

# Introduction:

## Why (Heidegger) Scholarship Is Generational

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But if fate constitutes the primordial historicity of Dasein, then history has its essential importance neither in what is past nor in the “today” and its ‘connection’ with what is past, but in that authentic historizing of existence which arises from Dasein’s future.

(GA 2: 510/SZ 386)

Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with Others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as *destiny*... Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free. Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’ goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein.

(GA 2: 508/SZ 384-5)

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Heidegger said about the title *Being and Time* that between the two venerable and recondite philosophical terms it joins, the “and” was the hard part. That’s because it has always been an “or”: either you have being – constantly and completely itself – *or* you have time – change, imperfection, mortality. Philosophy has always taken place within this divide, aching for the indivisible. If we were to look for what attunement determines these arguments – the attitude they embody, the intellectual climate they breathe – I think we would find a horror of time. This horror takes many forms, recoiling from various abysses across sub-disciplines and topics – epistemological uncertainty, metaphysical unreality, logical contradictions – but the source at the bottom of it all would be anguish before death. Plato said that philosophizing is preparing for death, but of course what he really meant was that philosophy is preparing *not* to die. It is the mortal preparation for immortality, a charm or incantation<sup>2</sup> meant to open up an exit from time, chance, and change that we may reside among the timeless. It is no accident that his metaphors for this life tend towards images of being chained up in a cave or trapped in a prison; such an attunement is essential to the notion that temporality is an accidental fall.

Plato finds this escape at those moments when reason runs across shards of eternity lodged in the stream of time, those moments of pristine truth breaking into this shamble through the dark ruins of error and opinion. These are the epistemological lightning strikes when we are struck by truths so true they cannot be untrue. They never change because their objects cannot, and if the knowledge never changes then neither will the knower. We ourselves must be akin to the immutable as we become aware of it, a connection that severs us from our present lives while at the same time recovering our true selves, selves so lost we did not know that they were we and we were lost. We come to know ourselves when we come to know being, and then we can truly be ourselves, for then we can truly be. Nowhere is Nietzsche’s assessment of Christianity as a mass plagiarism of Plato truer than here: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” The most important truth is just that there is Truth, that *something* transcends this

shabby world, a lifeline out of this life into life eternal; this knowledge alone unlocks our chains, even if there is still quite a bit of climbing and squinting to go.

We receive this salvific awareness of salvation in knowledge of things immutable, in evidence and arguments that never need revisiting or revising, thus relieving us from having to be concerned about what might turn up next. This is what Plato sought, the Forms above all the sensible, changeable, temporal particulars, so full of impurities and uncertainties that we cannot even say that they exist without qualification. This is what Augustine looked for, eternal life in the midst of unending death. This is what Descartes dreamed of when he sifted indubitable truth from the flotsam of dubious conviction; what Kant needed when he established necessary and universal knowledge in the face of wild contingency, willing even to pay the price of that knowledge no longer being about reality, just as long as it didn't change. This is how Hegel overcame history, allowing us to supersede the circle of time by rationalizing it, mastering it, overcoming the threat of death by transmuting it into its higher form of rebirth. All dreams of waking from our fall into this crumbling world, this life of decline and demise, to be with being and know the truth.

But if immortality and absolute truth are correlated, then the reverse must follow as well. A genuine coming to grips with death as death — a holding for true as Heidegger calls it (GA 2: 340/SZ 256), holding on for dear death one could say, of death not as a passage to immortality but as the ultimate impasse, the endless end where we all end up — such an attunement means accepting a temporality that marks us down to our core. All that we are will alter and decay for all that we are is in time, and this entails the finitude of our knowledge as well. Knower and known — both finite, both fated to death.

Derrida makes a similar connection when he says that writing itself intrinsically (if there were such a thing, as he always qualifies) implies the death of the author.<sup>3</sup> Writing, to be writing, must operate in the absence of the author, which extends to the logical conclusion of the author's radical absence in her death. This is the ultimate instance of not having any say over what one said, the situation when one cannot

even in principle be asked what one meant, the extreme that exposes the principle that must be the case in all cases. An author's own views can always be overturned or radically reinterpreted while fully respecting the text; no one can protect their writing from alien impositions, throwing into question the notions of an author's own views and alien impositions. This is the ultimate instance of absence that undermines all notions of ultimacy.

