

FRENCH INTERPRETATIONS OF
HEIDEGGER

An Exceptional Reception

Edited by

DAVID PETTIGREW

and FRANÇOIS RAFFOUL

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OF HEIDEGGER

SUNY SERIES IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH THOUGHT

David Pettigrew and François Raffoul, editors

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and FRANÇOIS RAFFOUL

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INTRODUCTION

David Pettigrew and François Raffoul

In May 2002, the annual meeting of the North American Heidegger Conference took place at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven. The conference, entitled “Heidegger and France,” was inspired by Dominique Janicaud’s *opus magnum Heidegger en France*, a remarkable work that chronicles the reception of Heidegger over the course of more than seven decades. Dominique Janicaud was one of two invited keynote speakers at the conference. Tragically, he was to die unexpectedly in August of the same year. This book, drawn from many of the papers presented at the Heidegger conference along with other invited contributions, is dedicated to his memory.

While Dominique Janicaud’s book *Heidegger en France* is a groundbreaking intellectual history of that reception, a radical and bold intertwining of *Historie* and *Geschichte* (much of Janicaud’s book is a reconstruction of the history of the reception of Heidegger’s work, following a chronological order from the late twenties and early thirties until the end of the century¹), *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception* undertakes a philosophical engagement of the work of a number of the most significant and most creative figures of that reception. Dominique Janicaud’s own essay, “Toward the End of the ‘French Exception’?,” delivered at the Heidegger Conference, serves as an introduction to this volume. Janicaud’s essay is then followed by chapters that address the work of the thinkers who have engaged Heidegger’s work, including Jean Beaufret, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Luce Irigaray, Marlène Zarader, Jean Greisch, and Françoise Dastur. In turn, and through these essays, this volume further explores the extraordinary impact that Heidegger’s thought has had on contemporary French philosophy.

The French interpretations of Heidegger² present the paradox of an encounter between the French Cartesian tradition of consciousness and reason

and a thought marked by the German phenomenological tradition. As Françoise Dastur explains in her chapter, “The Reception and Nonreception of Heidegger in France,” “We have, on the one hand, a Cartesian tradition that inaugurates the metaphysics of subjectivity that characterized modern thought, allied to a scientism and a positivism that give an exclusive privilege to the ontic, and on the other hand, the speculative summit of German idealism opening the way to both Husserlian transcendentalism and Heideggerian ontologism” (FIH, 267). This is an unlikely relation, and yet this peculiar hermeneutic encounter has been extraordinarily productive and has given rise to a tremendously creative body of work. As Janicaud describes it, “there took place a series of dramatic, passionate, polemical attitudes or interpretations”: not a peaceful reception but a veritable polemical turmoil. This explains in part why this reception also led to major (creative) misunderstandings, not the least of which being Sartre’s well-known misappropriation of Heidegger’s vocabulary in *Being and Time* as an ontologized anthropology, an existential Cartesianism. Janicaud rightly reminds us that Sartre appropriates so many insights from *Sein und Zeit* that “it is almost impossible to sum them up: facticity, being-in-the-world, freedom as transcendence, the ontological role of anxiety, the phenomenological description of the structures of inauthenticity and even the existential openness to authenticity” (FIH, 26). In Sartre’s text, these motifs are used to mean something quite different from Heidegger’s intent, which at the time was nothing less than a project of fundamental ontology, whereas Sartre develops a philosophy of the human will as absolute. Janicaud thus observes that the French “reception” of Heidegger has been anything but passive; in fact, it led to quite diverse interpretations, appropriations, or misappropriations (even if these were brilliant and inventive, as in the case of Sartre).³ The fact remains that the phenomenon of French existentialism was the expression of a need by French philosophers to “free themselves from the context of Cartesian philosophy” (FIH, 267), and Françoise Dastur emphasizes that it was a matter for both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre of finding in German philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger “a broader philosophy” and “a presuppositionless analysis of phenomena, that is, of the milieu in which our concrete life takes place”;⁴ it was a matter, then, of exploring “the concrete world of perception that remains outside of science,” and of finding again “the bond with the world that precedes thought properly speaking” (FIH, 267). As Dastur concludes on this point, “It was indeed a question for Sartre, as well as Merleau-Ponty, of finding in the ‘philosophy of existence’ that came from Germany through Husserl and Heidegger the means of breaking out from a Cartesian inspired reflexive philosophy, and of thinking the concrete situation of human beings in the world and in history” (FIH, 267). This first existentialist phase was followed by structural-

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ism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and gender theory, which all have, in their own way and towards their own ends, exploited the resources of Heidegger's questions.

Indeed, Dominique Janicaud stresses that key representatives of contemporary French philosophy are, to a large extent, critical or "inventive" recreations—as opposed to mere reflections—of Heidegger. This is an important issue for the American continental scene as well, because those figures are the very same French philosophers—Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Derrida, Nancy, Deleuze, Irigaray—who have buoyed and infused American continental philosophy for the past four decades. An engagement of the French thinkers who addressed Heidegger would thus allow American philosophers to undertake a critical archeology with respect to the sources of their *own* development. The discussion in this book of the French interpretations of Heidegger will thus not only shed light on the development of most of twentieth-century French philosophy, but will also enable American interests and expressions in contemporary continental philosophy to achieve new levels of self-reflection and self-understanding.

Dominique Janicaud's article, "Toward the End of the 'French Exception'?", borrows a theme that had been under tremendous discussion in France in recent years regarding the so-called French cultural exception, an expression that refers to the notion of a French identity staying immune to the ravages of globalization, keeping its distance from the creeping homogeneity of American culture, refusing the reduction of culture to business, and thereby maintaining its special status or "cultural exception." Stressing that globalization is not only economic but "involves also the whole network of information, ways of living and modes of thinking," Janicaud appropriates the expression to emphasize the bold and critical aspects of the French reception of Heidegger's thought: "My point in this essay is not to argue for or against this supposed French 'cultural exception' in general. It would be quite irrelevant to my topic. I just wanted to use the expression and to explain its origin, in order to establish a starting-point to set up *my* specific questions regarding Heidegger's reception in France during the last decades." Janicaud advances the hypothesis that "the French reception of Heidegger's thought has been continuously so outstanding, so bright, and so dramatic that it really constitutes an *exceptional phenomenon*" (FIH, 24, our emphasis), indeed an exceptional reception, unique in its kind, that this volume seeks to explore further. Janicaud asserts that "there is a hermeneutical legitimacy and fruitfulness in patiently checking how the main orientations of Heidegger's thought have been more or less creatively understood, questioned and sometimes positively reformulated in the French-speaking world" (FIH, 32). Janicaud addresses the distinctive aspects of the "most creative figures" of this reception, not just commentators but "great original and gifted intellectuals" such as Sartre,

Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Derrida, and Ricœur. Janicaud shows, for example, that it was thanks to Sartre's reception that Heidegger burst onto the French scene as a major thinker, as a major event. At the same time, Janicaud insists, Sartre emerged from this encounter with original and personal philosophical insights that led to French existentialism.

In the second part of his paper, Janicaud raises the question as to whether this "French exception" is coming to an end. Janicaud follows the trials and tribulations of the French reception. As he explains, "I chose to face them squarely instead of ignoring them, to accept them, to very clearly establish their status and to shed light on their relevance and their limits" (FIH, 30). Heidegger himself confessed, "When you will have seen my limits, you will have understood me. I cannot see them."⁵ Janicaud suggests that the task is to "open up the field of critical thought by both listening to Heideggerian requirements in their rigor *and* collecting the most creative objections, oppositions, criticisms, so as to enrich our hermeneutical work. It is a philosophical choice, a decision to go through the greatest difficulties, to sail through the most appalling storms . . ." (FIH, 31).

Janicaud formulates the hope that what might be called the "event quality" of the reception of Heidegger's thought in France would give way to a reading that would be more attentive to the "letter" of the text, thus opening to fruitful engagements. Janicaud also reveals the limits of this problematic French exception by encouraging American thinkers to be similarly creative and challenging. Going against Heidegger's skepticism with respect to the prospect of authentic thinking in America (!),⁶ Janicaud holds onto the "dream of a future collusion between the *Seinsfrage* and a still unapproachable America." He challenges "America" to engage Heidegger critically, selecting five fields in which the fruitfulness of Heidegger's thought could be tested and illustrated: the renewal of phenomenology, the refoundation of ethics, the questioning of hermeneutics, the theological debate, and the rethinking of the history of metaphysics, thus drawing the possible contours of a future thought opened by Heidegger.

The essays in this volume are, in a sense, responses to Dominique Janicaud's intellectual challenge. The various chapters reveal the dynamic and creative aspect of the French reception of Heidegger. Those written by contributors who are French or who have been based in France, including Jean-Luc Nancy, Pierre Jacerme, Dominique Janicaud, Françoise Dastur, and Jean Greisch, continue this tradition of rigorous interpretation of Heidegger's work. For their part, the American, Canadian, and British thinkers in this volume are far from mere echoes of the French interpretations, challenging French readings of Heidegger as well as Heidegger himself in philosophically suggestive and fruitful ways.

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Emmanuel Levinas's complex relation to Heidegger is addressed in Reginald Lilly's chapter, "Levinas's Heideggerian Fantasm." It was certainly in reaction to Heidegger that Levinas sought to go beyond being—as well as "the dictatorship of the Same" to which Heidegger's thought still belongs, for Levinas—in order to reach the ethical. "Because he sees being informed by a principle of identity and sameness, as hegemonic and henological and therefore irremediably atheistic and 'anethical,' Levinas posits the need to pass beyond being" (FIH, 35). Lilly questions the legitimacy of this interpretation and, as the title of his essay suggests, proposes to bring into view a certain fantasmatic structure of Levinas's thinking, paying close attention to his often-neglected early texts. Lilly has recourse to a psycho-analytic motif in order to suggest that Levinas's interpretations involve a suppression and a distortional reconstruction of Heidegger's thought. In a parenthetical comment, Lilly explains that Levinas "does not just misread Heidegger, but vigorously suppresses basic elements of Heidegger's thought whose recognition would have challenged his misreading" (FIH, 35). Fantasms, as Lilly points out, are always strategic: in this case, they allow Levinas to understand being in such a way as to prepare its overcoming. Levinas would see Heidegger as belonging to a tradition of egoism and solipsism—Heidegger is made to fit seamlessly into the Western henological tradition that begins with Parmenides—an egoism that Levinas attempts to escape in order to give thought to ethics.

Lilly intends to reveal such a "movement of consolidation, homogenization and displacement, and to indicate how this prepares for Levinas's own philosophy of being" (FIH, 36). Lilly sees in Levinas a *méconnaissance* of Heidegger's thinking of being, particularly insofar as Levinas refers to it as an anthropology. Lilly writes: "The denial that SZ is fundamentally a propaedeutic to a science of being is a denial of its theoretical (in Levinas's terminology) character and allows him to reduce it to a purely practical, anthropological treatise" (FIH, 39). This misreading, Lilly suggests, leads Levinas to overinvest the status of Dasein's understanding of Being and to interpret such an understanding as an "accomplished ontology" and as "a ego-reductive practice." In this way, Levinas conflates Heidegger's thought "with the modern metaphysics of subjectivity" (FIH, 39). Lilly asserts that Levinas sees in Heidegger's Dasein the "profoundest of modern solitudes." Moreover, where Heidegger sees difference, Levinas sees "the uniformity and self-sameness of Dasein's understanding" (FIH, 45). For Lilly, Levinas misses "the lethic dimension of being" in Heidegger's thought as well as his "critique of the metaphysics of presence" (FIH, 45). Interpreting Heidegger from within this Cartesian framework, Levinas sees Heidegger caught in this tradition (consolidation), where his alleged solipsism shows itself in having effected a homogenization of being, in which being, beings, and Dasein are practically indistinguishable.

Pierre Jacerme's chapter, "The Thoughtful Dialogue Between Martin Heidegger and Jean Beaufret: A New Way of Doing Philosophy," reveals Jean Beaufret's crucial role in the reception of Heidegger in France. Jean Beaufret was Heidegger's host in France as well as his main interlocutor. Beaufret paid his first visit to Heidegger's hut in September 1946, and so began their thirty years of philosophical friendship. The "Beaufret phase" includes the conference at Cerisy in 1955—Heidegger's first visit to France—as well as the Thor Seminars in Provence in 1966, 1968, and 1969. Given Beaufret's crucial and central position in the reception of Heidegger in France, it is all the more striking that Beaufret continues to be virtually unknown in the United States. Yet Beaufret was the recipient of the seminal "Letter on Humanism," in which Heidegger intimates how he has been misread by Sartre.

Thus, although Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" was written to Beaufret, few are aware of the details of their meeting or of their relationship. Pierre Jacerme's chapter provides important historical and philosophical insight in this regard. Beaufret read Heidegger and Husserl during the early forties after having escaped from German captivity. In fact, according to Jacerme, Beaufret was reading *Being and Time* while taking part in the French resistance. Later Beaufret began corresponding with Heidegger, who quickly expressed an admiration for Beaufret's grasp of philosophy. Jacerme insists that when they met for the first time on September 10, 1946, they met as equals rather than as master and disciple, to the extent that they were equally engaged in the matter of thought: "They were thus *equally* involved in the 'matter of thinking,' which became the heart of the experience of their relation, rather than the relation between a master and a disciple. This is what Heidegger calls here *sunousia*, a term borrowed from Plato's seventh letter, which expresses the enduring contact with the presence of the very thing which is to be thought, from which alone the clearing can light up" (FIH, 63). Jacerme's essay reveals the fascinating exchanges between Heidegger and Beaufret that were both philosophical and personal, particularly around the issue of language and thought.

