with-one-another*. These characters of the *equiprimordiality* of the being of human beings must be maintained uniformly if they are to actually hit upon the phenomenon” (GA 18: 64/45). Here Heidegger describes the fact that the characteristics cannot be derived from each other, but only implicitly does he preclude a derivation from another common ground, and he does not explain the positive relationship between the characteristics at all.

7 Thomas Sheehan, “On Movement and the Destruction of Ontology,” *The Monist* 64: 4 (October, 1981), 536. John van Buren’s discussion of Heidegger’s formally indicative appropriation of Aristotle’s concept of life is another place to look. There he says, “The existentiell principles (*archai*) of the basic character

- of practical motion-for-the-sake-of (*kinesis heneka tou*), which Aristotle's method inductively transcribes from concrete practical life, are supposed to be regarded neither as the Platonic forms (essentialism) nor as particular goods (ideology), but rather as the analogical similarities displayed immanently by different historical shapes of practical life..." John van Buren, "The Ethics of *Formale Anzeige* in Heidegger," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69:2 (1995), 162.
- 8 Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), 10.
- 9 Sheehan acknowledges this semester as a starting point of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle as proto-phenomenological but does not himself examine this lecture course and draw out the connection between the clearing and the ontological movements of prestructure and reluctance; see *Making Sense of Heidegger*, 12.
- 10 *Making Sense of Heidegger*, 23.
- 11 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 19, 61.
- 12 Yet another step is possible and not uncommon: when collapse takes place, but life is still buoyed by the desires, habits, and institutions of producing-oneself-for-oneself, there is a tendency to resort to the use of power over others in order to allay the feelings of insecurity and fallenness. The phenomenon of everyday tyranny emerges in the conjunction of these basic ontological movements: sustained ruinant collapse within oneself and the use of power or force to impose oneself on others. Socrates' characterizations of Meno's behavior speak to this possibility (see Plato, *Meno*, 86d).
- 13 Campbell offers an analysis of ruinance in terms of reluctance and prestructure and places his primary emphasis on temporality. Yet he makes no explicit connection to unity and disunity, which in turn means that he might well miss the distinctive disclosive capacity of ruinance. However, he does

discuss what he calls a “countermovement” against ruinance: “The countermovement can thus be described as the dismantling of life’s assumptions down to the factual immediacy of life, which Heidegger at one point describes as its wanting (*Darbung*)...The countermovement of life against ruinance, therefore, is in fact a matter of grasping that dimension of emptiness upon which life stands and which informs all its caring movements” (*The Early Heidegger’s Philosophy of Life*, 95). In my analysis, ruinance expresses an excess of disunity, which often results from an excess of prestructure that “wants” to secure unity once-and-for-all. Campbell’s countermovement must then be a reluctant shift toward the unity of existence that is guided by “the dimension of emptiness” rather than a dominating prestructive meaning. If this is right – he does explicitly connect this countermovement to reluctance on page 94 – then operating beneath Campbell’s discussion of ruinance and its countermovement is a sense of balance between reluctance and prestructure, and perhaps between unity and disunity. I will discuss such balance later when I bring up the *aretē* of letting-be and of *hexis*.

- 14 Sheehan, “On Movement and the Destruction of Ontology,” 537.
15 Sheehan, “On Movement and the Destruction of Ontology,” 537.
16 Gregory Fried is right to point out that Heidegger’s complete untethering from normativity is not only impractical but likely a source of his disastrous alignment with the National Socialists. It is true that “an intensely sensitive attunement to the radical finitude of historical situatedness” fails if it does not consider the guidance of historically situated normative values. However, my hope is that by retrieving the question of how one handles the unity and disunity of one’s existence, the basic insights of originary ethics can be steered away from a source of Heidegger’s personal failings. In particular, finding a balance between unity and disunity (which I will discuss shortly) allows for a *provisional* rather than exclusionary

- relationship with normative values precisely because the disruptive capacity of disunity is welcomed. See Gregory Fried, “Retrieving *phronêsis*: Heidegger on the essence of politics,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 47: 3 (December 2014), 293–313.
- 17 Jean-Luc Nancy, “Originary Ethics,” in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 173.
- 18 Nancy, “Originary Ethics,” 177.
- 19 Kisiel also notes, though without any further development, the connection between Aristotle’s doctrine of the Golden Mean of virtue and the categories that Heidegger uses to elaborate upon the primary category of care (*The Genesis of Heidegger’s “Being and Time,”* 236).
- 20 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2002), 1023a18–24.
- 21 John Van Buren, “The Ethics of *Formale Anzeige* in Heidegger,” 168. Van Buren’s work is particularly helpful for tracing the ethical sense of formal indication, especially in its development out of Heidegger’s work on Husserl, Kierkegaard, and Aristotle.
- 22 Kisiel confirms this interpretation of formal indication. Speaking of Heidegger’s WS 1921–22 lecture course, Kisiel writes: “the tentative, probing ‘having’ of formal-indicative definition, for all its decisiveness, is an insecure and so ‘in-authentic having’ which never fully determines or defines its object. This in fact is its formality, in providing only the ‘on-set’ of determination, seeking promising beginnings and directions for development to articulate its dynamic topic, like maps drawn lightly, in filigree, to prefigure ‘the’ way, only to recast to point to a new way. Philosophizing is according a never-ending ‘way’” (*The Genesis of Heidegger’s “Being and Time,”* 234–35).
- 23 For example, Heidegger warns against the tendency to take his formal indication of ruinance as a dogmatically fixed category. Such fixity carries the dangerous possibility of being used as a metaphysical foundation, which Heidegger characterizes

as a kind of drifting off into an assumed autonomy that has become blind to its own presuppositions and situation (see GA 61: 141-42/105). Heidegger is consistent in this warning. In a lecture course a year and a half later, he says: “A *formal indication* is always misunderstood when it is treated as a fixed universal proposition and used to make deductions from and fantasized with in a constructivistic dialectical fashion” (GA 63: 80-81/62).

- 24 It is noteworthy in this necessarily brief account of the lineage of the existentials that Heidegger refers to them as ontological movements in *Being and Time*. Heidegger writes, “Falling prey is an ontological concept of motion,” “*Das Verfallen ist ein ontologischer Bewegungsbegriff*” (GA 2: 238/SZ 180). The connection between the existentials and Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle’s ontology of movement has not gone unnoticed. Marjorie Oelie, for example, related *Befindlichkeit*, *Stimmung*, and *pathos* to movement in her essay “Heidegger’s Reading of Aristotle’s Concept of Pathos,” *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16.2 (Spring 2012): 389-406. She says that “by correlating *pathos* as emotion to physical change and ontology, *pathos* as passion or emotion leaves the narrow domain of psychology and is instead situated within the broader domain of life and its movements” (393). Charlotta Weigelt, for her part, focuses on the connection between *kinesis* and *logos* in “*Logos as Kinesis: Heidegger’s Interpretation of the Physics in Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*,” *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 9.1 (Fall 2004): 101-16. What tends to be addressed in the literature is the grounding of ontology in movement and its connection to one particular constitutive factor or another. What I hope to contribute is a sense that all of these connections together have behind them Heidegger’s development of the relationship between unity and disunity in factual life.

- 25 Referring to *Metaphysics* Δ , Heidegger explains that “In *pathos*, Aristotle sees, with the facts regarding *motion*, not so much the passive, but that something *occurs for me*. Here, *pathos* is taken in the broadest and the plainest meaning... of ‘becoming-otherwise.’ *Pathos* is a determination of beings with the character of alterability” (GA 18: 195/131).
- 26 Cf. GA 18: 179-81/121-22.

Thinking the Abyss of History: Heidegger's Critique of Hegelian Metaphysics

Ryan Johnson

Hegel's philosophy figures heavily in Heidegger's work. Indeed, when Heidegger becomes concerned with overcoming metaphysics, he will claim that Hegel's system is the highest point in the history of western philosophy, constituting the completion of metaphysics. Heidegger takes seriously Hegel's claim to have achieved absolute knowledge through subsuming the whole history of philosophy into his own system. Consequently, he argues, "any future, *still* higher standpoint over against it, which would be superordinate to Hegel's system...is once and for all impossible" (GA 68: 3-4/3-4). Heidegger's task of overturning metaphysics will require a "historical confrontation" with Hegel's system (GA 36/37: 13-14/10-11).

In his work entitled *Hegel*, Heidegger pursues this confrontation through a critical analysis of Hegel's concepts of negativity and nothingness. Heidegger claims that Hegel takes neither of these concepts "seriously," rather they are self-evidently presupposed and are only methodologically deployed in the quest for Absolute knowledge (GA 68: 47/37). Hegel never questions the meaning of nothingness and negativity as such. The importance of these concepts lies only in their dialectical sublimation, resulting in the becoming of what is absolutely determinable to thought. Negativity is this becoming, but since it is nothing, then nothing can be said of it. Negativity is always already engaged in the process of revealing the positivity of absolute thought (GA 68: 47/37). Thus, Hegel achieves certainty through the

deployment of negativity, but the truth of negativity as such is presupposed and “questionless” (GA 68: 14/11).

Against Hegel, Heidegger will argue that all representations, and truth claims about them, presuppose a “clearing” in which they can appear. Heidegger will argue that this clearing is itself nothing, though it is the condition for things to appear (GA 68: 46/37). What is important for Heidegger is that the self-concealment of the clearing, its nothingness, can never be “sublimated” (*aufgehoben*) or negated (GA 68: 46/37). Accordingly, Hegel’s absolute thought is impossible since it is always conditioned by the “a-byss” of the clearing. More succinctly, unconcealment can never abolish concealment.

Broadly put, the hypothesis of this essay will be that Heidegger’s account of the a-byss of the clearing is the point by which Heidegger wants to overcome metaphysics. If Hegel’s system is the historical culmination of the history of metaphysics, where nothing more could be added, then the self-concealment of the clearing allows for the occurrence of an inception of the truth of *beyng*. In regards to history, this inception will constitute a new historical beginning for philosophy, which Heidegger calls the “other beginning.” In short, Hegel’s philosophical history cannot be total, since it contains the possibility for historical rupture, made possible by the a-byss.

Our questioning will begin by examining the nature of Hegelian metaphysics. Then we will proceed to look at the role that both nothingness and negativity play in realizing this metaphysics. From here we will turn to Heidegger’s account of nothingness and truth, and how these concepts are employed in his critique of Hegel’s work. Lastly, we will examine Heidegger’s understanding of history, arguing that Heidegger’s account of nothingness allows for a rupture within Hegel’s teleological view of history.

HEGELIAN METAPHYSICS

For Hegel, logic “constitutes metaphysics proper.”¹ By this he means both that logic deals with the determination of concepts (like substance) that are found in thought alone and that these concepts are the actual

determinations of beings. Against Kant, who thought that the concepts of understanding are intelligible only when applied to sense intuition, Hegel thinks that “objective logic” is able to critique the concepts themselves without experience.² For Hegel, the result of this critique constitutes a “system of pure reason,” which reveals “truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature.”⁵

Hegel calls “objective thinking” the mode of thought that determines the pure concepts.⁴ This thinking is objective to the extent that the concepts determine what possible objects can be experienced or represented in thought. As Karin De Boer argues, the pure concepts “yield ontological perspectives that together determine the ways in which something can be objectified.”⁵ She points out that in the *Logic*, Hegel argues that something is actual only if it is determined by a concept, and thus, something without a concept is a “non-entity.”⁶ In other words, a being *is* only by being subsumed under a concept. Accordingly, Heidegger claims the determination of the concept reveals “what is conceived in the thing as such, its thinghood,” or “beings in their Being” (GA 36/37: 73/58).

In this regard, Hegel’s metaphysics fits into Heidegger’s understanding of metaphysics. For Heidegger, metaphysics “thinks being as a whole – the world, man, God – with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being.” The Being of beings is the “ground” by which beings come to “presence,” that is, by which they can be said to be (GA 14: 69–70/56). In “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” Heidegger will argue that metaphysics is essentially “onto-theological,” because it attempts to think of this ground as *causa sui*, and thus the Being of beings becomes equated with the concept of God (GA 11: 67/60). This last point is crucial to understanding Heidegger’s critique of Hegel. As the culmination of metaphysics, Hegel’s thought is also the highest expression of onto-theology.

The total determination of the concepts culminates in absolute knowledge, or the “Absolute Idea.” While the concepts reveal beings in their Being, the Absolute Idea grasps the Being of beings, “the presence of what is present” (GA 14: 76/62). Hegel corroborates this claim

by identifying the Absolute Idea with being.⁷ Heidegger argues that Hegel's Absolute is onto-theological insofar as it equates the ground of beings with God (GA 36/37: 75–76/60). Indeed, Hegel claims that his system expresses the being of God: “It can therefore be said that his content is the *exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind*” (GA 36/37: 76/60). What is significant here is that Hegel reduces the concept of God to unconditioned thought; the Being of beings is rooted in thought itself. Consequently, knowing “as absolute equates itself with absolute Being; by creating absolute Being, it knows it and just simply is it” (GA 36/37: 76–77/61). Therefore, Hegel's thought is the highest instance of onto-theology because the knowledge of the Being of beings is immanent to thought; rather than being conditioned from without, Hegel can now determine the Being of beings unconditionally and, thus, with certainty.

Hegel's certainty is most manifest in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which describes the dialectical movement of consciousness as it becomes self-certain in the formation of Absolute Spirit, which is absolute knowledge. Spirit, in general, is a “noun for the activity of thinking.”⁸ However, Absolute Spirit refers to Spirit's recognizing itself, meaning that the thinking subject has become self-conscious.⁹ Thinking is now aware of itself as being determinative of the objects of thought; it recognizes that something is knowable only if it is made an object “for” consciousness (GA 68: 110/85). Hence, self-conscious thought is unconditionally certain of itself as the condition for knowledge. This constitutes the “absolute idea”: the “unconditioned representation, manifestation of its own self in the unconditioned truth of its own essence” (GA 68: 103/80). In light of what has preceded, then, the Absolute Idea can be understood as the certainty that the pure concepts of thought do indeed determine the actuality of objects, or beings.

However, it is important to note that Heidegger argues that Hegel does not simply realize the certainty of Absolute knowledge, but systematically presupposes it. This is supported by Hegel's claim that Absolute knowledge is a “certainty that has *become* truth.”¹⁰ Heidegger argues that the *Phenomenology* begins with the assumption that there

is Absolute knowledge, which explicitly unfolds itself through the mediation of consciousness. Thus, Heidegger notes that the first “shape of consciousness” at the beginning of *Phenomenology* is already the shape of Absolute Spirit (GA 68: 86/68).

How does Absolute knowledge unfold? The concepts of Hegel’s system are not static ideas, but contain an internal movement. For Hegel, concepts occur as connected opposites, like essence and accidents, which thought comprehends by resolving their oppositions. This is the dialectic: “the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative.”¹¹ But the dialectic is not simply an operation of a thinking subject. Rather, the dialectic belongs to the movement of the concepts as they determine themselves. This self-determination is the “Concept,” which is the “effort of something to determine itself by establishing the synthesis of its contrary determinations.”¹² Absolute knowledge is the result of the Concept once it has sublimated (*aufgehoben*) all oppositions within pure thought.

Ultimately, Heidegger contends that the *Phenomenology* reveals the “absolute self-knowing of spirit, i.e., absolute metaphysics” (GA 68: 122/94). The result of the *Phenomenology* is the self-certainty of thought as the condition for objective knowledge, including knowledge of the pure concepts, though these are more fleshed out in the *Logic*, which deals with the structure of pure thought independent of its appearance in consciousness.¹⁵ Thus, Hegel’s system is the completion of metaphysics because it reveals the necessary conditions by which beings are present to thought. Also, because this knowledge is certain, Hegel’s system reveals the truth of being, which no future philosophy could possibly supplant.

NOTHINGNESS AND NEGATIVITY IN HEGEL’S LOGIC

Having presented the structure of Hegel’s metaphysics, we turn to the role that nothingness and negativity play. The *Logic* begins with being and nothingness, which are the first oppositions to be dialectically sublimated. Hegel first posits the concept of pure being, which lacks any determinate content, and is therefore essentially nothing, claiming:

“Pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same.”¹⁴ Yet this contradicts the understanding of being and nothingness as opposites. This contradiction is resolved, however, through affirming the difference between being and nothingness by means of the concept of “becoming,” when being is negated by nothingness, thereby revealing the truth of these concepts. “Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: becoming a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself.”¹⁵ Out of becoming emerges the concept of “determinate being” (*Dasein*), which enables thought to determine something as a being and is the fundamental condition for knowledge.¹⁶

It is in this section of the *Logic* that we also see the appearance of negativity, which is the movement and determination of a concept through its negation. Hence, negativity is the negation of being by nothingness, identified as becoming, which results in determinate being. Thus, negativity results in a positive determination. Negativity will be the movement that determines all concepts.

However, Hegel distinguishes two forms of negativity: abstract and absolute. Abstract negation is the first negation of a being into nothingness, something into what it is not, while absolute negation is the negation of the abstract negation. Using De Boer’s example, abstract negation occurs when a tomato is declared not red, while absolute negation negates this claim, affirming that the tomato is red, although redness is not an essential aspect of being a tomato.¹⁷ As Hegel puts it, the determinate something “is equally the meditation of itself with itself.”¹⁸ That is to say, the tomato has determined itself as separate from its accidental property of being red.

The centrality of absolute negativity in Hegel’s system cannot be overstated. As the means by which all the concepts achieve self-determination, absolute negativity is the heart of the dialectical movement of the Concept. Hegel claims that absolute negativity is “the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true.”¹⁹ Absolute Spirit reveals its self through a process of

negation, for “it is its own restless process of superseding itself, or negativity.”²⁰ Thus, we can see that Hegel’s entire system is determined by negativity, which Heidegger calls “the energy” of unconditional thought (GA 68: 14/11).

HEIDEGGER’S CRITIQUE OF NOTHINGNESS AND NEGATIVITY

It should seem initially strange that Heidegger argues that Hegel takes neither negativity nor nothingness seriously. After all, nothingness begins the dialectical movement towards absolute knowledge, and negativity is the movement itself. Yet, both of these concepts are only conceived in relation to revealing the positivity of absolute knowledge. Moreover, negativity is grounded in the certitude of absolute knowledge: “Negativity as the negation of negation is grounded in the yes to unconditional self-consciousness – of absolute certainty as ‘truth’ (i.e., beingness as beings)” (GA 68: 14/11). Thus, negativity and nothingness are only methodically deployed, but are not examined as such.

Of course, as Heidegger interprets, Hegel would have good reason for not considering negativity, or nothingness, itself. It makes no sense to think of these things in themselves since, as nothing, they have no positive content (GA 68: 38/30). Yet Heidegger indicates that the truth of the claim presupposes that thought is only concerned with being, what is present. For Hegel, it is self-evident that thinking “maintains the determinative relation to the being of beings” (GA 68: 39/31). Thus, Heidegger concludes that Hegel’s assumption that thinking must always have determinate content makes negativity as such unquestionable.

In order to overcome this assumption, and thereby make nothingness questionable, Heidegger will turn to his notion of the “ontological difference”: being as such is not a being, and is therefore nothing. In a sense, the ontological difference is already found at the beginning of the *Logic*, where pure being and nothingness are undifferentiated. But it is ultimately sublimated into the affirmation of determinative being. Heidegger argues that the “renunciation” of the difference is an “essential presupposition of the possible absoluteness of unconditional thinking” (GA 68: 14/11). Hence, as Daniel Dahlstrom argues, Hegel

“must forsake any consideration of this ground [ontological difference] or relinquish its claim to be unconditioned.”²¹ It is going to be through the affirmation of the ontological difference that Heidegger is able to undermine Hegel’s metaphysical claim to absolute knowledge.

Dahlstrom also points out that during the time of this text (1938–1939) the meaning of the ontological difference has been altered. Heidegger has now “come to the conclusion that what it means to be, entailing the ontological difference, is a historical event, and this event, or more precisely, its unfolding or prevailing (*Wesung*), is the primordial sense of being (*Seyn*).”²² As early as *Being and Time*, Heidegger will express the ontological difference: “The being of beings ‘is’ itself not a being” (GA 2: 8/SZ 6, tm). But he will come to see that it is not enough to think the difference between being and beings; we must reflect on its origin. This is primarily because the difference can be misunderstood as the difference between beings and beingness, the essential presence of being in beings. In this form, metaphysics is able to express the difference logically, reducing it to “harmlessness” (GA 65: 423–24/335).²³ Heidegger tries to salvage the radical nature of the difference by showing it to “originate in the essential occurrence of beyng,” which is to say, the “truth of beyng” (GA 65: 464–66/366).

In Hegel, Heidegger declares that to think nothingness is to “inquire into the truth of beyng” (GA 68: 15/12). Therefore, Heidegger’s task of confronting Hegel on the basis of questioning nothingness and, thereby, undermining his system becomes an engagement with the truth of beyng.

BEYNG, NOTHINGNESS AND TRUTH

What does Heidegger mean by the truth of beyng? How can this truth be disclosed if beyng is nothing? In order to ask these questions, it is necessary to examine what Heidegger means by truth. The question of the essence of truth figures into almost the entirety of his work. Critical of the traditional conception of truth as “correctness,” Heidegger tries to uncover and appropriate a more originary sense of truth, represented

by the Greek understanding of truth as *alētheia*, or “unconcealment” (*Unverborgenheit*).

In “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger gradually reveals unconcealment as the condition for the possibility of the traditional understanding of truth. This is done by way of a three-stage regression.²⁴ First, Heidegger defines the traditional conception of truth as the “correctness” of the statement with regard to the matter (*Sache*): “A statement is true if what it means and says is in accordance with the matter about which the statement is made” (GA 9: 179/138). For example, the statement “the truck is red” is true if the truck it refers to is indeed red.

At the second stage, Heidegger argues that this sense of truth is made possible by “comportment,” a way of relating to beings such that they are made present *as* they are. So, using our example, the statement is a way of comportment that explicitly presents the truck as red. More specifically, Heidegger will define this presenting as letting a being “stand opposed as object,” as something over and against us (GA 9: 184/141). Comportment, then, reveals beings as objects present before us.²⁵ Thus, insofar as it is the condition that makes possible truth as correctness, Heidegger concludes that the “openness of comportment” is the more originary essence of truth (GA 9: 185/142).

Third, Heidegger claims that comportment is grounded in freedom, which is the essence of truth (GA 9: 186/142). For Heidegger, comportment occurs within an “open region,” a space within which beings are revealed as such (GA 9: 184/141). In this context, Heidegger’s sense of freedom is to be understood as “letting beings be”: that is, letting beings be revealed as they are within the open region (GA 9: 188/144). For us, the truck occurs within an open region, which lets the statement declare it as red. In this sense, Heidegger claims that to let be is not to leave beings alone, but to relate oneself towards them in such a way that they are revealed, or unconcealed, *as* they are.

It is on this point that Heidegger introduces his notion of unconcealment. For Heidegger, unconcealment both signifies the revealing of beings *as* beings within the open region and is equated with the region itself (GA 9: 184/141). The unconcealment of beings means that

they are present to thought. It is apparent, then, that unconcealment is very different from what we would normally call truth. Heidegger stresses this difference in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”: “*alētheia*, unconcealment in the sense of the clearing, may not be equated with truth. Rather, *alētheia*, unconcealment thought as clearing, first grants the possibility of truth” (GA 14: 85-86/69). The identification of unconcealment with “the clearing” (*Lichtung*) further emphasizes this difference. For Heidegger, the clearing acts in just the same manner as a clearing in the forest. Just as a forest clearing is a space that is free and allows light to reach the forest floor, the clearing “is the open region for everything that becomes present and absent” (GA 14: 81/65). Within the clearing beings are unconcealed in their presence.

But clearing is not a physical space. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that Dasein “is itself the clearing.” Dasein, the being that we ourselves are, is a being that has a pre-ontological understanding of being as such. For this reason, Dasein is not only able to encounter and understand beings *as* beings, but also comports itself towards its own being. Dasein is a clearing insofar as it has already cleared itself as a being (GA 2: 177/SZ 133). Thus, the clearing is not a physical space, but the site in which beings are intelligibly present. Yet in “On The Essence of Truth,” Heidegger will use the word *Da-sein* to emphasize the distinction between the open region and the being of man. For *Da-sein* is the “essential ground, long ungrounded, on the basis of which man is able to ek-sist, [and which] is preserved for him” (GA 9: 189/145). Also, Heidegger claims that it is by “standing” in the clearing that “man is in the ground of *Da-sein*” (GA 68: 45/36). Thus, like other beings, the being of man is manifest within the clearing.