This is why Plato viewed writing with horror, parallel to that of time: writing means losing control (Derrida calls Plato's condemnation of writing for this reason "the philosophical movement par excellence").<sup>4</sup> The claim to knowledge of an absolute truth, while pretending submission, exerts one's will over the future – no one can ever gainsay this or prove me wrong or come to any other reasonable conclusion than this – and even over the past – anyone who thought differently from what I say now was simply wrong, and this fact about the entire past will be true for the rest of time. This is the epistemological way to exact revenge on time for its passing, according to Zarathustra's diagnosis – by willing backwards.<sup>5</sup> Yes, time passes, things fade away, beliefs shift – but not this; never this; this I know. The young despairing Plato consoled himself in the face of his smug fellow Athenians contentedly condemning to death the best and wisest man who had ever lived, by telling himself that while they may possess temporal power, that's by its nature temporary; he had the Good itself on *his* side, and that's forever. So have all metaphysicians since taken epistemological solace, reassuring themselves that they have made contact with something that transcends the ephemeral uncertainties our daily business trades in. Thus, we strike a match against the everlasting darkness.

Heidegger's hard-won "and," making being temporal and giving time being, embraces what Plato feared – the pervasiveness of time, the inevitability of death, the drift of meaning, and he did this nowhere better than in his continuous dialogue with the tradition. Heidegger, who late in life summed up his career as an engagement with the canon ("my whole work in lectures and exercises in the past 30 years has been in the main only an interpretation of Western philosophy"<sup>6</sup>) is at once the tradition's most fawning sycophant and its most brazen critic. Early

on, he called his readings violent interpretations, switching later to the more serene image of uncovering hidden treasures in canonical works, but both indicate the same thing: the temporality of texts. The intrinsic meaning of a text changes over time precisely because there is no intrinsic meaning, because meaning like everything else is built of time because it happens in the world like all meaning.<sup>7</sup> As he commented (in a rare successful witticism), there is no such thing as a “Kant in himself” (GA 3: 249/175), i.e., a literary noumenon housing the literal meaning of a work separate from all phenomenal readings that can judge them authoritatively in place of the author. Just as phenomenological ontology defines phenomena’s being as their appearances, so texts exist only in their readings, creating the Möbius strip of interpretations without an original that fascinated Nietzsche and Derrida.

Heidegger derives this hermeneutic stance at least partially from his violent reading of the phenomenal Kant. If Gadamer preferred a Hegel with his head cut off to liberate the bad infinite of endless dialectic, Heidegger adopts a Kant with the noumenon extracted. Kant’s importance is due to the fact that he is “the first and only person who has gone any stretch of the way towards investigating the dimension of Temporality,” in particular in regards to “the question whether and to what extent the Interpretation of Being and the phenomenon of time have been brought together thematically in the course of the history of ontology” (GA 2: 31/SZ 23). In other words, Kant is the thinker who had best advanced the “and,” and the way he did it was by locating it within the self, more specifically, within our capacity for knowing. In the system of the first *Critique*,

as the ground for the possibility of selfhood, time already lies within pure apperception, and so it first makes the mind into a mind. The pure, finite self has, in itself, temporal character [sic]... Time and the “I think” no longer stand incompatibly and incomparably at odds; they are the same. (GA 3: 191/134)

Whereas the tradition had rendered our thinking self and time “incompatibly and incomparably at odds,” Kant’s “and” integrates them, making the self “temporal” and “finite” in its foundation (“it first makes the mind into a mind”). This insight lies at the center of Kant’s thought,<sup>8</sup> which Heidegger defines as “precisely a question of becoming certain of this finitude in order to hold oneself in it” (GA 3: 216-17/152). We must hold our finitude for true, and we do this by integrating time into our selves, as Heidegger’s Kant shows us.

Heidegger’s early work takes this as the necessary first step towards the full scale understanding of being as temporal, the complete implementation of the titular “and,” in an argumentative structure he attributes to Kant. To put it briefly: being, as we understand it, must be temporal since our understanding of being is temporal, since all understanding is, since we are.

The understanding of being has itself the mode of being of the human Dasein. .... If temporality constitutes the meaning of the being of the human Dasein and if understanding of being belongs to the constitution of the Dasein’s being, then this understanding of being, too, must be possible only on the basis of temporality. (GA 24: 21-2/16 )<sup>9</sup>

If we read passages like these and substitute “reading” for “understanding” and “texts” for “being,” we arrive at our present thesis: scholarship is temporal and, as I will turn to in a moment, this takes the form of generations.