Jean Beaufret was a legendary professor of philosophy, having trained generations of students and future professors, who never taught a course on Heidegger. That is the case, as Jacerme reminds us, because Beaufret believed that "one cannot *summarize* Heidegger's thought. One cannot even *present* it. Heidegger's thought sheds a singular light on the modern world itself, a speech that destroys the security of instrumental language and destabilizes the foundation of man in the midst of beings" (FIH, 59). Jacerme stresses that it is not a question of speaking *about* something but of showing how Being opens in a clearing while taking the form of our world, and "that is what we must seek to *see* and to *hear*, acquiring thereby a new language" (FIH, 60). Hence he

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details the unique meetings of minds between Heidegger and Beaufret, a meeting of mutual understanding and respect. Jaccard suggests that the theme of time provided a particular philosophical link between the two thinkers and specifies, moreover, certain of Beaufret's inventive translation choices that emerge from his unique relation to Heidegger (in a singular play of "mutual exchange" of languages) as in his usage of the expression *il y a* or of the term *représentation*, better suited to preserve the relation between *presence* and *presentation* than *Vorstellung*.

In the next chapter, "Postscripts to the 'Letter on Humanism': Heidegger, Sartre, and Being-Human," Dennis Skocz focuses on Sartre's reading of Heidegger. In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger was responding to Sartre's "reception" of his work. Skocz reads the "Letter on Humanism" as a frustrated exchange that falls short of a genuine dialogue. Hence his chapter is an effort to pick up where this dialogue foundered. Skocz writes that "both Sartre and Heidegger fall short of a satisfying being-historical reflection on being-human. Sartre's formulation of the question inscribes him in a metaphysical conceptuality from which he never breaks free. Heidegger, who helps us see this with respect to Sartre, fails to engage humanism in its historicity . . . and is silent on the political dimensions of human-being." In short, "if Sartre does not think being-human in being-historical terms, then Heidegger leaves out the historical in being-historical" (FIH, 74). Although Skocz recognizes that both Sartre and Heidegger situate themselves outside the tradition of humanism in their efforts to define what it is to be human, he nevertheless asks whether Heidegger's treatment of Dasein in the "Letter on Humanism" takes sufficient account of Dasein's "being-historical" aspect. Skocz finds Heidegger's rhetoric in the "Letter on Humanism" singularly ahistorical and blind to political history. He thus states that Heidegger's thinking of history "completely ignores the Enlightenment, the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen,' the French Revolution, and the Terror. How strange that a letter addressed to the Frenchman Beaufret, inserting Heidegger in a debate of historical moment to the French, should make no reference to the preceding and none at all to any of the *philosophes*, the quintessential humanists of modernity!" (FIH, 77). Skocz takes account of Heidegger's discourse on the history of being but finds that Heidegger's text is not sufficiently grounded in a political historical sense. On the other hand, Skocz considers the extent to which a metaphysics of production remains central to Sartre's project. He reflects on what praxis means for being human: "The metaphysical paradigm, which underlies Sartre's thinking from "Existentialism" to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, seems to preclude a satisfying response to the being-historical challenge of alienation" (FIH, 81). Skocz's treatment is illuminative of Sartre's and Heidegger's texts even as it

deems the exchange constituted by the “Letter on Humanism” to be inconclusive. “The long Franco-German reflection on being-human as pursued by Heidegger and Sartre before and after the ‘Letter on Humanism’ concludes with unsatisfying responses to the human condition understood as alienation or homelessness, but the ‘dialogue’ on being-human continues” (FIH, 85).

Wayne Froman’s chapter, “Merleau-Ponty’s 1959 Heidegger Lectures: The Task of Thinking and the Possibility of Philosophy Today,” engages Merleau-Ponty’s heretofore little-known 1959 lecture course in *Notes de Cours 1959–1961*. Froman emphasizes that with the posthumous publication of *The Visible and the Invisible* and its working notes, some readers were surprised by the prevalence of Heideggerian terminology and questions in the text. What at first seemed surprising in *The Visible and the Invisible* is better understood, Froman indicates, with the 1996 publication of Merleau-Ponty’s 1959 lecture course at the Collège de France. Froman asserts that Merleau-Ponty’s course reveals intimate and extensive knowledge of Heidegger’s work. Froman writes, “this text shows Merleau-Ponty remarkably perspicacious and well out ahead in terms of understanding what Heidegger was saying, before the at-length expositions of Heidegger’s work would appear . . . the reading that we find here remains difficult to surpass” (FIH, 89–90). Froman specifies that Merleau-Ponty’s objective in the lecture is not a simple exposition of Heidegger “but rather to bring out in the later Heidegger what pertains to the question for the course, that is, what pertains to the possibility of philosophy” (FIH, 89).

Froman focuses on how Merleau-Ponty understands Heidegger’s transition from the early to the later work and the implications of that transition “for the questions that concern humanism, language, and history” (FIH, 90). With respect to this transition, Froman reflects on Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of the movement from *Sein* to *Seyn*, the question of language, the emergence of *aletheia*, and the equiprimordial status of space and time. Rather than as a reversal, Merleau-Ponty understands Heidegger’s later work as a deepening, a deepening the French thinker was working on at the end of his life. Froman asserts, for example, “With regard then to the transition from the earlier work to the later work, in 1959, Merleau-Ponty’s understanding is that ‘[t]he development is not [a] reversal from an anthropology into a mysticism of Being: the start is not anthropology and the end is not mysticism’” (FIH, 93). Indeed for Froman, Merleau-Ponty’s lecture suggests the work that “lay before him . . . when the work on the *Visible and the Invisible* was interrupted by death” (FIH, 90). Froman shows that Merleau-Ponty neither duplicated nor renounced the insights from Heidegger’s thought and that he “set out toward phenomenological philosophy via a philosophical interrogation of the world that he explicitly distinguished from reflection as well as from dialectic and intuition” (FIH, 101).

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In their chapter, “Self-fashioning as a Response to the Crisis of ‘Ethics’: A Foucault/Heidegger *Auseinandersetzung*,” Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg stage a critical encounter between the thought of Michel Foucault and that of Martin Heidegger, an encounter made possible by the crisis of ethics. As they explain, “In staging this *Auseinandersetzung* or critical encounter, our focus will be on how Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger each responded to what we believe was for them a profound crisis of ‘ethics’ in the modern world, *our* world. . . . The insights of these two thinkers can assist us in both grasping the elements of that crisis, and in beginning to fashion a response to it” (FIH, 104). Milchman and Rosenberg understand ethics “not in the sense of code morality, the moral law or commandments in its manifold forms . . . but rather, as in Foucault’s last writings, as the self’s relationship to itself, its *rapport à soi*, which includes its self-practices [*pratiques de soi*] through which we become ethical subjects . . .” (FIH, 106). Milchman and Rosenberg attempt to think this sense of self alongside Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein as an entity whose way of being entails care, as Heidegger develops it in the early Freiburg lecture courses (1919–1923), and the Marburg lecture courses.

Milchman and Rosenberg trace the ethical crisis addressed by Heidegger and Foucault to Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God. “It is that space,” they write, “vacated by the death of God, a space that has remained empty, which has generated the profound ethical crisis through which we have lived now for more than a century” (FIH, 109). Milchman and Rosenberg point out moreover that “the death of God was—as Foucault pointed out in the final page of his *Les mots et les choses* [*The Order of Things*—the prospective basis for the death of *man*; not human being, but the historical form of the subject that had shaped the modern West” (FIH, 109).

Milchman and Rosenberg suggest that “the fashioning of a self, its transformation from a dispersed self into a shaped self, and the ability to generate values without transcendentals,” (FIH, 111–112) was, for Foucault and Heidegger, the point of departure, in albeit different ways, for a response to the ethical crisis of our time. Heidegger had identified a counter-ruinant movedness to life that led to the project of a fashioning of the self: Heidegger’s emphasis on facticity in the early works is also connected to Foucault’s notion of philosophy as a way of life. “That kind of re-description of philosophy, and its source in the lived experience of the thinker, in her *Faktizität*, which Heidegger had articulated so powerfully in the 1920s, had its counterpart in Foucault’s articulation of philosophy as a way of life” (FIH, 115). Another important feature of their encounter was how “Foucault’s *genealogies* share with Heidegger a commitment to historicity,” as “Dasein does not respond to anxiety by finding the resources for its resolution in a solipsistic self; rather, its own historicity, its own

historical being-in-the-world, is what has taken us, here, to the very threshold of a project of self-fashioning" (FIH, 117–118). In the course of its analysis, the chapter takes into account the insights of a range of commentators, including Dreyfus, Nehamas, Van Buren, Danto, and Haugeland.

Andrew Mitchell's chapter, "Contamination, Essence, and Decomposition: Heidegger and Derrida," is a careful analysis of Heidegger's treatment of essence (*Wesen*) and a response to Derrida's charge that Heideggerian thinking is grounded in metaphysical notions of purity and presence. Repeated throughout the eighties and nineties, signally in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, Derrida's argument is couched in terms of a "contamination" that Heidegger is desperate to avoid. According to Derrida, Heideggerian thinking is an effort to cordon off a region of purity free from the taint of the ontic and the technological. The name for this region in Heidegger's work, according to Derrida, is *essence*. Heidegger's strategy is to secure a place for essence at the ontological level where it would remain free from ontic "contamination" and especially from the destructive power of modern technology, a strategy he pursues, according to Derrida, by thinking in terms of strict conceptual demarcations.

Countering these claims, Mitchell's essay shows that Derrida overlooked the crucial aspect of withdrawal in Heidegger's thinking of essence. Pursuing the idea of withdrawal and non-presence in essence, Mitchell explores decomposition (*Ver-wesen*) and ambiguity in turn to offer a more nuanced view of essence in Heidegger. The point is not to claim that Heidegger already thinks contamination, but that the idea of contamination itself is untenable for the nonpresent, worldly, and ambiguous sense of essence that Heidegger's thought proposes.

In responding to Derrida's charges, Mitchell analyzes the role of withdrawal in essence for Heidegger to argue that, far from a policy of quarantine, Heidegger's notion of essence names an abandonment to the ontic and technological world. Withdrawal is how "being" (*Seyn*) remains affiliated with beings. Mitchell shows that withdrawal must be thought in terms of a concealment that singularizes the being by allowing it to not show itself.

To properly understand this abandonment, Mitchell turns to an analysis of Heidegger's notion of decomposition (*Verwesen*), drawing on the very text at stake in Derrida's critique, "Language in the Poem," Heidegger's lengthy reading of the poet Georg Trakl. Mitchell shows that the connection between essence (*Wesen*) and decomposition (*Verwesen*) is more than an etymological one; the withdrawal inherent to essence is matched by the departure and displacement endemic to decomposition in Heidegger's analysis. For a thinking of abandonment, in other words, it is not enough to focus solely on the being's abandonment "by" beyng; one must also understand the being itself as permeated by abandonment, living it out as decomposition. Decomposition shows, in

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other words, that all abandonment is abandonment to . . . abandonment. Mitchell proposes decomposition as a corrective to Derrida's notion of contamination.

In the closing pages of the essay, Mitchell turns to the issue of ambiguity as a rejoinder to Derrida's charge that Heideggerian thinking would be a matter of conceptual demarcation. Contra Heidegger's earlier denunciation of ambiguity in *Being and Time*, the later work could be said to locate ambiguity as the domain of the poet. Again attending to the very text that Derrida draws from, Heidegger's Trakl reading, Mitchell shows that the withdrawal of essence can only be addressed ambiguously. Mitchell's essay is thus a complex response to each point of Derrida's most recent critique of Heidegger, a response showing that far from failing to think contamination, Heidegger presents a far more nuanced thinking of essence in his treatment of decomposition.

Jonathan Dronsfield addresses Deleuze's reading of Heidegger in his chapter provocatively titled, "Between Deleuze and Heidegger There Never Is Any Difference." At the outset of his chapter, Dronsfield brings to light the tenuous yet crucial relation between Deleuze and Heidegger as he notes a correspondence between difference and questioning, between ontological difference and the being of the question, a correspondence that would bring "Deleuze, or at least the 'early' Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, very close to Heidegger, a thinker whose thought Deleuze otherwise never ceased to contend was different from his own" (FIH, 152). Yet Dronsfield insists that being is a question for both Deleuze and Heidegger, and that this represents a correlation the degree of which "cannot be underestimated." Dronsfield's chapter elaborates on the nature of the question of being in Deleuze and Heidegger as well as on the extent to which for each the question, or questioning itself, involves a transformation of what is meant by the question.