To think the clearing for unconcealment is pivotal for overcoming metaphysics. As the site that “first grants Being and thinking and their presencing to and for each other,” the clearing is the condition for the possibility of metaphysics (GA 14: 84/68). Because metaphysics attempts to think the Being of beings, it requires and presupposes the clearing, but does not think the clearing as such (GA 14: 82/66). Metaphysically,

the clearing is unthinkable, because it is not a being; the clearing itself is concealed and, as such, is nothing (GA 14: 88/71). In the 1930s, Heidegger will call the clearing an “a-byss,” to emphasize that it is the ground by which beings emerge and yet it is a ground that is never “present-at-hand” (GA 68: 45-46/37); it is a ground that “refuses” or conceals itself, and thus only appears groundless.²⁶

What does the a-byssal ground of the clearing have to do with the truth of beyng? What do our findings have to do with undermining Hegel’s system? In *Hegel*, Heidegger directly equates beyng with the a-byss of the clearing.²⁷ What this means is that beyng is the clearing that makes possible the unconcealment of beings *as* beings, and of making correct truth claims. Thus, the most primordial essence of truth (the grounding of truth) is the truth of beyng. More radically, though, Heidegger will contend that the truth of beyng is not different from beyng, “but rather is the most proper essence of beyng” (GA 65: 93-94/74). But, as we have mentioned, the truth of beyng is also the origin of the ontological difference. This means two things. First, as origin, beyng is not something eternal, but is something that happens: “Beyng essentially occurs as event” (GA 65: 344/272-73). Second, this event explicitly bestows the difference between being as such and beings.²⁸ However, this bestowal does not mean that beyng is unconcealed; it is pivotal for Heidegger that beyng is always concealed. “Beyng is a possibility, something that is never objectively present and yet is always bestowing and denying itself in refusal through appropriation” (GA 65: 475-76/374).

This leads us to Heidegger’s critique of Hegel. Because Hegel is concerned with representing the Being of beings, his system is also grounded on the abyssal clearing. It is through the clearing that the “I” is able to “represent something as something in the light of being” (GA 68: 45/36). Further, this representing includes the “unconditional representation” of self-consciousness, which constitutes the certitude of the Absolute Idea (GA 68: 80/103). Thinking the nothingness of the truth of beyng undermines Hegel’s claim to absolute knowledge, for knowledge cannot be unconditional if it is conditioned by the clearing. Moreover,

while Hegel unconsciously articulates the ontological difference and then proceeds to negate it, the truth of *beyng* is incapable of negation. “The clearing of concealment does not mean the sublation [*Aufhebung*] of the concealed, i.e., its liberation and transformation into unconcealment. It instead means precisely the grounding of the abyssal ground for the *concealment* (the hesitant withholding)” (GA 65: 352/278).

Thus, Heidegger undermines Hegel by affirming nothingness and negativity, understood as the clearing of the truth of *beyng*.²⁹ Hegel’s supposed certitude rests on an abyss, which cannot be represented as if it were a being. Indeed, Heidegger’s appeal to the clearing makes any claim to certitude, concerning being, impossible. As Richard Polt argues, the event of *beyng* withdraws (conceals) “in the sense that it cannot be guaranteed, mastered, or founded metaphysically on some absolute entity or certainty.”⁵⁰ He notes that Heidegger corroborates this in the *Contributions*: “non-definitive knowledge adheres precisely to the abyss and thus to the essence of *beyng*” (GA 65: 459–60/362). Also, for this reason, *beyng* is not eternal, but contingent, finite and, as we will see, historical.⁵¹

HISTORY IN HEIDEGGER AND HEGEL

Hegel’s thought is the completion of philosophy not only because it makes the certitude of thought the Being of beings, but also because he philosophically realized the whole history of philosophy in his system. Heidegger claims, “Hegel gathered the entire earlier (even pre-platonic) history of philosophy into an affiliation,” arguing that there was a “necessity arising out of the essence of beingness (idea), a necessity according to which the phases of the history of the ideas had to form themselves into those phases” (GA 65: 213–14/167). While it is tempting to cast aside Hegel’s philosophical history as presumptuous, Heidegger takes this claim seriously, calling it the first and last “appropriate” philosophical interrogation of history.

For Hegel, world history follows a rational and necessary development. Absolute Spirit enacts history in the effort to realize itself. “In history [Spirit’s] act is to gain consciousness of itself as Mind [Spirit],

to apprehend itself in its interpretation of itself to itself.”⁵² This same teleology is reflected in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here, the “goal” of Absolute Spirit is partially realized through the dialectical meditation of “comprehended history.”⁵³ Hegel argues that all instances of life, from the individual person to the life of nations, are necessary as the “unconscious tools and organs” of Absolute Spirit.⁵⁴ Accordingly, this includes philosophy as well. For Hegel, the history of philosophy is a “revelation” of the telos of Spirit.⁵⁵

De Boer argues that the dialectical development of the Concept, by means of negation, is reflected not only in the *Logic*, but also in the history of philosophy itself.⁵⁶ This is evident by the fact that the beginning of the *Logic* parallels the beginning of philosophy. Parmenides determines pure being as the “absolute and self truth,” which is summarily negated by Heraclitus, who presents the “higher, total concept of becoming.”⁵⁷ The history of philosophy is a positive development of thought, where each critique leads to closer instances of absolute knowledge. However, De Boer notes that the thoughts of actual philosophers are the “merely subjective side of the absolute reflection achieved by the concept as such.”⁵⁸ The necessary process of history is the activity of the Concept itself.

Hegel’s system is exemplary in the history of philosophy, insofar as it takes into account the necessary shape of philosophy. The absolute knowledge posited at the beginning of philosophy is realized in the certitude of Hegel’s thought. Thus, Hegel’s history is not linear; rather “Hegel can understand the history of thinking as a closed circle of which his own philosophy constitutes the final link.”⁵⁹

In some respects, Heidegger’s view of history is not totally dissimilar. Michel Haar speaks of Heidegger’s account of the history of philosophy as an “inversion of Hegelianism.”⁴⁰ While Hegel claims that history progressively moves towards absolute knowledge, for Heidegger this progression is actually the “increasing oblivion of the commencement, of the inaugural essence of truth as *alētheia*.”⁴¹ Negatively, the end of philosophy, or metaphysics, is the culmination of nihilism and the technological domination of the earth. What is this oblivion? It

is the forgetting of the ontological difference (GA 11: 59/50). Or, more specifically, its origin: the truth of being.

The similarity between Hegel and Heidegger can be found in the fact that Heidegger seems to posit some form of historical necessity. Heidegger speaks of the history of Being, that is to say the history of the forgetting of the ontological difference, as a “destiny” (*Geschick*), “the sending of being.”⁴² However, this is not destiny in the sense that a certain event had to happen, but that certain past events produce a narrower frame for what future possibilities are available. So too has the interpretation of “Being” been framed by history.⁴³ Radically, Heidegger argues that the most basic structure of language, the articulation of being through the word “is,” has influenced the assumption that being concerns only what *is*, in terms of presence: “The little word ‘is’... contains the whole destiny of Being – from the ἔστιν γὰρ εἶναι of Parmenides to the ‘is’ of Hegel’s speculative sentence, and to the dissolution of the ‘is’ in the positing of the Will to Power with Nietzsche” (GA 11: 79/73). Hegel’s historical necessity, for Heidegger, is built on an assumption, grounded in language, that being refers to presence. But if Heidegger’s sense of the truth of being, as concealing, grounds and potentially overturns the metaphysical desire to determine the presence of being in beings, then does this concealing also contain the potential for a rupture in the historical destiny of being as reflected in Hegel’s system?

While the destiny of philosophy has been dictated by the metaphysical determination of Being, there belongs to this history a more “essential past” (*Wesensherkunft*, GA 11: 48/72) which made metaphysics possible: the ontological difference. But this is not to say that at some historical point being was thought; it is rather the un-thought origin of philosophy. In fact, for Heidegger, the retrieval of this difference (the truth of being) will constitute a new path for thought, unthinkable within the history of being, which Heidegger calls “the other beginning.”⁴⁴ This “inceptual thinking” will take place as a “confrontation” (GA 65: 58–59/47) between the first and the other beginning, and will include a critical appropriation of the whole metaphysical tradition,

with the aim of accessing the truth of beyng (GA 65: 171–72/135). This necessarily includes Hegel’s system as well.

The historical thinking of beyng (*seynsgeschichtliches Denken*) constitutes both a new path in philosophy and the appropriation of the history of metaphysics.⁴⁵ Turning back to our earlier concern with negativity and negation, the historical thinking of beyng is a meditation on nothingness that cannot be subsumed in the history of metaphysics. It is an ever-present possibility within the history of philosophy. Hence, Hegel’s historical account of his certitude is nullified by the possible historical emergence of the truth of beyng. This is evident in section 90 of the *Contributions*. Here Heidegger claims that “negation” needs to be recognized as the “leap” away from the first beginning, and “does so out of a knowledge and recognition of the uniqueness of what, at its end, demands the other beginning” (GA 65: 178–79/140). The negativity of the truth of beyng calls us to realize that history is not complete, but requires a rebirth. Heidegger claims that negativity not only makes “otherness,” like the other beginning, possible, but also “compels” it (GA 65: 266–68/210).

We conclude, then, that Heidegger’s affirmation of the nothingness of the truth of beyng undermines Hegel’s system not only in regards to his claim of realizing absolute, unconditional knowledge, but also in regards to his claim that this knowledge developed out of historical necessity. Hegel’s thought cannot be the completion of history insofar as the truth of beyng enables and, in fact compels, the historical emergence of a new path for thinking, founded on the truth of beyng. However, we cannot say what this emergence will look like. At this point it is only a possibility. Heidegger posits that being-historical thinking is thinking that is still to come, reserved for the “future ones” who will ground the abyss of the truth of beyng (GA 65: 395–401/313–18).⁴⁶

Notes

- 1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), 27.
- 2 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 64.
- 3 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.
- 4 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 51.
- 5 Karin De Boer, *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41.
- 6 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.
- 7 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 824.
- 8 Allegra de Laurentiis, "Absolute Knowing," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Kenneth R. Westphal (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 248.
- 9 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 485.
- 10 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 47.
- 11 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 56.
- 12 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 43.
- 13 de Laurentiis, "Absolute Knowing," 260.
- 14 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 82.
- 15 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 83.
- 16 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 88.
- 17 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 70.
- 18 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 116.
- 19 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 835.
- 20 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 491.
- 21 Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Thinking of Nothing: Heidegger's Criticism of Hegel's Conception of Negativity," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 529.
- 22 Dahlstrom, "Thinking of Nothing," 530.
- 23 Cf. Karin De Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger's Encounter with Hegel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2000), 146–147.

- 24 This reading of “On The Essence of Truth” was discussed by John Sallis in a class on Heidegger.
- 25 Statements are only one mode of comportment. For Heidegger, all action is comportment: “All working and achieving, all action and calculation, keep within an open region within which beings . . . take their stand and become capable of being said” (GA 9: 184/141).
- 26 “The opening of the abyssal ground is not groundless. The abyss is not a ‘no’ to every ground in the manner of groundlessness; it is rather a ‘yes’ to the ground in the concealed breadth and remoteness of that ground” (GA 65: 387–88/306).
- 27 “The abyss: beyng” (GA 68: 37).
- 28 Heidegger also notes that the pre-ontological understanding of beings in *Being and Time* is shown now “as belonging to an appropriation by beyng itself” (GA 65: 252–53/199)
- 29 Heidegger claims that the negative belongs to truth, though not as a lack, “but as resistance, as the self-concealing which comes into the clearing as such” (GA 65: 355–56/181).
- 30 Richard Polt, “The Question of Nothing,” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s “Introduction to Metaphysics,”* ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 72.
- 31 The descriptions of beyng as contingent and finite are Polt’s words.
- 32 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), §343.
- 33 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 493.
- 34 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §344.
- 35 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Lectures on The History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 547.
- 36 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 55.
- 37 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 83.
- 38 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 58.
- 39 De Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time*, 305.

- 40 Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 72.
- 41 Haar, *Song of the Earth*, 72.
- 42 Haar, *Song of The Earth*, 69.
- 43 “‘Being’ ever always speaks as destiny, and thus permeated by tradition” (GA 11: 60/51).
- 44 Heidegger’s description of the other beginning: “The other beginning experiences the truth of beyng, and asks about the beyng of truth in order first to ground the essential occurrence of beyng and to let beings arise as the true of the original truth” (GA 65: 179–80/141).
- 45 John Sallis argues, “it is only in the crossing into another beginning that an originary appropriation of metaphysics and of its history becomes possible; that is, precisely at the point of its overcoming that metaphysics first becomes recognizable in its essence.” See “Grounders of the Abyss,” in *Companion to Heidegger’s “Contributions to Philosophy,”* eds. Charles Scott et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 184.
- 46 However, this does not mean canceling the abyss, but “apprehending” it as the abysmal ground: Sallis, “Grounders of the Abyss,” 189.

Heidegger and Jünger: Nihilism and the Fate of Europe

Timothy Sean Quinn

Beginning in the early 1930s, Martin Heidegger began what would become a lifelong engagement with the work of Ernst Jünger. According to Heidegger, a collegial study of two of Jünger's writings, "Total Mobilization" of 1930 and *The Worker* of 1932, framed that most controversial decade of his career. From them Heidegger gleaned "how they express an essential understanding of Nietzsche's metaphysics, insofar as the history and the present of the Western world are seen and foreseen within the horizon of this metaphysics." With Jünger's essays providing a basis for his own subsequent reflections, Heidegger and his small circle of colleagues "were able to think what was coming." This ominous judgment Heidegger summarized in 1940: from Jünger, he learned "the universal rule of the will to power within planetary history" (GA 16: 375).¹ Part of Heidegger's interest in Jünger was a result of Jünger's Nietzsche-inspired cultural diagnosis; in Heidegger's words, "he makes all previous writings 'about' Nietzsche inessential; for Jünger has not discussed the 'will to power' as the content of some doctrine to be adopted and improved; he has made visible, in essential experiences, with sharp and cold eyes, the Being of beings as will to power" (GA 90: 277). Jünger's Nietzsche is thus the clue to understanding "what is coming," the fulfillment of the will to power "in planetary history"; Jünger, from Heidegger's point of view, understood this fact better than anyone. Jünger's Nietzschean judgments concerning the development of nihilism in Europe subsequently help to inspire a series of essays from Heidegger: they are at work especially (although unacknowledged) in "The Age of the World Picture."²

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At the same time, however, Heidegger was quite critical of Jünger. Concerning what he called Jünger's "bedazzlement" (*Blendung*) and "blindness" (*Verblendung*) before the thought of Nietzsche, Heidegger judges that Jünger fails to see the "essence and ground of the contemporary subjectivity of humanity" and therewith "the authentic sphere of decision ... between Being and beings" (GA 90: 13-14). Jünger's limitations are therefore also Nietzsche's: "the contradiction [*Wider-spruch*] of Jünger can only be the contradiction of *Nietzsche's metaphysics* ... a contradiction of metaphysics *as such*, that is, of *Western philosophy in its entirety*." This broad indictment culminates in the harsh verdict, "Jünger is one who recognizes [*Erkenner*], but is in no way a thinker" (GA 90: 27).

What explains Heidegger's interest in Jünger's work, an interest that would eventually grow into a friendship? What was it about Jünger's writings that attuned Heidegger's cultural ear to "what was coming?" How, in short, ought we to estimate Jünger's effect on Heidegger's thought? A complete answer to these questions would have to evaluate the entire ambit of Heidegger's reflections on Jünger, from its earliest stages in 1933 through their correspondence into the 1970s. For present purposes, I wish to focus these questions on a particular exchange during the 1950s, when each penned a work for *Festschriften* dedicated to the other on the occasion of their birthdays: Jünger's "Über die Linie" ("Across the Line") of 1950, and Heidegger's response, "Über 'Die Linie'" ("Concerning 'The Line'") of 1955.³

To begin, the principal theme of Jünger's essay is the abolition of nihilism. Citing Nietzsche's remark in the Preface to *The Will to Power* that he is "Europe's first absolute nihilist" who has nonetheless "lived through nihilism within himself," Jünger notes cause for optimism, in the fact that nihilism is less an end than a phase of a more comprehensive intellectual and spiritual process. Those living through an age of nihilistic decline may not feel so fortunate; their proximity to nihilism does not "allow room for considerations that transcend the nightmare world" of "active nihilism." To transcend nihilism, however, it is necessary to define it, even though doing so

“would be comparable to discovering the causes of cancer.” Jünger therefore enlists the aid of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. While different in their precise diagnoses of the prevailing nihilism of the age, they agree in their hope of escape. Nietzsche, for example, tells us that “in some future or other” a “contrary movement” will develop, abolishing the regnant “absolute nihilism.” Nihilism thus represents but a stage in an ongoing process, a “complete unfolding” that culminates in transcendence. For Dostoevsky, “the prognosis is also optimistic; he does not see in nihilism a final, deadly stage” but “a necessary stage, intrinsic to a movement toward particular ends.” Quoting Bernanos, Jünger writes: “the light flares up when the darkness is complete.” The darkness in question is a leveling of European humanity, a reign of the average that nonetheless does not obviate, but rather provokes, a desire for greatness – an allusion to Nietzsche’s horizon of monumentality and its longings.⁴ Complete nihilism of the sort Nietzsche claims for himself liberates, in short, the possibility for a restoration of human greatness over and above the bourgeois mediocrity of the age, a point Jünger emphasizes by indicating Nietzsche’s and Dostoevsky’s own fascination with Napoleon (70–71).

Jünger devotes the majority of his essay to what he calls “diagnostic remarks” about nihilism’s main features. He notes in particular the political appearances of nihilism: the devastation of technological war; the propaganda of governments threatening the terror of absolute destruction at the hands of anonymous enemies; the assertion of the primacy of the people, the *Volk*, over the individual – all are feats of “annihilation” (73). What, specifically, do they annihilate? Based upon Jünger’s examples, the annihilation is first and foremost of the individual – a judgment Heidegger shared, and which by then had become a staple of European conservatism, especially Catholic conservatism, in which Jünger in small measure participated.⁵ Following Nietzsche, Jünger judges the root of these symptoms to be “the decline of values. . . above all the decline of Christian values.” This decline “corresponds to the impossibility of bringing forth higher types” of individuals, and therefore to profound pessimism concerning the human condition (74).

With the advent of this pessimism, the distinction between higher and lower disappears, and with this disappearance, pessimism drifts into nihilism. Nihilism is therefore “the expression of the uselessness of the other world” – a judgment equally at home in Dostoevsky and in Nietzsche.⁶ But it is not, correspondingly, a renunciation of this world or of existence in general. “Great growth,” Jünger writes, “brings with it immense damage and loss, and in this respect, nihilism’s appearing as the most extreme form of pessimism can be a favorable sign.” Again enlisting the observations of Dostoevsky, Jünger observes that nihilism is a stage of moral purification and strengthening through which one passes.⁷ Nihilism, Jünger concludes, advances then in three phases: “from doubt to pessimism, from there to actions in valueless and godless space, and then to new fulfillment.”

There is, however, a deeper issue involved with the nihilistic diagnosis: the impossibility of representing Nothing. Nothing, he writes, “approaches the zone in which intuition as well as knowledge wither. . . . One makes of Nothing neither image nor concept” (75). And where Nothing defies representation, nihilism cannot be overcome. One response to this circumstance has been an identification of nihilism with chaos or with disease. From Jünger’s point of view, it is neither. In the first case, he indicates that notions of chaos and anarchy are in deep conflict with nihilism, since nihilism “can harmonize with vast systems of order, which is even the rule when it is active and its power deployed” (76). Nihilism finds in order “a favorable substrate” that “nihilism refashions. . . for its purposes.” In this respect, order “belongs to its style.” The type of order Jünger has in mind is political and technological order, which overlap when the state comes to be “arranged for pure functioning.” Dehumanization of politics and of the art of war are for Jünger symptoms of a nihilism that has infested modern regimes; the ensuing decomposition of the state, its devolution into chaos and anarchy, is therefore a consequence of nihilism rather than its origin. Where nihilism prevails, “the great sites of physical annihilation” are accompanied by “sobriety, hygiene, and strict order” – an allusion, to be sure, to Nazi totalitarianism.

But nihilism is also not a disease or a species of decadence. Indeed, “with a bit of observation one will find that physical health is connected with it – above all where it is vigorously at work” (79). The “active nihilist” disdains pity and pain, extols health and strength. Ironically, however, such prototypical *Übermenschen* arise in a world that has become increasingly democratic; Jünger has in mind specifically the “welfare state,” where “entitlements, health insurance, safety nets, and narcotics” prevail. The active nihilist and the citizen of the welfare state are, in Jünger’s words, “complementary figures,” the latter having become a “passive nihilist.” Indeed, Jünger notes that the experience of two world wars has produced not only souls steeled by pain, but “men of iron,” “escapees from the waves of terror, purges, and liquidation.” In short, nihilists of one stripe or another compass the whole of contemporary society; “how a person faced with annihilation can endure in the wake of nihilism” has thus become the great literary theme of the day, in authors as diverse as Verlaine, Rilke, Trakl, T. E. Lawrence, and St. Exupéry.

Finally, Jünger notes that nihilism is not a species of evil: “programs of nihilistic action can be distinguished by good intentions and philanthropy,” specifically as antidotes to emergent political disorder. “The nihilist is no criminal in the traditional sense,” Jünger writes; he is, instead, one who abandons any distinction between good and evil, a situation Jünger deems “more disturbing” than explicit criminality (83).

What then is nihilism for Jünger? It is, he writes, a sort of reductionism: “the nihilistic world is in its essence a reduced and increasingly self-reductive world” (83). Among the principal symptoms of nihilistic reductionism is the turn toward method and toward specialization in the sciences. By wedding the perfection of technological order to a complete absence of moral feeling, all sense of wonder and admiration come to be suppressed. Where specialization reigns, “the synoptic talent dwindles almost completely,” only to be replaced by the image of the worker on an assembly line.⁸ In this scenario, only middling values arise: to be productive, to play a role. It is an age of “apostles without

mandates,” where “political parties participate in the apotheosis. And whatever serves their doctrines and their changing goals becomes divine” – politics and science, in short, emerge as “ersatz religions.”

In the arts, a similar reduction occurs. Nihilism reduces the beautiful to the measurable, and eros to an economic or market venture subject to calculation and measurement. This quantification of desire signifies “a dismantling of taboos, which at first frightens,” but after which “what has then been enucleated becomes a matter of course.” Indeed, Jünger notes, “as macabre a book as Evelyn Waugh’s about the Hollywood funeral industry” – he has in mind *The Loved One* – “belongs to entertainment literature.”⁹ Death, no longer terrifying, is merely comic.

By its symptomatic reductionisms, its shrinking of human values, its transformation of the citizen into the worker, Nihilism for Jünger has become the norm. We have reached, in his words, “the null point.” Jünger cites with approval Nietzsche’s verdict that “the era of the monster state has begun,” driven by “the mechanical and automated world” (94). Technological automation, dehumanization, and totalitarianism are of a piece: “total mobilization.” The modern state is in short the apex of nihilism: organization without principle and motion without goal. Jünger therefore asks whether there exist at this null-point any signs of hope? Is even “a restricted scope of freedom possible?” (96). Yes, he answers, there are “oases in our deserts,” two in particular: poetry and eros. Eros, Jünger observes, is the irruption of the unpredictable and the personal; it is for that reason that tyrants suppress it: “*One* single individual is a sufficient witness that freedom has not yet disappeared. . . . Then the powers of resistance awake in us. Tyrants know this and seek to dissolve the human into the universal and the public – keeping at a distance everything unpredictable and extraordinary. . . . Freedom and the life of the Muses are inseparably bound together.” Poetry in particular gives form (*Gestalt*) to the age; it is consequently an agent of self-understanding as well as of erotic striving. The same is true with thinking. Poet and thinker, Jünger writes, stand in “mirror-like correspondence” (99). Both are able to confront nothingness without

being overwhelmed by it – an observation familiar from Heidegger as well. In this confrontation, poet and thinker become opponents of mechanization and tyranny, that is, of nihilism: “Eros will always triumph as the gods’ true messenger over all titanic constructs.” They will also be the objects of tyrannical attack: “Persecution is the mark of the artist.” Nonetheless, it is the poet and the thinker, not the fanatic bomb-throwers, who are the “authentic anarchists”; it is they who “cross the line.”¹⁰

Liberation from the age, however, requires living through it: “He knows the age the least who has not experienced the immense power of nothingness in himself and has not been tempted by it” (101). For this reason, the future remains cloudy. “Now we are in virgin territory,” Jünger writes, “certainty is slim, but with greater hope of results” (§21). Invoking Heidegger again, he concludes, “forest paths” – *Holzwege* – “is a beautiful, Socratic word for this territory. It explains that we find ourselves off the beaten track and with an abundance of riches.”

It is useful to observe certain features of Jünger’s argument. First and most conspicuously is its indebtedness to Nietzsche on which Heidegger often remarks. Two features of that indebtedness deserve particular attention. The first is its identification of nihilism with a cultural and political phenomenon, and not just a state of certain bleak and literary souls, like Raskolnikov. As Nietzsche indicates especially in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Europe as a whole lives in the throes of political degeneration, symptoms of which are the concerns for equality and right – shadows of Christian values that ought to have been repudiated.¹¹ Jünger however transcends Nietzsche’s political characterization of nihilism: it is no longer a property of European life, but of the planet, evidence of which is Jünger’s association of nihilism with totalitarianisms, whose emergence during the twentieth century is matched by the cataclysms of *world war*. The “planetary” scope of these wars is part and parcel of the universal reach of the totalitarian state. Again following Nietzsche, the dominion of modern natural science and its technological aims is inseparable from the emergence of Leviathan: both are modes of order that prefer efficiency to virtue and the measurable

to the beautiful or astonishing. Yet Jünger exceeds Nietzsche with his emphasis on the universal scope of nihilism. Indeed, by the close of the essay, nihilism and totalitarianism are virtually synonymous. It is clear, however, that the totalitarianism Jünger has in mind is that of Nazi Germany, rather than that of Nietzsche's "socialist fools": its principal features mix fanaticism with strict order and a passion for hygiene. One therefore wonders whether Jünger is not making a covert apologia of sorts for the depredations of Nazism: if we are indeed *über die Linie*, then the null-point represented by the Third Reich is Bernanos' overwhelming darkness before the coming of the light.