We should note, in this discussion of Heidegger’s violent interpretation of Kant, that Kant is the philosopher who informed us that we can understand a philosopher “even better than he understood himself,”<sup>10</sup> presenting his corrections of earlier figures as a matter of using their terms and ideas more faithfully to their own intentions than they did. Kant lays out this hermeneutic theory when he takes Plato’s “idea” into his own system where it can become the idea it always wanted to be. This raises a number of brief observations. First, there is the irony

that it was Plato who first wrote of the anxiety about just this kind of hermeneutic kidnapping, i.e., later readers taking the meaning of his text for their own purposes, against its overt sense which “always gives one unvarying answer.”<sup>11</sup> Kant presents his reading, which violates the explicit meaning of Plato’s text, as fulfilling Plato’s thought, as if the violation of Plato’s texts was more faithful than being faithful to the texts.<sup>12</sup> The fact that Plato’s texts include an explicit plea to never violate his texts means that Kant must also be understanding this plea better than Plato understood himself, the plea to never claim to understand what he means better than he does.

Second, while Kant is doing to Plato what Plato *forbade* us to do to him, Heidegger is doing to Kant what Kant *encourages* us to do to other philosophers: take an idea out of their system in order to use it to one’s own purposes. It’s just that, instead of the idea “idea” that Kant took from Plato, the idea here is the very notion of taking ideas from philosophers and reorienting them. This is what Heidegger self-consciously does to texts, and he gets the idea from Kant, for whereas Kant said he was rescuing the true meaning of Plato’s idea, in fact he altered it radically. A Kantian idea is an unattainable mirage of an ideal constructed by reason, and the notion that we can attain knowledge of it is an illusion that must be burst – pretty far from Forms that form the realest reality, knowledge of which forms the fundamental point of Plato’s entire system. While claiming to be faithful to the true meaning of the philosopher he was understanding better, Kant was actually giving a violent reading, even if he denied it (and, as often happens in such cases, he admitted it in a footnote).<sup>13</sup>

So perhaps Heidegger’s violent reading of Kant is, perversely, more faithful to Kant’s own intentions than actually following what Kant says about being faithful to the text. If so, then Heidegger understands what Kant meant by understanding a philosopher even better than he understood himself, even better than Kant himself did. Heidegger is being more faithful to Kant’s intentions by following what he actually meant instead of following what he said he was doing, which is exactly what Kant said we should do. This goes against what Kant

said but with what he did since he changed Plato's idea while saying that he served its true intent and then forbade anyone to do the same to him: "yet before I conclude this provisional introduction, I entreat those who take philosophy to heart...to take care to preserve the expression *idea* in its original meaning, so that it will not henceforth fall among the other expressions by which all sorts of representations are denoted in careless disorder, to the detriment of science...Here is their progression," whereupon he set out the sole legitimate way to define all related terms, which ought never be overturned.<sup>14</sup> Plato's writings can be radically reinterpreted since he "spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention," and so can Kant since he did the same, especially regarding the idea of speaking and thinking contrary to one's own intention.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the element that Kant retrieves from the Platonic idea for his own system is the notion that true knowledge must be independent of temporal experience, since deriving knowledge from experience makes its object "an ambiguous non-entity, changeable with time and circumstance."<sup>16</sup> These effects that Kant is avoiding in order to talk about beings are precisely what Heidegger seizes on to talk about being: being's ambiguity is what gives rise to the ontological difference and hence all of Western philosophy; being is not a being and so is a non-entity; and its temporal mutability is the point of the "and" and the source of history. Furthermore, these are also the conditions for the possibility of the kind of reinterpretation that Kant is endorsing, allowing for the possibility that, instead of the plain meaning which Kant disagrees with, "the lofty language that served [Plato] in this field is surely quite susceptible of a milder interpretation."<sup>17</sup> If a text were an entity as traditionally conceived, a self-identical unchangeable unambiguous substance, it would not have the ability to give various understandings of itself but would be like Plato's first complaint about writing: only ever saying the same thing. A reinterpretable, polysemic text must be more like a dynamic process without immutable meaning, i.e., "an ambiguous non-entity, changeable with time and circumstance."<sup>18</sup> Only thus can Kant read Plato otherwise than in the overt sense of his writing; only thus can Heidegger read Kant reading Plato otherwise.