Dronsfield provides an in-depth investigation of the nature of the question in Deleuze's work, particularly in terms of the unconscious in its relation to art and chance. For Deleuze, he claims, "the work of art is a problem complex comprising a 'theatre of problems and always open questions' enabling us to encounter questions of being" (FIH, 155). It is the central nature of chance that brings about Deleuze's fundamental break with Heidegger, in contrast to the latter's recourse to the concept of history. According to Deleuze, Heidegger does not go far enough in his thinking, because he does not break with history. It is not history that is at stake but rather the repetition of the question. Dronsfield writes, "Each time the die is tossed there is a repetition. Being is repetition" (FIH, 160). There is an episodic repetition expressed through the work of art. This repetitive fissure of expression is something that cannot be fulfilled or historicized. Dronsfield suggests that for Deleuze the fissure or fracture "is the place from where ideas that derive from imperatives enter and leave, and is displaced

by them each time" (FIH, 157). Dronsfield clarifies further that the fundamental difference with Heidegger is that Deleuze thinks without origin. In his development of this difference, Dronsfield explains Deleuze's rejection of the tendency in Heidegger's work to undertake a return or retrieval. Dronsfield writes that "it is with Heidegger's appeal to history, to the historical destiny of man to take on the burden of his finitude, and 'once more' to do so, that we arrive at the matter of Deleuze's fundamental disagreement with Heidegger: the question of history, the history of the question of being, and what Deleuze calls Heidegger's historicism" (FIH, 160).

In spite of the fact that Heidegger's project required the return to the Greeks, or that for Deleuze that return prevented "philosophy from creating new concepts," Dronsfield boldly suggests that ultimately there is never any difference between Heidegger and Deleuze. "If Deleuze is right, and 'there is' never any difference because 'it is never anywhere but in the question, and in the repetition of the question,' then Deleuze and Heidegger are the same" (FIH, 162), that is to say, they have the question of being—being as a question—in common.

Jean Luc Nancy's chapter, "On a Divine *Wink*," enters into a thinking of "the hint" and of the "last God" in Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. Nancy's discussion revolves around the sentence, "The last god: his occurring is found in the sign [*im Wink*], in the onset and absence of an arrival [*dem Anfall und Ausbleib der Ankunft*], as well as in the flight of the gods that are past and their hidden metamorphosis" (FIH 167). The German word for hint (*Wink*), which has been rendered by Derrida as *clin d'œil*, is a term that Nancy calls, properly speaking "untranslatable" (FIH, 168). Nancy raises concerns about understanding *Wink* as a sort of sign, but also about the interpretation of the term *clin d'œil*. "*Clin d'œil*," he writes, "... would introduce other connotations just as suspect, and of an order more fraught or more carefree than that of *signe* understood in the sense of *Zeichen*, of signifying sign, of meaning-to-say . . ." (FIH, 168). With *Wink*, Nancy insists, it is anything but a question of meaning. Indeed, Nancy suggests that any translation is inadequate because *Wink* refers to the contradictory event of what is simultaneously an arrival and a flight. The word, Nancy writes, is "awaiting its own true sense." And further: "The *Wink* is a sign of awaiting, or of putting expectation in the position of a sign. It is suspended between hope and disappointment. We must await its interpretation, but that waiting is, in itself, already a mobilization, and its mobility or motility is more important than its final interpretation" (FIH, 169).

For Nancy, the proper sense of the term *Wink*, as well as what it portends in this context, is "deferred." Further, this fact of deferral and impossible translation—the "exception of the untranslatable"—represents what Nancy calls the very "law

of translation.” The exception suggests a sovereign exclusion of language, or any language, and the impossibility of a simple translation except with a certain “wink.” Nancy shows that in Heidegger’s text, the word *Wink* is associated with another enigmatic term, *Vorbeigang*, or “passage,” with the connotation of “in passing.” Describing the link between *Wink* and *Vorbeigang*, Nancy asserts that “The *Wink*, here, in its function of sign or divine signal—of god-signal, one would have to murmur—is identified as fugitiveness, as the beating of the instant according to which what arrives leaves and, *in leaving* . . . remains absent . . .” (FIH, 171).

It is with the *Wink* that Nancy seeks to determine the nontheological divinity of the last God. In such a *Wink* of the passing, Nancy discerns the “appearance of the inapparent.” The *Wink* is that which is “in excess of itself, or else in lack” (FIH, 175). Why must this passing, Nancy asks, a “gesture in the direction of the inappropriable Being of being,” be referred to as God? (FIH, 177) In response, Nancy suggests that “Some *one* who passes, is but the tread of the passing, not a being who would have passing as an attribute. One should not speak—Heidegger himself should not—of the passing *of the god*: but God is in the passing. God is the passerby and the step of the passerby” (FIH, 178). This is for Nancy the “divine truth” of the *Wink*: “. . . there is no wink *of god*, but that the god *is* the wink. He does not do it, he winks himself there, just as he states his name in it, properly common and commonly proper—the name, in sum, of every person” (FIH, 182).

According to Gregory Schufreider, Lacoue-Labarthe has provided one of the most sophisticated accounts of Heidegger’s Nazism. Based on a close reading of a series of texts, he traces a line in Heidegger’s thought that is designed to connect over two decades of what is said to be a “‘political’ journey”: from the *Rectoral Address* (1933) through *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935/36) and *The Question Concerning Technology* (1953) to *The Question of Being* (1955).

In order to resist this four-sided frame, Schufreider’s “Sticking Heidegger with a Stela: Lacoue-Labarthe, Art, and Politics” revisits the question of the *Ge-stell* around which Lacoue-Labarthe organizes his account, in part to see whether the word can mean the same in the “frame-work” of art as it does in the “framing” of modern technology. To show that Lacoue-Labarthe’s connection is too direct, Schufreider retraces his account through two of his texts, namely, *Typography* and *The Fiction of the Political*. By concentrating on his central figure of “figuration,” Schufreider addresses the question of how a “configuration” of truth may be said to take place, according to Heidegger, if it is not to be thought in terms of an “ontosteleology”: as if the law of being were written in stone and erected on a stela.

To question the “set up,” Schufreider takes a closer look at Heidegger’s use of language in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, especially with respect to *Gestalt*

and *Gestell*. On Schufreider's account, *Gestalt* cannot there refer to what the tradition (including Nietzsche and Jünger) has called "form" but to a "con-figuration" of truth that is set into operation in the strife between world and Earth. To be specific, Schufreider shows that a network of linguistic relations is set up between *Gestalt*, *Ge-stell*, and *Gefüge*, on the one hand, and *Streit*, *Riß*, and *Fuge*, on the other; between configuration, frame-work, and structure (system), on the one hand, and strife, split (slit), and slot, on the other. On Schufreider's view, these two sets go hand in hand, which means that, in art, one must think in terms of the configuration of a rift (*Gestalt/Riß*) that takes place in a framework of strife (*Ge-stell/Streit*) that is joined through a system of slots (*Gefüge/Fuge*) or structured openings.

In contrast to Lacoue-Labarthe's account, Schufreider reads the *Ge-stell* in *The Origin of the Work of Art* not in terms of the imposition of a rigid form, as in the case of the framework of technology, but in view of a dynamic operation that is designed to create an opening linguistically. In the case in point, *Ge-stell* does not refer to a frame but names the gathering of a set of *stellens* whose own configuration is graphically designed to create a opposition between setting up (*auf-stellen*) and setting forth (*her-stellen*), setting back (*zurück-stellen*) and setting down (*fest-stellen*). On this view, the *Ge-stell* must itself be read typographically: in terms of a stela that is inserted into the word to create a rift in language. Rather than imposing a form (including etymologically) or creating a direct line to other words, the hyphen is designed to configure a breach that is literally un-heard in the spoken word if one takes Heidegger's writing literally rather than literarily. In effect, Heidegger's "hyphonation," as Schufreider would call it, is designed to open up a silent space in which the word is exposed in its own linguistic creation.

In the end, then, Schufreider questions whether there is not a lost stela in Lacoue-Labarthe's accounting, and one that can never quite be found: *eine offene Stelle*, as Heidegger would say. In that event, far from being confused by his own use of the terms *Gestalt* and *Gestell* in the thirties, as Lacoue-Labarthe contends (in what amount to a "defense"), Schufreider concludes that Heidegger had all of the resources available to him to reject National Socialism as inconsistent with his thinking at the time and did not need to wait until the fifties to uncover the "truth," i.e., its falsehood as a political imposition that refuses to submit itself to the struggle and opposition required for the creation of a collective configuration.

Helen Fielding's chapter, "Dwelling with Language: Irigaray Responds," elaborates on Irigaray's unique reception of Heidegger's thought. Stating that "rather than directly following in his path, Irigaray engages with Heidegger's works dialogically" (FIH, 215), Fielding marks the conceptual differences

between Irigaray and Heidegger, arguing that although Irigaray begins, like Heidegger, with a critique of Western metaphysics, “unlike Heidegger, it is not a relation to language and to being that Irigaray attempts to reveal; rather, it is the relation between two humans who are different, that is, the relation of sexual difference that is at the heart of her project” (FIH, 215). Fielding does not suggest that Irigaray simply opposes or rejects Heidegger’s thought. In fact, she asserts that although Irigaray’s texts are critical of Heidegger, they can only be understood in terms of their proximity to Heidegger’s thought. In fact, only such an understanding, Fielding writes, would “allow for an adequate assessment of [Irigaray’s] central claim for the priority of sexual difference” (FIH, 216). Specifically, Fielding draws on the late Heidegger’s thinking with respect to language and “nearness,” to the extent that such thinking would help clarify Irigaray’s approach to sexual difference and her own intuition of proximity. “What is factual, however, is that human beings are (at least) two,” and thus such a reflection of proximity would further allow for the recognition of sexual difference as well as other differences. Fielding writes that “This proximity is one that cannot be grasped, that does not appear, and so cannot be known as such. And yet, the relation that emerges out of this proximity, if the feminine and the masculine come into their own through their relation while retaining their distinctness, allows for the recognition of other differences” (FIH, 218).

Fielding asserts that Irigaray’s philosophical contribution is that she anticipates an economy not grounded in the being of the same, but rather “one sustained by the groundless ground of the weaving of relations” (FIH, 219). Fielding finds a unique articulation in Irigaray of this “groundless ground,” since, “[t]he ground of being, which provides the whole of the same, cannot account for the originary whole of the relation with the mother that preceded any differentiation as such” (FIH, 219). It is this primordial relation to the mother which is to be thought, a thinking that must begin from the human capacity to be in relation, rather than with inverse differences between men and women, a thinking that allows for a rethinking of sexual difference as neither essential nor completely constructed. “Rather than it being the ontico-ontological difference that is the most unthinkable of differences, for Irigaray it is this elusive yet primordial relation with the mother that needs to be thought” (FIH 219).

Fielding insists that Irigaray does not seek to repudiate Heidegger’s claim that language is the house of being but would question the totalizing nature of his claim and the fact that, in Irigaray’s view, Heidegger disallows “a language of nature or alternate rhythms” (FIH, 221). For Irigaray, Heidegger’s language of Being is “a closed system” that cuts “off the possibilities of language for opening up the future through a communication between two in the present.” Fielding shows that Irigaray sought to “remind Heidegger of his own insight

that language is rooted in the body” (FIH, 221) and to radicalize such a claim in terms of our abyssal debt towards it and of the community it opens up.

Allen Scult’s chapter, entitled “Forgiving ‘*La Dette Impensée*’: Being Jewish and Reading Heidegger,” reflects on Marlène Zarader’s reception of Heidegger in her book *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*.⁷ Zarader’s reception of Heidegger provides a path for Scult to reflect as a Jew on his own relation to Heidegger’s thought, and to reflect on Heidegger’s debt to the Hebraic intellectual tradition. Scult writes of his distress with what he calls Heidegger’s “stark silence,” a silence with respect to National Socialism and a silence with respect to the Jewish tradition in general (FIH, 231). For Scult, Heidegger’s silence with respect to the Jewish intellectual tradition is a philosophical silence, or even a silencing of a whole tradition of thought in favor of a privileging of Greek thought.

Scult asks, “But what if the lineage Heidegger lays out to guide the focus of his philosophical preoccupation is deficient, and the rigorously conceived ‘new beginning’ fails to take account of an essential aspect of its own becoming?” (FIH, 233). The “unthought” beginning to which Scult refers is the Hebraic tradition. Zarader’s reading of Heidegger is seen as particularly valuable insofar as it offers a “detailed delineation of the striking structural analogy between hermeneutical phenomenology as we find it in the later Heidegger and in the fundamental revelation texts of the Old Testament” (FIH, 233). In this respect, Scult cites Caputo, who wrote that “[Heidegger’s] discourse of call, address and response . . . is borrowed from the biblical tradition of a salvation history, from the religions of the Book, which are set in motion by the Shema, the sacred command or call—‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord Thy God is One.’—a command that defines and identifies a sacred people: one God, one people, one place.”

Scult laments that Heidegger does not acknowledge his debt to Jewish hermeneutics. It is this debt that Zarader’s text illuminates, showing that it resurfaces in Heidegger “transfigured: The voice of God becomes the voice of Being; The People of God, the recipients of the call, are relocated in the German ‘*Volk*,’ with Heidegger himself as bearer of the message. Zarader’s intention seems clearly to expose Heidegger’s impersonation of a Hebrew prophet” (FIH, 234). Scult proceeds to reflect on the implications of a “devotional commitment to the words of a particular text” (FIH, 236). While Zarader and Caputo see this central imperative of the Shema—the message of the prayer which hermeneutically anchors every Jewish service, the Shema: “Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One.”—as being at the core of Heidegger’s “borrowing,” Scult contends that the “apparent similarity arises out of the exigencies of Heidegger’s own hermeneutical phenomenology” (FIH, 236).