A second aspect of Jünger's Nietzschean inheritance worth noting is its aesthetic emphases. Jünger's nihilism is not only political, but literary, as are its solutions in the activity of poets and thinkers. The judgment recalls in particular Nietzsche's conclusions in the final paragraphs of *Advantage and Disadvantage of History*, where art and religion – in effect, a new paganism – are the "antidotes" to the "poisons" of modern natural science and its objectification of human beings. Absent from consideration, both by Jünger and Nietzsche, are any notions of justice: political renewal is to be achieved by non-political or apolitical means, liberating the individual over and against the mass.

Finally, it is necessary to raise the question concerning Jünger's own activity as "poet and thinker" in relation to his age: is his own act of writing a "crossing of the line" or merely the final symptom of nihilism's progress toward the null-point? We recall in this connection Nietzsche's own verdict concerning his relationship to his age: remaining among the "last men," trapped in struggle with the very horizon he wished to overthrow, and which therefore defined him.¹² These questions inform Heidegger's response to Jünger, in the essay "Concerning 'The Line.'"

Heidegger offers us a preview of this response in one letter in particular, dated 18 December 1950. He begins by praising Jünger's essay, stating that "the spirit that was already active in *The Worker*... is now purified, its vision widened..." allowing Jünger "to bring that work once again to the consciousness of the age."¹³ He then locates what

he deems the “metaphysical kernel” of Jünger’s argument in the sentence, “The moment in which the line is passed brings a new turning approach [*Zuwendung*] of Being.” Heidegger writes: “Must we not, in order to respond to the essence of Being, at the same time say: the line is first passable in the moment instigated by Being in its turning approach, which turning approach is first an awakening and eventful addressing of the essence of man?”¹⁴ If so, crossing the line of nihilism is less an advance than an “overtaking by what saves, whose beyond first genuinely illuminates the line for the crossing over.” This thought would translate, in Heidegger’s essay “Concerning ‘The Line’” into a correction of the very image of the line in favor of a “zone” of nihilism, where being and nothingness intersect; Heidegger, both in this essay and in later works would symbolize this different sense of crossing with an X through the word *Sein*.

Heidegger’s essay itself begins with a pun at the expense of the title of Jünger’s essay, a pun that reveals its basic perspective: not “Über die Linie” (“Across the Line”), but “Über ‘Die Linie’” (“Concerning ‘The Line’”). Unlike Jünger, whose title connotes a crossing of the line – *über* in the sense of “across” or “beyond” – Heidegger wishes to call into question the very possibility of passage beyond nihilism. As Heidegger puts it, while Jünger offers “an assessment of the human situation in relation to the movement of nihilism,” he intends to probe nihilism’s essence: “you look across and go across the line; I simply take a look only at the line that you have represented” (GA 9: 389/294). Heidegger thus indicates that their efforts are complementary: both contend that nihilism is neither disease nor chaos nor evil. They agree further regarding Nietzsche’s characterization of the present age as that of the “last men.” In this light, Heidegger praises Jünger’s grasp of Nietzsche.¹⁵ Their disagreement, which takes up the substance of Heidegger’s essay, turns on whether a crossing of the line is conceivable: knowing its essence is not equal to having a cure at hand.

Heidegger begins his critique by returning to Jünger’s earlier works, “Total Mobilization” and *The Worker*; both of which, in Heidegger’s view, form the metaphysical core of Jünger’s judgments concerning

the line. The figure of the worker, Heidegger writes, belongs “to the phase of active nihilism” (GA 9: 389/294). It becomes for Jünger a sign of the “‘total work-like character’ of all that is actual.” Work therefore becomes the mode of total mobilization, which now appears as a “planetary tendency,” evidence for which is the universal reach of technology. It illustrates, according to Heidegger, “the movement of nihilism in the many forms of its inexorable and planetary character” toward becoming the “normal condition” of humanity (GA 9: 392/296). Proof of the normalizing of nihilism are the “reactive” attempts to stem its progress – what Heidegger identifies as “salvation in taking flight” rather than in a genuine confrontation with its essence. In the event, Heidegger asks, what are the genuine prospects for crossing the line, that is, of realizing the fulfillment of nihilism and thus abandoning it? In fact, Heidegger notes, two world wars have failed to check nihilism’s progress or to divert its course. Evidence of this failure is found in the very language Jünger employs: on both sides of the line “you speak the same language.” Language, Heidegger cautions, is intended “not as a mere means of expression that can be taken off and exchanged like a garment” (GA 9: 394/298). Rather, what we express appears “for the first time” in language; expressions shift, but language remains. To illustrate the limits of language to articulate an alternative to nihilism, Heidegger focuses attention on the subtitle of Jünger’s *The Worker*: “Dominance and *Gestalt*.” *Gestalt*, “in the sense of the Gestalt psychology of the time,” means “a whole that contains more than the sum of its parts.” The word also means “form” – a loaded term in the Heideggerian lexicon, given its identity in Greek with the word “idea” (*eidos*). It is this affinity of terms that troubles Heidegger, specifically, their recollection of Platonic metaphysics.¹⁶ As Heidegger reminds the reader, “form” and “idea” signal “being that is at rest” for the Greeks, in contrast to “changeable being.” The motion from the latter toward the former, from beings to Being as such, is “transcendence,” that is, “meta-physical.” To speak of the *Gestalt* of the worker is to invoke this metaphysics of transcendence, a metaphysics that, given its covert

presence in Jünger's argument, helps account for his conviction that a movement away from nihilism is possible.

But *Gestalt* has another valence which Heidegger reminds us is also at work in Jünger's thought: it is "the source that gives meaning," where the relationship between form and what is formed is like that between stamp and impression. The relationship is technological in character; it suggests a divide between the superior being of the artificer and the contingent being of the artifact, the metaphysical expression of which is the divide between subject and object. Jünger's use of the term *Gestalt*, in short, privileges the central position the human being enjoys within the metaphysics of transcendence. Thus, Heidegger: "The appearance of the metaphysical *Gestalt* of the human being as the source that gives meaning is the ultimate consequence of positing the human essence as the authoritative subiectum" (GA 9: 397/300). Heidegger acknowledges the Cartesian provenance of these remarks, that is, Descartes' methodological basis in the *ego cogito* on behalf of technological "mastery of nature."¹⁷ But its origins are Platonic, expressed in the concept of Being as form or idea. In this respect, Platonic philosophy is of a piece with modernity: the Platonic concept of the *eidos* is the source for modern subjectivity; dividing Being from beings inspires a concept of the subject that bestows meaning by stamping its form on beings. Technological mastery of nature is but the culmination of Western metaphysics. Importantly, the point of culmination is Nietzsche: his doctrine of the will to power is but the expression of the oblivion of Being and therewith nihilism. This swift history of metaphysics is a familiar theme in Heidegger's writings, at work especially in his writings from the thirties. Here, however, Heidegger deploys it to indicate the degree to which Jünger's notion of the worker "corresponds to the projection of the essential *Gestalt* of Zarathustra within the metaphysics of the will to power" (GA 9: 396/299). Jünger's metaphysical presuppositions, which Heidegger wishes to expose, remain within the very tradition that has reached a culmination in the nihilism he wishes to escape.

In this respect, Jünger's limitations, in Heidegger's view, are Nietzsche's: both are indelibly stamped by the metaphysical history

of the West. What is most salient in that history is the turn toward the human being as subject, a turn that makes possible technological exploitation of the world. Heidegger writes: “the meta-physical of metaphysics, namely, transcendence, comes to be transformed whenever...the *Gestalt* of the human essence appears as the source that gives meaning” (GA 9: 398/300-301). The degree to which we form the world is the degree to which “the Gestalt of the worker is power...‘a new and special kind of will to power’ (*Arbeiter*, 70). Being in the sense of the will to power.” Heidegger applauds Jünger’s awareness of the totalitarian character of work. Quoting Jünger, Heidegger indicates that technology is “mobilization of the world through the *Gestalt* of the worker” (GA 9: 399/301). Given the dominance of the subject over the world, technology, as expressive of this dominance, is “a reversal of transcendence into the rescendence of the *Gestalt* of the worker, whereby the presence of this *Gestalt* unfolds into the representation of its power.” It is (again quoting Jünger), “the destroyer of every belief whatsoever” (GA 9: 399/301-2). Through technology, in short, the world becomes us, and we lose ourselves.

It is useful to pause briefly with these assertions. By tracing Jünger’s notion of *Gestalt* to antecedent origins in Platonic notions of form or idea, Heidegger has in mind an etymologically correct rendering of the Greek term *eidos* as “look.” However, following Nietzsche, he understands the Platonic notion of form or idea – the look of a being – as a point of view or vista, over and against which some subject stands. Here, Heidegger is informed in large measure by Nietzsche’s critique of modern scientific objectivity, which places the human being at a remove from what it seeks to understand.¹⁸ For Nietzsche and for Heidegger, the subject-object polarity is problematic, if not utterly erroneous. Plato is originally responsible for this polarity, made irrevocable by his distinction between “ideal” and “real” worlds – a conception that Heidegger will later invoke, again following Nietzsche, to criticize Christianity as “Platonism for the people.”¹⁹ In this manner, Heidegger is, along with Nietzsche, able to connect “ancients” and “moderns”: Platonic ideas culminate in Nietzsche’s nihilism, since the metaphysical

position Nietzsche seeks to undermine is originally Platonic in origin and intention. This history becomes germane, for Heidegger, to an understanding of Jünger, given his perception of Jünger's limitations: Jünger still moves within the zone of traditional metaphysics, that is, he shares the same mistakes as Nietzsche. The principal symptom of Jünger's Nietzschean "bedazzlement" is his desire to transcend, to cross the line. Importantly, this very way of posing the dilemma of modernity indicates its insufficiency: the relationship between this side and the other side of the line mimics that between subject and object, between Being and nothingness, reality and appearance, freedom and necessity. Jünger, in short, is trapped amidst the polarities of modernity.

Consequently, transcendence, "crossing the line," seems impossible; the very language in which we articulate the possibility of this transcendence reiterates what is to be transcended. Thus, Heidegger writes:

In what language does the fundamental outline of that thinking speak that prefigures a crossing of the line? Is the language of the metaphysics of the will to power, of *Gestalt*, and of values to be saved over beyond the critical line? What if the language of metaphysics and metaphysics itself, whether it is that of the living or of the dead God, in fact constituted, *as* metaphysics, that limit which prevents a transition over of the line, i.e., the overcoming of nihilism? If this were the case, would not crossing the line then necessarily have to become a transformation of our saying and demand a transformed relationship to the essence of language?
(GA 9: 405/306)

Such a transformation would take time, especially when language is continually confronted by "the temptation" to measure things "according to the tempo of calculation and planning" (26). To this extent, Heidegger agrees with Jünger that we must marshal "still untapped springs of power. . .to hold one's own in the wake of nihilism." Yet Heidegger also cautions that this effort could forestall a confrontation with

the essence of nihilism: we cannot know it while struggling to remain aloof from it. How then to renovate language so that a confrontation with the essence of nihilism could be possible, a confrontation that could lead at the same time to “a new direction of Being”?

Heidegger approaches this question by returning to what he proposes as the root distinction at work within our metaphysical horizon, namely the subject-object distinction. From the point of view of this distinction, stated in simplest terms, to be is to be present; being present is always a presence toward some subject. Therefore, “Presenting (‘being’) is, as presenting. . . a presenting directed toward the human essence, insofar as presenting is a call. . . that on each occasion calls upon the human essence” (GA 9: 408/308). For this reason, the subject-object dichotomy undermines itself: Being is alternatively wholly, exhaustively present toward the human being – in which case “to be” is “to be human” – or wholly absent, as mere object over and against which the human subject stands. Absence, however, is a sort of nothingness, a way in which nothingness is experienced. Yet presence and absence are not intelligible apart from one another; being and nothingness in some sense always belong together. For this reason, confrontation with the essence of nihilism brings along with it the possibility of a new recovery (*Verwindung*) of Being. To enter into this confrontation correctly however requires that we pass beyond the language of traditional metaphysics, that is, the language of sheer presence. As Heidegger puts the matter, “is the question of which language of fundamental words is spoken at the moment of crossing the line. . . left to the whim of those who are speaking?” This question and others must be confronted, “even at the peril of having to relinquish old and established habits of thinking in the sense of metaphysical representation” (GA 9: 409/309).

The solution to the dilemma of metaphysical language Heidegger now proposes takes the form of a graphic rendering of Being as ~~Being~~ (GA 9: 411/310). This celebrated sign is not meant to negate Being as a concept available to the human intellect. Its intention lies at the intersection of the two lines: “not. . . merely the negative sign of crossing out,” but of a gathering at the point of intersection (GA 9: 411/310–311).

This description recalls Heidegger's account of *logos*: in its primordial sense, it means gathering or collecting (GA 40: 132-133/137-138). Fittingly, *logos*, language, is what is at stake here, for Heidegger. What is gathered in this case is the essence of the human being together with the essence of Being itself: "in his essence the human being is the thoughtful memory of being, but of ~~being~~. This means: the human essence also belongs to that which, in the crossing out of being, takes thinking into the claim of a more originary call" (GA 9: 411/311). The human being, in short, belongs to the being that "turns toward" him: the human being is the "place" of Being.

Accordingly, Jünger's image of the line is inadequate; Heidegger proposes in its place the word "zone" [*Zone*]. In this zone, Being and the human essence, but also Being and Nothingness, cross: "Like ~~being~~, the nothing would also have to be written...in the same way" (GA 9: 411/311). Nihilism therefore belongs equally to the essence of the human being as the human essence belongs to Being. The human being therefore "has an essential share" in nihilism. He "does not stand in the critical zone of the line; he himself...is this zone and this line."

What, then, asks Heidegger, is the "topology" of this zone, that is, of the place where Being and nothingness gather in ways that determine both the essence of nihilism and its overcoming? According to Jünger, the place is nihilistic "reductionism" accompanied by "a growing unfolding of power and effective force." Heidegger comments that this reduction...rests on a production of being, namely, on the unfolding of the will to power into the unconditional will to will" (GA 9: 413/312). The interplay of reductionism and will, of Being and nothingness, points to that of presence and absence, oblivion and recollection, that is, to the very pattern of human being and thinking. The presence upon which absence is premised is the basis for transcendence, now conceived as "surpassing," and surpassing, Heidegger asserts, "is metaphysics itself." Here resides "the essential locale of nihilism":

Accordingly, if the nothing prevails within nihilism and the essence of the nothing belongs to being, yet being is the destiny of the surpassing, then the essential

locale of nihilism shows itself to be the essence of metaphysics. (GA 9: 413-414/313)

Just as Being is inextricable from nothingness, metaphysics is inextricable from nihilism.²⁰ Nihilism is therefore not merely something people do or undergo; it is how Being unfolds into “unconcealment.” Famously, “unconcealment” is Heidegger’s etymologically evocative way of rendering the Greek word *alētheia*, customarily, “truth.” Truth as unconcealment is both of the essence of being and of nothingness, falsehood or deception: concealment belongs to truth. The impediment to this way of conceiving truth, Heidegger reminds us, is the sciences, which address only what is present or given in ways that can be quantified and expressed in propositions. The sciences have become “metaphysically neutral.”

Heidegger therefore concludes: “[metaphysical thinking] must content itself with building the *path* which leads into the locality of the restriction of metaphysics and thereby permits a walk through the destined phase of an overcoming of nihilism” (43). Note the shift from crossing a line to walking down a path: the former directed, making progress; the latter, reflective, a meandering stroll following along the unfolding of the path’s dead ends – *Holzwege*. This, he indicates, is the point of his letter to Jünger: “Your assessment of the situation *trans lineam* and my discussion *de linea* are referred to one another,” since together they oblige “planetary building ” of a sort that could foster dialogue between Europe and Asia, neither capable on its own of opening upon “the realm of possible dialogue” (GA 9: 424/320-321). Curiously, immediately after this statement Heidegger recalls a similar reflection of Nietzsche’s. Nietzsche, in whose “light or shadow” we all think, “heard a calling that demands that human beings prepare for assuming a domination over the earth,” predicting “the erupting struggle for domination” upon which we now verge. Heidegger cautions, though, that what Nietzsche – and he with him – intends “is no war, but the *polemos* that first lets gods and humans, freemen and slaves, appear in their respective essence and leads to a critical encounter of ~~being~~.” The recent world wars, he judges, are but the foreground of

this *polemos*; they are inadequate to the struggle, “less and less capable of deciding anything the more technological their armaments” (GA 9: 425/321). Nietzsche, in short, “heard that call to reflect on the essence of a planetary domination,” and “followed the call on the path of the metaphysical thinking granted him and collapsed on the way.” In this way, though, Nietzsche issues an invitation to a new reflection that may do what actual war has failed to do. In so writing, Heidegger also has in mind Jünger, who, he has made clear, shares Nietzsche’s convictions more thoroughly than any other contemporary writer. Like Nietzsche, Jünger’s thought, in Heidegger’s view, breaks down on the way to crossing the line. However, in so doing, he offers our age the same invitation Nietzsche offered his.

We return now to our original questions: What did Heidegger learn from Jünger such that it attuned Heidegger’s cultural ear to “what was coming?” How ought one to estimate Jünger’s effect on Heidegger’s thought?

We now may note certain affinities. First and foremost, there is Heidegger’s endorsement of Jünger’s Nietzscheanism. Jünger, the last true follower of Nietzsche, understood clearly Nietzsche’s view concerning “the universal rule of the will to power within planetary history.” He understood that Nietzschean will to power is a “will to will” stemming from the destruction of Christian values that issues in the essential features of nihilism: fanaticism, moral emptiness, and a technological ordering of all areas of human experience and thought – what Jünger deems rightly to be a form of reductionism. To be sure, Heidegger was persuaded of this judgment decades prior to “Über die Linie” by Jünger’s other writings. That later work however only intensified Heidegger’s perception: “The spirit that was already at work in *The Worker*, but which in a certain way still remains tied there to a fixed reality, is now purified, its vision widened.”²¹ One is tempted to wonder whether the “fixed reality” Heidegger mentions was not the political situation of the 1930s. In that case, Jünger’s insight is to have “purified” and “widened” the nihilistic vision of *The Worker* in

a way fitting for the global reach of technology, as manifestation of “planetary domination.”

If for Heidegger, Jünger’s virtues are Nietzsche’s, so too are his limitations. Heidegger expresses the main limitation in metaphysical terms: Jünger and Nietzsche both remain under the sway of those philosophical positions that have culminated in the very nihilism they seek to oppose. Any optimism about “crossing the line” into an age that would once again liberate the highest human possibilities is therefore ill-founded. Jünger, in short, fails to transcend the “optic” or horizon Nietzsche provides him. In a separate reflection, Heidegger summarizes the matter in this way: Jünger describes the features of his age “more coldly and precisely” than anyone, understanding the being of the age as will to power under the influence of Nietzsche’s metaphysics. He sees the proper *Gestalt* of the age to be “the worker,” rather than poet and thinker. As a result, Jünger sees the age, but not beyond the age: “since Jünger does *not* see what is only able to be thought, he maintains that this fulfillment of metaphysics in the being of the will to power is the advent of a new age.”²²

Heidegger couches his response to Jünger in “Über ‘die Linie’” in metaphysical terms familiar from his *Introduction to Metaphysics*: the unfolding story of the oblivion of Being; the necessity of attempting to think nothingness together with Being; the limitations of modern natural science; the rise of technology and the debasement of rank; the problem of language.²⁵ In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, however, Heidegger linked these metaphysical themes to political judgments, suggesting a connection between the metaphysical destiny of the German *Volk* and an embrace of National Socialism, whose “inner truth and greatness” have yet to be fully realized. Heidegger’s relative silence about matters of political culture in his response to Jünger is therefore telling, especially given the political overtones of Jünger’s own reflections on nihilism. How ought we to understand this silence? It is tempting, of course, to take it as an acknowledgement of sorts (albeit tepid) on Heidegger’s part of the failure of his expectations for metaphysical renewal in Germany. One index of this possibility is his

remark, mentioned earlier, concerning “the universal rule of the will to power in planetary history”: immediately following this statement, Heidegger adds, “Today everything is a part of this reality, whether it is called communism, or fascism, or world democracy.” This statement from 1940 suggests, first, that by that time Heidegger had already surrendered hope for National Socialism.²⁴ It suggests further that the planetary domination of technological nihilism had, at that point, effaced the differences between regimes: communism, fascism, and “world democracy” are equally totalitarian. In that event, political renewal ceases to be a matter of political decision or of political philosophy. It is rather a matter of metaphysics.

When, then, Heidegger remarks in the 1930s that a study of Jünger alerted him to “what was coming,” he intends this usurpation of political life by technology. In this respect, Heidegger’s reading of Jünger provokes a change in the way in which Heidegger had come to think of him: not offering a new beginning for the West, but announcing its end.²⁵ The political and cultural pessimism we have come to associate with the post-war Heidegger, his absorption into the problem of technology, his turn away from will to power in favor of “letting” (*Gelassenheit*), all emerge in response to Heidegger’s occupation with Jünger. In an early letter to Jünger from 1949, Heidegger mentions the need to write with caution.²⁶ His essay in response to Jünger belongs to that period of caution. This caution is perhaps what Heidegger finally gleans from Jünger: a way of articulating political conceptions without politics.

Notes

- 1 Heidegger reports, in a reflection from 1945, “The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts,” that he participated in small reading groups of Jünger’s essays (GA 16: 375/MHNS 17–18). Heidegger’s reflections on Jünger compose GA 90, *Zu Ernst Jünger*. Excerpts from GA 90 have been translated in *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. Günter Figal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), trans. Jerome Veith, pp. 189–206.
- 2 See also Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 293. Finally, note Heidegger’s own admission at GA 9: 391/295.
- 3 The text of Jünger’s “Über die Linie” is from his *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7 (Klett-Cotta: Stuttgart, 1978–2003): 237–80. See my translation in Martin Heidegger and Ernst Jünger, *Correspondence 1949–1975* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016), 69–102. All references to Jünger’s essay will be to the English translation. Heidegger’s “Über ‘Die Linie’” was subsequently published under the title *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1956) and is included in GA 9.
- 4 *On The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1980), §2: 14–19.
- 5 See for example GA 40: 40–41/41–42. See also Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 22–32. Finally, a series of Catholic magisterial statements warn against the emergent power of the “total state”: Pius IX’s *Quanta Cura* (1864); Leo XIII’s *Quod apostolici muneris* (1878); Pius X’s *Vehementer nos* (1906), and finally Pius XI’s *Ubi Arcano Dei* (1921) and *Quadragesimo anno* (1931). Jünger’s *The Worker* echoes some of these traditional Catholic verdicts on state suppression of the individual; yet unlike the Catholic doctrine, Jünger’s statements are wholly without any consideration of rights. See also Jünger’s essay “Der Weltstaat” in his *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7: 483–526.

- 6 See Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 485–86.
- 7 This theme of purification through suffering is the focus of Jünger's celebrated novel *Storm of Steel* (1924), trans. Michael Hofmann (New York: Penguin, 2004) as well as of his essay *On Pain* (1934), trans. David C. Durst (Candor, NY: Telos Press, 2008).
- 8 Heidegger's essay "The Age of the World Picture" repeats this same theme. Noting "the precedence of methodology over whatever is," Heidegger writes: "The decisive development of the modern character of science as on-going activity also forms men of a different stamp. The scholar disappears. He is succeeded by the research man who is engaged in research projects. . . . The research worker necessarily presses forward of himself into the sphere characteristic of the technologist" (GA 5: 84–85/125). See too Nietzsche, *On The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 59: "The education of German youth proceeds directly from this false and unfruitful concept of culture: its goal, rightly understood, is indeed not the liberally educated man, but the scholar, the scientific man. . . . who stands apart from life in order to grasp it quite clearly."
- 9 Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One* (New York: Penguin, 1956).
- 10 In his 1977 novel *Eumeswil* Jünger would create the figure of "the anarch" to contrast with the more conventional "anarchist." The anarch, for Jünger, is a person (represented in the novel by the character Manuel) who enjoys inner freedom from subordination to societal and intellectual norms, but who behaves outwardly in conformity with society. The anarch is the genuine individual; the anarchist is only superficially free from society. *Eumeswil*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Marsilio, 1994).
- 11 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), §203, 208.
- 12 *On The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* §3, 10; *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974),

- §377; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1983), “The Three Metamorphoses.”
- 13 Jünger and Heidegger, *Correspondence*, 9–12. The German text of the correspondence can be found in Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger, *Briefwechsel 1949–1975*, ed. Günter Figal (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008).
- 14 Heidegger to Jünger, 18 December 1950 (*Correspondence*, 12).
- 15 Heidegger repeats this judgment in several places over a span of years (GA 90: 227, 239, 255, 277–82). Jünger is Nietzsche’s only authentic representative because he grasps the will to power without romantic and positivistic connotations (GA 90: 76, 255).
- 16 See GA 40, Chapter 4, “Being and Seeming.”
- 17 GA 9: 397/300. See also Richard Kennington, “Descartes and the Mastery of Nature,” in *On Modern Origins*, ed. Pamela Kraus and Frank Hunt (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004): 123–44.
- 18 See *On The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, §6.
- 19 GA 40: 113/116; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface.
- 20 The notion that transcendence is a sort of nihilism has important origins in Nietzsche; see especially *Twilight of the Idols*, “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable.”
- 21 Heidegger to Jünger, 18 December 1950 (*Correspondence*, 9).
- 22 “Was Ernst Jünger nicht sieht” (GA 90: 264).
- 23 It is worth noting that Heidegger brought out a revised version of *Introduction to Metaphysics* in 1953, between the publication of his and Jünger’s essays.
- 24 At least in its Hitlerian guise, as the recent publication of several volumes of Heidegger’s *Schwarze Hefte* (GA 94–97) makes clear.
- 25 See Michael Zimmerman, “Die Entwicklung von Heidegger’s Nietzsche-Interpretation,” *Heidegger-Jahrbuch* II (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2005): 97–116.
- 26 See the letter of 23 June 1949 (*Correspondence*, 6–7).