Now, if this is Heidegger's hermeneutics, then he must consider it applicable to his own work just as much as anyone else's. His own writings are mortal, his own control over them finite, their own sense an event of meaning occurring anew at every reading. He suggests this hermeneutic outlook on occasion, for instance, in the last sentence of the Addendum to "The Origin of the Work of Art:" "for the author himself, however, there remains the quandary of always having to speak in the language most opportune for each of the various stations on his way" (GA 5: 74/56). Or, the epigraph of his *Gesamtausgabe*, "ways, not works." Or, when he says to his Japanese interlocutor,

I have left an earlier standpoint, not in order to exchange it for another one, but because even the former standpoint was merely a way-station along a way. The lasting element in thinking is the way. And ways of thinking hold within them that mysterious quality that we can walk them forward and backward, and that indeed only the way back will lead us forward (GA 12: 94/12).

The specific terms used, arguments constructed, even the claims made are merely attempts to say the one, utterly simple thing, so we must not get hung up on textual fidelity, on freezing interpretations. We must rather think on and in their movement, which is what thinking is. The term, by the way, which he tells his Japanese visitor has been left behind on the way which leads us forward here is "hermeneutics."

Heidegger is constantly pointing us away from the pointing finger of his works towards the moon of being, to use a Zen analogy, and this fits with the difficulty of the "and" that I started with. If being is temporal all the way down, then so must be all knowledge of being, and knowers, and this changes everything. As he says, "we are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones. We have left behind us the presumption of all unconditionedness" (GA 7: 182/PLT 178-79). This is the finitude he learned from Kant, against Kant – that all thinking is conditioned by conditions unchosen and unjustifiable.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, all texts are conditioned by things – by circumstances, by society, by time, by the questions we ask

and the questioners we are – Heidegger’s own as much as those of Plato or Kant. I used to find Heidegger’s readings of his own earlier works laughable – ridiculous, Procrustean attempts to fit his earlier works into what he was thinking at the time of the new interpretation so that he never had to admit he had been wrong. Now I see them as Heidegger’s violent readings of Heidegger, like the ones he had given of Parmenides or Nietzsche. The time of writing, the distinctive textual temporality, uncovered insights that had been covered up at the time of writing, including to the writer, including insights about the time of writing.

It is these temporal turnings of thoughts and texts that turn out new ideas. Of course, few of us are so intellectually flexible to undergo a massive *Kehre* overturning much of what we once believed, that we can re-vise with very new eyes. This is where Gadamer helps, for he explains that one of the best sources for overturning our presuppositions is through dialogue with others. Conversations with people who lack our presuppositions expose our deepest beliefs *as* presuppositions rather than just the obvious unquestionable truth. “To keep clear of prejudice, we must be ready and willing to listen” (GA 8: 15/13), Heidegger wrote. One of the best sources to find those challenging interlocutors is to read works from a different time, which is why attending to the past is so important.

But any temporal distance will serve, including that of the future, the foreign land we teachers are fortunate enough to spend our time in, seeding thoughts in those who will supersede us. When Heidegger says, “the teacher must be capable of being more teachable than the apprentices. The teacher is far less assured of his ground than those who learn are of theirs” (GA 8: 18/15), the point is that the core of teaching is not having a great store of knowledge but a great openness, and that, I think, is the *result* as much as the *condition* of good teaching. Or, it is both the condition for good teaching to happen, and the condition in which it happens. Educating those who may not share our presuppositions puts these presuppositions at stake, gets them challenged, keeps them exposed and vulnerable. Just as Socrates’ ignorance was his wisdom, this vulnerability is the educator’s strength. To be repeatedly forced to

rethink what one thinks is what it is to think, and the temporality of knowledge is the great lesson we learn time and time again. To paraphrase Heraclitus, you cannot read the same book twice since the second time the book isn't the same book and you aren't the same reader, and that's especially true when your students literally aren't the same students each time you teach it. The lesson we learn from teaching is the lesson that Socrates taught his interlocutors: not specific facts – they often ended in *aporia* – but that certainties hide alternatives and uncertainty is the condition of wisdom. One learns from Socrates to unknow in an inverted recollection, a recovery of an ignorance that is a gain rather than a lack. Perhaps this is why, at the end of these thoughts on teaching, Heidegger adds, “all through his life and right into his death, Socrates did nothing else than place himself into this draft, this current, and maintain himself in it. This is why he is the purest thinker of the West” (GA 8: 20/17).<sup>20</sup>