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In the concluding section of his text, Scult reflects on the extent to which Heidegger's text and Judaism each entails an ontology that involves a call to an origin. With respect to Heidegger, he writes, "Yet the way to understand care—to think it ontologically—still must be grounded in the facticity of the originary call 'being what it was.' Thinking the call as the call to care links its present showing as conscience to its originary factual showing as the call of faith and thus makes a factually grounded ontology possible" (FIH, 240). In the case of "Being Jewish," the call is to the Torah, a dwelling with the words of a sacred text. Scult reflects: "'Being Jewish' turns out to be an ongoing responsibility, carried along on one's wanderings from place to place, to interpret and re-interpret the word in order to continue to heed its call" (FIH, 240). Scult finds his work as a reader and interpreter of religious text illuminated by his experience of reading Heidegger. The intense reading of the religious text entails for Scult an experience of "discoveredness." He writes:

The experience of reading Heidegger I am trying to account for here has been for me a series of returns to the authentic "how" of being Jewish as a way of reading particular texts, whose words seem to connect one to the place from which one comes, through a reenactment of the primordial always-already-having-been of the relationship between Dasein and the Word. (FIH, 242)

Thus, another debt is acknowledged: Scult's own debt to Heidegger, which has led him to a sense of philosophical self-understanding.

In his chapter entitled "The Poverty of Heidegger's 'Last God,'" Jean Greisch analyzes the "reframing" that the philosophical and theological question of God undergoes in Martin Heidegger's thought at the time of the turning and his essay is an important contribution to Heidegger's impact on a philosophy of religion. Greisch asks in a somewhat provocative way, "what are we to do with Heidegger's 'last God?'," that is, with a God that is positioned in confrontation with the Christian God?⁸ Indeed, Greisch claims that with this motif of the last God, "what is at stake here is also a confrontation with the God of Judeo-Christian faith" (FIH, 246) as well as the *causa sui* God of the tradition. His chapter undertakes a reading of three of Heidegger's texts written between 1936 and 1939: *Die Beiträge zur Philosophie, Besinnung*, and *Die Geschichte des Seins*, texts that address the enigma of the last God.⁹ Greisch undertakes a careful reflection on the notion of the "last" as it also implies a reference to the beginning and the origin.

Greisch writes in this respect: "In fact, the 'last God' involves a paradoxical relation with the idea of a beginning. The event (that only occurs as a 'passing' [*Vorbeigang*]) of the 'last God' does not mark the end but the beginning of a new history. 'The last God is not the end but the other beginning of immeasurable

possibilities for our history' (GA 65, 411/289). In a sense, we could apply to it the sentence in the Gospel: 'The last will be the first.' For the same reason, the end cannot be understood either in the teleological sense of an end to be attained" (FIH, 249).

Greisch wonders whether such a thinking of the last God is not a "more or less esoteric crypto-religion," or "if there is some complicity here with Judeo-Christian eschatology" (FIH, 255). Greisch responds to this question through an analysis of the "poverty" of the last God. His analysis suggests that the arrival of the last God should be understood as a mode of finitude. The theme of poverty is an analog for the poverty or finitude of Being. As Heidegger writes, "Poverty: the essence of be-ing as *Ereignis*" (GA 69, 110) (FIH, 257).

The theme of finitude or poverty is also present in *Besinnung*. While Heidegger employs the expression, "Last God," the issue in this case is the "abyss of the truth of Being" (FIH, 253). In the face of this abyss, Heidegger suggests that philosophical and Christian theology have "exhausted their possibilities" and can no longer offer salvation (FIH, 253). In the third text from this period, *Die Geschichte des Seins*, the last God is further associated with the theme of poverty. Greisch emphasizes that Heidegger in fact speaks of the last god in terms of the "gift of impoverishment" (FIH, 256). He shows that it is this very poverty that Heidegger sets against the themes of domination, power, and even "powering of power" in our time. For Heidegger, the impoverishment of poverty is proper to the "richness of be-ing" (FIH, 257).

In addition to the treatment of the poverty of the last God, Greisch's chapter undertakes an interpretive reading of the philosophical relation between the *Beiträge* and *Being and Time*. Whereas in *Being and Time* the basic mood was anxiety and associated with care, in the *Beiträge* it is *Verhaltenheit* that appears as "the fundamental mood of the other beginning of the thinking, which substitutes for the role that the metaphysical beginning accorded to wonder. *Reservedness* is the middle term of a triad of which 'startled dismay' [*Erschrecken*] and deep awe [*Scheu*] are the extremes (GA 65, 15/12). The agreement of these three moods is found in a new interpretation of care" (FIH, 251).

In this respect, Greisch shows how after the turn *Dasein* refers to the humans who discover their fundamental vocation as "guardians, and caretakers of being" (GA 65, 13/17) (FIH, 251). Humans become the guardians of the "silent passing of the last God" (GA 65, 406/286) (FIH, 251). In this respect, Greisch emphasizes Heidegger's concern that we are not attuned in our time to this task, that man has been without mood for a long time (*Stimmunglos ist seit langem der Mensch*) (GA 66, 238–239) (FIH, 254).

Françoise Dastur engages the question of the reception of Heidegger's thought in the broader context of the French-German philosophical dialogue,

and in particular in light of the need of contemporary French philosophers to free themselves from Cartesian philosophy. Heidegger developed a thought that would retrieve a bond with the world prior to thought properly speaking, and it is this break with Cartesian philosophy that attracted the existentialists, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and those who followed. "It was indeed a question for Sartre, as well as Merleau-Ponty, of finding in the 'philosophy of existence' . . . the means of breaking out from a Cartesian-inspired reflexive philosophy, and of thinking the concrete situation of human beings in the world and in history" (FIH, 267). Dastur proceeds in her chapter, "The Reception and Nonreception of Heidegger in France," to reconstruct this reception of Heidegger's thought, as well as its limits in Sartre, Levinas, Derrida, and Merleau-Ponty. Sartre remains caught in a Cartesian philosophy of consciousness and will, and the fundamental stakes are thus "the confrontation of the Heideggerian analytic of *Dasein* with Sartre's philosophy of consciousness" (FIH, 268). After a detailed terminological comparison of the vocabulary of *Being and Nothingness* with that of *Being and Time*, Dastur concludes that Sartre missed the true meaning of Heidegger's thought of Being because of the implicit Cartesianism of the thought of the French philosopher, with which Heidegger decisively broke.

Turning to Levinas, Dastur argues that although Levinas was not trained in the Cartesianism of French philosophy, "just as in the case of Sartre . . . in the last analysis, it was also a Cartesian motif that Levinas opposed to Heidegger's thought" (FIH, 271). Noting the radical break introduced after *Totality and Infinity* with his earlier commentaries on Heidegger, Dastur shows how Levinas has opted for a more classical metaphysics of transcendence than Heidegger's analytic of finitude, "as if to the thought of transitivity he had to oppose a thought of exteriority" (FIH, 275). Dastur sees a Cartesian heritage in this reference to the exteriority of transcendence, and she cites Levinas in this respect: "Descartes," he concludes, "better than an idealist or a realist, discovers a relation with a total alterity irreducible to interiority, which nevertheless does not do violence to interiority" (TI, p. 211, cited in FIH, 275). With respect to Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger, Dastur notes a constant ambivalence through which Derrida detects in Heidegger two contrary gestures: "one by which he remains within metaphysics and the other by which he places the determination of being as presence in question, thus opening the possibility of thinking being as a withdrawal or absence" (FIH, 276). Derrida is said to take issue with Heidegger's thought of difference, in the sense that such a thought "seems to reinforce the value of the *presence* of being," an issue addressed by Andrew Mitchell in his chapter. Dastur discusses this *differend* and insists on the radical misunderstanding in Derrida's reading of Heidegger, a misunderstanding that she traces in Derrida's unacknowledged Sartreanism.

Dastur contends that “it is in fact paradoxically to Merleau-Ponty that we must turn if we want to find a true ‘reception’ of Heidegger’s thought” (FIH, 279). Dastur contends that some working notes from *The Visible and the Invisible* show that the work of the “later” Heidegger served as a model for Merleau-Ponty. The notion of flesh, of flesh of the world, bears strong affinities with Heidegger’s nonanthropocentric thought of presence. Many a statement from Merleau-Ponty on the chiasm “have a clearly Heideggerian resonance,” we are told. Dastur explores these resonances by close reading of some passages from *The Visible and the Invisible*. Stressing the “remarkable homology between Heidegger’s motif of *Seyn* and Merleau-Ponty’s problematic of the visible and the invisible” (FIH, 284), Dastur sheds light on this striking statement from Merleau-Ponty that the “perceptual world is at bottom Being in Heidegger’s sense” (FIH, 282).

As the chapters in this volume attest, contemporary French philosophy of the last fifty years has been deeply affected by Heidegger’s thought. Jacques Derrida once wrote that, “what I have attempted to do would not have been possible without the *opening* of Heidegger’s questions.”¹⁰ *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception* addresses that very “opening” provided by Heidegger’s questions and explores its dimensions and developments within French thought from its earliest to its most recent expressions. As Dominique Janicaud asserts in his chapter, the French reception of Heidegger has been a “creative appropriation rather than a passive reception, or in more literary terms, a saga rather than an ordinary story . . . a series of dramatic, passionate, polemical attitudes or interpretations” (FIH, 24). Indeed, entire areas, disciplines, and fields have been transformed through this encounter: first and foremost phenomenology, but also ethics, esthetics, theology, theory of action (Ricoeur), gender theory, literary theory, philosophies of technology and of the environment. Indeed, most of French philosophy of the last fifty years has been deeply determined by it. *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception* suggests moreover the remarkable extent to which American continental philosophy has itself been affected by the French reception of Heidegger’s thought. The French engagement of Heidegger has drawn a new geography of thought encompassing both sides of the Atlantic, always in a dialogue, whose contours have only begun to be explored. The present volume, inspired by Dominique Janicaud’s masterful *Heidegger en France* as well as by his life’s work, attempts to further this dialogue, to enact a genuine *sunousia* (as Heidegger termed it in his letter to Jean Beaufret of November 23, 1945) that opens Heidegger’s thought anew as it appreciates the legacy of the French interpretations of Heidegger.

Introduction

Notes

David Pettigrew and François Raffoul, eds., *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008). Cited herein as FIH, followed by the page number.

1. In a veritable tour de force, Janicaud reconstitutes such a long and complex history, from Levinas's first commentaries on Heidegger's early works in the late twenties (Levinas was the one who first introduced Heidegger in France, along with other Jewish philosophers such as Koyre or Jean Wahl); to Sartre's magisterial (mis)appropriation of the key moments and vocabulary of *Being and Time* in *Being and Nothingness*; to the explosion of existentialism after the war and the famed "Letter on Humanism," addressed to Jean Beaufret, a key figure in the French reception of Heidegger; to Heidegger's visit in France in the mid-fifties at the Cerisy meeting and his encounter with Lacan, as well as his lecture in Aix-en-Provence in 1958; to the sixties and the seminars held in France, in Provence at the Thor, near the house of René Char, now available in English as *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), hereafter cited as FS; to the eventual debates in the eighties regarding the translation of *Being and Time*, which took sixty years to be completed after many vicissitudes; and, last but not least, to the cyclical reappearance in the French intellectual scene from the thirties (but especially since 1947 through articles in *Les Temps Modernes*) to Victor Farias's infamous 1987 pamphlet, of heated debates regarding Heidegger's relationship with the Nazi regime.

2. In an interview in the journal *L'Histoire* in December 2001 (volume n. 260), Dominique Janicaud proposes that Heidegger was less appreciated in Germany than in France due to "the German bad conscience after World War II."

3. Janicaud relates that Heidegger, hearing of this polymorphous transformation or re-creation of his thought, exclaimed: "My god, I did not want this!"

4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Parcours 1935–1951* (Paris: Verdier, 1997), p. 67. Hereafter cited as P, followed by page number.

5. See Jean Beaufret, *Dialogue with Heidegger: Greek Philosophy*, trans. Mark Sinclair (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. xxv.

6. "As to the interest of America for the 'question of Being,' the reality of that country is veiled from the view of those interested: the collusion between industry and the military (the economic development and the armament that it requires)." FS, p. 56.

7. *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Berkeley, CA: Stanford University Press, April 2006).

8. Further, he unfolds this question in the following three ways:

- "1. What "returns" but in an absolutely novel manner through the figure of the "last God"? Or, perhaps what is the "last God" about?
2. In what sense does the "last God" co-respond to the Judeo-Christian God and the God *causa sui* while speaking against them?

3. How does the last God speak to us? To whom does he speak? What words does he use?" (FIH 247).

9. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 65, Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis) (1936–1938)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989). (The *Beiträge* has been published in English as Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999). Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 66, Besinnung (1938–1939)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997). Henceforth cited as GA 66 followed by the page number. (English translation as Martin Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2006).

Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 69, Die Geschichte des Seyns: 1. Die Geschichte des Seyns (1938–1940) 2. Koinon. Aus der Geschichte des Seyns (1939)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998). Henceforth cited as GA 69 followed by the page number.

10. Jacques Derrida. *Positions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 9, our emphasis.

One

TOWARD THE END OF THE “FRENCH EXCEPTION”?