On Heidegger's *Einmaligkeit* Again:

The Single Turn of the Event

Krzysztof Ziarek

Though appearing prosaic and everyday, being as it happens never repeats, giving each time singularly in its spatio-temporal disposition. In this discrete sense, being ever only begins, and does so always once, bearing no resemblance and brooking no repetition. Yet the repetitive nature of language and signification, of ideas and meaning, persistently covers up this spatio-temporal singularity, or singleness, of being's event, having it appear as if it were recurrent or repetitive in its essence. In the end, singularity appears to carry the inscription of inescapable repetition, not simply as its shadow or companion but even as its condition of possibility. Singularity entails repetition, even demands it, because the event can claim its mark as singular only if it appears repeatable – that is, repeatedly sayable – in its uniqueness, intrinsically engaged in substitution characteristic of linguistic expression.¹ In short, uniqueness is such only because the event's singularity can be repeated in and as its irreplaceable occurrence. What in reality appears repeatable is the “each time” of the singular occurrence, the fact that it can be remarked as such each and every time. It is this line of thinking about singularity that becomes complicated, even slanted in Heidegger's idiomatic understanding of *Ereignis* (event) presented in the recently published “*Ereignis*-manuscripts” dating from 1936 to 1944.² This inflection of singularity still remains largely unexplored in critical responses or scholarly commentaries, in part perhaps because it requires a continuous turning of thinking, that is, it calls for thinking the event in its turn precisely as the very turn (in)to thinking. It

is only when thinking is kept turning in this manner, kept moving through and along this turn, that the *Einmaligkeit*, the “one-timeness,” of singularity (*Einzigkeit*) makes its mark. This becomes possible because the thinking Heidegger advances in the *Ereignis*-manuscripts examines the issue of singularity/repetition simultaneously from two sides: event and language. If from the perspective of the repetitive nature of language, the event seems to be possible as singular only in its impossible repetition, from the event, the one-time, non-repeatable character of its unfolding comes to inflect this dynamic beyond the optics of singularity and repetition. In the course of this unfolding, both event (*Ereignis*) and language change bearings, so to speak, so that they become actuated specifically in their nonrepeatable “once.” For, as Heidegger explains in *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, “Singularity – is both the unexpected and the unrepeatable.”⁵ This altered, inflected bearing of the event comes into view only within the twofold perspective of event and language, or more precisely in view of the constitutive turn of the event *as* language and *into* language. The turning toward human beings, thinking, and language, takes place *from* the event, while at the same time being – and remaining – *of* the event: not simply its part or stage but in fact its actuating pathway. The event thus eventuates as its own turn, and does so in an always one-time, non-repeatable traversal.

This dynamic, instantiating turn, which Heidegger calls “inceptual” or “inceptive” (*anfänglich*), signals merely *that* the event begins *once*. The complex “winding” course of the event’s beginning, which Heidegger often calls *Gewinde* (coil) or even *Kranz* (wreath), is crucial to understanding the role of *Einmaligkeit* with regard to event, language, and thought. Among the *Ereignis*-manuscripts, sections 184 and 185 of Heidegger’s 1941–42 text *The Event* (GA 71: 143–78/125–50) offer some of the most dense but also most significant remarks about the event and the correlates of its essence, namely: word, language, beginning, turn, the human, the singular, and the one time. Although quite difficult, these comments are at the same time remarkably lucid, and, when given appropriate time and attentiveness, they can be recognized as delineating the framework of questioning within which Heidegger’s

Ereignis retains distinctive valence that is not quite translatable into the English term *event* or its French cognate *événement*, both of which are derived, unlike *Ereignis*, from the Latin verb *venire*, to come. This distinction of *Ereignis* from *event* would not be significant beyond scholarly exactitude were it not for the implications that the understanding of the event *as a turn* discloses for a range of issues from the essence of technology and capital to language, the proper, and singularity. In what follows, I will outline the way that Heidegger's "event" (*Ereignis*) must be approached initially apart from any residues of beings (entities) or meaning, that is, how it should be thought and experienced by following along its turn as this turn actuates what Heidegger calls "the domain of what is proper" (*Eigentum*) to the event. Most important, this turn occurs specifically as the turn of language, or in fact the turn *into* language, as Heidegger indicates by writing that "The event words [*Das Ereignis wortet*]" (GA 74: 99).

The first sentence of *The Event*, section 185, which is entitled "The Treasure of the Word," takes us through the event as it turns word while opening its main pathway: the disposition of the relation of the truth of being (*Seyn*) to human beings. "The event is the inceptual word, because its arrogation [*Zueignung*] (as the unique adoption [*Aneignung*] of the human being into the truth of being) disposes the human essence to the truth of being" (GA 71: 170/145). The term *Zueignung* indicates the constitutive turn of the event, as the prefix "zu" keeps pointing at once in both directions of the pathway of language: from being to humans and from humans to being. *Zueignung* signals the manner in which being, having already dispatched itself, as it were, toward the human being, dedicates itself to it and through this dedication adopts the human being by rendering it apt for "understanding" being. The turning evidenced in the prefix *zu-* suggests that in its arrogation being turns the human toward itself, so that being becomes an issue for the way that the human being exists, as Heidegger indicated in *Being and Time*.

Since the *Ereignis* issues through a turn, one can say neither that the *Ereignis* always simply *is* nor that it occurs *only* through the human

carrying out of *Da-sein*. Formulated differently, because the eventuation of the event lies in its turning, the event never “is,” without ever simply “not being.” This is also why the event cannot be stated, described, or given a meaning. For one cannot take or assert a position *about* the event, since any such position could only be partial, disregarding the event’s turn, and thus evacuating its very momentum. Instead of making statements or producing assertions, thinking is called underway to follow along and undergo the event’s turn. This is also why neither the *Ereignis* nor the human “with-standing” of *Da-sein* can be figured as either simply active or merely passive. In this perspective, the prefix “zu” in *Zueignung* can be seen as one of the markers in Heidegger’s thought of how and why the originating “between” of the relation that spans being and humans cannot be grasped in terms of either activity or passivity. For the very possibility and the assignation of the labels of activity and passivity unfold from the originative turning marked by Heidegger through the prefix *zu-* a turning that is neither active nor passive but rather “begins” the relation between being and humans.

What is pivotal for understanding Heidegger, and yet has not been sufficiently appreciated in critical commentaries, is the sense in which the turn marked in the sentence cited above by the German term *Zueignung* constitutes the “inceptual word” as Heidegger claims. In this remark, Heidegger uses the German verb *stimmen* to characterize what transpires as *Zueignung* (arrogation, appropriation, dedication). *Zueignung* takes place as a reciprocal disposition of being to humans and of humans, that is, of human thinking/comportment/doing, to being – a disposition that in the early Heidegger takes the form of the preontological understanding of being. In other words, it is the *Zueignung* that sets the tone, or initiates the pitch, in which the turn of the event not only unfolds in the direction of human beings but at the same time lets humans respond by disposing their thinking into the appropriate key. As will become clear, at issue in this disposition is not simply a temporal coincidence that pre-sets the wavelength for the relation between being and human beings so that it can take its proper shape of language, but also, and perhaps primarily, the non-repeatable

singularity of this turn. In addition to the musical terms deployed in the gloss above, the verb *stimmen* also invokes language, specifically, voice (*Stimme*). It is in this idiomatic sense that, as Heidegger explains, “the event-related beginning is the inceptually disposing voice [*stimmende Stimme*]: the word.”

The quasi-tautological phrase *stimmende Stimme* illustrates the dimension and the manner in which language “begins.” In his formulation *Stimme* is obviously not simply “voice,” for this voice, Heidegger insists, is characteristically soundless (*lautlos*). It is not sound or vocalization that is determinative here but the disposing or tuning (*stimmen*). In other words, the “voice” does not ever resound; it is never voiced and does not become audible. Its “voicing” consists not in vocalization or expression but in disposing, tuning, or toning, that is, in bringing the event in relation with human beings, that is, in tune with their thinking. What being “voices” is not anything audible or inaudible, for this voicing is not auditory but, if one could put it this way, it is instead “dispositive.” It disposes by opening, inaugurating, actuating, and letting be. It is thanks to this disposition (*Stimmung*) that thinking can transpire and come into language, for the dispositive “voicing” opens the pathway for the audible as well as for the visible, that is, for speaking and writing, for sounds and letters. It pre-sets the key for language, in other words. As Heidegger explains, *Stimmung* or “‘disposition’ is not a human state of feeling, but is the event of the word as a self-arrogating adoption [*sich zueignende Aneignung*]” (GA 71: 171/145).

These remarks illustrate quite clearly how Heidegger sees language “begin” and work its pathways. The event occurs word and as word, or, as Heidegger puts it: “The event words [*Das Ereignis wortet*]” (GA 74: 99). This does not mean that the event forms or articulates words as language-signs but rather that the inceptual wording consists in the disposition of the between that draws the event’s turn as *Zueignung*.

The event, in its event-related essence, is soundless. In addition, however, inceptually the word does not have the property of ‘meaning’ or ‘sense,’ because, as the self-arrogating clearing of being, the word first becomes

the ground of the subsequent formation of 'word meanings' and 'word sounds.' Both of these arise concurrently and arise every time the word-sound is intoned. But all sounding is the echo of the fact that beings, previously beingless, enter into the eventuation toward being and persist therein. (GA 71: 171/145-46)

Heidegger plays here with the German *Wortlaut* to have it indicate primarily something that in English could be called "wording": not just word sound but more broadly coming or being formed into words in both of their registers: as meaning and as sounds or letters. The way the event "words" inceptually is without meaning or sense just as much as it is without speech or writing to start with; and in this manner it might be said to take place "prior" to all of them. This inceptual word does not have the properties of a sign, let alone those of a language-sign or dictionary term. It is neither a signifier nor a signified, which means that such word cannot be discussed in terms of language-signs or conceptions of language based on signs, differential meaning, reference, system, or code. The word taken in this valence occurs silent and meaning-free, as it lets signs form and acquire their linguistic shape as word meanings and word sounds.

Event as the inceptual word "intones" language in a specific and idiomatic manner: that is, the word lets word meanings and word sounds – signifieds and signifiers – arise, and does so each time anew through the repetition of similarities and distinctions, of the multiple differentiations required for the existence of language and meaning. The word is inceptual because it allows for the formation and functioning of language in terms of signs. All wording, *Lauten*, that is, all sounding and writing, takes place thanks to and in the aftermath of the event's wording. As Heidegger remarks, "In the inceptual voice of the event-related disposition, there is neither announcing [*Verlautbarung*] nor silence" (GA 71: 171/146). As used in this remark, *Verlautbarung* comprises both speaking and writing, which here mean specifically the announcing and the stating that express in language-signs, that is, in "word meanings" and "word sounds," to echo Heidegger's vocabulary.

This “sounding” (*Verlautbarung*), which brings word meanings and word sounds, is itself only an echo of the way in which “beings, previously beingless [*das Seinlose*] enter into the eventuation toward being” and stay there. What opens the pathway of the language signs is the wording of the event, and, as the comment just quoted clarifies, this wording transpires specifically as the turn from the beinglessness to being, that is, as the entrance of the beingless (*das Seinlose*) into what is (*das Seiende*). This turn from beinglessness to being is what Heidegger refers to as the beginning (*Anfang*). The event takes place through “wording” what is “beingless” into being, thus giving or granting being to what becomes manifest as beings.

As *Über den Anfang* (GA 70) explains in greater detail, such event begins always singly, which means that what comes to be is worded momentarily and only ever once, even as it happens to be “sounded” or uttered in repeatable word-signs. “Singularity is the inceptuality of the inception. The inception is each time more singular; this singularity does not exclude the ‘many,’ for ‘the many’ is already pure semblance, which the singular of re-presentation covers over” (GA 70: 44).⁴ Perhaps the best word to describe the force of this inception or beginning is the rarely used adjective *semelfactive*. With regard to a verb or its aspect, the term “semelfactive” expresses action as single in its occurrence without repetition or continuation. *Semelfactive* comes from the New or neo-Latin *semelfactivus*, where *semel* means once, a single time, and is related to the Proto-Indo-European root *sem* (one, as one, together), which also gives rise to the English “same.” *Factivus* comes from *factum*, event or occurrence. The two components of the term *semelfactive* underscore not simply the link between but in fact – or as fact – the “sameness” of the event and of its “once” or “one time,” manifest in the characteristic non-repetition and non-continuation.⁵ It is the semelfactivity of the event that renders each beginning incomparable and “more inceptual”: not just more intense or more original with regard to the degree of its inceptuality but more inceptual specifically due to each event’s semelfactivity. Because the event does not (just) occur but *begins*, and does so in the wake of nihilation, its inceptual momentum

is not simply new but singly originaive as its proper, non-repeatable once. The beginning that unfolds in the event's turn is thus nonpareil and without compare, which Heidegger indicates by using terms like *einzig*, *einzigartig*, *einmalig*, or also *einstig*, which is given by Heidegger the semelfactive valence of "singly once." Beginning or inceptuality concerns the way in which a being "is" by abiding its while singly one time.⁶ What this notion of beginning discloses about being is that each moment gives the beingless into being and does so once precisely because of the nothingness intrinsic to being's unfolding. This non-repeatable singleness comes to pass because the event lets be thanks to being's departure (*Abschied*): in letting beings be, in allowing them to appear as either present or absent, being departs or takes leave from those beings. It never coincides with beings, with what is, and desists from simply becoming part of their existence or of its meaning. This is why in relation to beings or entities, being appears as "nothing." Yet it is precisely as this "nothing" that being properly occurs.

Exclude for once mere description, which always takes refuge only in "beings," forbid mere reports, which are given over only to the past, desist from plans and calculations, which are attached only to the immediate future – and then still try to think and speak. Then to you it is as if there were nothing [*das Nichts*]. Yet then to you would be what is: beyng [*das Seyn*]. (GA 71: 122/103)

What this entails, however, is that letting be is tantamount to nihilation: emerging and becoming present for a while, beings are let be in the momentum of nothingness proper to being: "What purely and simply is not nothing is a being [*Seiendes*]. Nothingness itself, however, is being [*Sein*]" (GA 71: 121/103). The reciprocal turn of the beginning into the departure, or the beginning *through* departure, takes place once or as the once (*das Einst*), as GA 73 proposes. This is to say that the wording that the event takes as language is shaped as a one-time beginning.

To understand the specifics of the event as one-time, it is important to nuance the relation between beginning and departure on which the *Ereignis* pivots into language, and more specifically into language signs.

The event is the self-sheltering richness of the simplicity because it is down-going into the departure from the inceptuality of the beginning [*aus der Anfängnis der Anfang in der Abschied untergehende*]. It is as this richness of simplicity that the turning of beyng eventuates while disposing and bestows the showing of signs. The event [*Er-ignis*] is beyng as inceptual voice. The event is the treasure of the word. Nevertheless, the e-vent, as beyng, is inceptually the relation to the essence of the historical human being, an essence which is thereby determined, as regards attitudes and comportments, with respect to this relation and thus with respect to disposedness through voice. The relation eventuates in the departing-differentiating counter-turn [*in der abschiedlich-unterschiedlichen Gegenwendigkeit*]. (GA 71: 173/147)

The last phrase in this quotation specifies the manner in which the event's turn, initially as the turn of being toward human beings, transpires as a simultaneous countering of departure and differentiation. What is of course lost in translation is that the German words *Abschied* (departure) and *Unterschied* (difference) share the same root *Schied*, which indicates scission and parting. This scission is precisely what (dis)joins and is shared by departure and difference, which explains why in the event's turn departure and difference acquire distinct momentums. Though forming one jointure, difference and departure counter each other, which means that the event transpires simultaneously as the momentum of differentiation and as the backtracking pull of being's departure from beings, which counters any pretense to stable or abiding

presence, that is, to “beingness,” conjured up by the difference between being and beings.

Understanding Heidegger's *Ereignis* solicits a thinking that eschews statements and assertions about the event and instead proceeds, grammatically and semantically, to engage the counter-turn of departure and difference. The difference Heidegger names in *The Event* as the *Unterschied* is the uneasy scission and collapse constantly marking the differentiation of being from beings as it is underpinned by departure (*Abschied*) and nothingness (*Nichts*). The *Unterschied* spells out the predicament of the ontological difference, which by the mid-1930s Heidegger identifies more as an obstacle than as the access to the question of being promised in *Being and Time*. In this altered context, Heidegger introduces the antiquated spelling of *Seyn* with a “y” to signal precisely this counter-turning, which means here the manner in which beyng (*Seyn*) de-parts from the ontological difference, that is, from the unsuccessful attempt to distinguish between beings and being (*Sein* in its conventional modern spelling), which merely reduplicates beings into beingness while failing expressly to register the nihilating pull of the *Abschied* and thus of beyng (*Seyn*).

The counter-turning of the *Abschied* and the *Unterschied* signals the distinctness of *Ereignis* from other ways of thinking the event. To put it simply, *Ereignis* is never only or simply about difference or differentiation, whether thought in terms of the trace, as in Derrida, or an immanent multiplicity and folds, as in Deleuze, or the notions of the event proposed by Foucault or more recently by Badiou. Difference constitutes only one momentum of the *Ereignis*, against which the event turns the nihilating backdraft of the de-parting beyng. It is significant that what Heidegger calls the *Unterschied* is not a *Differenz*, as, for instance, in his better-known term “ontological difference” (*ontologische Differenz*).⁷ Difference as *Differenz* is difference unfolding with regard to beings, which means that difference, even the ontological difference between being and beings, is still formed and determined in terms of beings. That is why within the ontological difference being appears as beingness (*Seiendheit*). *Unterschied*, by contrast, opens through the

scission between being and nothingness, the scission that is integral to being itself in just this sense that being occurs properly as nothingness. In *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, Heidegger explains that the only way to enter and sink into the ontological difference, and thus into difference as such, is to let unfold its essence as the *Unterschied*, that is, specifically with regard to departure and nothingness (GA 73.2: 987). This may explain why Heidegger introduces the old spelling *Seyn*: in order to suggest that “beyng” (*Seyn*) occurs as the parting of being (*Sein*) and nothingness (*Nichts*), the parting that initiates ‘in turn’ the difference between being (*Sein* as *Seiendheit*) and beings (*Seiende*). The *Unterschied* is thus more complex than the ontological difference, and, moreover, it centrally or essentially involves nothingness. For without nothingness, without its nihilating momentum, no difference – whether between being and beings or among beings themselves – would be possible. In short, difference and differentiation transpire in the wake of the “on-timeness,” of the *Einmaligkeit*, that gives, or metes out, the proper pace of nothingness.

Another way of looking at this distinctness of the *Ereignis* could be phrased in the following manner. If what comes to the fore in difference is the between underpinning and spacing the momentum of differentiation in Heidegger’s understanding of the event, then the originative fold of being into beings, the inceptive between, is actuated by nothingness and takes place as already turning (back) into nothingness. This is why Heidegger refers to nothingness as inceptual:

The inceptual nothingness [*das anfanghafte Nichts*] is the purely bestowing clearing as the event of the turning [*Kehre*]. In this nothingness, the refusal essentially occurs as the basic trait of the abyss. / Out of this nothingness and its nothinging [*Nichten*], i.e. its refusing, i.e. its inceptuality, the ‘not’ and the ‘no’ [*das Nicht und Nein-hafte*] are determined in the difference [*Unterschied*]. Yet inasmuch as nothingness is beyng, beyng is essentially the difference [*Unterschied*]

as the inceptually concealed and refused departure
[*Abschied*]. (GA 71: 124/106)

The German suffix *-haft* underscores a particular feature or propensity, which in the quotation above indicates that nothingness, charged with beginning (*anfanghaft*) is what lets being begin. The quote also makes clear that *Unterschied* is to be understood first with regard to departure (*Abschied*), and thus in the perspective of nothingness and its inceptuality. Only as such a “departure” can the *Unterschied* also unfold (as) a *Differenz*. In this interpretation, the *Unterschied* always pivots between departure (*Abschied*) and difference(s), which means that differentiation starts to unfold already within the nihilating momentum of the clearing. The *Ereignis*, while certainly being about the tracing of difference (the *Unterschied*, and, “subsequently,” *Differenz*), occurs, counter to the production of difference it keeps enabling, as the simultaneous nihilation not only of differences but of the differentiating scission as well. The *Abschied* has always already turned against the *Unterschied*. It is in this manner that *Ereignis* counter-turns between *Unterschied* and *Abschied*.

While the *Unterschied* opens, through the ontological difference, onto differences and distinctions – from being(ness) to beings to differences between beings – the *Abschied* opens onto the nothing and its nihilating (*Nichten*), all the way to the “beingless” (*das Seinlose*). The turning between the *Abschied* and the *Unterschied* points in both directions at once: toward being as beingness in its difference from beings and toward the departure, the *Ab-schied*, which nihilates the *Schied*. Yet this nihilation does not annul the difference and produce unity or uniformity in its place but instead actuates the abyss of the being-less, or the being-free. If I understand Heidegger well, then his writings from the mid-1930s onward indicate that what transpires with regard to the *Abschied* and the *Unterschied* is not difference – that is, a difference or a distinction between them – but a turn or a counter-turn. The obvious conclusion, and the real difficulty for thinking, is that the event’s turn cannot, therefore, be thought in terms of difference and/or identity. This becomes even more salient since *Ereignis* eventuates

only once, without repeating its traversal. Its turning brings beings into what is proper to them, namely the while of their existence, at the same time also freeing itself in the direction of the nothing, as the event departs from being into the being-less. In other words, the event draws from the being-less into being, into the ontological difference and the play of differentiation, while in the same gesture releasing into nothing. The event's turn bespeaks the fact that nothingness is not the negation or the opposite of being: it is not not-being but rather forms part of the momentum proper to being (*Seyn*) as event.

The departure is so crucial to Heidegger's *Ereignis* because it is its nihilating momentum that renders what has come into being "being-less" once more.⁸ In other words, it is the *Abschied* that gives the event its semelfactively inceptive momentum, which eventuates the being-less each time anew into being. Without nihilation, which is not just negation or the difference that negation brings into the open but constitutes the nihilating pull into the abyss, there would be no beginning; or the beginning would be merely a species of repetition. The counter-turning between the *Unter-schied* and the *Ab-schied* is the *Ab-grund*, the de-grounding over which the event stretches the play of the differences it springs into the clearing. This is why what seems like an iterative mode of instantiation in truth does not repeat. Yet to the extent that the *Ereignis*, beginning from the being-less, opens difference and distinctness, it also makes iteration possible, even necessary. Still, this iteration is subtended and stirred by the semelfactive traction of nothingness (*Nichtung*): it is nihilated, trailed ever singly into nothing. If repetition becomes possible on the event's side of the difference (the *Unterschied*), it does not operate on the side of the departure (the *Abschied*), and this is why the event begins in such a way that the beginning takes place singly once. This semelfactivity is enabled by the nihilating traction or sweep of the abyss. One could say that the beginning is both *the charge* and *in the charge* of the nihilation. The single, non-repeatable surge of the beginning comes from the way in which *Nichtung* does repeat, because, as the force of nihilation, it vacates and frees always like nothing else, nonpareil. In other words, nihilation (*Nichtung*) is not of the order

of repetition and non-repetition, as its sweep instates, that is “begins,” those very possibilities. The way in which the nothing already sweeps away and empties the present makes each coming moment of being appear as the sole and only one in being, existing awhile just this once. Through nihilation, the momentum of the event “begins” ever so new as to make comparison impossible.