All of this is to say that the generational structure of teaching – the older teaching the younger – has an essential appropriateness to it beyond just the obvious notion that the knowledgeable and experienced should pass on what they have had more time to learn. Not yet educated into the same views, the inexperienced possess an absence from which the learned and the learning gain something important. The new generation lack fundamental presuppositions taken for granted among the previous cohort and hence can think in new ways and read new things in old texts. Asking new questions provokes new responses, from texts and teachers alike. This is less like a kidnapper forcing the child to speak falsely than a parent who helps her grow into a new person. These ever-renewed challenges reveal new facets of works that the teachers may have been working on for a great deal of time, and this – not the charm of immortality – is the revitalization of education and its subject matter, of the life of the mind and of the spirit. As the student matures, the teacher rejuvenates, and philosophy flourishes in the exchange.

All of this only makes sense when understood in temporal terms. The gaps between the generations echo in miniature the leaps among

the epochal understandings of being, collectively pointing us to something deeper. Heidegger writes that because

Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with Others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as destiny.... Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free. Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein. (GA 2: 508/SZ 384-85)

The history of scholarship is measured in the units of generations, just as the history of being is in epochs, and both histories come from their futures: "Dasein 'is' its past in the way of its own Being, which, to put it roughly, 'historizes' out of its future on each occasion" (GA 2: 27/SZ 20). Derrida likes to say that the temporality of texts is best expressed in the tense of the future anterior: since we cannot predict what later generations will find already in them, we never know what texts will have said. An education is not just taking on what has been handed down; it is at the same time an inheriting from the future.

At its best, teaching is a form of Heidegger's notion of strife, where the partners bring each other to their best rather than tearing each other down through competition. Teaching involves the loss of control that so horrifies the philosopher because just as the parent of the text cannot know what it will say to readers once it is out of his grasp, so teachers do not know what their students will learn, nor how or where or why they will implement these lessons. But that's the point. As Derrida argues over and over again, that's not the *problem* with writing; that's its superpower – the ability to always say something different, to keep replenishing no matter how much we draw from it, to keep resurrecting itself throughout all of its deaths. As we can take from Kant, writing's temporal changeability relieves it of getting mired in traditional static ontology, thereby endowing it with a fertile ambiguity.

It is the generational gaps that generate new ideas and new readings, surprising and surpassing the teacher. "Hence it behooves us first of all

to learn how to learn from the teacher, even if that only means to ask out beyond him” (GA 7: 106/N2 216). Kuhn said that the only way to complete a scientific revolution was to wait for the old fogeys, ensconced within both the old paradigm and positions of institutional power, to die off. Perhaps the humanities allow us to accommodate a more amicable transference by embracing change as the essence of knowledge. This returns us now to our earlier topic of death, and to one of Heidegger’s students who used his teacher’s thought to think otherwise.

Levinas saw Heidegger’s view of death as a misunderstanding of finitude rather than its paradigm. If the self is porous – a lesson Heidegger taught us better than anyone – then why should we look to it to collapse into an isolated entity in resolute anticipation, Dasein’s death raising the ghost of traditional subjectivity? Despite his insistence that Dasein is being-with essentially, all the way down and from the beginning, Heidegger argues that our

ownmost possibility is *non-relational*. . . . Death *lays claim* to it as an *individual* Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself. . . . It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for Being is the issue. Dasein can be *authentically itself* only if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord. (GA 2: 349-50/SZ 263)

He immediately qualifies this, clarifying that social structures have not been “cut off” from us, that we must integrate them into our resolute response; nevertheless, Dasein is “forced by that very anticipation into the possibility of taking over from itself its ownmost Being, and doing so of its own accord” (GA 2: 350/SZ 264).