Dominique Janicaud

A debate recently took place in France and abroad about the French “cultural exception.” What was at issue? According to most French publishers, politicians, writers, artists, and even singers, French culture and language need to be protected against the dangers of a “wild” globalization; culture cannot be assimilated to an ordinary business. The peculiarities and qualities of French culture are supposed to be so fragile that they run the risk of being unable to survive in an open market exclusively ruled by the law of profit, in a world where a few huge corporations now control the whole production of “cultural artifacts”; French books, films, and TV programs should consequently benefit from special subsidies and other economic measures in order to allow them to remain alive in the new, hard, planetary competition.

My point in this essay is not to argue for or against this supposed French “cultural exception” in general. It would be quite irrelevant to my topic. I just wanted to use the expression and to explain its origin, in order to establish a starting-point to set up *my* specific questions regarding Heidegger’s reception in France during the last decades.

I recently published a two-volume work *Heidegger en France*. In the first volume, I wrote the history of how Heidegger’s thought was received in France, from the nineteen-thirties up to the end of the twentieth century; the second volume is made up of a collection of interviews with philosophers and interpreters who played an important and very distinct role in that reception. I have tried to broaden the horizon and include very critical as well as orthodox Heideggerian viewpoints, from Derrida to Biemel, from Faye to Dastur, from

Professor Janicaud wrote this chapter in English for presentation at the annual meeting of the North American Heidegger Conference in May 2002 at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). His text was edited for the conference presentation by John Dudley, of the philosophy department at SCSU.

Nancy to Marion. In this essay, I might have been tempted to offer a mere summary of these two volumes, but it would have been useless and tedious. If you are full of courage (and sufficiently fluent in French), you may read them. Otherwise, you will have to wait for the careful and talented translation that is being carried out by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew.

I prefer not to repeat literally what I wrote in the two volumes of *Heidegger en France*. I shall rather focus on the following question: is it possible to argue that the French reception of Heidegger's thought has been continuously so outstanding, so bright, and so dramatic that it really constitutes an exceptional phenomenon? I shall first try to bolster this hypothesis, summing up the arguments and collecting the main examples that have allowed me to reconstitute Heidegger's French reception as a creative appropriation rather than a passive reception, or in more literary terms, as a saga rather than as an ordinary story.

In the second part of this essay, I will adopt a more critical approach to this reception, that is to say, to its qualities and its flaws regarding the understanding and interpretation of Heidegger's thought, as well as to its historical limitations (by also taking into account the possibility of a radical change in the coming years). Starting from facts, events and well-known texts, we shall eventually reach the more uncertain area of present times, and my suggestions will be quite open to your questioning.

An Exceptional Reception

Without dreaming of an ideal, perfect reception of Heidegger's thought, one could have conceived of the possibility of a more reasonable or, at least, less paradoxical intellectual history than the one that "actually" took place. Is it not surprising that Heidegger's masterwork, *Sein und Zeit*, was not completely translated into French until the years 1985–1986, nearly sixty years after the publication of the book in Germany?

Instead of an ongoing, consistent reading of Heidegger's texts, instead of serious, rigorous, academic studies devoted to them, a series of dramatic, passionate, polemical attitudes or interpretations took place. This nearly unceasing turmoil, if I may so call it, started as early as the beginning of the thirties. It may come as a surprise that the first person to write and teach on Heidegger in France was Georges Gurvitch, who became well known as a sociologist teaching in the Sorbonne but who, by then, no longer had anything to do with Heidegger. In the book he published in 1930 on the trends of German contemporary philosophy, Gurvitch could not resist mixing up explanations and criticisms. He was the first to show that *Sein und Zeit* offered a radically new

kind of phenomenology, an existential one, which had no longer anything to do with an anthropology; but he incorrectly coined the expression "existential idealism" to describe Heidegger's project. He saw Heidegger as a Neoplatonist who had failed to retrieve the ethical and metaphysical achievements of Fichte's last philosophy.¹

Most of the other contributions of the thirties were enthusiastic, such as those of Alexandre Koyré, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Wahl, and Rachel Bessaloff. The only ones who resisted, and as a matter of fact for political reasons after 1933, were a few Marxists.² It is striking to acknowledge that, as early as in the thirties, the name (and thought) of Heidegger was already a challenge among French intellectuals, even if in nonacademic terms; Heidegger's thought was perceived as a fascinating, rather mysterious, radically original existential phenomenology. Even Koyré, who later became famous as a distinguished specialist in the history of science, introduced Heidegger as a leading figure of the avant-garde, and he did it in the following provocative terms: "For Martin Heidegger's undertaking—and in this its value and importance consist—is a fantastic work of demolition. The analyses of *Sein und Zeit* are a kind of emancipatory and destructive *catharsis*."³

An interesting discovery I made while studying these first years of Heidegger's reception in France has to do with the case of Jean-Paul Sartre. Whereas he claimed⁴ that he discovered Heidegger's thought in the late thirties by reading Corbin's translation of *Was ist Metaphysik?* and other pieces, I discovered that he had published a short original article on "*La légende de la vérité*" (The Legend of Truth) in the year 1931 at the age of 24, in the same issue of the journal *Bifur* in which the very first translation of Heidegger's lecture *Was ist Metaphysik?* was published.⁵ This means that Sartre was already aware, not only of Heidegger's name but above all of the philosophical relevance of a radical meditation on Nothingness for a new concrete approach to Being.

As I cannot enter here into many details, I would like to focus now on another specific feature of Heidegger's French reception: the role played by great original and gifted intellectuals, such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Derrida, and Ricœur, among others.

The title of the chapter I devoted to Sartre may seem surprising: "*La bombe Sartre*." Why do I use this metaphor of a "bomb"? One may justify it by saying that the extraordinary success of Sartre's book *Being and Nothingness* suddenly and violently opened up a new philosophical period that was called the "existentialist years." A renewal of French philosophy took place in the wake of a mere intellectual fashion. To what extent was Heidegger's thought involved in such an ambiguous event? Sartre does not quote Heidegger at random, but he instantly transforms him into a great, almost already "classical" philosopher, on

par with Hegel and Husserl. Sartre borrows so many insights from *Sein und Zeit* that it is almost impossible to sum them up: facticity, being-in-the-world, freedom as transcendence, the ontological role of anxiety, the phenomenological description of the structures of inauthenticity, and even the existential openness to authenticity. Sartre's debt towards Heidegger is so great that it might seem to be mere plagiarism. This, however, is not the case, because Sartre's style turns out to be very personal and full of original purple patches that became quickly famous (I recall such talented descriptions of the "bad faith" of the *garçon de café*, of the seduced woman, of the look of the Other). The other reason that allowed Sartre to appear to be original (and perhaps more original than he actually was) was that he himself clearly and cleverly stressed how close he remained to Descartes's *cogito*, how critical he stood towards Heidegger's conception of alterity as *Mitsein*, and how different from Heidegger's ontology was his "existential psychoanalysis." One could and should attempt to improve on the analytical study of all these differences that I offer here. But the main point for the present discussion is that, owing to Sartre, Heidegger came bursting onto the French philosophical scene as the major contemporary figure. It is true that before the Second world war Heidegger had begun to be known as a rather famous contemporary philosopher, among others; after Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, he was acknowledged as the undisputable master of existentialism. Sartre's reception of Heidegger was therefore exceptional, not only great but at once dramatic, original, and critical.

Among the major intellectual figures who, after Sartre, played a prominent role in the French reception of Heidegger, it is impossible not to mention Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. But what are the tellingly relevant differences between them? Although both were fascinated by Heidegger's thought, and both had an intimate knowledge of *Sein und Zeit*, their reactions took them to almost opposite conclusions. Whereas Merleau-Ponty made the difficult attempt to reconcile Heidegger's and Husserl's methods in his *Phenomenology of Perception* and grew progressively closer to Heidegger's ontology in his later writings, one may legitimately be startled by the complete and sensational reversal in Levinas's estimation of the German philosopher. In his first articles of the thirties, Levinas was as whole-heartedly enthusiastic towards Heidegger as he was radically hostile to him in *Totality and Infinity* (which was published in 1961 at the Hague). I just said "radically hostile" and I must immediately correct this expression by explaining its inadequacy: it is true that *Totality and Infinity*, from its very beginning, is set against an ontology of war and of totality in which it is easy to recognize a schematization of Heidegger's thought. In fact, the whole book cannot be understood without taking into account the intimate tension that permeates Levinas's rewriting of *Sein und Zeit* (for instance, anxiety replaced by joy, the fini-

tude of temporality becoming the openness to infinitude). Notwithstanding all the explicit oppositions to Heidegger's views, it seems to me impossible to reduce *Totality and Infinity* to a set of misconceptions or oppositions towards Heidegger. I must confess that I feel compelled to disagree with Jean Beaufret on this point: I remember that he often mentioned Levinas as a mere "adversary" of Heidegger; I progressively discovered, by meeting and, above all, reading Levinas, that his relationship to Heidegger was much more complex and that it remained intimate. Without Heidegger, all the real background to *Totality and Infinity* would vanish and the book could no longer be understood.⁶ In a sense, becoming such an "adversary" is the best way to pay one's philosophical respects to a great thinker. This example shows, once more, how original works made Heidegger's French reception passionate and far more interesting than academic studies would have done (this being said, with all the respect due to excellent academic work in general).

Another example, still more complex, is provided by Jacques Derrida's deconstruction. In this respect, it goes without saying that I can focus only on a few very limited remarks, since a comprehensive study including a comparative history of Derrida's "dialogue" with Heidegger would require around 10,000 pages, according to what Derrida himself suggested, half ironically, half seriously, in his recent Discourse upon receiving the Adorno Prize.⁷ From his first writings in the sixties up to this Discourse, Jacques Derrida has never ceased to be intimately concerned with Heidegger's thought, although he never wrote the whole book devoted to Heidegger which had been once announced, a long time ago. In the interview of the second volume of *Heidegger en France*, Derrida admits that he often had the strange impression that Heidegger was present, close to him, watching him and checking what he thinks and does,⁸ and not always approving of him, especially when it comes to his many travels around the world! Jacques knows he constantly disobeys the orders and advice of the severe father and master, Martin.⁹ In so doing, Derrida sees (and feels) Heidegger as his *contre-maître*, thus playing with a French expression which usually means "foreman," overseer, for instance in a workshop, and which, in the present case, also means that Heidegger remains the Master, even if in nonconventional terms.

More seriously, if we had to meet the nearly impossible challenge to characterize in a few words the singularity of Derrida's "reception" of Heidegger, we should refer to the most explicit Derridean deconstruction of the very notion of a "proper" reception in *La Carte postale*.¹⁰ You may remember that the whole first part of that book is made up of an exchange of postcards and short letters in which and through which the possibility of an appropriation of the destiny of the Western world and of its spiritual *Geist* (metaphysics) is questioned. The

Heideggerian *Geschick*, both a “sending” and a destiny, is deconstructed into a complex set of networks, relay stations, and exchanges in such a way that both the unity of metaphysics and its unthought “truth” (the ontological difference) are submitted to a critical rereading and split into the multiple traces of a proliferating textuality. Nevertheless, in spite of all this very sharp deconstruction of the Heideggerian “proper” and in fact through it, Derrida is paying his respects to Heidegger’s thought, as he writes: “One will not bypass Freiburg.”¹¹

Here is one among many other examples of the exceptional feature of Derrida’s case. The Heideggerian *Abbau* of metaphysics is both sent back to Heidegger, as a letter would be, and reversed, turned against his thought (or rather unthought). Heidegger’s thought is in turn deconstructed, not to be destroyed or set aside, but in order to remain open to questioning and perhaps to an infinite task of deconstruction.

The last great figure I would like to call up is quite different from that of Derrida, perhaps less original, less paradoxical, less dramatic, but exceptional in another sense. I have in mind the name and works of Paul Ricœur to whom I have devoted many pages in my book, even if several friends we have in common may have judged that my tone or feeling was neither enthusiastic nor favorable enough and that Ricœur was somewhat unappreciated in that story. I sincerely tried not to be unfair to Ricœur, and there was no bad intention on my part when ironically I noticed that at one point (in *The Conflict of Interpretations*¹²) Ricœur gave the impression that Heidegger’s thought was a kind of “cumbersome object” which had to be handled with care! I alluded to the fact that Ricœur was then both paying his respects to the existential analytics of *Sein und Zeit*, which he viewed as maintaining a hermeneutics of the subject, and reducing the thought of the later Heidegger to a “philosophy of language,” thus schematizing Heidegger’s turn from metaphysics to a new way of thinking. This critical remark did not prevent me from devoting nearly a full chapter to the thorough discussion which was later carried out by Ricœur, in order to show how Heidegger’s ontological radicality failed to find the “way back” from a general hermeneutical level to a “regional hermeneutics” (history, psychology, political philosophy).¹³ It is mainly on the question of the status of praxis that Ricœur turned out to be in opposition to Heidegger and eventually attempted to reconstruct a metaphysical theory of action in a manner that is explicitly said to be very close to Aristotelian ethics. The point is that, as he several times had the opportunity to confess, Ricœur sincerely admired *Sein und Zeit* but remained reluctant towards the thought of the later Heidegger and his so-called overcoming of metaphysics. This coherent position was not formulated as clearly in the fifties and sixties, so that Ricœur’s reception of Heidegger’s thought offers the remarkable example of a scrupulous reading which becomes more and more

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critical as it becomes aware of its own presuppositions. Less daring than Levinas, less literary and suggestive than Derrida, closer to Arendt and Gadamer, Ricœur has always claimed a reflexive standpoint that he paradoxically shares with Sartre. His way of being exceptional is quite different from the other great intellectual French figures: he is, in a sense, the exception that proves the rule, that is to say the fact that Heidegger's reception was the saga of a set of original, nonconventional interpretations of Heidegger's thought.