As “late” Heidegger was fond of saying, the nothing is not different from or opposed to being but inaugurates being’s own true momentum. What is both important and difficult here is that nothingness, which pulses within, at once actuating and departing being, and makes difference possible, is itself “beyond-differential” and yet “non-unitary” in relation to being. This is why it cannot be stated or rendered into meaning but instead endured and carried out – I am thinking here of what Heidegger names *Inständigkeit* and *Austrag* – through what might be called the event’s “departive” turn. This counter-turn is of course not the only momentum at work in the event, for the *Ereignis* opens and carries out being’s relation to human beings, projecting open the time-space for the human relation to being. The attending difficulty lies in the fact that what might be seen as the two sides of this relation, being and human beings, are in fact submitted to a critical turn eventuating as Da-sein. Dasein is accessed through and as the human mode of being – in the manner extensively elaborated initially in *Being and Time* – only for this perspective to be turned so that Da-sein becomes the site opened from or granted by being itself as a possibility for humans to enter, stand in, and withstand. The “care” implied here is of course not passive, since Da-sein does not really open, or is withstood, until the human being takes part in carrying it out and stands or holds *with* and *in* Da-sein. Differently said, only through humans with-standing it, can Da-sein stay open and engaged as it were.

Taken together, the counter-turn between departure and difference, and then the ensuing turn from being to humans, all form the outline of language. This jointure also specifies one of the most difficult and underestimated distinctions crucial to Heidegger’s *Ereignis*, namely the one between the word of being and language signs, or word-signs

(*Wörterzeichen*) as Heidegger on occasion calls them. Heidegger invokes this distinction by pointing, though often only implicitly, to the double plural of “word” in German: *Worte* and *Wörter*. Let me indicate this crucial distinction through another quote from section 185.

Because being itself is inceptually the word (the event-related disposition which knows neither utterance nor silence and stillness), the treasure of the word (treasure [*Schatz*] as the origin of the ‘vocabulary’ [*Wortschatz*] of ‘language’) must be experienced in the saying of being. Out of the apparently emptiest and poorest word, out of the ‘is’ and its inceptual truth, there originates the ordained fullness of words [*Wörter*] and of their cases and inflections. (GA 71: 172/146–47, tm)

What Heidegger calls the “treasure of the word” constitutes the originative force for the entire vocabulary of language and thought. But this treasure is not limited to linguistic or conceptual capacity. Most important, it indicates exactly the momentum of the beginning or inception (*Anfang*). Heidegger’s phrase “the event words” ties the origin of language specifically to the semelfactive momentum of the beginning. What “begins” is the each time singular disposing, which exerts itself and takes shape as the “word” or the “voice” of being. This “word,” which Heidegger evokes through the term “is,” is the emptiest, but not for the reasons Nietzsche claimed. To be precise, this word is inceptive through its force of emptying and freeing, that is, through nihilation. It marks the poverty of being, which constitutes also the richness of the simplicity with which the event begins (its) while nihilating. The difficult simplicity, the simple of being, that Heidegger repeatedly invokes, is the once, the semelfactivity, of this beginning.

Describing the event and its signature departure/beginning, Heidegger uses predominantly the German adjective *einzig* and its noun, *Einzigkeit*. I deliberately want to foreground, however, the second term he sometimes employs to reinforce *einzig*, especially to underscore the one-time character of the singularity at issue, namely the adjective

einmalig. On occasion one can find in Heidegger's texts *einzig einmalig* paired together, and in such instances English translations render *einmalig* specifically as "non-repeatable," thus highlighting the key role that non-iteration plays in the way in which the event's simultaneous departure and beginning transpire. In GA 73, Heidegger employs another adverb *einst* (once) as well as the adjective *einstig* (one-time) and the substantive, *das Einstige* (the one-time) in order to intensify further the non-repeatable signature of the event. ("The one-time, however, is first the discharge of the present, which eventuates right now"⁹; that is, at this very moment, in the blink of an eye; GA 73.1: 791). Heidegger in fact goes as far as to turn the adverb *einst* into a neologism *das Einst*, in order to indicate the nonrepetable "once," that the event marks.¹⁰ This "one time" or "once" indicates not the temporality of the event but rather the way in which the event "times," that is, gives and begins time as a while that opens always only once. In other words, the semelfactivity here does not describe a moment in or of time but rather the nihilating force of giving time. Focusing on the adjective *einmalig* in this context is important especially for developing the understanding of the event specifically *through* the turn, which not only occasions the event but also actuates it as language. Language is thought of here in the specific, originative dimension that Heidegger calls "the word 'of' beyng [*Seyn*]." To see more clearly the confluence or the juncture between "event," "turn," and "word," an etymological query into the German term *mal* can provide an important and helpful indication.

Mal functions in German as both noun and adverb, which indicates the term's crucial mobility between key grammatical categories, the nominal and the verbal. According to the Grimms' dictionary, *mal* derives from the Gothic *mêl*, which meant on the one hand, *kairos* and, on the other, *graphie* and *gramma* or *grammata*.¹¹ Its primary meaning in Gothic is associated with time, as it was used to translate the Biblical Greek terms such as *kairos*, *kronos*, and *hora* (moment, time, hour). On the other hand, the Gothic *mel* also referred to writing and letters, as well as to signs, marks, spots, flecks, etc. *Mal* thus indicates a *Zeitpunkt*: moment, time, instant of time, date, point in time, point of time, or

even hour, though not as a temporal extension but rather as a kairotic marker. But it also points this idea of *kairos* toward, even fleshes it out, into writing, *Schrift*, into script or written signs, *Schriftzeichen*. Furthermore, *Mal* is related to *malen*, which means to picture, to paint, to image, and thus to another verb, *zeichnen*, meaning to draw, to sketch, to outline. Both German verbs, though especially *zeichnen*, once again draw the term *mal* directly into a relation to language, making it a precursor to both signs and marks.

As a word, the German *Mal* sketches – it literally draws out spatio-temporally – the while unfolding out of the event and textures it into language. The relations between time and writing, temporality and language, marking and signs, contained in the German *Mal* form the sinews and ligatures through which the event turns, and turns out “to be.” The compound *einmal* intensifies the singleness indicated by *mal* beyond the notions of singularity or uniqueness. It lets me take the terms *einmalig* and *Einmaligkeit* as they are deployed in Heidegger’s work in the direction that stretches and frays the philosophical discourses on singularity. This is the case because *einmalig* refers neither to anything singular (a being or an entity) nor to a singular instance or occurrence (an event – but not *Ereignis* – in the sense of a happening, a happenstance, or an occasion) but instead to the once of the event’s turn. The language of singularity or singularization is indebted to the language and the thought of beings, and to the understanding of time as a kind of being (a moment or an instance), which means that, for all its importance and dexterity, such language is not capable of registering the turn – *abschiedlich-unterschiedlich* – of the *Ereignis*, the turn of nothingness turned being turning nothing. The etymological ligature between the temporal moment, the momentum of time itself, on the one hand, and writing, on the other, instantiated by the term *Mal/mal* is echoed by its fluctuation between nominal and verbal resonances. Graphically, it also oscillates between the capitalized nominal form *Mal* and the non-capitalizable adverbial *mal*.

I do not have the time to develop here the importance of this non-capitalizable turn evidenced in the term *mal*, especially for ways of

critiquing capital and its imbrication in the essence of technology, or the *Gestell* as Heidegger terms it. Here I only can show briefly how this trade-off also begins and operates in language, capitalizing words into signs and providing the flexibility and power of meaning. It binds into a turn both a non-repeatable temporal once and the repeatability and generality associated with signs, writing, and language. To put it simply, the German word *mal* turns, profitably, one might say, from its semelfactivity to proliferating difference and repetition, from the one-time to the explosive production of meaning. In other words, one could say that *Einmaligkeit* is what makes writing, letters, and language, possible. Could one think here of the impossible bind of a one-time or a one-off writing: a semelfactive writing before writing? Though in his text on language Heidegger employs predominantly the vocabulary of saying, voice, and tuning to describe the unfolding of the event, the writing register of *Einmaligkeit* indicates the very turn that leads into language by forking into speech and writing. *Einmaligkeit* thus lets us position the event with regard to language, specifically as the turn through which the event “words” (*Das Ereignis wortet*) and also with regard to temporality, especially the timing implied in the idea of repetition.

Signs and their components, both signifiers and signifieds, rely on repetition: of sounds, letters, and meanings. Even new meanings can arise only through the gesture of extending or rupturing repetition. *Einmaligkeit* provides a corrective to this operation, manifesting – to the extent that a “once” can be said to manifest – precisely the underhanded, necessarily concealable and mostly covered, trade-off of semelfactivity into repetition. Once again the German term *einmal* is instructive here: take the phrase *noch einmal*, “once more” or “one more.” What appears to be once more – whether as a being, an occurrence, a sign, or a meaning – seems, at least structurally and with regard to its meaning, to be a repetition, a once again, while in fact – and it is the word “while” that remains crucial here – it is nonetheless still only once, still one time: *noch ein mal*. The verb “seems” must remain ambivalent here, indicating both appearance, or

manifestation, and seeming, or semblance. Language is based on this semblance, on trading off the semelfactivity of manifestation for the appearances of meaning. This trade-off is secured through the iterative nature of language signs, which seem to capitalize – stabilize and repeat – what one might call the non-repeatable, semelfactive “word ‘of’ beynɡ [*Wort ‘des’ Seyns*].”

The German word *mal* reveals one more interesting etymological shoot. Its Gothic predecessor was related to the Gothic verb *mitan*: to measure or to deal out, etymologically tied to the Greek *metron*. The tie between “once” and “measure” suggests an important way in which we should perhaps rethink the poetic measure discussed in Heidegger’s texts on Hölderlin. This poetic measure needs to be thought not simply as the inverse of scientific measure: while science measures the unknown by establishing and using a known standard, poetry measures through exposure to the unknown. What is important is that the unknown Heidegger evokes through Hölderlin’s poetry is not a question of otherness or alterity but rather of what, in words from *Contributions to Philosophy*, makes possible and enforces otherness yet itself has no other: namely, the simple once of being.¹² The difficulty of the poetic measure lies in that it needs to be taken semelfactively in spite of the apparent repetition of word-signs, images, and meanings.

Even though to my knowledge Heidegger did not elaborate anywhere the etymological resonances of *einmalig* and *Einmaligkeit* the way I have sketched them out here, these adduced characteristics do serve to crystallize and develop the intricate twists and turns through which the event, at least in the Heideggerian valence of *Ereignis*, issues. As we know, the turn from being to humans as well as the corresponding turn of human thought to being should be thought as *abschiedlich-unterschiedlich*. In parallel with this turn, the word of being turns into word-signs just as it departs from those signs and the play of signification. In a way, this emptiest word as Heidegger defiantly calls it, speaks by nihilating signs, which means here that it allows for differences while emptying out these differences into the abyss of the departure. With the thought of the fourfold, another layer of cross-relatedness is

mapped onto this already complex unfolding of the event. The relations delineated out of the event are again re-oriented within the active sense of regioning that spans the between of what Heidegger names “earth” and “sky,” “mortals” and “the godlike.” At this point, at issue is no longer just the turning between being and humans but also the fourfold crossing and counter-turning that inflect, that is, counter and re-dimension, or re-measure, the relation between being and human beings, that is, they “multi-fold” the *Seinsfrage*. What is more, this kinetic topographic of the fourfold has to be both inflected through the prism of the tension between difference and departure and remarked with the index of *Einmaligkeit*, or semelfactivity.

In this context, it is important to note that the turn of the event points to the way in which also the notion of the proper comes to be indexed as *einmalig*. Explaining the correct etymology of *Ereignis*, Heidegger begins to dislocate the notion of *eigen*, precisely by evoking the false etymology, which mistakenly links *er-äugen* with *er-eigen* (GA 71: 184-85/156-57). By making the word *Ereignis* Janus-faced as it were, these remarks draw attention to the way in which the proper ever only comes through as its own disappropriation. This was indicated, though perhaps still with some hesitation, in the oscillation between *Uneigentlichkeit* and *Eigentlichkeit* sketched out in *Being and Time*. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the rejoinder or the counter to *Being and Time*, namely the talk entitled “Time and Being,” this rethinking of the proper is conveyed through the figure of *Ereignis* turning into, and thus fittingly taking place as, *Enteignis*.¹⁵ In *Zum Ereignis-Denken* Heidegger calls this turn “*das einstige Enteignis*” (GA 73.1: 795). This turn is not only nothing negative but is in fact the proper turn of the event as the turn of the proper. By the turn of the proper I mean here the manner in which the event eventuates through its “proper” dis- or de-eventuation. What this implies about the proper is that it only ever comes as its own momentary, punctiliar, expropriated, and nihilated “one time.” The proper not *is*, neither as proper nor as improper, but rather turns its once.¹⁴ This becomes evident in Heidegger’s formulations in *Zum Ereignis-Denken* such as “The de-event in the once [*Die*

Enteignis in die Einst]” and “The once(on)ly of the once [*das Einstige des Einst]*” (GA 73.2: 1179). So translating *er-eignen* as appropriating, *an-eignen* as appropriation, etc., may be in fact mistaken, because the *eigen* in *Ereignis* is always already being “de-propered.” Such translation tends to forget the turning intrinsic to the event, which makes Heidegger’s term *Ereignis* spin terminologically between manifestation and appropriation, between *Er-äugen* and *Er-eigen*, between the non-repeatable once of manifestation and the notion of the proper. One could say that just as the event illuminates or lights the proper, it also lightens it, emptying it anew into nothing. This is the double-play of the *Lichtung*, the clearing, in Heidegger: The clearing is not only an opening that makes room and projectively brings to light, but also an emptying which, as the abyss, renders beginning semelfactive.

As my close attention to Heidegger’s language suggests, the fact that the event “words,” that its turn disposes by turning “the word of being” into word-signs, is not merely a matter of a philosophical conception or a set of assertions about language. Heidegger’s thought is not a theory of language but an attempt at transforming the scope and the “language” of thinking through a changed relation to it, and thus a new experience of it. This attempt is also no mere language play, for its significance comes from the way it renders thinking pliable, moving it away from limiting itself to or giving priority to propositional statements, argument, or analysis. It makes thinking follow in its language the turns and twists of the event, and do so both in its grammar and lexis. Deliberate quasi-tautological statements that work through propositional structures only to leave them altered; patient restatements or multiple rephrasing, sometimes shifting just a word or a word category, for instance from the noun *Anfang*, through the adjective *anfänglich*, to another noun, *Anfänglichkeit*, or its more contrived yet also more resonant and evocative variant, *Anfängnis*, may seem like unnecessary multiplication of terms. Yet these shifts in fact register the modulations in experience whereby what exists fluctuates between a verbal and a nominal status, constantly making thought attentive to the slippage between beings and being. Such rephrasing also tries to have thought

begin always afresh, so that instead of describing and generalizing, it follows along the originative turn of the event in its singly one time trajectory. In other words, it tries to sound out the word's inceptual force, what Heidegger, playing on the German term "vocabulary" (*Wortschatz*), called the word's "treasure" (*Schatz*). For Heidegger, it was the only way for thinking to try to become a response to the event, which would mean getting its language in tune with the event's semelfactive turn, that is, with the idiomatic way the event comes to word.

Notes

- 1 "...the event cannot appear to be an event, when it appears, unless it is already repeatable in its very uniqueness. It is very difficult to grasp this idea of uniqueness as immediately iterable, of singularity as immediately engaged in substitution, as Lévinas would say." Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," trans. Gila Walker, *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Winter 2007), 452.
- 2 The texts in question are the *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* (GA 65), *Mindfulness* (GA 66), *The History of Beyng* (GA 69), *Über den Anfang* (GA 70), *The Event* (GA 71), and *Zum Ereignis-Denken* (GA 73.1–73.2).
- 3 "Die *Einzigkeit* – ist das Unerwartete sowohl wie das Unwiederholbare" (GA 73.1: 261).
- 4 "Die *Einzigkeit* ist Anfänglichkeit des Anfangs. Der Anfang ist je als einziger; diese *Einzigkeit* schliesst nicht das 'Viele,' aber 'das Viele' ist bereits nur rein Schein, der das Einzige vom Vorstellen her überdeckt."

- 5 Derrida draws attention to the semelfactivity, the one time of the event in “Typewriter Ribbon”: “singularity, semelfactivity (that is, the concept of what happens just once), ‘the one time only’ of the event.” Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 332.
- 6 “Auch ist das Sein nicht nur das Seiende noch einmal, so daß im Sein das Seiende sich wiederholte, sondern im Sein ist das Seiende das einzige Mal und ragt so in die Einzigkeit des Seins” (GA 70: 119).
- 7 Heidegger discusses at length the relation between *Unterschied* and (*ontologische*) *Differenz* in various texts in GA 73. See, for instance, GA 73.2: 987–88.
- 8 “Weil das Seyn ist und weil nur das Seyn ist, das Seyn aber vom Wesen des ereignenden Anfangs, deshalb muss das Seyn auch nicht sein” (GA 71: 15–16).
- 9 “Das Einstige aber ist der Austrag erst der Gegen-wart, die im Augenblick ereignet wird.”
- 10 He writes about the *Einst* of “poverty” (*Armut*), of the “same” (*Selbe*), of “beginning” (*Anfang*), and of the “parting” (*Letze*), and of the “event of de-event in the dif-ference [*Das Einst des Ereignisses der Enteignis in den Unterschied*]” (GA 73.2: 924–25, 1168, 1176).
- 11 *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm Online* (<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GMoo651>).
- 12 “Insofar as beyng essentially occurs as permeated with negativity [als nichthaftes wesend], it at the same time makes possible and enforces otherness” (GA 65: 267/210).
- 13 See the discussion of *Ereignis* in “Time and Being,” GA 14: 24–30/19–24.
- 14 In *Zum Ereignis-Denken* Heidegger also writes of the span of truth as that which is only once: “Die Wahr-heit ist das Einstige” (GA 73.1: 758).

The Thing and I: Thinking Things in Heidegger's *Country Path Conversations*

Shane M. Ewegen

Who thinks? Such a question strikes us, most of all, as hopelessly naïve. Not only has the history of philosophy affirmed again and again that it is the human being, as the rational animal, who thinks, but we ourselves – scholars engaged in the act of thinking – know most of all the answer to this question. *We* think – human beings, whose very essence lies in thinking. Even Heidegger, who rigorously calls into question the suitability of the term “rational animal” to touch upon the essence of the human, affirms that it is the human – and seemingly only the human – who thinks.¹

In his *Country Path Conversations* (1944), Heidegger wanders down a path that calls this decidedly metaphysical understanding of thinking into question. Through an analysis of this text, as well as references to several thematically related texts, I will argue that, from at least 1944 on, Heidegger understood thinking to be an *event* (*Ereignis*) that only comes about through a *conversation* between human beings and things. I hope to show here that, so understood, it is illegitimate to claim that, for Heidegger, it is the human being who thinks. Rather, one must say that human beings, when they think, *think together* along with the things in-and-through which they find themselves in the free-expanse (*die freie Weite*) of a world.² To follow Heidegger on this country path is to follow him into a radically new way of thinking – a way already laid out before us as the very condition for the possibility of thinking.

* * *

One early evening, while far down a certain country path, the Guide (*der Weise*) – who cannot simply be aligned with Heidegger – calls into question the essence of thinking and thus the essence of the being to whom it is thought thinking properly belongs. In a remarkable and, of course, imagined exchange, everything regarding this essence hangs in the air, undecided:

SCIENTIST: we define the essence [*Wesen*] of plants without ourselves being plants.

GUIDE: Even this I would like to doubt.

SCHOLAR: But a plant can surely live as a plant without knowing or even thinking [*denken*] about the essence of plants.

GUIDE: Yet what does thinking mean here? What do we know about the essence of thinking [*Wesen des Denkens*]?

SCIENTIST: But surely we can determine the essence of a jug [*eines Kruges*] or a bowl without ourselves being a jug or a bowl.

GUIDE: Even with regard to this question, I would not like to decide.

SCHOLAR: What is certain, however, is that the jug is a jug without itself thinking its essence; for indeed, it cannot think at all [*denn er kann ja gar nicht denken*].

GUIDE: We would do well to leave even this still open [*wir tun gut daran, sogar dies noch offen zu lassen*].

(GA 77: 67–68/43)

There, on the precipice of the approaching night, and in the free expanse of the Guide's indecision, the possibility is entertained that a jug (*ein Krug*) might be capable of thinking. Such a suggestion strikes the Scientist – and strikes us ourselves – as outrageous. However, the audacity of the Guide's statement is tempered quickly once we remember that the entirety of the conversation in which they are engaged is concerned with determining the still questionable essence of thinking.

So long as thinking remains questionable, we are in no position – even as thinking beings (if indeed we are!) – to deny anything else the ability to think, be it an animal, plant, or *thing*. Indeed, our ability to alight upon the essence of thinking depends upon the extent to which we can suspend our presuppositions about thinking and genuinely attempt to *hear*; from thinking, what it is and to whom – or what – it belongs. It is precisely this suspension that the characters attempt to undertake during their conversation.

Along their way the speakers follow many different digressions that seem to threaten their task and divert them from their predetermined goal. However, the digressional character of the conversation – the way in which it wanders off, against their will, onto new unforeseen paths – proves indispensable to the task underway. The most substantial digression in this regard occurs when the Scholar, growing impatient with the Guide's ambiguities and indecisions, asks him what it is he wills to gain (*wollen*) from their conversation (GA 77: 51/33). It is here that the kinship between thinking and the will (*der Wille*) first becomes transparent (GA 77: 52/33). Drawing especially upon Leibniz's distinction between *perceptio* and *appetitus*,³ the Scholar in particular observes that representational thinking (*Vorstellen*), insofar as it is always directed toward that which it represents, consists of a striving (*ein Streben*) toward that thing. Likewise, all striving, insofar as it is a striving toward *something*, is oriented by a representation of that toward which it strives. Thus, thinking (*Denken*) and willing (*Wollen*) belong together in an essential intimacy, each always implicating the other (GA 77: 54/35). In other words, and to employ a trope that occurs again and again throughout the *Conversations*, thinking and willing are the selfsame (*das Selbe*): they belong-together (*gehören . . . zusammen*) in essential and simple intimacy (GA 77: 54/35).⁴

Immediately following the enunciation of the kinship between thinking and willing, the conversation turns to the issue of conversation (*Gespräch*) itself. It is suggested by the Scholar that the issue of willing, while seemingly pertinent to the matter of thinking, actually indicates an inadvertent and unintended digression (GA 77: 56/36). The

Scientist, however, disagrees by insisting that nothing could be more suitable than to consider explicitly that which is willed through a conversation; and that, furthermore, they all could have saved themselves a great deal of perplexity if they had simply stated what was willed in the first place. To this, the Guide responds in his typically provocative and somewhat oracular manner: “Yet, perhaps one could doubt whether a conversation [*Gespräch*] is still a conversation at all if it wills something [*wenn es etwas will*]” (GA 77: 56/36).

With this terse suggestion, the Guide hints at the threat that willing poses to genuine thinking, despite the apparent intimacy between the two. According to the Guide, genuine conversation is only possible where it “first waits upon reaching that of which it speaks” (GA 77: 57/37). Further, the ability for the participants to speak meaningfully about the matter depends entirely upon whether “they are prepared [*bereit*] for something to befall them [*etwas widerfährt*] in the conversation which transforms their own essence” (GA 77: 57/37). One is able to converse, then, not by willing some result or effect, but rather by preparing oneself to receive what befalls (*widerfahren*) of its own accord. The more one wills to bring about a matter for thinking, the less one is able to attend thoughtfully to that matter.

The consequences for representational thinking – the thinking to which we are most accustomed – are fatal. If representational thinking is essentially oriented by the will – if thinking and willing are the self-same – then thinking is essentially unable to attend heedfully to the matter it pursues. Precisely through willing its object, representational thinking renders the thing, as it is in itself, inaccessible. Phrased otherwise, representational thinking, through its representations, blinds itself to what befalls of its own accord: it shrouds the matter under its own representations. For the purposes of the conversation underway, this means that the more the participants *will* to bring about the essence of thinking, the more that essence slips from their grasps. Representational thinking is thus like Tantalus, whose very effort at reaching for the low hanging fruit precipitates its withdrawal.

What proves necessary is a consideration of thinking that frees itself from its representational character, a thinking that could thereby open itself to what would befall from thinking itself (GA 77: 65/41). Therefore, an attempt is made within the conversation to think beyond the strictures of representational thinking: for, as the Guide intimates on a number of occasions, it is only by abandoning the willfulness of representational thought that a genuine experience (*erfahren*) of thinking can occur (GA 77: 65/41). Given the setting of this conversation – a country path (*Feldweg*) – one should hear the *fahren* in *erfahren*. The more the speakers follow the paths laid out for them by representational thinking (e.g., the rules of logic and inference), the less they are able to follow along (*fahren*) where thinking itself might take them. In order to experience (*erfahren*) the essence of thinking, they must prepare (*bereit*) themselves for what befalls (*widerfahren*) from thinking of its own accord.