Heidegger seems to have skipped a few pages of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, namely, the part where Ivan Ilyich’s dying enables him to form the first genuine friendship of his life. It’s notable that Heidegger talks a lot about inheriting from the past – having a tradition handed down

to us – and about our claiming it as our own – our handing it down to ourselves – but nothing about what we hand down to our heirs, despite his insistence on the primacy of the future. Autonomy still reigns here, squeezing out any place for generosity, trapped within the in-each-case-mineness of projects and the ontological narcissism of tautological self-care.

Levinas would argue that our in-each-case-mineness is not the key to authenticity but actually part of our fallenness. There is an “in-some-cases-ours” (I will leave it to those playing at home to coin their own German counterpart). Where Heidegger falls back upon the self in anticipation of death, Levinas looks forward to the child.<sup>21</sup> Heidegger’s rejection of the ontology of self-identical substances for Dasein’s way of being creates the need for a different form of identity for us, one knotted through with time. He says that Dasein is stretched out between birth and death,<sup>22</sup> but only to gather itself back up from this dispersion which ends at each end. Levinas explores the ontological freedom granted us by Heidegger more freely than Heidegger did himself, spanning the self across accepted borders separating individuals, lifetimes, generations. Then death does not have to be the impossibility of my possibilities; it can be a transformation into new possibilities liberated into *our* possibilities. I do not have to face their absolute end; I can hand them over, passing them on as I do. This is holding mortality for true, while also holding onto the friend. Instead of anticipating all others to fail us, we can look for them to succeed us.

It is not just what I hand down to myself that matters, but what I hand down to others. Not just how authentically I face my death on my own, but how generous a legacy I leave. Not simply the despairing fact that at some point I will no longer be able to carry on the projects that matter most to me, but also the faith, or the hope, that others will share my vision and shoulder my burden when I no longer can. What exceeds me can still matter to me since this me does not have to end at my limits; where I end you start, and the in-between forms an irreducible we. Scholarship is a lonely affair indeed, yet still, we write for others. This is not the denial of finitude, but a deeper recognition of it. Death can

be our most relational relation, one that I *cannot* achieve on my own, an opening rather than a void. My end can be not the impossibility of all my possibilities, but the releasement of endless possibilities which are mine and not mine at the same time precisely because they are never at the same time. Plato feared writing as a vulnerable child unsecured by knowledge, but the child is the promise of the unknown future.

This is our authentic relationship with the past which is as much an inheritance as it is a selection, an interpretation, a decision; a response as much as a reception, a given we must take on in the multiple senses of “given” and “take on.” This is our relationship with the past which is at the same time our relationship with the future, as it will be the future’s relationship with us as we pass into its past in its future. This is the place of teaching, of the learning exchanged back and forth between generations.

A place where to take is also to give, to write is to read and to read is to write, to pass on is to alter, to understand to renew.

Where gratitude to the past and obligation to the future meet, switch places, and become indistinguishable.

Where the past stands in front of us as the future recasts the past.

Where we answer to those whom we question, and we learn from those we teach.

A place that belongs to me because I belong to it, that I make my own only by giving it to others.

This is the time of thinking.

## NOTES

- 1 My thanks to John Preston and Megan Altman for their helpful comments on this paper.
- 2 On the day of his death, in the midst of giving arguments to prove the immortality of his soul, Socrates lightly mocks his interlocutors for childish fears. “Cebes laughed and said: Assuming that we were afraid, Socrates, try to change our minds, or rather do not assume that we are afraid, but perhaps there is a child in us who has these fears; try to persuade him not to fear death like a bogey.  
You should, said Socrates, sing a charm over him every day until you have charmed away his fears.  
Where shall we find a good charmer for these fears, Socrates, he said, now that you are leaving us?  
Greece is a large country, Cebes, he said, and there are good men in it; the tribes of foreigners are also numerous. You should search for such a charmer among them all, sparing neither trouble nor expense, for there is nothing on which you could spend your money to greater advantage” (Plato. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*. Trans. G. Grube. Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing, 1981. *Phaedo* 78a-b). This plea for the urgent need for magic is strangely reminiscent of his plea for reason: “There is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate reasonable discourse,” which occurs when one has believed a persuasive argument only to find it “unreliable” (89d). At the end of the dialogue, immediately before beginning his death, Socrates admits that his arguments have been unreliable, yet we should believe them nonetheless, confirming his own status as the charmer of death and his arguments as incantations sung to quell the fears of children, as opposed to sensible men: “No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief – for the risk is a noble one – that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man



should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale” (114d). What then happens to the distinction between *logos* and *mythos*, in this dialogue which abhors misology and yet begins with Socrates obeying the command from a dream to practice the arts? He had previously interpreted this as an order to do philosophy but now takes it to mean that he should “compose poetry” since “I realized that a poet, if he is to be a poet, must compose fables, not arguments” (61b).