By concluding this too brief survey of the most creative figures of Heidegger's French reception, I may have given the impression that I have given an absolute privilege to critical or even hostile viewpoints and that I have forgotten the faithful, serious and admirable appropriations patiently carried out by greatly talented teachers: Jean Beaufret, Henri Birault, Gérard Granel, to mention the most important and the better known among them. Fortunately, Pierre Jaccard's contribution [to this volume] is doing Jean Beaufret justice. More generally speaking, it is indisputable that, if Heidegger's reception in France has been so interesting and even exceptional, it is above all due to the fact that a few remarkable scholars, most of them gifted writers, were the early readers of Heidegger even before they were "interpreters" in the literal sense of the word. This is true from the very beginning in the thirties (with Levinas, Koyré, and others) up to that period which I was tempted to call "the end," by which I mean the end of our story in the last decades of the twentieth century.

We cannot avoid the questions that remain and that might be summed up as follows: how are we to evaluate this exceptional reception? Is a new process taking place, are new works and new tasks appearing or is the "French exception" coming to an end?

An Ambiguous Project, an Uncertain Present

In the process of writing the history of seventy years of reception of Heidegger's thought in France, I realized that my task was very peculiar and difficult for at least two reasons: this history is a philosophical history, and to that extent it is never reducible to the multiple facts or events that I have had to take into account, but it has been subjected to a constant reinterpretation of the very thought of Heidegger; on the other hand, because it involves people who are still alive, this history could certainly not be considered as dealing with past events only but is still open to new developments.

As for the first difficulty, I may say that I did my best to make this history as philosophical as possible. A mere collection of summaries, titles, and facts would have been quite unsatisfactory. We have just seen that to understand how

exceptional Heidegger's reception was, one had to clarify the very content and purport of the new questions (and of the new ways of questioning) which have been induced by Heidegger's reception in France, even if it took place through many misunderstandings or even distortions of the original thought and even if it would have been possible to show other kinds of creative displacements by quoting and analyzing the cases of Lacan, Foucault or Althusser.

Taking one's stand on this remark, one could here raise a radical objection, which I made to myself in my moments of bad conscience! One of the specific qualities of Heidegger's thought is always to go to the *Sache selbst* or, better, to radically question the truth of Being and the unthought in Western metaphysics. Is not a conventional history of such a reception bound to be limited to the external "effects" of that thought, that is to say, is it not doomed to be superficial and unfaithful to its very project and aims? Can such an enterprise regarding Heidegger be really and properly Heideggerian? Can it ever be so? In his late seminars, Heidegger himself advised his audience to avoid publicity, to meditate on the essential questions, and thus to patiently pave the way for a long-term, epochal, transhistorical "turn" in Being itself by waiting for a possible *Ereignis* and the upsurge of a "new God" or at least a new sense of the Sacred. Contrary to these indications regarding the best and most authentic path to follow, ought not a history of the reception—be it French or American, or German, or any other—be banned in pure Heideggerian terms?

This objection must be discussed with the utmost seriousness. I don't deny that a history of the reception of a great thought such as that of Heidegger may appear to be to some extent superficial. Let us frankly confess that it obviously involves many micro-events, most of which are more *historish* than *geschichtlich*, more historical in the ordinary sense of the word than faithful to the authentic Heideggerian meaning. When dealing with the problems of the translation of *Sein und Zeit* or when discussing the political implications of the work, the turmoil of the "Farias affair" as well as the polemical debates between Martineau and Vezin (not to mention many previous other episodes or anecdotes), the heights of the ontological questioning may seem to have been forgotten and Heidegger's appeal to meditative thinking and to *Gelassenheit* completely set aside.

Being fully aware of all these "dangers" (in Heidegger's sense), I chose to face them squarely instead of ignoring them, to accept them, to very clearly establish their status, and to shed light on their relevance and their limits. There is thus an assumption in my work. I can formulate it in this way: if *Historie* and *Geschichte* cannot be kept in watertight compartments, if any critical stand implies that one runs the risk of being mistaken or even of being led astray, one need not fear being unfair to Heidegger's own thought, provided one does not forget its requirements. In other words, either one refrains from all

external questioning to be as faithful and authentic as possible, or one is willing to be more daring and to dive into the troubled waters of polemical debates and journalistic discussions. I chose the latter, not to cultivate "superficiality" and not to indulge anti-Heideggerianism, but for a more essential and philosophical reason. Heidegger himself confessed: "When you will have seen my limits, you will have understood me. I cannot see them."¹⁴ How to understand him by a mere repetition of his "doctrine"? Is not the task of thought to always go on questioning? My choice has been to accept an external, critical stand, seemingly unfaithful to Heidegger's own stubborn way of thinking, *provided* (I stress this) that the history of the so-called external debates does not allow the essential Heideggerian questions to be forgotten in the process. In fact, it is not an easy choice and it cannot be reduced to a mere surrender to historicism. My challenge has rather been to open up the field of critical thought by both listening to Heideggerian requirements in their rigor and collecting the most creative objections, oppositions, and criticisms, so as to enrich our hermeneutical work. It is a philosophical choice, a decision to go through the greatest difficulties, to sail through the most appalling storms, a little like Odysseus among the sirens, in order to decide what had to be dropped, what had to be kept, and what had to be reformulated or rethought. At the end of my book, I did not take a negative position, since I selected five fields in which the fruitfulness of Heidegger's thought could be tested and illustrated—and not only in France: the renewal of phenomenology, the reconstruction of ethics, the questioning of hermeneutics, the theological debate, and the rethinking of the history of metaphysics.

This choice is up to the reader. Let us wish, let us hope that there are still scholars and philosophers who are mature enough to differentiate between that which is important and that which turns out to be just anecdotal. For instance, during or just after the last world war, the French Communist oppositions to Heidegger, which were perhaps justified on a political level, do not offer a philosophical interest that can be said to be still relevant to us, whereas the political debate which was opened and carried out by Éric Weil, Jean-Pierre Faye, Jacques Derrida (in *Of Spirit*), and more recently by Jacques Taminiaux allows us to question the unilaterality and indeterminacy of the theory of *Entschlossenheit* at the end of *Sein und Zeit*, to discuss the status of *Geist* in the Discourse of the Rectorate, to try to articulate *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*, and to reformulate the political question in connection with the question of the essence of technology. It goes without saying that the political question is not the only one upon which a philosophical history of Heidegger's reception could produce positive insights, in spite of all the noise and turmoil that have focused public attention on this issue.

Having chosen a critical viewpoint, I cannot claim to be absolutely right. The risks I have taken and the wagers I have made are not negligible. But Heidegger himself was aware of such risks. "He who thinks greatly must err greatly."¹⁵ What is the best path, what is the best way for us to think in order to meet the challenges of our epoch of distress? I do not claim that the saga that I have told and the philosophical conclusions which have been drawn in *Heidegger en France* are the best ones, nor are they the exclusive ways of addressing such a rich and complex topic. My only claim is that I have tried to perform this difficult work in both a critical and a positive manner by indicating the tasks of a future thought which would remain in dialogue with Heidegger's suggestions. I respect other possible choices, either risking new explorations which would drop Heidegger altogether, and prefer more daring companions such as Nietzsche or Deleuze, or on the contrary just keep Heidegger's thought faithfully in mind in order to meditate on it. Avoiding any "Last Judgment," I only claim that there is a hermeneutical legitimacy and fruitfulness in patiently checking how the main orientations of Heidegger's thought have been more or less creatively understood, questioned, and sometimes positively reformulated in the French-speaking world.

Taking now into account the uncertainties of the present situation in France, as we and as all other nations are coming to terms with a globalization that is not only economic but involves also the whole network of information, ways of living, and modes of thinking, I wish to avoid risking a prophecy. I think it only reasonable to raise the problem of the reading and translation of the *Gesamtausgabe*: it is an unavoidable resource for all the scholars in France as well as in the States or elsewhere who remain interested in Heidegger. There is no longer any "French exception" in relation to the considerable task that has to be performed. Jacques Derrida himself confessed that he felt a form of bad conscience when he saw how slow he was in reading Heidegger's complete works in German.¹⁶ More generally speaking, it is undeniable that the patient reading of Heidegger's lectures and seminars is a scholarly work that now turns out to be less conducive to brilliant and original insights than the first and fresh discoveries of the past. An example of this new kind of careful reception is given by the excellent commentary on *Sein und Zeit* written by Jean Greisch entitled *Ontologie et temporalité*.¹⁷ It is a study that seems rather akin to the great commentary by Theodore Kisiel. In terms of a literal understanding and faithful interpretation of Heidegger, these high-standard books are certainly better and more reliable references than most of the brilliant French "products" of the glorious postwar years, but they do not play the same role and certainly will not have a comparable influence in triggering creativity.

Does it mean that I am too indulgent toward provocative thought, instead of privileging care and seriousness? This kind of criticism has been coming from different sides (for instance, by Tom Rockmore as well as by Raymond

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Klibanski and other distinguished scholars) against French fashionable thoughts and intellectual coquetties that have constituted, actually and for a long time, parts of the “French exception.” In fact, as a historian and observer of all that history, I have tried to be as impartial as possible. I attempted to acknowledge the qualities and flaws, the positive and negative sides of each kind of interpretation. For instance, I did not deny the one-sidedness of Sartre’s reading of *Sein und Zeit*, but I did not ignore the original personal suggestions or the magnificent insights of *Being and Nothingness*.

I would rather like to claim that times have changed and that the historical tasks we now have to face are quite different, more dedicated to the “letter” of the texts, and less exciting than those of our forerunners. In his interview in the second volume of *Heidegger en France*, Kostas Axelos went so far as to suggest that the publication of the *Gesamtausgabe* was in its very principle a mistake and that the monumental edition was becoming a “hunting field for dissertations.”¹⁸ Walter Biemel conceded nearly as much and hinted that the old Heidegger was reluctant, although too weak to prevent the project from being launched by his family and his publisher Klostermann.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the *Gesamtausgabe* is a growing reality and cannot be ignored by serious Heidegger scholars. It seems that in France the translation, under the direction of François Fédier, will follow a very slow process.

One may consequently guess that, in France as well as in other countries, the time of passion pro or contra Heidegger is over. Let us readily admit that it undoubtedly means the end of a certain “French exception.” Let us hopefully remain confident that it does not imply the end of thoughtful and fruitful dialogues with Heidegger, either in France or here in your country, which Hegel named “the land of the future” and which could become the home of a creative reception of Heidegger’s thought. This would be a way of responding to Heidegger’s own reluctance towards the future of an authentic thought in America, which he expressed when he confessed in one of the seminars held in Provence: “As to the interest of America for the ‘question of Being,’ the reality of that country is veiled from the view of those interested: the collusion between industry and the military (the economic development and the armament that it requires).”²⁰ Let us nevertheless dream of a future collusion between the *Seinsfrage* and a still unapproachable America!

Notes

1. See Georges Gurvitch, *Les Tendances actuelles de la philosophie allemande* (Paris: Vrin, 1930), and my book, *Heidegger en France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), pp. 25–30. The

English version is under contract as *Heidegger in France*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (forthcoming, Indiana University Press).

2. Let us mention Georges Politzer, Paul Nizan, Henri Lefebvre: see *Heidegger en France*, pp. 51–52.

3. *Bifur*, June 1931, p. 3.

4. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939–40*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 182–187.

5. Martin Heidegger, “*Qu’est-ce que la métaphysique?*” trans. Corbin-Petithenry, with an introduction by Alexandre Koyré, *Bifur*, June 1931, pp. 1–27 (reproduced by Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 1976). English translation Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

6. See *Heidegger en France*, pp. 199–205.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Fichus* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), pp. 46–47.

8. See *Heidegger en France*, Vol. II. *Entretiens*, p. 103.

9. See Derrida’s interview in *Heidegger en France*, Vol. II, p. 115.

10. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud*, trans. Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

11. *The Post Card*, p. 70.

12. Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 222–232. See *Heidegger en France*, Vol. I, pp. 239–240.

13. *Heidegger en France*, pp. 464–477.

14. See Jean Beaufret, *Dialogue with Heidegger: Greek Philosophy*, trans. Mark Sinclair (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. xxv.

15. “*Wer gross denkt, muss gross irren.*” Martin Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), p. 17.

16. See *Heidegger en France*, Vol. II, p. 108.

17. Jean Greisch, *Ontologie et temporalité. Esquisse d’une interprétation intégrale de Sein und Zeit* (Paris: PUF, 1994).

18. “*Eine Jagd für Dissertationen*” (see Kostas Axelos’s interview, in *Heidegger en France*, Vol. II, p. 17).

19. See Walter Biemel’s interview in *Heidegger en France*, Vol. II, p. 44.

20. Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 56.