However, there appears to be a paradox at the heart of such a project: for any such preparation seems ineluctably to involve the will. In willing to bring about a thinking that frees itself from the strictures of the will, one seems only to compound the problem by utilizing the very faculty one seeks to avoid (GA 77: 106/69). Even the utter renunciation (*Absagen*) of the will still leaves the difficulty in place, insofar as renunciation remains an operation of the will. Nonetheless, renunciation (*Absage*), even as a kind of willing, is precisely what is needed to prepare us for a genuine encounter with the essence of thinking. It is the Scientist who articulates this most clearly:

You will a non-willing in the sense of a renouncing of willing, so that through this renouncing we can let ourselves engage in – *or at least prepare ourselves for an engagement in* – the sought-for essence of that thinking which is a non-willing [*einlassen können oder uns wenigstens hierzu bereit machen*]. (GA 77: 107/69, em)

Renunciation of the will is thus the preparatory step toward letting things befall as they will.⁵ When we renounce (*ab-sage*) the will, we

prepare ourselves for what is said (*Sagen*) by the matter itself. According to the Guide, it is only to the extent that we can renounce willful positing that “what is spoken of may of itself bring itself to language for us and thus bring itself near [*das Besprochene von sich aus sich uns zur Sprache und damit nahe bringen möchte*]” (GA 77: 75/47). So long as we set our plan in advance, and set out to think about thinking in accordance with the demands of that plan, we fail *to listen* to what brings itself to language (GA 77: 80/50).

Therefore, it is only through the renunciation of the will that a genuinely heedful thinking can come to pass: thus, according to the Scholar, “in speaking, a listening to [*Hineinhören*] the conversation would almost be more essential than the speaking out of making statements [*Aussagen*]” (GA 77: 75/47). The making of statements, precisely through trying to draw the matter near, threatens to overpower and drown out what the matter itself says. Only to the extent that one can avoid making plans and following them assiduously can one truly meditate (*besinnen*) on the nature of the matter (GA 77: 75/48). Phrased otherwise: only if one renounces (*absage*) the will and avoids making assertions (*Aussagen*) about the matter can that matter itself say (*Sagen*) what it has to say. This plays out in the conversation itself: for it is only as the speakers become more and more comfortable with the digressive character of their undertaking that they find themselves in the vicinity of the essence of thinking.

Thus, despite the previously exposed kinship between thinking and willing, a new kinship between thinking and releasement (*Gelassenheit*) comes to the fore (GA 77: 109/71).⁶ Yet, how can thinking, which is the selfsame as willing, also share a kinship with the non-willing characteristic of *Gelassenheit*? This difficulty points to a tension at work within thinking itself: namely, the tension between representational thinking (or planning [*die Planung*]) and meditative thinking (*das Besinnung*), the latter of which is the ground of the former (GA 77: 76/48). As is the case in later texts, representational thinking is here said both to depend upon meditative thinking and to threaten to ‘engulf’ (*überfluten*) it (GA 77: 75/48).⁷ The attempt to bring about a

non-representational thinking is thus an attempt on the part of thinking to gain distance from itself and its (own) willful character precisely as it wanders closer to its true non-representational essence (see GA 77: 121/78). It is the dual kinship of thinking with both willing and non-willing that accounts for the difficulty in articulating, let alone practicing, a truly non-willful (and non-representational) thinking.

Though much is said of representational thinking in *Conversations*, the precise nature of non-representational thinking remains radically elusive, as any attempt to *think it* in any traditional sense threatens to reduce that nature to a representation (GA 77: 110/71). Nonetheless, as becomes clear throughout the discussion that follows, such thinking is characterized above all by its attentiveness to the matter to be thought, and not to the subjective horizons (or schemas) that objectify or represent that matter to the human subject. Such thinking finds its determinations and directives not from itself (as do, say, the Cartesian or Kantian subjects), but from the *other*: “[...] the essence of thinking is not determined from thinking [...] but rather from the other itself [*dem Anderen*], that is, from the open-region [*der Gegnet*] . . .” (GA 77: 123/80).⁸ Thus, such non-representational thinking first and foremost comes to be what it is through its attendance upon the other, i.e., the free-expanse (*die freie Weite*) in and through which things come to abide.⁹ In a word, such thinking frees itself to the essential occurring of truth (*Wesung der Wahrheit*) (GA 77: 144/93).¹⁰

Though such thinking, by its very nature, cannot be represented, we can see such thinking take place through the speakers’ consideration of the jug (*der Krug*). In a manner that prefigures Heidegger’s engagement with the jug in his 1950 “The Thing,” the speakers undertake a determination of the essence of the jug that illustrates their transition from representational thinking toward a thinking understood as releasement. In a typically metaphysical manner, the Scholar first conceives of the jug as an object (*Gegenstand*) by looking to the *eidos* that determines it, thereby reducing the jug to the manufacturing process that created it (GA 77: 127–28/82–83). However, as the Guide makes clear, when one looks solely to the *eidos*, one only understands the jug

in terms of the subjective horizon of representational thinking that brought it about, and utterly overlooks what the jug itself truly is as it lies in the open of the free-expanse.

It is the Guide who first hits upon what is essential about the jug: namely, that it is not the sides or the bottom of the jug that contains the liquid, but rather its emptiness (GA 77: 130/84). This leads the Scholar to observe that, astonishingly, “the nothingness of the jug is really what the jug is [*dieses Nichts am Krug ist eigentlich das, was der Krug ist*]” (GA 77: 130/85). The being of the jug – what it *is* – is thus determined from out of its nothingness.

In passing we should note an interesting analogue that arises here between Heidegger’s analysis of the jug and his understanding of the human being. As enunciated in *Being and Time* and elsewhere,¹¹ human Dasein comes into its own through a relation to the Nothing (e.g., through its relation to its own possible death).¹² Likewise, the jug here comes into its own through its relation to the Nothing of its own emptiness.¹³ Of course, the all-important difference is that human Dasein, as the being who cares, is able to *relate* to the nothingness of its death *as* that nothingness, and experience that relation in the mode of anxiety. Surely the jug does not relate to its nothingness in such a manner since, presumably, the jug does not relate to anything at all. As an inanimate object, the jug is lacking in any ability to relate to the world as a world.¹⁴ At best we might say that human Dasein, as the being who relates meaningfully to the world, sets up relations between itself and the jug: but surely the jug itself does not relate to human Dasein nor, indeed, to anything at all.

Yet, did the Guide not urge caution in determining too quickly the nature of the jug? If we here state simply that the jug does not relate to its nothingness (because, as mere object, it cannot relate to anything at all) then we have already closed off the very thing that the Guide opened up: namely, the essence and provenance of thinking. Given that we are still uncertain about the essence of thinking, we are in no position to deny the jug the ability (if indeed it is an ability) to relate to the world. The extent to which we can entertain this strange possibility is

the measure of the extent to which we can open ourselves to the heretofore undetermined essence of thinking.¹⁵

In response to the Guide's observation that the nothingness of the jug determines its essence, the Scholar tells the Guide that "you indicate [*nennen*] something astonishing about the jug" (GA 77: 130/84). The Guide's response is decisive for their inquiry into thinking: "If such was indicated, the jug said this to us [*wenn solches genannt wird, sagt dies der Krug zu uns*]" (GA 77: 130/84). Thus, it is not the Guide who has indicated (*genannt*) or spoken (*sagt*) this astonishing truth – it is the *jug* who has spoken.

Of course, one might say that 'speaking' here can only be metaphorical: for it is clearly and distinctly the human being, as the ζῶον λόγον ἔχον, who speaks.¹⁶ Thus, the jug, as an object lacking in λόγος and the concurrent ability to think, surely has not 'said' anything here. 'Saying' is something only humans can do – surely this much at least is clear and distinct.

A conclusion such as this would indicate a grave forgetfulness on our part.¹⁷ For, as we recall again that it is precisely the provenance and scope of thinking that is in question throughout this conversation, we see that we are in no position to deny the jug the ability to speak. If we are to follow Heidegger's characters along their way, we must bracket what we think we know about the nature of the jug and prepare ourselves to attend to what the jug itself has to say about itself, and to what it can tell us about the nature of speaking and, ultimately, thinking.

What is it 'to speak'? As Heidegger suggests elsewhere, the basic operation of saying (*Sagen*) lies not in phonetic speech, but rather in a pre-linguistic gathering of beings in the openness of a world. In his 1951 essay "Logos," λόγος (through its association with λέγειν) is said to consist of a "laying before that gathers itself and others" (GA 7: 200/EGT 60). This operation of gathering, which occurs "essentially as the letting-lie-together-before of everything which, laid in unconcealment, comes to presence" (GA 7: 204/EGT 65), is what all human phonetic speaking presupposes. So understood, *Sagen* is the original gathering

(λόγος) through which beings come to rest in the open of the free expanse.

As is clear through the Guide's analysis of the jug, such a gathering is precisely what the jug, *as thing*, accomplishes. The thing, precisely through its relation to the world and the human, *announces* this world by gathering it together in its openness. In *Conversations*, the Guide uses the language of 'world' (*Welt*) to name this gathering: "the world, insofar as it worlds, gathers everything, each to the other, and lets everything return to itself in its own resting in the selfsame" (GA 77: 149/98). The role of the thing in this gathering is more explicitly laid out in 1950's "The Thing," where the thing is said *to sustain* the world in which it comes to abide: "The thing stays [*verweilt*] the fourfold" (GA 7: 173/PLT 178, em). In other words, the jug, through its announcing of the four-fold, gathers together and sustains the world in its openness: "The thing things world [*Das Ding dingt Welt*]" (GA 7: 173/PLT 178).¹⁸ When allowed to be the thing that it is, the jug heralds the open-region to which it, as thing, belongs. As Heidegger writes, "[t]he jug's presencing is the pure, giving gathering of the onefold fourfold into a single time-space, a single stay" (GA 7: 165/PLT 171). The jug, through its thingness, brings the four terms of the four-fold together into their togetherness, thereby intimating the free expanse of the truth of Being. Stated simply, "The thing things. Thinging gathers [*Das Ding dingt. Das Dingen versammelt*]" (GA 7: 166/PLT 172).

As was argued above, such gathering is the operation proper to speaking (*Sagen*) understood in its most primordial sense. Thus, insofar as the thing gathers together the openness of world, *it speaks*.¹⁹ A thing, in thinging, lays out and presents the open four-fold to which it essentially belongs. In other words, the thing bespeaks the four-fold – it utters the truth of Being. Mortals may attend to such speaking only if we renounce (*Absage*) our representational thinking and prepare ourselves for a genuine listening. As the will is so renounced, the speaking proper to things is heeded: and such heedful listening is the defining characteristic of non-representational thought. Only when thinking hears

(*hören*) what things say does that thinking come to be-long (*Gehören*) to those things, relating to them as the things they truly are.²⁰

When attended to, the thing bespeaks a complex set of relations that stand between the human, the open-region, and themselves.²¹ Although the speakers spend some time analyzing each term of this relation, the Guide urges that they avoid setting out to demarcate the intricacies of these relations in any systematic way: for such demarcation would only draw those relations back into the realm of representational thought, and thus into the realm of the will. Nonetheless, the Guide at one point offers an important clarification concerning the nature of the interrelationship:

Things are evidently things by means of the regioning of the open-region [...] Yet, the regioning of the open-region does not cause and effect things, any more than the open-region effects releasement. (GA 77: 138–39/90)

This passage emphasizes that the setting of things into a region is not something that the human, as the being who thinks or releases things, brings about or effects. It is not that releasement first happens and then things subsequently come into presence; nor is it that the open-region first happens and then releasement occurs. Rather, all at once, as it were, humans and things are set into the free expanse of the open wherein they relate to one another.²² Neither the human nor the thing has temporal or causal priority over the other. Rather, the two happen together – they occur together as a gathering, as *the* gathering of world.²³ The world happens as the coincidence of human beings and things.

The nature of this relationship between humans and things is made clearer through a passage from “The Thing.” Whereas, in *Conversations*, it is said that the open-region bethings (*bedingt*) the thing (GA 77: 140/91), in “The Thing” it is said that the thing bethings the human. As the following passage makes clear, the thing bears the responsibility of co-determining the very essence of the human being:

If we let [*lassen*] the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding world, then we are thinking of the thing as a thing. Taking thought in this way, we let ourselves be concerned by the worlding being. Thinking in this way, we are called [*gerufen*] by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged [*die Be-dingen*], “the conditioned ones.” (GA 7: 182/PLT 178)

Things thus condition (*bedingt*) us to be who we are: concerned beings standing in a world of worlding beings. Only by letting (*lassen*) things be what they are – only by attending heedfully to their call – can we become privy to the gathering which things, as heralds of the four-fold, announce. Only by such listening do we become aware of the extent to which we are ‘the conditioned ones,’ thereby freeing ourselves for an appropriate relation to the world.

Although Hoftstader’s translation of *die Be-dingen* as ‘the conditioned ones’ is lacking in any onomastic connection to the world *ding*, it is nonetheless an excellent and provocative translation. The word ‘condition,’ derived from the Latin *condicere*, brings to mind a conversation, a speaking-with. When things are let to be what they are, they speak to us; and we, in attending to them in their thingness, listen to what they have to say. It is only through such conversing that we come to be gathered to the open-region to which we belong.²⁴

To bring this back to the general problematic of thinking, it can now be said that thinking comes about through a heeding of the open region in which things show themselves and say (*sagen*) what they are. Thinking thus unfolds from out of the *Ereignis* of the one-fold fourfold, the event of the open-regioning of things, world, and human. Only by a renunciation of the will, and a consequent letting-be of things, can genuine thinking come about. Through such a letting, the thing conditions us by calling to us and awaiting our response.²⁵ This open space in which we await the thing – and the thing awaits a response – is the very place of thinking.²⁶ When we really think, we only do so to the extent that we are able to tarry along with things

within the free expanse of the truth of Being. We only think when we converse with things.

Heidegger was fond of noting the similarity between *denken* and *danken*, thinking and thanking, and the Guide himself draws this connection within the conversation (GA 77: 100/64). Given the interplay between thinking and thinging that *Conversations* has brought to light, one might note in playful passing the similarity between the words *denken* and *dingend*. Such play only names what we have seen unfold throughout: the essential connection between thinging and thinking, and the way in which the two unfold in mutual interdependence. Such interdependence is stated, near the end of the text, by the Scientist and Guide together in conversation:

SCIENTIST: So we must first learn to think what bethinging is.

GUIDE: By learning to experience the essence of thinking (GA 77: 140/91)

The two – thinging and thinking – belong together: they are the selfsame. We only think when we think along with things: that is, we only stand mindfully in the open of the free-expanse of the truth of Being when we stand along with things.

CONCLUSION

The ‘I think’ characteristic of Cartesianism and its legacy takes undue credit for what is a communal event that arises only from out of the human being’s attentive patience in a world of worlding things. To say that the human being thinks things is to err on the side of the subject-object divide that Heidegger’s thinking is at such great pains to surpass. It is more appropriate to say that the thing, in bethinging the human, gives itself to be thought. The human, for its part, participates in this thinking only when it lets the thing be the thing that it is. Thinking, then, is the conversation between things and human beings.

At one point in the conversation, the Guide claims that their inquiry has been concerned with only one thing: namely, “the art or

forbearance [*Langmut*] [...] of speaking together in conversation” (*im Gespräch mitzusprechen*) (GA 77: 46/30). As my analysis has suggested, this is not so much a matter of speaking with other humans – though it certainly does entail this – but is above all a matter of conversing with things. Genuine conversation (*Gespräch*) is the gathering together with things whereby we come to know ourselves as situated in the open-region of the truth of Being (see GA 77: 147/95). As the Guide puts it: “[...] it seems to me as though in a proper conversation an event takes place wherein something comes to language [*mir scheint, als ob im eigentlichen Gespräch sich dies ereigne, daß etwas zur Sprache kommt*]” (GA 77: 57/36). This event (*ereigne*) is nothing other than the unfolding of the fourfold through which things come to presence and thinking comes to pass. Such an event – and, with it, thinking – only comes about through the conversation between human beings and things.

Notes

- 1 See *What is Called Thinking*: “man is called the being who thinks, and rightly so” (GA 8: 5/3). See also “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” in which Heidegger announces the abyss that stands between the essence of the human and the essence of (other) animals – an abyss owed above all to the former’s relationship to language and, thus, to thinking (GA 9: 157/248).
- 2 See Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: a Different Side of Ethics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), 66.
- 3 One finds this, for example, in Leibniz’s “Monadology,” sections 14–15. In *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 644.
- 4 For an excellent account of Heidegger’s understanding of the historical development of the connection between thinking

- and willing, see Bret Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 168–73.
- 5 See *Heidegger and the Will*, 176.
- 6 This was already hinted at much earlier. See GA 77: 67–68/43.
- 7 On this see, for example, 1955’s “Memorial Address” (GA 16: 517–29/DT 43–57).
- 8 It is important to note that the human being is not the same as the open-region: rather, the human being *belongs* to the open region, and only insofar as he or she is appropriated *by* the open-region (GA 77: 122/79).
- 9 See GA 54: 220–24/148–50.
- 10 For an excellent analysis of the alterity of things and their role in thinking, see Benso, *Face of Things*.
- 11 See GA 2: 348–50/SZ 262–64.
- 12 See GA 2: 409/SZ 308: “Das Nichts, davor die Angst bringt, enthüllt die Nichtigkeit, die das Dasein in seinem Grunde bestimmt, der selbst ist als Geworfenheit in den Tod.”
- 13 During a consideration of the relationship between things and (their) world, Andrew Mitchell thinks in a similar direction (though he does not explicitly broach the issue of nothingness): “If existence is ecstatic when outside itself, then things, too, exist ecstatically, as each member of the four-fold describes a way for the thing to be outside itself.” See Andrew Mitchell, “The Fourfold,” in Bret Davis, ed., *Heidegger: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010), 215.
- 14 Such a sentiment seems to agree with ‘Letter on Humanism,’ in GA 9:157/248.
- 15 In this direction, see Benso, *Face of Things*, 114.
- 16 See GA 77: 102–3/66.
- 17 See GA 77: 111/71, where forgetfulness is said to be a constant companion to conversations such as those in which the interlocutors are engaged.
- 18 See Benso, *Face of Things*, 116.

- 19 During a careful and precise discussion of the relational character of things, Andrew Mitchell describes such speaking: “Nothing is simply inert, stones speak, rivers poetize, and both plants and animals move past any presumed encapsulation in an environment (*Umwelt*) or ‘disinhibiting ring’ (*Enthemmungsring*).” See Andrew Mitchell, “The Fourfold,” in François Raffoul and Eric Nelson, eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 298.
- 20 See GA 7: 220/EGT 66.
- 21 Though Heidegger will not employ the language of the fourfold until the Bremen lectures of 1949, the characters’ attempt to think through these relations marks a step in that direction.
- 22 It is said explicitly by the Scientist that things bear a relation (*Beziehung*) both to the open region and to the human: “[...] *eine Beziehung des Kruges zum Menschen*” (GA 77: 137/89). This is a relation that *belongs to the jug*, the jug’s relation to the human. The jug is thus said to be a being that can relate to other beings. On this, and on the relation between things and human beings, see Andrew Mitchell’s lapidary article on the four-fold in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, 297–98.
- 23 See GA 77: 122/79.
- 24 Andrew Mitchell makes a similar point, it seems to me, while discussing the relational character of the four-fold: “The only traction that we find in this world is through a *reciprocal relation* of holding each other afloat. We bear each other, we bear the world, but those same others and that same world bears us in return” (*The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, 298, em).
- 25 See GA 7: 182/PLT 178: “Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing.”
- 26 In David Krell’s translation, “we truly incline toward something only when it, in turn, inclines toward us, toward our essential being, by appealing to our essential being as what holds us there” (GA 7: 129/BW 369).

Heidegger on the Way
from Onto-Historical Ethnocentrism
to East-West Dialogue

Bret W. Davis

Some scholars may still wish to debate whether Heidegger was the greatest Western philosopher of the twentieth century. Most all will agree, however, that among those who make the short list for this distinction, Heidegger not only committed the most egregious political error but also, at least in the 1930s, was the most stubbornly ethnocentric thinker of the lot. Heidegger often asserted that Germany, as “the land of poets and thinkers,” had a central world-historical role to play in any possible recovery from the technological nihilism of the modern epoch.

And yet, it is also arguably the case that, among the greatest of twentieth-century Western philosophers, Heidegger demonstrated the most sincere and sustained interest in clearing the way for a radical dialogue with East Asian thought.¹ East Asian students and scholars were among the first to show interest in his work, and he reciprocated by conversing with them and reading translations of texts from the Daoist and Zen traditions in particular. “From a Conversation on Language: Between a Japanese and an Inquirer [*Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache. Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden*]” (GA 12: 79-146/OWL 1-54,

tm) is not only a noteworthy indication of this interest, it is also widely acknowledged as one of his most important texts.

The ensuing question that I wish to pursue in this article is this: How are Heidegger's trenchant ethnocentrism and his profound interest in East-West dialogue related? While neither can be wholly confined to one or another period in his thought, I will show how, starting in the late 1930s, Heidegger begins to recover from the most ethnocentric period of his thought, and how he starts thinking of his reflections on the Western history of being as a preparation for what in 1953 he came to call "the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world [*das unausweichliche Gespräch mit der ostasiatischen Welt*]" (GA 7: 41/QCT 158).

ONTO-HISTORICAL ETHNOCENTRISM: 1930S AND BEYOND

The recently published Black Notebooks further reveal *both* the depth of Heidegger's entanglement with National Socialism in 1933–34 – with his attempt to develop a "metaphysics of Dasein" into a "metapolitics 'of' the historical people [*Metapolitik 'des' geschichtlichen Volkes*]" (GA 94: 124/91, em; see also 115–16/85)² – and the intensity of his efforts to disentangle his own unrealized vision of a "spiritual National Socialism [*geistigen Nationalsozialismus*]" (GA 94: 136/99) from the ruling "vulgar National Socialism [*Vulgärnationalsozialismus*]" with its "brainless references . . . to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*" (GA 94: 142/104, tm). Heidegger soon comes to identify the latter with a "barbarian principle" (GA 94: 194/142, tm), and to call his own 1933 Rectoral Address a "little interlude of a great error" (GA 94: 198/145, tm; see also GA 95: 18, 408; GA 97: 98–99, 258). By the end of the war, Heidegger bemoans what he calls "a blinded leading-astray of our own people" (GA 77: 206/133). Throughout his notebooks, as elsewhere, Heidegger consistently criticizes in particular the biological racism of Nazi ideologues (see for example GA 94: 143/105, 157/115, 364/266, 478/347; GA 95: 22–23, 32; GA 96: 48; see also GA 36/37: 209–12/159–61; GA 65: 18–19/17; GA 45: 143/124; and GA 69: 70–71/61).³

Strangely and disturbingly, however, an infusion of anti-Semitic thoughts into his narrative of the decline of the (Western) history of

being into rootlessness (*Bodenlosigkeit*) and machination (*Machenschaft*) first occurs in the *Black Notebooks* in 1938 (GA 95: 97),⁴ several years after he had distanced himself from the actual Nazi movement, and continues into the mid-1940s (see esp. GA 95: 326, 339; GA 96: 46–47, 56–57, 133, 243, 261–62; GA 97: 20, 159).⁵ The recent discussions of the *Black Notebooks* have been rather restrictively focused on a dozen or so passages containing disparaging remarks about Jews and “*Judentum*.”⁶ This critical focus is understandable, of course, given longstanding debates regarding how to view the relation between Heidegger’s thought and his affiliation with Nazism, and given the absence heretofore of hardly any evidence that the anti-Semitism he occasionally displayed in personal and professional correspondence, not to mention in his actions as rector, played a role in Heidegger’s thought itself.⁷

Although this new evidence demonstrates a more entwined relation between Heidegger’s anti-Semitism and aspects of his thought than previously known, I think it would go too far to say that what Peter Trawny aptly calls a *seinsgeschichtlicher Antisemitismus* inextricably contaminates (*kontaminiert*) the core of all Heidegger’s thinking during these years, much less his thought before and after this time period.⁸ It seems to me more apt to say that in these passages from the *Black Notebooks* Heidegger experimented with linking his critique of the rootlessness, machination, and technological calculation that for him defines Western modernity to certain anti-Semitic stereotypes, tropes, and conspiracy theories that pervaded not just Nazi Germany but also much of the Western world at the time. To be sure, this was a reckless and culpable experiment, especially given what we know of the ghastly outcome of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. And it is difficult to fathom why Heidegger allowed these passages to be published, without comment, as part of his *Gesamtausgabe*. For the historical record, perhaps, but then why not also, for a more complete historical record, clarify whether and why he ceased to hold these views after a certain date? In any case, as lamentable and condemnable as the *seinsgeschichtlicher Antisemitismus* expressed in these passages is, it is far from being

the keystone of Heidegger's thought-path as a whole – and so not the Achilles' heel some polemicists would hope for.

However, a stronger case *can* be made against an ethnocentrism (or *Volk*-centrism) that pervades Heidegger's thinking more deeply, broadly, and for a longer period of time. What Trawny calls “the narrative of a German salvation of the Occident [*das Narrativ einer deutschen Rettung des Abendlandes*]”⁹ might well be dubbed a *seinsgeschichtlicher Ethnozentrismus*, that is to say, an onto-historical ethnocentrism.