- 3 See, e.g., “Signature Event Context” in Jacques Derrida’s *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), esp. 7-8, for an early, forceful rehearsal of this argument.
- 4 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 316.
- 5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), 250-53.
- 6 “‘Only a God Can Save Us’: *Der Spiegel*’s Interview with Martin Heidegger” in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 109.
- 7 “If we are inquiring about the meaning of Being, our investigation does not then become a ‘deep’ one [*tiefsinnig*], nor does it puzzle out what stands behind Being. It asks about Being itself in so far as Being enters into the intelligibility of Dasein” (GA 2: 202/SZ 152).
- 8 This is the specific topic Heidegger singles out for treatment in the proposed Part Two of *Being and Time*: “in spite of the fact that he was bringing the phenomenon of time back into the subject again, his analysis of it remained oriented towards the traditional way in which time had been ordinarily understood.... Because of this double effect of tradition the decisive connection between *time* and the ‘*I think*’ was shrouded in utter darkness; it did not even become a problem” (GA 2: 32/SZ 24).

- 9 Heidegger repeats this argument in another work on Kant from the same period: “temporality is the basic constitution of human Dasein. On the basis of Dasein’s original constitution it is possible for Dasein to have pure understanding of being and of determinations of being. Understanding of being in general is constituted on the basis of the temporality of Dasein. And only because something like this is possible can Dasein as an existing being comport itself toward beings that are not Dasein and simultaneously toward a being that Dasein itself is. Although Kant did not unfold the problem of ontological knowledge in such a fundamental way and did not push the possibility of a radical resolution this far, nevertheless he offers a hint at the problem” (GA 25: 425/288-89).
- 10 Immanuel Kant, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 396/A314/B370.
- 11 Comparing his thoughts to vulnerable children, Plato says, “when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves” (*Phaedrus* 275d-e). In this scenario of literally violent reading, Kant would be the disheveled kidnapper living in a van by the river.
- 12 Derrida says that philosophers fall into kettle or inconsistent logic when discussing writing, and it is peculiar that Plato appears to contradict himself within just a few lines here. If a text can only say one thing, then why worry about it saying different things to people when the author is not around? Wouldn’t the flaw of monotony protect it from the flaw of free reading, its poison serving also as remedy?
- 13 “Of course [Plato] also extended his concept to speculative cognitions....Now I cannot follow him in this, just as little as I can in

the mystical deduction of these ideas or in the exaggerated way in which he hypostatized them, as it were; although the lofty language that served him in this field is surely quite susceptible of a milder interpretation, and one that accords better with the nature of things” (Kant 2013, 396n./A314/B371).

14 Kant, 398/A319/B376.

15 Kant, 396/A314/B370.

16 Kant, 396/A315/B371.

17 Kant, 396n./A314/B371.

18 Here we can see traces of Derrida’s thought: “there is a problematic of the gift only on the basis of a consistent problematic of the trace and the text. There can never be such a thing on the basis of a metaphysics of the present, or even of the sign, signifier, signified, or value. This is one of the reasons we always set out from texts for the elaboration of this problematic.” Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: Counterfeit Money v.1*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 100.

19 For more on Kant’s duality, see “Conclusion: A Tale of Two Kants” in Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

20 Heidegger goes on to praise Socrates’ lack of writing, blaming writers for “seek[ing] refuge from any draft too strong for them.” I take it that he means people who write in an attempt to control future readings, a control his own readings show to be impossible in that very book among other places. For more on this topic, see my *Being Saying the Same: Polysemy in Later Heidegger*, nearly finished, almost finished, very close.

21 I am ignoring what Derrida rightly criticizes as Levinas’s sexism of the “son,” in a gratuitousness so complete that it doesn’t attempt even a sham of a justification.

22 “Dasein *stretches along* between birth and death.... It stretches itself along in such a way that its own Being is constituted in advance as a stretching-along. The ‘between’ which relates to birth and death already lies in the Being of Dasein” (GA 2: 494-95/SZ 374).