LEVINAS'S HEIDEGGERIAN FANTASM

Reginald Lilly

As is well known, Emmanuel Levinas starkly opposes ethics as first philosophy and ontology because for him the latter lacked the alterity needed for ethics.¹ Western thought from Parmenides to Heidegger is, accordingly for Levinas, entirely governed by a principled reduction of being to sameness—being as sameness. Because he sees being informed by a principle of identity and sameness, as hegemonic and henological and therefore irremediably atheistic and ‘anethical,’ Levinas posits the need to pass beyond being—beyond ontology—in order to make ethics possible.² As he says, his goal is “a pluralism that does merge into unity . . . and, if this can be dared, [to] break with Parmenides.”³ His strategy is to develop a notion of being—he eventually calls it the *il y a* (there is)—that not only comprehends the Western tradition of the philosophy of being but prepares it for its (own) displacement. Levinas develops his notion of being in the 1930s and 1940s especially through his reading of Heidegger who, for Levinas, is the consummation of the tradition of henological philosophy.

Surprisingly little critical attention has been paid to the genesis in Levinas’s reading of Heidegger:⁴ more often than not, commentators simply repeat Levinas’s version of ontology and the reading of Heidegger through which he developed it without thereby asking the critical questions: is Levinas’s representation of Heidegger accurate? Is his conception of being truly expressive of the conceptions of being from Parmenides to Heidegger, and beyond? Is being as Levinas portrays it? I would like to suggest that Levinas renders Heidegger fantasmic: not only is the image of Heidegger and the ontology we are offered in his name a “complex idea to which there is no objective referent” (he does not just misread Heidegger, but vigorously suppresses basic elements of Heidegger’s thought whose recognition would have challenged his misreading) but, to speak psychoanalytically, this fantasized image of the real state of being has the salutary and compensatory effect of transforming the Real into something tolerable for Levinas.⁵ This is to say that a condition for the possibility of

Levinas's thought is a fantasm that affords him a certain escape: a fantasm that simplifies Heidegger's thought (and being) not so as to newly engage being, but so as to set being and the question of being out of play—to dismiss both being and Heidegger in favor of an ethics beyond being. The fantasmatic character of being becomes all the more impressive when one considers that, already in the 1920s and then desperately so in the 1930s and 1940s, Heidegger's thinking of being is one from which the gods have flown, a flight that has always already undermined any possible completeness of being, and opened an abyss whose very gaping is the urgency of the question of being as a question such as it is addressed in the 1950s and 1960s in texts such as *The Principle of Reason and Identity and Difference*.

Fantasms are always strategic; the strategy Levinas's Heideggerian fantasm pursues is one of consolidation, homogenization, and displacement with regard to being, and it does so to prepare the philosophical *topos* for an ethics that is defined precisely by its being beyond being. Levinas does not so much criticize a received tradition of reflection on being as he does construct one to which it is doubtful any historical philosopher has subscribed, Heidegger especially.⁶ Specifically, Levinas's teleologic strategy of consolidation and homogenization represents Heidegger as the consummation of the philosophical tradition's supposed tendency toward solipsism.⁷ And given this caricature of henological and solipsistic being, Levinas then seeks to effect its displacement in the 1940s with his own conception of being (the *il y a*), a displacement that opens up that traumatic gap, that wound in being that produces the site of the Other, a 'being' defined by its alterity with regard to being.

It is my present intention to trace out this movement of consolidation, homogenization and displacement and to indicate how this prepares for Levinas's own philosophy of being. In doing so, I hope to show that the philosophical topology deployed by his tripartite strategy involves ontological commitments that are profound and ironically cannot be examined within the framework of Levinas's thought precisely because his basic posture is to set out of play the question of being. Appreciating this will shed light on why there remain for Levinas very real problems in his conception of the Other with regard to being and beings and that bear especially on the nature of the political and ethical.

Heidegger

Levinas was at least fifteen years into his philosophical career before the *il y a* (there is) occurred to him as the technical term it was destined to become in

Time and the Other and *Existence and Existents* and, with nuances, was to remain until the end. Levinas's conception of the *il y a* itself was the result of a long *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger; it seemed close enough to Heidegger's *es gibt* to prompt Levinas in 1977 to make the effort to distance his term from Heidegger's,⁸ and indeed the proximity is striking: inasmuch as the *es gibt* (there is) or *Ereignis* (event of appropriation), as Heidegger will come to say, is his word for being as such, for the event of being, and inasmuch as *il y a* is Levinas's term for "being in general" (EE, 94), the *es gibt* and the *il y a* do indeed seem to be very closely related, to say nothing of their being linguistic equivalents. Moreover, Levinas seems to be asking Heidegger's question when he asks, in the opening pages of *De l'existence à l'existant*, "What is the event of Being, Being in general, detached from beings which dominate it?"⁹ Yet Levinas's statement thirty years later (in 1977) is no bit of revisionism, for what these two terms say—the *il y a* and the *es gibt* or *Ereignis*—are quite different, so different that it is an error to speak of the former as prefiguring the latter, even if it does pre-date it.¹⁰ Taking the measure of this distance will help us understand what being is for Levinas and to gauge the fantasmatic modification effected by Levinas.¹¹



For Levinas in the 1930s, everything in Heidegger comes down to *Seinsverständnis*—the understanding of being: "The understanding of being is the fundamental fact and characteristic of human existence."¹² As Heidegger describes it, "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather, it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it."¹³ As close as these may seem, there are significant differences between them. For Heidegger, Dasein, as that being for whom being is an issue by virtue of its always having an understanding of being, offers a point of departure for the raising of the question of being which has been forgotten and in important ways needs to be recollected and clarified. Therefore Dasein's ontico-ontological privilege has a methodological import for the goal of explicating the idea of being in general: "If we are to arrive at the basic concept of 'Being' and to outline the ontological conceptions which it requires and the variations which it necessarily undergoes, we need a clue which is concrete."¹⁴ If an understanding of Dasein's being is, then, a necessary condition for ontology (especially for one demonstrably secured by a methodology), in Heidegger's view it is not a sufficient one. For this reason Heidegger distinguished between fundamental ontology (the preparatory analytic of Dasein that secures the properly formulated question for ontology) from ontology, namely, the science of being *per se*.¹⁵

To mistake either the projection or execution of *Being and Time* with the accomplishment of this project is to fail to see, among other things, that in fact the project foundered, and of necessity. If *Being and Time* sought to secure access to the genuine experience of being and to put one in a position to begin the analysis of being as such, then this project's foundering points to an experience of being incommensurable with the initially projected hermeneutic ontology, which prompted Heidegger's so-called turning (*Kehre*).¹⁶ In short, *Being and Time* must be read as a preparation for an ontology that, for its part, never was achieved (or achievable), and this became evident to Heidegger shortly after publication of *Being and Time*. It must strike even the casual reader that the reading of Heidegger's project as failed differs markedly from the triumphal characterizations of Heidegger's thought by Levinas.

No doubt Levinas sees deeply into Heidegger's project and the central role of *Seinsverständnis* therein, but it is exactly the difference between fundamental ontology and ontology (to say nothing of metontology), as well as the seemingly preparatory character of the former that Levinas denies: "Consequently, the study of the understanding of being is *ipso facto* a study of the mode of man's being. It is not only a preparation for ontology, but is already an ontology."¹⁷ Now, "but is already an ontology" ("*mais déjà une ontologie*") is not an acknowledgement of the fundamentally preparatory status of *Being and Time*, for he goes on to aver that "*Being and Time*, which develops this necessary correlation between being and the understanding of being, is thus *initially* uninterested in anthropology."¹⁸ I emphasize *initially* because although this word hints that Levinas may sense that something in *Being and Time* resists the anthropologization of being and therefore that *Being and Time* cannot itself be read as the actualization of the goal of producing an ontology grounded in Dasein, it is a thought he quickly dismisses, for after briefly indicating that Heidegger is really concerned with the conditions of thought, of truth, and that "human existence appears only in this perspective," he says, "But *Being and Time* is equally an anthropology."¹⁹ As did Husserl, Levinas sees fundamental ontology as a subdiscipline of anthropology.

What does it mean to fail to see the propaedeutic status of *Being and Time*? What does it mean to claim it is a replete ontology? Why is it anthropology? If *Being and Time* were not a propaedeutic to, but a fulfillment of, ontology, then one would have good grounds to see in it an anthropology, for the analytic of Dasein would not be the *terminus a quo* but the *terminus ad quem*. And this is what Levinas sees. On Levinas's view, Dasein is simply that being in whom and in whom alone being happens and happens as and only as an understanding, that is, as determined by Dasein's modalities of being, much as for Kant objects conform to categorially functioning consciousness. Being, which so occurs as

Seinsverständnis, is an anthropological matter because *Seinsverständnis* is a “total accomplishment” on the part of the human being. Being is its being understood, or as he also often says, in Heidegger essence (i.e., being) is its existence (i.e., its being understood). The act of existing itself, *Seinsverständnis*, is inseparable from the acts constituting that understanding, and these acts, for their part, are only modalities or moments of Dasein (existence) *in toto*.

This totalizing nature of the *Seinsverständnis*—indeed the whole project tied up with it—is why, for Levinas, Heidegger’s project is not (and could not be) “theoretical” (DEHH, 94), for if *Seinsverständnis* were theoretical it would be at best a provisional, speculative accomplishment by a subject over against which objects would offer themselves to be understood and from which the subject might detach itself,²⁰ and it is just such a speculative structure that Levinas with some justification sees as being undercut by *Seinsverständnis* (as a methodological text it is in fact equally theoretical and practical). But for Levinas this spells a loss, for in Levinas’s view the theoretical relation still preserves some sense of the exteriority of the object vis-à-vis the theorizing subject, whereas the practical relation that he sees characterizing Heidegger’s *Seinsverständnis* does not. The practical relation—that relation in which all that counts is what the subject projects and does and makes (a relation that grows spontaneously from out of the subject alone)—is characterized by a self-closure that Levinas’s theoretical relation still avoids by virtue of its other-, object-directedness. It is not difficult to see, here, the supposition of a dualist ontology that opposes subject and object, the practical and the theoretical. The denial that *Being and Time* is fundamentally a propaedeutic to a science of being is a denial of its theoretical (in Levinas’s terminology) character and allows him to reduce it to a purely practical, anthropological treatise. For Levinas *Seinsverständnis* is a practice and not a theory, as it were, and *Being and Time* is a treatise that demonstrates the subordination of theory to practice; it is a theory that closes the door behind it, so to speak, on all originary theorizing. And so, seeing the collapse of being into Dasein’s existence, he concludes that “We are the question of being, we are in the world and we understand. . . . Ontology is our very existence.”²¹ Of course, Heidegger says that theory is the highest praxis, but his intention is not to subordinate theory to practice; rather, it is to call into question the dichotomy of theory and practice.²²

Levinas’s formulation of the project of *Being and Time* as an accomplished ontology, and of *Seinsverständnis* as a ego-reductive practice, represents an important moment in Levinas’s consolidation of Heidegger’s thought with the modern metaphysics of subjectivity, for what it obliterates is any sign of the critical impulses in Heidegger’s thinking of being and its history; Levinas reads Heidegger’s criticisms of metaphysics as an *Aufhebung* of them. Consolidation here is the effacement of difference.²³ Since it will bear directly on Levinas’s

notion of being, it is important to stress here the ontological framework of Levinas's reading of Heidegger: Levinas always thinks of being within the framework of objects given to subjects or objects posited by subjects, regardless of whether it is in a theoretical or practical relation. Moreover, one must especially note that his interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy as the logical conclusion of ontology and as having reached this point through a radicalization of the practical relation will provide him with the basis for his understanding of being as act—a thoroughgoing energeticism.

The effect of Levinas's consolidation is to make of Heidegger a radical idealist in which the object (being) is not so much given to the subject—for this would, as in Kant, indicate an otherness to being even if only noumenal—but is produced by Dasein.²⁴ As such, otherness is not a structure of being vis-à-vis Dasein, and therefore there is in Levinas's Heidegger no meaningful sense of human plurality or, *a fortiori*, ethics or politics.²⁵

It should not be surprising, then, that for Levinas, Heidegger's principle accomplishment under the guise of *Seinsverständnis* was the introduction of transitivity into being: "it is the introduction of transitivity into the notion of being that has helped to promote the notion of existence that one has used since Heidegger and, in France, since Sartre."²⁶ That Heidegger's is a philosophical anthropology follows from what Levinas sees as the reduction of being to the being or existence of Dasein, which is nothing but the act of *Seinsverständnis*: "In sum, the problem of being that Heidegger poses to us leads to man, for man is a *being* that understands being. But, on the other hand, this *Seinsverständnis* is itself being: it is not an attribute but the mode of existence of man."²⁷ Dasein is that being for whom being is its being-in-the-world, and therefore, on Levinas's reading, concern for being (*Sorge*) is nothing but Dasein's egocentric concern for itself and its own possibilities for being such that self-understanding comes to be the equivalent of *Seinsverständnis*: "In sum, to be, for Dasein is to understand being. To understand being is to exist in such that, 'in this existence what is at stake is this very existence.' 'What is at stake is this very existence'—is being-in-the-world or being-there."²⁸ In Heidegger, Levinas sees a tour de force of reductionism, and the pièce de résistance of this reduction is the reduction of being to time and, ultimately, time to Dasein's temporalization: "It is important to emphasize this reduction to time of all that one would tend to call 'supratemporal,' the reduction to existence of all that one would call 'relation.' It is there that we find the fundamental ontologism of Heidegger that it is important for us to bring into relief in this work." Being is *Seinsverständnis*; being is being understood by Dasein.²⁹ With this, whatever may have remained outside of Dasein's constituting activity, outside being always already understood by Dasein—God, eternity, other Daseins—has vanished.