In the summer semester of 1933, Heidegger opens his first lecture course as the first Nazi rector of Freiburg University with the claim: “The German people [*Volk*] is now passing through a moment of historical greatness” (GA 36/37: 3/3). He goes on to argue that because the “ethnicity [*Stammesart*] and language” of the ancient “Greek people [*Volk*]” have “the same provenance as ours,” there is a special philosophical and “spiritual-political mission of the German people [*Volk*]” (GA 36/37: 4-6/4-5).¹⁰ To be sure, Heidegger stepped down from his official position as the rector of Freiburg University after only a year in office (1933-34), and he became increasingly critical of Nazi politics from then on. Nevertheless, he continued to assert that there is a special world-historical role to be played by the Germans as “the people of poets and thinkers [*das Volk der Dichter und Denker*].” In a notebook entry from the early 1930s, Heidegger confidently proclaims: “The German alone can poetize and say being in an originally new manner [*Der Deutsche allein kann das Sein ursprünglich neu dichten und sagen*]” (GA 94: 27/21, tm). In an entry from the mid-1940s, Heidegger calls the Germans “the shepherds in the Occident [*das Hirtentum im Abendland*]” (GA 97: 51). And in a lecture course from 1943 he claims that “world-historical reflection can come only from the Germans, provided that they find and preserve ‘the German’” (GA 55: 123).

Even when the Germans lose the war, Heidegger continues to assert that it is they, and they alone, who can save the Occident and indeed the entire Europeanizing world. At the end of the third and last of the *Country Path Conversations* (*Feldweg-Gespräche*), completed on 8 May, 1945, Heidegger writes of this date: “On the day the world celebrated

its victory, without yet recognizing that already for centuries it has been defeated by its own rebellious uprising” (GA 77: 240/157). “The War decides nothing,” he adds in a note; the devastation it entailed is just a surface phenomenon of the nihilistic “desertification” (*Verwüstung*) that is eating away at the heart of the Occident, that is to say, of the “abandonment of being” (*Seynsverlassenheit*) that corresponds to our own “uprising and refusal of attention to the belongingness in beyng” (GA 77: 242, 244/159, 160). The real decision, Heidegger tells us, is “whether the *Germans* as the central heart of the Occident fail in the face of their historically destined assignment and *become* the victim of *foreign ideas*” (GA 77: 244/160). “Nationalism” is in fact one of the “foreign ideas” – based as it is on “what is naturally given,” and thus on the biological and racial – that Heidegger’s *Germans* must reject if they are to recover their true spiritual essence as the people of poets and thinkers that “waits” in attentive correspondence with being (GA 77: 232–36/151–54).

Being or “beyng” (*Seyn*), in contrast to all the beings (*Seienden*) we normally concern ourselves with, in contrast, that is to say, to all the “necessities” of life with which we are generally preoccupied, is “the unnecessary” (*das Unnötige*). Being (or beyng) is not one being among other beings, but rather the appropriating event (*Ereignis*) that first opens up a world and so bestows meaning on beings and their relations. This bestowal, however, requires us as responsive recipients: “The unnecessary requires us and our essence like the sound ... requires the instrument which gives it off” (GA 77: 237/155). *Sein* requires *Dasein* and, in particular it seems, *German Dasein*. We *Germans*, Heidegger’s character says near the end of the third conversation, “must learn to know the necessity of the unnecessary and, as learners, teach it to other peoples” (GA 77: 237/155). The onto-historical ethnocentrism that pervades much of Heidegger’s thinking, especially during this period, is in plain view here.

And yet, and yet ... the third conversation does not quite end there. Rather, it – and thus the entire collection of *Country Path Conversations* – ends by quoting “a short conversation between two thinkers” from a

“historiological account of Chinese philosophy,”¹¹ a conversation, moreover, that concerns precisely “the necessity of the unnecessary” (GA 77: 239/156). Evidently, the “kindred ones” who will share “the burden of the teaching that learns” may after all include non-Germans and, specifically, East Asians. This remarkable reference to a passage from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* at the end of *Country Path Conversations*, and at the end of the war, is not, I think, an isolated aberration on Heidegger’s otherwise ethnocentric path of thought. Rather, it bears witness to a significant countermovement *within* that path, a movement toward what he finally comes to call “the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world” (GA 7: 41/QCT 158). It is this aspect of Heidegger’s thought-path – this movement beyond onto-historical ethnocentrism toward opening up a radically intertraditional dialogue with East Asia – that I wish to pursue.¹²

TOWARD THE INEVITABLE DIALOGUE WITH THE EASTERN WORLD

Heidegger’s interest in East Asia dates back to the 1920s, when a number of Japanese students and young scholars, including Tanabe Hajime and later Kuki Shūzō, studied with him in Freiburg and Marburg. At least by 1930 Heidegger was familiar with Martin Buber’s 1910 edition of the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 17 of which he once referenced in a conversation in order to elucidate our being-with others.¹³ In retrospect Heidegger expressed appreciation for the ability of the Japanese, as opposed to his fellow Europeans, to understand what he meant by “das Nichts” in his 1929 lecture “What is Metaphysics?”¹⁴

But in the mid-1930s, during Heidegger’s most ethnocentric period, he acknowledged no affinity for East Asian thought and he viewed “the Asiatic” (*das Asiatische*) in general as something that Europe needed to guard against. In a speech entitled “Europa und die deutsche Philosophie” that was given in Rome on April 8, 1936, Heidegger says that one of the conditions of the salvation of Europe is “the protection of the European peoples from the Asiatic [*die Bewahrung der europäischen Völker vor dem Asiatischen*].”¹⁵ In his Schelling lectures given the same year, Heidegger links the “Asiatic” with “the mythical” (*das Mythische*), and

claims that these were overcome by the Greek inception of philosophy (GA 42: 252/146; see also GA 39: 134/118).¹⁶ Still in 1941, in his *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger writes that *Abendland* (Occident), as opposed to *Europa* (Europe), is a “historical concept [*geschichtlicher Begriff*]” which defines the essential history of the Germans and their provenance from out of the confrontation with the Oriental [*dem Morgenländischen*]” (GA 96: 274).¹⁷ References to East Asia are scarce in the notebooks, though on at least two occasions from the mid- to late 1930s he links China with a lack of genuine historicity as well as with technological machination and superficial “lived experience”: “*history ceases* and the Chinese realm of machination and lived-experience begins [*die Geschichte untergeht und das Chinesentum der Machenschaft und des Erlebens beginnt*]” (GA 94: 432/314 tm; see also 302/220).

However, starting in the late 1930s Heidegger’s respect for and interest in East Asia is rekindled. Let me recount a couple of episodes relating to Heidegger’s renewed interest in East Asian thought between 1937 and 1946. When Nishitani Keiji, the Zen thinker and Kyoto School philosopher, was studying in Freiburg between 1937 and 1939, he presented Heidegger with a copy of the first volume of D. T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. It turned out Heidegger had already read and was eager to discuss this book. Nishitani recounted to Graham Parkes “how Heidegger had given him a ‘standing invitation’ to come to his house on Saturday afternoons to talk about Zen.”¹⁸ Nishitani also told Ban Kazunori that he had often been invited to the Heidegger residence, where he “explained quite a lot about the standpoint of Zen to Heidegger.” He even said that, after taking meticulous notes, “Heidegger would himself repeat these ideas in his lectures, only without mentioning Zen!”¹⁹

After meeting Heidegger in 1942, Paul Shih-yi Hsiao recalls having “now and then . . . handed him parts of [his] translation of the [*Daodejing*] into Italian,” and during the summer break of 1946, their plans to work on a collaborative translation of the *Daodejing* into German materialized when Hsiao “met [with Heidegger] regularly every Saturday in his cabin on top of Todtnauberg.”²⁰

Even though Heidegger's interest in East Asian thought was thus clearly on the rise since the end of the 1930s, a significant reference to it did not appear on the surface of his texts until 1945 when, in the final pages of *Country Path Conversations*, he quotes the *Zhuangzi*. But this conversation remained unpublished until 1995. Publicly, Heidegger broke the silence on his longstanding conversation with East Asians and East Asian thought with another text written in the form of a conversation. In the mid-1950s, occasioned by a visit from Tezuka Tomio, and on the basis of his conversations with numerous other Japanese scholars and philosophers over the years, Heidegger composed "From a Conversation on Language: Between a Japanese and an Inquirer" (GA 12: 79-146/OWL 1-54, tm). It is not difficult to surmise the need Heidegger felt to compose this particular text in the form of a dialogue; it is, after all, a dialogue concerned with the very possibility of dialogue between two radically different traditions, two radically different languages or "houses of being."

I would like to suggest a special connection between *Country Path Conversations* and "From a Conversation on Language." It is fitting that he chose to write these two texts in the form of conversations, since both texts evince the arc spanning the twin dialogical orientations of Heidegger's thinking.²¹ On the one hand, Heidegger clearly developed his thinking in dialogue with those whom he considered to be the great thinkers of the Western tradition, and especially with the Greeks. With the possible exception of Hegel, no other Western philosopher has so thoroughly engaged in a dialogue with his predecessors. On the other hand, as Rolf Elberfeld notes, "Heidegger is the first great European thinker . . . whose entire path of thought has been accompanied by dialogues with Asian philosophers."²² Indeed, on several occasions Heidegger himself suggested that his lifelong dialogue with the Western tradition is to be understood as a preparation for dialogue with East Asian thought. His hermeneutical engagements with the Western tradition were not meant to hermetically seal us up within it, but rather to open up the possibility of a more radical, originary, and perhaps ineptual dialogue with non-Western traditions, those of East Asia in

particular. To the organizers of the first conference held on this theme, in 1969 Heidegger wrote: “Again and again it has seemed urgent to me that a dialogue take place with the thinkers of what is to us the Eastern world.”²³ Yet, at the same time, this urgency is tempered by Heidegger’s insistence that “the dialogue with the Greek thinkers and their language ... remains for us the precondition of the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world” (GA 7: 41/QCT 158). The step outward into dialogue with the East requires Westerners to first step back through a dialogue with the Greek origins of their own thinking. Heidegger never wavers from insisting on this precondition. Nevertheless, the step back through a dialogue with the Greeks increasingly comes to be seen as a step on the way to an inexorable East-West dialogue.

What I am calling the arc spanning the twin dialogical orientations of Heidegger’s thinking – the arc that extends back to the Greeks and then over to East Asia – is clearly at issue in “From a Conversation on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer.” Let me suggest how it can also be found expressed in *Country Path Conversations*. All three of the conversations that make up this book reflect on the Western provenance of the problem of willful technological thinking. The first conversation aims to retrieve and rethink a one-word fragment from Heraclitus, but in the background can be discerned the unmistakable influence of the *Daodejing*.²⁴ The second conversation ends with the arrival of an enigmatic “guest,” who, on account of his ability to listen “with such courteous anticipation,” is said to be “the guest *par excellence*” (GA 77: 180/117). The guest is said to have brought a picture to the Tower Warden (GA 77: 169/109), a picture that “unsettles” the Teacher as something “wondrous” to be “solved,” but which the Tower Warden says is something “strange” that “hints back into itself” (GA 77: 163–64/105–6; 188/122). Is this perhaps a Japanese guest, who brought with him a picture that shows how “the ruling world-picture of the natural sciences and technology” (GA 77: 193/126) has spread from Europe across the globe? Or does the picture from Japan perhaps intimate rather a non-technological form of art? Or, as suggested by Heidegger’s later comments on Kurosawa’s 1950 film *Rashōmon* in

“From a Conversation on Language” (GA 12: 99/OWL 16), might it even be a picture from Japan that does both at once? In any case, surmising that the guest is from East Asia is enhanced by the fact that the third conversation ends with the Older Man retelling a story from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* to help illuminate the “necessity of the unnecessary” (GA 77: 239/156). In sum, we might venture to interpret the course of these three conversations as demonstrating a step back through the Western tradition that enables a step outward toward dialogue with East Asian traditions.

LESSONS AND LIMITS OF HÖLDERLIN’S HOMECOMING THROUGH THE FOREIGN

Hölderlin plays a crucial role in Heidegger’s Greco-Germanic *Seinsgeschichte*, and thus in the onto-historically ethnocentric current of this thought-path; he is the poet of poets who, in dialogue with the thinker, will purportedly show Germans, and hence Westerners, and hence the whole world, how to leap into another inception beyond the technological end of the Western history of metaphysics.²⁵ What role does he play in that other current of Heidegger’s thought-path that we have been pursuing, which ultimately leads outward toward an intertraditional dialogue with East Asia? To begin with, it was Hölderlin who taught Heidegger that “the free use of one’s own [*der freie Ge-brauch des Eigenen*]” becomes possible only by way of an encounter with the foreign. Heidegger returns time and again to Hölderlin’s letter to his friend Böhlendorff, dated 4 December 1801, in which he says that in order for the Germans to learn to freely use what is proper to them, namely “the clarity of presentation [*die Klarheit der Darstellung*],” they must learn what is natural not to them but to the Greeks, namely “the fire from heaven [*das Feuer vom Himmel*]” or “holy pathos” (GA 39: 290-94/261-67; GA 52: 188-91; GA 53: 168-70/134-70; GA 4: 86-100/110-22).

Yet it is questionable whether Heidegger’s reading of the poetic project sketched in Hölderlin’s letter provides a path toward a genuine intertraditional dialogue, and especially one that would exceed

the orbit of the Greco-Germanic European tradition. Let me be clear that I am concerned here with *Heidegger's reading* of Hölderlin. It has been pointed out that Heidegger largely ignores Hölderlin's references to Egypt and to India.²⁶ In the 1947 "Letter on 'Humanism,'" Heidegger himself confesses that "we have still scarcely begun to think the mysterious relations to the East that have come to word in Hölderlin's poetry" (GA 9: 338/257). In his readings of Hölderlin, Heidegger is concerned with going only as far East as Greece – and of going to Greece only for sake of enabling a true homecoming to Germany. Heidegger's first lecture course on Hölderlin in 1934/35 ends with a reflection on Hölderlin's 1801 letter to Böhlendorff, and the entire lecture course is concluded by citing again what is for Heidegger the key point: "Nothing is more difficult for us to learn than the free use of the national" (GA 39: 294/267). In his 1943 essay "Andenken," he again stresses: "the love for what is not like home, purely for the sake of becoming at home in what is one's own, is the essential law of destiny by which the poet is sent into the foundation of the history of the 'fatherland'" (GA 4: 87/111–12).

The journey to the foreign is thus undertaken for the sake of "becoming at home in what is one's own," for the sake of learning "the free use of one's own." In a footnote, Heidegger acknowledges the question of whether the "law of historicity [*das Gesetz der Geschichtlichkeit*]" poetized by Hölderlin – the law according to which "spirit is not at home at the beginning" and so needs to pass through "colony" in order to appropriate its own homeland – is clarified or obscured by reference to "the unconditional subjectivity of the German absolute metaphysics of [Hölderlin's friends] Schelling and Hegel, according to whose doctrine the very being-in-itself of spirit requires its return to itself, which in turn presupposes its being-outside-itself" (GA 4: 90n/173n2). While Heidegger presumably wants to argue that drawing this connection obscures rather than clarifies Hölderlin's thought, he evades or postpones making this argument and merely says that this "question is best left for further reflection" (GA 4: 90n/173n2); Heidegger also raises, but barely responds to, this question in GA 53: 158/126–27. We are reminded of a comment by Gadamer, who was otherwise much more sympathetic

to Hegel than was Heidegger: “Hegel’s dialectic [of a self-othering and self-recuperating spirit] is a monologue” rather than a dialogue, which requires a genuine openness to what the other has to say.²⁷

The question is whether the “law of historicity” that Heidegger gleans from his reading of Hölderlin is the only legitimate manner of intercultural dialogue. Is there not rather a whole spectrum of legitimate ways in which someone can relate to two or more cultures, languages, and traditions? Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin provides us with one possibility, a possibility that is in some respects quite edifying and compelling, but in other respects rather questionable. Specifically, we need to critically ask whether Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin provides a model for intercultural or intertraditional dialogue that is open to a creative *transformation* of one’s horizons, or whether it only ever sees the journey into the foreign as a way of distancing oneself from one’s native land so that, having supplemented one’s natural endowment by learning from the foreign, one can then proceed to the ultimate aim of returning home capable of a “free use of one’s own.” What seems problematic to me is, first of all, that what is “one’s own” supposedly remains a given: the parameters of what is native and what is foreign are seen as fixed; and secondly, that the foreign is treated as “colony.” Hölderlin writes: “Colony and bold forgetting are what the spirit loves [*Kolonie liebt, und tapfer Vergessen der Geist*]” (GA 4: 90/114, tm). But, I submit, the forgetting of the homeland is not yet bold enough as long as it loves the foreign land only as “colony.”

It would seem, at least, that the other land is not respected as the land of the Other insofar as it is treated as “colony.” Moreover, could not an initially foreign land become the site of a new homestead, the site of a new individual beginning or even the site of another historical inception for a community? At the other end of the spectrum from homecoming through the foreign, emigration/immigration – such that what was once a foreign land becomes not a colony, but a new home – should not be ruled out of the range of possible outcomes of an encounter with another land and its initially foreign tradition. Yet it seems

that emigration/immigration would be outlawed according to “the law of historicity” Heidegger’s gleans from his reading of Hölderlin.

Heidegger says that what Hölderlin teaches us (and by “us” is meant here specifically, though not only, the Germans of 1942) is first of all that “the relation to one’s own is never a mere self-assured affirmation of the so-called ‘natural’ or ‘organic’” (GA 53: 179/143). It is only by way of journeying to the foreign and, moreover, harboring the foreign as “guest,” that is, as “the presence of the unhomely in the homely,” that the homeland can be appropriated. “The guest makes the thinking of the homely into a steadfast remembrance of the journeying to the foreign (to ‘colony’). The appropriation of one’s own is only as the encounter and guest-like dialogue with the foreign” (GA 53: 177/142). This is surely a significant critique of actual Nazism, and a bold teaching for Heidegger to deliver in this lecture course of 1942. We still have much to learn from it today. But it is not clear that Hölderlin, much less Heidegger, has broken free of the orbit of an always self-returning dialectic of spirit, insofar as the foreign would be treated as colony, and as a means for homecoming, and furthermore insofar as Greece is taken as the inception of the tradition to which Germany belongs, so that the journey that brings this guest back home would be a recuperation of one’s own estranged origin more than an encounter with a radical other.²⁸ All the more significant, therefore, are the implications of interpreting the guest who arrives at the end of the second of the *Country Path Conversations* as an East Asian. The journey to, and the welcoming of a guest from, a land outside the orbit of the Western tradition introduces, to be sure, a more enigmatic set of questions; but it also inaugurates a more radical and potentially more radically transformative kind of intertraditional dialogue.

HESITANT OPENINGS TO RADICAL EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

Heidegger sometimes advances toward and sometimes steps back, or perhaps shrinks back, from “the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian World” – and sometimes in the same text. In the 1966 *Spiegel* interview, for example, moments after having said, “and who of us

can decide whether one day in Russia and in China ancient traditions of a ‘thinking’ will awaken which will help enable human being to have a free relationship to the technical world” (GA 16: 677/MHNS 61), Heidegger pulls back and proclaims that “any reversal of the modern technological world can only occur from out of the same location in which it arose, and . . . cannot happen by means of an adoption of Zen Buddhism or other Eastern experiences of the world” (GA 16: 679/MHNS 62). He then goes on to say that “When [the French] begin to think, they speak German,” and affirms that the Germans have a special task in the transformation of thinking “in the sense of the dialogue with Hölderlin” (GA 16: 679/MHNS 63).

In the 1947 “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” however, Heidegger says that when he spoke of the “homeland” at issue in Hölderlin’s elegy “Homecoming,” this is not a matter of patriotism or nationalism, in fact it is not so much about returning to Germany as it is about returning to the West. Furthermore,

even the West is not thought regionally as the Occident in contrast to the Orient, nor merely as Europe, but rather world-historically out of nearness to the source [*Nähe zum Ursprung*]. . . . “German” is not spoken to the world so that the world might be reformed through the German essence; rather, it is spoken to the Germans so that from a destinal belongingness to other peoples they might become world-historical along with them.
(GA 9: 338/257)

In the space of the ellipses of this quote is where Heidegger says that “we have still scarcely begun to think the mysterious relations to the East that have come to word in Hölderlin’s poetry.” The question is, insofar as Eastern nations belong to the world but not to the West, how they might become world-historical along with the nations of the West. Presumably they have their own ways of dwelling “near to the source.” Heidegger seems to recognize this in his 1959 lecture “Hölderlin’s Earth

and Heaven,” where he says that the humble Occidental present of the great Greek inception

can no longer remain in its Occidental isolation. It is opening itself to the few other great inceptions which belong, with what is proper to them, in the selfsame of the inception of the in-finite relationship in which the earth is contained. (GA 4: 177/201)²⁹

In a foreword written for the Japanese translation of one of his essays in 1968, two years after his wavering in the *Spiegel* interview, Heidegger affirmed that a dialogue between a “transformed European thinking” and Eastern thinking “can assist in the endeavor to save the essence of the human from the threat of an extreme technical calculation and manipulation of human Dasein” (GA 16: 695). And so, the inevitable and even urgent dialogue with the East Asian world would, in the end, play a world-historical role in the turning from the *Ge-stell* to a more authentically human dwelling near the source.

EAST-WEST DIALOGUE WITHIN THE MONOLOGUE OF LANGUAGE

Yet this returns us to the most vexing question: How would such a radical East-West dialogue be hermeneutically possible? Insofar as, according to Heidegger, it is the kinship between the German and Greek languages, along with the entire legacy of the Greek inception of metaphysics, that allows the journey (back) into the (semi-)foreign world of the Ancient Greeks, on what grounds would a dialogue with an utterly non-Western tradition such as those of China and Japan take place?

It is precisely this question that is addressed in Heidegger’s “From a Conversation on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer,” which is what makes this such a crucial text in Heidegger’s corpus. In that conversation Heidegger says that, if “language is the house of being,” then “we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than do East Asians,” such that “a dialogue from house to house remains nearly impossible” (GA 12: 85/OWL 5, tm). A few pages later he tentatively speaks of the possibility that “European-Occidental saying

and East Asian saying” could “enter into dialogue in such a manner that something sings which wells up from a single source” (GA 12: 89/8).

Let us approach this possibility of radical intertraditional dialogue by way of starting with Heidegger’s interpretation of a line from Hölderlin on conversation (*Gespräch*). In an essay on Hölderlin from 1936, Heidegger interprets Hölderlin’s line “Since we have been a conversation” to mean that “the being of humans is grounded in language” and that “this properly occurs only in *conversation*” (GA 4: 38/56). The conversation at issue here is not only that between humans, but first and foremost that between the poets and the gods: “it is precisely in the naming of the gods and in the world becoming word that authentic conversation, which we ourselves are, consists” (GA 4: 40/58). Heidegger stresses that this “always also signifies we are *one* conversation.” “The unity of a conversation consists in the fact,” he goes on to say, “that in the essential word there is always manifest that one and the same on which we agree, on the basis of which we are united and so are authentically ourselves” (GA 4: 39/57). What provides this unity underlying the plurality of voices in a conversation? To “be *one* conversation and to be historical . . . belong together, and they are the same,” says Heidegger (GA 4: 39/57). Germans can speak to other Westerners, and they can converse with the texts of the ancient Greeks, because the Western tradition has unfolded as one long conversation. As Gadamer will later work out in his philosophical hermeneutics, we can understand the classical texts of the Western tradition ever anew because they belong to what he calls in the preface to *Truth and Method* “the historical tradition to which *we* all belong.”⁵⁰ The “we” here indicates the readership Gadamer has first and foremost in mind, namely, those who have inherited what he calls, later on in the book, the “single horizon”⁵¹ of the West. But how is it that “we” can read texts that don’t belong to the horizon of the Western tradition? How can we engage not just in an *intratraditional* dialogue but in an *intertraditional* dialogue?⁵² When Heidegger says that “essential thinkers always say the Same [*das Selbe*]” (GA 9: 363/275), does this include non-Western thinkers? What is the enigmatic selfsame region that would encompass such different

horizons? Is there a language that includes all the houses of being; is there a house that includes all the languages of being; is there a language of languages?

In the essay “The Way to Language,” Heidegger, taking up a suggestion from Novalis, claims that “language *is* monologue [*die Sprache* ist *Monolog*]” (GA 12: 254/OWL 134). After all that has been said of the conversational nature of language, what does it mean to say that language is monologue? As paradoxical as this seems, we recall that Heidegger thinks conversation, *Gespräch*, as a gathering of language, indeed as *logos* in the sense of “the gathering toward the originally all-unifying One” (GA 77: 224/145). We also recall that he says that “language speaks” (*die Sprache spricht*), and that humans speak only insofar as they listen and respond to this speaking of language (GA 12: 30/OWL 210). Now, it is important to point out that this monological speaking of language is not simply a unilateral dictation from above; it calls for a human response (*Entsprechung*). To say that language is monologue, Heidegger writes, means that it speaks “lonesomely” (*einsam*), but this implies: “the same in what unites that which belongs together.” What belongs together is the call of being and the response of the human, and together these are the monological conversation that is “the Saying” (*die Sage*) that is the speaking of language. “Saying is in need of being voiced in the word,” and so needs the human voice. “But the human is capable of speaking only insofar as he, belonging to Saying, listens to Saying, so that in resaying it he may be able to say a word” (GA 12: 254/OWL 134). And what first of all must be listened to is the way in which language speaks most primordially as “the peal of silence” (*das Geläut der Stille*).

What is appropriated, the essence of the human, is brought into its essence through language, it remains appropriated over to the essence of language and the peal of silence. This appropriating occurs [*Solches Ereignen ereignet sich*] insofar as the *essential unfolding* [*das Wesen*] of language, the peal of silence, *requires* mortals in order to sound out [*verlauten*] as the peal of

silence for the hearing [*Hören*] of mortals. Only insofar as humans belong [*gehören*] within the peal of silence are humans as mortals, in *their* manner, capable of vocalized speech [*verlautende Sprechen*]. (GA 12: 27–28/OWL 208, tm)

What is demanded of us humans is that “we bear in silence the appropriating, initiating movement in the essential unfolding of language [*die ereignende Be-wägung im Sprachwesen zu er-schweigen*] – and do so without talking about silence” (GA 12: 255/OWL 135, tm).

In a supplementary note to the first of the *Country Path Conversations*, Heidegger suggests that it is in “true conversation” that “the unspoken” could be “purely kept, heeded” (GA 77: 159/104). In “The Nature of Language” he writes: “Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying conceals itself in the word ‘way,’ *Dao*, if only we let these names return to what they leave unspoken” (GA 12: 187/OWL 92, tm). Putting these thoughts together, would it not be the case that it is precisely in radically intertraditional dialogue that the essential provenance of language could be most radically thought, or at least attended to in its silent withdrawal?

The engagement in the gathering of language that takes place in a true *Gespräch* “leads the speakers into the unspoken,” that is, into “*that* realm and abode about which they are speaking” (GA 8: 182/178). That realm in this case would be nothing less than the selfsame origin, that is, what the “Conversation on Language” calls the “single source” (*die einzige Quelle*) of Eastern as well as Western languages and thought (GA 12: 89/OWL 8). Heidegger’s “Conversation on Language” ends with a conversation on silence and the role it plays in genuine dialogue (GA 12: 144/OWL 52–53).⁵³ It suggests that a genuine dialogue – and especially one that would attempt to open up a conversation between different linguistic houses of being – must remain attentive to the depths of a shared silence. Only if the speakers learn to speak and listen to one another from out of, and back into, this silent origin of language, can they bridge the abyss that separates, and connects, the radically different traditions of East and West.⁵⁴

Notes

- 1 For an overview of Heidegger's interest in East Asian thought over the course of his career, with references to the principal literature on this relation, see my "Heidegger and Asian Philosophy," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, eds. François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 459–71. For my previous treatment of Heidegger's comportment toward East-West dialogue, see my "Heidegger's Orientations: The Step Back on the Way to Dialogue with the East," in *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 7: Heidegger und das ostasiatische Denken*, eds. Alfred Denker et al. (Freiburg/Munich: Alber, 2013), 153–80. The present essay supplements the latter.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this paper are my own. Note that Chinese and Japanese names will generally be written in the order of family name first, except in cases where the Western order has been used for publications in Western languages.
- 3 Heidegger also rejects biologicistic, rather than metaphysical or ontological, interpretations of Nietzsche (GA 6.1: 465–74/N3 39–47; GA 6.2: 278/N3 231). However, the development of Heidegger's thinking about "race" during the 1930s is complicated and controversial. In his 1933 Rectorial Address, Heidegger writes that "the *spiritual world* of a *Volk* is not its cultural superstructure ... rather, it is the power that comes from preserving at the most profound level the forces that are rooted in the soil and blood of a *Volk*" (GA 16: 112/SA 33–34). In 1934 he acknowledges that "Blood and soil [*Blut und Boden*] are indeed necessary and powerful," even if his point is that "they are *not sufficient* conditions for the *Dasein* of a people [*Volk*]" (GA 36/37: 263/201; see also GA 38: 65–68, 153–57/57–59, 131–34). More essential than the givenness, or "thrownness," of blood, soil, and biological race, claims Heidegger, is how a people "projects" itself through knowledge and spirit (see also GA 94: 189; GA 95: 339; GA 65: 42–43/35). Although written before the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, the

following articles by Robert Bernasconi are insightful critical treatments of Heidegger and the problem of racism: “Heidegger’s Alleged Challenge to the Nazi Conceptions of Race,” in *Appropriating Heidegger*, ed. J. Faulconer and M. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50–67; “Race and Earth in Heidegger’s Thinking During the Late 1930s,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48: 1 (2010): 49–66. Bernasconi compellingly argues that “Heidegger’s efforts at this time [of the mid-1930s] were not directed to excluding ‘the racial element,’ but rather to attacking the idea that race was primary” (“Heidegger’s Alleged Challenge,” 52). In *Besinnung* (1938–39), Heidegger writes that “history alone endows a people with national cohesion and distinctness of its ownmost. ‘Space’ and ‘land,’ climate and blood, never have the power to shape nor the will to cohere” (GA 66: 167/145; see also GA 65: 399/316). As Bernasconi notes, “this is a significant step beyond calling blood and soil a necessary but not sufficient condition of the Dasein of a *Volk*” (“Race and Earth,” 60), even if it still leaves the problems accruing to an historical ethnocentrism unresolved.

- 4 As Peter Trawny points out, however, already in the winter semester of 1933/34, according to the seminar protocol, Heidegger had remarked that “the nature of our German space” would “perhaps never at all become disclosed to Semitic nomads”; Peter Trawny, *Heidegger and the Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 115. See “‘Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat.’ Übung aus dem Wintersemester 1933/34“ in Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski (eds.), *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente. Heidegger-Jahrbuch 4* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2009), 82; *Nature, History, State: 1933–1934*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 56.
- 5 See also Heidegger’s provocative criticisms of Judeo-Christian monotheism in notebook entries from 1947–48 (GA 97: 357, 369, 409, 438).

- 6 In one passage in the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger accuses Jews themselves of racism: “The Jews, *with their marked gift for calculation*, have already been ‘living’ for the longest time according to the principle of race, which is why they also defend themselves as vigorously as they can against its unrestricted application” (GA 96: 56, trans. Richard Polt). In what is undoubtedly the most disturbing anti-Semitic passage, Heidegger seems to characterize the impending Holocaust as a form of “self-annihilation”: “When what is ‘Jewish’ in the metaphysical sense combats what is Jewish, the high point of self-annihilation in history has been attained – supposing that the ‘Jewish’ has everywhere completely seized mastery, so that even the fight against ‘the Jewish,’ and it above all, becomes subject to it” (GA 97: 20, trans. Richard Polt). In other words, Heidegger accused the Nazis of being “metaphysically Jewish.” As Bernasconi points out, however, neither the accusation of Jewish racism nor this “idea of Jewish self-annihilation” was entirely unique to Heidegger: the former reiterates a long history of criticism of the Jewish claim to being a “chosen people,” and the latter was “another familiar trope within German anti-Semitism” that “can be traced back at least as far as Richard Wagner’s ‘Judaism in Music.’” See Bernasconi, “Another Eisenmenger? On the Alleged Originality and Clear Complexity of Heidegger’s Anti-Semitism,” forthcoming in *Heidegger’s “Black Notebooks”: Responding to Anti-Semitism*, eds. Andrew J. Mitchell and Peter Trawny (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).
- 7 For a concise and judicious orientation to the problem of Heidegger’s relation to National Socialism and anti-Semitism, albeit one that was written before the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, see Charles Bambach, “Heidegger, National Socialism, and the German People,” in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret W. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2014), 102–15.
- 8 See Trawny, *Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy*, 2–3, 94–95.
- 9 Trawny, *Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy*, 97; see also 14–15.

- 10 As late as 1966, in the *Spiegel* interview, Heidegger continues to avow a “special inner relationship of the German language to the language of the Greeks and its thinking” (GA 16: 679/MHNS 63).
- 11 The passage is from chapter 26 of the *Zhuangzi*. For an English translation, see *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 299. The original Chinese that corresponds to Heidegger’s “die Notwendigkeit des Unnötigen” is 无用之爲用 *wu yong zhi wei yong*: *Sōshi* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1983), vol. 4: 24.
- 12 Heidegger in fact prefers the word *Gespräch* (conversation) to *Dialog* (dialogue), apparently because, while the latter might be (mis)understood as a subsequent speaking that takes place between two subjects about something predetermined, the former can be understood as an originary gathering (*Ge-*) of language (*Sprache*) which first determines who is speaking and what is spoken about: “a conversation first waits upon reaching that of which it speaks. And the speakers of a conversation can speak in its sense only if they are prepared for something to befall them in the conversation which transforms their own essence” (GA 77: 57/37). Neither the term “dialogue,” which implies a *speaking across*, nor “conversation,” which implies a *turning toward one another*, is able to carry over into English the sense of *Ge-spräch* as a gathering of language or of speaking. Yet, in letting such terms resonate with the sense given to them through Heidegger’s texts, we can also let them add something of their own. For example, the turning toward one another of “conversation” need not be thought of strictly in terms of “intersubjectivity,” but can be understood as the convergence between the address of being and the response of human being, a response that always occurs by way of a conversation among human beings and a conversation with the texts of a tradition – and sometimes, at decisive times, a conversation between traditions, between Athens and Jerusalem, for example, or between the Presocratics and the thinkers of the Indian Subcontinent, or between Freiburg and Kyoto. In this way,

translation can become “an awakening, clarification, and unfolding of one’s own language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language” (GA 53: 80/65–66). While Heidegger in 1942 bemoans the fact that “both we [Germans] and the Japanese learn the Anglo-American language,” and while we today should bemoan the hegemony of the English language in the oxymoronic “global village,” we can agree with Heidegger that “a historical people *is* only from the dialogue [*Zwiesprache*] between its language and foreign languages” (GA 53: 80/65). Although in this text from 1942 Heidegger is stressing the connection between the Greek and German languages, we can pluralize his point so as to say that philosophical thinking is nurtured by interlinguistic and intertraditional dialogue.

- 13 Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters & Dialogues with Martin Heidegger 1929–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 18.
- 14 See Heidegger’s 1963 letter to Kojima Takehiko, in *Japan und Heidegger*, ed. Harmut Buchner (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1989), 225; and GA 12: 103/OWL 19. On the resonances and differences between Heidegger’s conceptions of “das Nichts” and the Zen Buddhist notion of “Nothing” (*mu*), see my “Heidegger and Asian Philosophy,” pp. 464–68.
- 15 Martin Heidegger, “Europa und die deutsche Philosophie” (1936), in *Europa und die Philosophie*, ed. Hans-Helmut Gander (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993).
- 16 Heidegger is much closer to Hegel than to Schelling here. For the latter, “positive philosophy” can, at best, trace its origins back to the mythical. See F. W. J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: SUNY, 2007). On the contributions Schelling, as opposed to Hegel, makes to opening up the Western tradition to dialogue with the Indian tradition, see Jason M. Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Times* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), especially chapter

8. Incidentally, Heidegger later rejects the idea that philosophy is born as a separation of *logos* from *mythos*: “*mythos* and *logos* are not, as our current historians of philosophy claim, placed in opposition by philosophy as such; on the contrary, the early Greek thinkers (Parmenides, fragment 8) are precisely the ones to use *mythos* and *logos* in the same sense. *Mythos* and *logos* become separated and opposed only at the point where neither *mythos* nor *logos* can keep to its original nature” (GA 8: 12/10).
- 17 As late as 1962 Heidegger still claims that “the *Auseinandersetzung* with the Asiatic was for the Greek *Dasein* a fruitful necessity” (GA 75: 228/s 25). He goes on to say that “it is for us today, in an entirely different manner and to a far greater extent, the decision about the fate of Europe and of that which is called the Western world.” The question is whether the “completely different way” of carrying out the *Auseinandersetzung* he envisions may entail cooperative dialogue with, rather than confrontational separation from, the various traditions of Asia.
- 18 Graham Parkes, “Rising Sun over Black Forest: Heidegger’s Japanese Connections,” in Reinhard May, *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work*, trans. with a complementary essay by Graham Parkes (New York: Routledge, 1996), 100.
- 19 Ban Kazunori, *Kakyō kara hanarezu: Nishitani Keiji sensei tokubetsu kōgi* [Without Departing from Home: Special Lectures of Professor Nishitani Keiji] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1998), 189–90, 201.
- 20 Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, “Heidegger and Our Translation of the *Tao Te Ching*,” in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 93, 96.
- 21 The only other text he composed in this form is “Das abendländische Gespräch” from 1946/47–1948 (GA 75: 57–196).
- 22 Rolf Elberfeld, “Heidegger und das ostasiatische Denken: Annäherungen zwischen fremden Welten,” in *Heidegger Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, ed. Dieter Thomä (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 469.

- 23 From Heidegger's letter to the editor of a special edition of *Philosophy East and West* 20: 3 (July 1970): 221, on the theme of "Heidegger and Eastern Thought."
- 24 The interconnectedness and alteration of contraries (see GA 77: 167-68/108) is a topic shared by Heraclitus and the *Daodejing*. In *Country Path Conversations*, however, Heidegger no longer refers to Heraclitus's notion of *polemos*, which had earlier played such an important role in his thought, but now speaks of non-willing (*Nicht-Wollen*) and *Gelassenheit*, themes that strongly resonate with the notion of *wu-wei* 無爲 in the *Daodejing*. (On Heidegger's turn from the will to *Gelassenheit*, see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007]). Other themes in *Country Path Conversations* that reveal connections with the *Daodejing* include the emptiness of the jug (GA 77: 130/84-85) and the notion of a "way" (*Weg*) that "moves [*bewegt*] us" (GA 77: 118, 202/76-77, 131).
- 25 As late as 1963 Heidegger claims that "Hölderlin's poetry is a destiny for us" (GA 4: 195/224). Who is the "us" here? Heidegger continues: "It waits for the day when mortals will correspond to it" (GA 4: 195/224). Insofar as the "us" for whom Hölderlin's poetry is a destiny is not simply Germans, nor even merely Westerns, but "mortals" (*die Sterblichen*) as such, Heidegger's onto-historical ethnocentrism can be heard here echoing through his writings to the end.
- 26 See the mere passing mention of the latter in GA 4: 83/108. On the necessity of taking Hölderlin's references to Egypt into consideration, see Andrzej Warminski, *Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), Part One.
- 27 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990), 375; *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 369.

- 28 The figure of the “guest” appears in Hölderlin’s poem “The Ister” as Heracles, who is invited to cool himself in the shade by this German river. Heidegger interprets: “The guest, that is, the Greek poet of the heavenly fire, is the presence of the unhomely in the homely. The guest makes the thinking of the homely into a steadfast remembrance of the journeying to the foreign (to ‘colony’)” (GA 53: 177/142).
- 29 Bernasconi maintains that this passage, which suggests the possibility and indeed the necessity of a radically intertraditional dialogue, remains an anomaly that is unsupported by any other of Heidegger’s writings: Robert Bernasconi, “Heidegger and the Invention of the Western Philosophical Tradition,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 26: 3 (1995): 251. I have been concerned to show that this is not the case, and that it reflects at least one significant current of Heidegger’s thought-path. Indeed Bernasconi himself, when he repeats the claim, offers as evidence a reference to texts which in fact suggest the necessity of a *bilateral* East-West dialogue: “For example, in the mid-1950s, in the context of a discussion of ‘planetary thinking,’ Heidegger noted the inability of either European languages or East-Asian languages to open up *on their own* an area of possible dialogue between them” (GA 9: 424/321, em; see also GA 12: 89/ 8): Robert Bernasconi, “Heidegger’s Other Sins of Omission,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69:2 (1995): 344.
- 30 Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 5; *Truth and Method*, xxv, em.
- 31 Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 309; *Truth and Method*, 304, tm.
- 32 See Raimundo Pannikar’s distinction between diachronic and diatopical hermeneutics in “What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?” in *Interpreting Across Boundaries*, ed. Gerald James Larson and Eliot Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 116–36. See also my “Sharing Words of Silence: Panikkar after Gadamer,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 7: 1 (2015): 52–68.

- 33 See my “Heidegger’s Orientations: The Step Back on the Way to Dialogue with the East,” 179–80.
- 34 A version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the *Kansai Haidegā Kenkyūkai* (Kansai Heidegger Research Group) at Kyoto University on 19 July, 2015. I would like to thank Abe Hiroshi for the invitation to give this lecture and all the participants for the lively and lengthy discussion that followed. Three points on which I think we all agreed were (1) the need for a more differentiated understanding of “East Asia” than Heidegger allowed for with his references to “the East Asian world”; (2) a better appreciation of the fact that the East-West dialogue Heidegger was cautiously preparing for was already well underway in places like Japan; and (3) the need for approaching this East-West dialogue, and indeed our very understanding of such matters as “dialogue,” from both (or rather from many) directions. With regard to the third point, allow me to note that, three days later, I gave a lecture at Kyoto Sangyo University entitled “Jiyū-na hinjugokan: Ueda Shizuteru no Zen-tetsugaku kara mita taiwa no kakushin” (“The Free Exchange of Host and Guest: The Core of Dialogue According to the Zen Philosophy of Ueda Shizuteru”). Other articles I have written in this vein include “Dialogue and Appropriation: The Kyoto School as Cross-Cultural Philosophy,” in *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, eds. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 33–51; “Conversing in Emptiness: Rethinking Cross-Cultural Dialogue with the Kyoto School,” in *Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 171–94; and “Nishida to ibunkakan-taiwa: Kongen-teki sekaishiminshugi no kanōsei” (“Nishida and Intercultural Dialogue: The Possibility of a Radical Cosmopolitanism”), in *Shisōkan no taiwa: Higashi-ajia ni okeru tetsugaku no juyō to tenkai* (Dialogue between Ways of Thinking: The Reception and Development of Philosophy in East Asia), ed. Fujita Masakatsu (Kyoto: Shōwadō, 2015), pp. 40–56.

TEXTS OF HEIDEGGER CITED AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

References to the works of Martin Heidegger are provided parenthetically in the text by the volume of *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975–, abbreviated “GA”), followed by the German pagination, a slash, and the English pagination of published translations where extant. The relevant translations are listed following the information for the corresponding GA volume. There is one exception to this practice. No references to the pages of English translations are provided in the case of *Being and Time* (GA 2); instead the GA pagination is followed by “sz,” referring to the single edition, re-issued several times: *Sein und Zeit*, 11th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967), since the pagination of sz is contained in all three of the English translations of *Sein und Zeit*. Modifications to published translations are noted by ‘tm’; modifications to emphasis by ‘em.’

FROM THE GESAMTAUSGABE

- GA 2 *Sein und Zeit*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1977. English translation: *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh, rev. Dennis J. Schmidt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010; trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- GA 3 *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*. 2nd ed. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 2010. English translation: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. 5th ed, enlarged. Trans. Richard Taft. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- GA 4 *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. 2nd ed. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1991. English translation: *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*. Trans. Keith Hoeller. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000.
- GA 5 *Holzwege*. 7th ed. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1994. English translation: *Off the Beaten Track*. Ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

- GA 6.1 *Nietzsche I.* Ed. Brigitte Schillbach. 1996.
- GA 6.2 *Nietzsche II.* Ed. Brigitte Schillbach. 1997.
- GA 7 *Vorträge und Aufsätze.* Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 2000.
- GA 8 *Was Heißt Denken?* Ed. Paolo-Ludovika Coriando. 2002. English translation: *What Is Called Thinking?* Trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- GA 9 *Wegmarken.* 3rd ed. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1996. English translation: *Pathmarks.* Ed. William McNeill. Various trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- GA 11 *Identität und Differenz.* Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 2006. English translation: *Identity and Difference.* Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- GA 12 *Unterwegs zur Sprache.* Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1985.
- GA 14 *Zur Sache des Denkens.* Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 2007. English translation: *On Time and Being.* Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- GA 15 *Seminare.* Ed. Curd Ochwadt. 1986.
- GA 16 *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges.* Ed. Hermann Heidegger. 2000.
- GA 18 *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie.* Ed. Mark Michalski. 2002. English translation: *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy.* Trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- GA 20 *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs.* Ed. Petra Jaeger. 1994. English translation: *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena.* Trans. Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- GA 21 *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit.* Ed. Walter Biemel. 1976. English translation: *Logic: The Question of Truth.* Trans. Thomas Sheehan. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

- GA 24 *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie.* 2nd ed. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1989. English translation: *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology.* Revised ed. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- GA 29/30 *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit.* 2nd ed. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1992. English translation: *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude.* Trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- GA 36/37 *Sein und Wahrheit.* Ed. Hartmut Tietjen. 2001. English translation: *Being and Truth.* Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- GA 38 *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache.* Ed. Günter Seubold. 1998. English translation: *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language.* Trans. Wanda Torres Gregory and Yvonne Unna. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009.
- GA 39 *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein.”* 2nd ed. Ed. Susanne Ziegler. 1989. English Translation: *Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine.”* Trans. William McNeill and Julia Ireland. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.
- GA 40 *Einführung in die Metaphysik.* Ed. Petra Jaeger. 1983. English translation: *Introduction to Metaphysics.* 2nd ed. Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- GA 42 *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809).* Ed. Ingrid Schübler. 1988. English translation: *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom.* Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985.
- GA 45 *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte “Probleme” der “Logik.”* 1992. English translation: *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic.”* Trans. Richard

- Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- GA 52 *Hölderlins Hymne "Andenken."* Ed. Curd Ochwadt. 1982.
- GA 53 *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister."* Ed. Walter Biemel. 1984. English translation: *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* Trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- GA 55 *Heraklit.* 2nd ed. Ed. Manfred S. Frings, 1987.
- GA 56/57 *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie.* 2nd ed. Ed. Bernd Heimbüchel. 1999. English translation: *Towards the Definition of Philosophy.* Trans. Ted Sadler. New York: Continuum, 2008.
- GA 60 *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens.* Ed. Matthias Jung, Thomas Regehly, Claudius Strube. 1995. English translation: *The Phenomenology of Religious Life.* Trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- GA 61 *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung.* 2nd ed. Ed. Walter Bröcker and Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns. 1994.
- GA 62 *Phänomenologische Interpretationen ausgewählter Abhandlungen des Aristoteles zu Ontologie und Logik.* Ed. Günther Neumann, 2005.
- GA 63 *Ontologie – Hermeneutik der Faktizität* (Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns, 1988)
- GA 65 *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis).* 2nd ed. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1994. English translation: *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event).* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- GA 66 *Besinnung.* Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. 1997. English translation: *Mindfulness.* Trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- GA 68 *Hegel.* Ed. Ingrid Schüßler. 1993. English translation: *Hegel.* Trans. Joseph Arel and Niels Feuerhahn. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.

- GA 69 *Die Geschichte des Seyns*. Ed. Peter Trawny. 1998.
- GA 70 *Über den Anfang*. Ed. Paola-Ludovika Coriando. 2005.
- GA 71 *Das Ereignis*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2009.
English translation: *The Event*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- GA 73.1 *Zum Ereignis-Denken*. Ed. Peter Trawny. 2013.
- GA 73.2 *Zum Ereignis-Denken*. Ed. Peter Trawny. 2013.
- GA 74 *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*. Ed.
Thomas Regehly. 2010.
- GA 75 *Zu Hölderlin – Griechenlandreisen*. Ed. Curd Ochwadt.
2000.
- GA 77 *Feldweg-Gespräche*. 2nd ed. Ed. Ingeborg Schübler. 2007.
English translation: *Country Path Conversations*. Trans.
Bret W. Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- GA 90 *Zu Ernst Jünger*. Ed. Peter Trawny. 2004.
- GA 94 *Überlegungen II-VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938)*. Ed. Peter
Trawny. 2014. English translation: *Ponderings II-VI*. Trans.
Richard Rojcewicz. Indiana University Press.
- GA 95 *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938-1939)*. Ed. Peter
Trawny. 2014.
- GA 96 *Überlegungen XII-XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939-1941)*. Ed. Peter
Trawny. 2014.
- GA 97 *Anmerkungen I-V (Schwarze Hefte 1942-1948)*. Ed. Peter
Trawny. 2015.

FROM OTHER ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

- BW *Basic Writings*. Revised edition. Ed. David Farrell Krell. Trans.
various. San Francisco: Harper, 1993.
- DT *Discourse on Thinking*. Trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans
Freund. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- EGT *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy*. Trans.
David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. New York: Harper
& Row, Publishers, 1975.

- MHNS *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions & Answers.* Ed. Günther Neske and Emil Kettering. Trans. Lisa Harries. New York: Paragon House, 1990.
- N3 *Nietzsche*, vol. 3: *The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics.* Ed. and trans. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell, and Frank A. Capuzzi. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.
- OWL *On the Way to Language.* Trans. Peter D. Hertz. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971.
- PLT *Poetry, Language, Thought.* Ed. and trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 2001.
- QCT *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays.* Ed and trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- S *Sojourns: The Journey to Greece.* Trans. John P. Manoussakis. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- SA "The Self-Assertion of the German University." Trans. William S. Lewis. In *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), 29-39.
- SZ *Sein und Zeit.* 11th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967.