Solipsism, Homogenization

We begin to see more clearly Levinas's strategy of reading Heidegger from within a Kantian or Husserlian framework, and from within this framework as a neo-Hegelian who has radicalized the idealist coincidence of thought and being, of subject and object. For both Husserl and Kant, to inquire into something means to ascertain its phenomenal status and ultimately the subjective acts—the syntheses—that produced the phenomenon. Objective analysis gives way to the analysis of the constituting subject, though the object is nevertheless posited as existing separately “in itself.” Seeing at once the proximity yet difference between a neo-Hegelian idealism and phenomenology on this point, Levinas says that “One is correct to see in the intentionality [of phenomenology] a protest against an idealism that would absorb things into consciousness. Intentions aim at an exterior object.”³⁰ However, Levinas sees Heidegger's rooting all understanding, indeed the very occurrence of being, in modes of Dasein's existence as failing precisely to make good on this protestation and as having totally absorbed the object into the existential manner of (Dasein's) being's happening, that is, as a function of Dasein's modalities of being, and this without even paying lip service to the distinction between subject and object as does, at the very least, Hegel's dialectic. As Levinas says, “To say that the act of thinking, for the subject, amounts to the act of existing—and the Husserlian conception is quite precise on this point—is to modify the very notion of being. Thinking is not only an essential attribute of being; to be is to think. From that moment on the transitive structure of thought characterizes the act of being.”³¹

Here Levinas performs a sort of graft whose effect is to convert the reduction of being to *Seinsverständnis* into a solipsism: Levinas reads Heidegger's notion of *Seinsverständnis* and the disclosure of beings in the world as if it were surgically substituted, in the subject, for the Kantian synthesis of the given with the concept, or for Husserl's transcendental ego. The effect of this substitution is to eliminate the intuitive, receptive moments found in Kant and Husserl while retaining the structure of subjectivity. In this substitution the framework within which such synthetic activity historically was conceived³²—the opposition of subject and world that Heidegger's anti-Cartesian notion of being-in-the-world indeed calls into question—remains in place: *Seinsverständnis* is lodged in the Cartesian subject standing over against the world. However, because *Seinsverständnis* is explicitly critical of Cartesian dualism in proposing the world as the originary openness, and because *Seinsverständnis* as the originary disclosure of “what is” is this originary openness, this *Seinsverständnis*-subject opposed to the world gets conceived as a subject for which there is no

“outside,” no freestanding objects, no “givenness”: the distinction of subject and object is made to collapse into a subject that is, contrary to the thrust of Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world and *Seinsverständnis*, conceived in accord with Cartesian dualism. Therefore, one sees how Levinas concludes that beings and all of being, having been assimilated to Dasein, fall to solipsism; one ends up with the oxymoronic conception of a subject that is essentially transitive, but for which there is nothing externally given upon which to act, hence Levinas’s stress on the autoreferentiality of Dasein as *Sorge*. Bluntly, the subject acts on nothing but itself, because that’s all there is. It is inevitable, then, that Levinas would conclude that Heidegger’s notion of transcendence puts the finishing touch on the solipsism of Dasein, a solipsism in which the other, the object, has always already been leapt over and encompassed *a priori* in, even produced by, Dasein’s *Seinsverständnis*:

The act of exiting the self so as to get to object—this relation of the subject to the object that modern philosophers know about—has its basis in a leap carried out beyond “beings,” understood in an ontic manner, towards ontological being, a leap that is carried out by the existence of Dasein and that is the very occurrence of this existence, not a phenomenon that is added to it. It is for this leap beyond beings toward being—and which is ontology itself, the understanding of being—that reserves the word “transcendence.”³³

For Levinas, transcendence and temporality are moments rooted in *Seinsverständnis* rather than *Seinsverständnis* in temporality; in fact, by conceiving of temporality as the motor of projection in Dasein’s appropriative grasp of being, “One could say that time is the thrust by which man is inscribed in being, by which he takes it over.”³⁴ Transcendence is, then, nothing but the transitivity of the act of understanding that constitutes beings in their being.

For Heidegger there is of course a profound conjunction between transcendence, temporality, and worldhood,³⁵ and a primary importance of his notion of the world is that it deprives Cartesian dualism of its claim to foundational status and makes moot the problem of Cartesian solipsism by showing that the world is that radical openness “prior” to the “regionalizing” of being, that is, prior to the world resolving itself into subjects and objects (SZ, §§19–21). Being-in-the-world—the ecstatic unity of *Zeitlichkeit*—is itself grounded in the open unity of *Temporalität*. Rather than seeing in this conjunction the world primarily as an opening whose finitude signals a radical absence (exteriority), and by conceiving the understanding of being as a practical matter and indeed as a transitivity (not in the middle voice) in which the subject directs itself to objects it has always already given itself (i.e., disclosed),

Levinas is led to conclude that “The World is nothing but this ‘in view of itself’ where Dasein is engaged in its existence in relation to which there can occur the encounter with the manipulable,”³⁶ and to emphasize the radical interiority of the world: “the interior world, the world of an epoch, the world of a Goethe or a Proust, is no longer a metaphor, but the origin of the phenomenon of the world.”³⁷ Being, beings, and Dasein have been fully homogenized within the solipsistic space of the subject.

Being, Light, Mastery

Having interpreted Dasein within the framework of the modern subject, and having found in *Seinsverständnis* and being-in-the-world a transitivity that does not contest the enclosure of modern subjectivity but is its alpha and omega, it is no surprise to find Levinas rejoining Heidegger with idealism. But if Levinas does not completely identify Heidegger with classical idealism, it is because in place of idealism's promise of Faustian self-mastery, he sees Heidegger as having realized this mastery. Specifically, for Levinas Dasein's thrownness is an element of realism that “traces a limit to intellection,”³⁸ a realism whereby Heidegger acknowledges “a reality in stark contrast to understanding”³⁹ but which, nevertheless, Dasein has always already had to master. As if thrownness is but the trace of an alterity that Dasein has always already had to assimilate, conquer, thrownness on Levinas's reading is therefore not truly other, but an otherness internal to Dasein's Cartesian subjectivity. This realism is not that of Kant's *Ding an sich*, for it is a limit really (and not just formally) arising solely from Dasein's own being, an origination that Levinas sees thrusting Dasein back upon itself in a self-involvement whose essence is care and whose task is self-mastery. On this reading, Dasein really can, in the most meaningful sense, take care and control of its life. “To exist is to be preoccupied with existence; to exist is to care for existence. In this caring human existence already outlines the horizon of being in general, of the verb being that is, all that is in question in this care: it outlines it precisely because it is not a concept, but is that which we have to take over; it is, if I dare say, a gerund.”⁴⁰ Indeed, as the concrete manifestation of *Seinsverständnis*, Levinas inserts care at the very core of the classical notion of the subject.

The entire formulation expressing care is therefore composed of three elements: being-beyond-oneself—having always already been in the world—being among things. Their unity is not that of a proposition that one could always set up arbitrarily, but that of the concrete phenomenon of care revealed by anxiety.

It is precisely here that one has an excellent example of the world of Heideggerian thinking. It is not a question of combining concepts through a synthetic thought, but of finding a mode of existence that comprehends them, which is to say that grasps as existing possibilities—of being that they reflect.⁴¹

As with the insertion of *Seinsverständnis* into a subject construed within a Cartesian framework, so here we find by inserting the notions of ‘care’ and ‘world’ into the framework of Cartesian subjectivity, even reducing these to subjectivity—which is always a subject standing over against being—Levinas ends up similarly conceiving of the world as an all-encompassing subjective enclosure rather than an opening, an enclosure from which the outside has been closed out and which makes of care a sort of auto-affection. World for Levinas is the interiority of Dasein’s being-in-the-world.

For Levinas what distinguishes Heidegger from the tradition of idealism and phenomenology is that in making being itself the principle stake in the determination of the subject (and Levinas always thinks Dasein as a subject), Heidegger assimilates all being to the identity and interiority of the subject, whereas idealism still maintains the reality of that which is transcendent to phenomenality, be it noumenally or noetically transcendent, even if this places it beyond the grasp of human reason.

Heidegger’s philosophy at one and the same time takes up again with the grand tradition of antiquity in posing the problem of being in general and responds to the preoccupation of modern thought with returning to people the mastery of their destiny. But in western idealism the sovereignty of the I has never been separable from the prestige of the Transcendent, be this God or simply the Eternal, but it is always an existent being.⁴²

A bit further on he says, “This relation with being is the truly original interiority. Heidegger’s philosophy is thus an attempt to establish the person—as the site where *Seinsverständnis* happens—by abandoning any support in the Eternal.”⁴³ Levinas sees in Heidegger’s Dasein the profoundest of modern solitudes for it is one in which there seems to be no possibility of anything beyond Dasein’s self-illuminated, hermetically autoreferential world: no hope of anything other than what is as Dasein understands it.

Within such a windowless energetic monad awash in a light of its own making, care represents that practical folding-back upon itself of Dasein that follows in the train of the founding and ever-ongoing, ever-successful activity of *Seinsverständnis*, which is nothing but existence itself. Hence, for Levinas, with Heidegger we enter into an absolute closure; we are “always already under-

standingly in circuit with the real. And nothing can escape from it.”⁴⁴ His “fundamental intuition [is] of the closed circuit of understanding.”⁴⁵ *Seinsverständnis* so conceived produces a framework of being upon which proceed all encounters with beings and upon which all knowledge of all things is based. If Kant counseled that we will find nothing in nature but what we have put there, and then, on the basis of a dualist ontology, set as his task the critical delimitation of our cognition with regard to what we have put there and what is there “in itself,” Levinas sees in Heidegger a subscription to the first proposition and a denegation of the second: there is no limit of Dasein’s understanding with regard to what is—being. Where Heidegger sees a difference between being, Dasein, and beings, Levinas sees these reduced to the uniformity and self-sameness of Dasein’s understanding

One senses the force of Levinas’s consolidation and homogenization of Heidegger as a well-rounded solipsist perhaps nowhere more clearly than when he speaks of light, one of the most powerful and telling images in Levinas’s vocabulary and one that is, especially after the “moment of vision” of *Being and Time*, entirely absent in Heidegger.⁴⁶ He says:

The originality of the Heideggerian conception of existence in relation to the traditional idea of internal consciousness consists in that this self-knowledge, this internal illumination—this understanding—not only no longer admits of the subject-object structure, but is not at all theoretical. This is not an awareness, a noticing pure and simple of what one *is*, a noticing capable of measuring our power over ourselves; this *understanding is the very dynamism of this existence, it is this very power over the self*.⁴⁷ (my emphasis)

Being is fully, if latently, illuminated “from within”; that Dasein has always already understood being and lives internally, awash in the light of its understanding, is what enables Dasein *qua Seinsverständnis* to have power over itself and over its destiny: the lethic dimension of being, already important in *Being and Time* and increasingly so during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, simply does not exist in Levinas’s photologic reading of Heidegger, nor is there any recognition of one of the most important themes of Heidegger’s career: the critique of the metaphysics of presence. As if time, history, and destiny were the last vestiges of genuine philosophical (and practical) alterity to disappear—beginning with *Time and the Other* Levinas will use time and history to break open the enclosure of being-in-the-world—Levinas remarks that in the notion of Dasein, that is, *Seinsverständnis* as the basis of temporality and transcendence, “the internal illumination of which the philosophers of consciousness know becomes inseparable from the fate and the history of concrete man; both are

but one. It is concrete man that appears at the center of philosophy: in relation to him, the notion of consciousness is nothing but an abstraction separating consciousness—illumination as illumination—from history, from existence.”⁴⁸ Enclosed within its world, whose sole being and light is that which Dasein’s own *Seinsverständnis* effects, concerned with only itself, one can hardly be surprised that Levinas sees in Heidegger’s thought of Dasein not a being who, in *Angst*, confronts the irrecoverable baselessness of being-in-the-world nor the one epochalized in *Seinsgeschichte*, but one who inexorably mounts the ladder whose two uprights are mastery and (self-) understanding: “To pass from the implicit understanding of being to the explicit understanding is to set oneself to the task of mastery and domination at the heart of a naïveté familiarity with existence that will, perhaps, ruin the very security of this familiarity.”⁴⁹ For Levinas, Dasein’s *Seinsverständnis* makes it “virile,” “powerful,” “possible”; thrownness, fallenness, the lethic heart of truth all have fallen from Levinas’s view of Heidegger.

There is an extremely tight reasoning in Levinas’s interpretation of Heidegger. Transcendence, being, the world—all are traced back to the totalizing transitivity of *Seinsverständnis*, which itself finds its ultimate and seemingly unshakable ground in the fact that it is, its “concrete existence.” This “fact of being” is Dasein’s thereness, its “Da”; the “Da-ness” of Dasein is its brute and simple presence, which Levinas calls “existence,” and which one might well call, within the vocabulary of modern philosophy, the empirical instantiation, or the elemental givenness, of Dasein. This givenness of Dasein—the Da of Dasein—will prove to be a pivot point in Levinas’s thought of being; the givenness of human being will be the starting point for its displacement in favor of the Other.

Being Ontologically

Thus far we have seen that the thrust of Levinas’s interpretation of Heidegger’s Dasein is to consolidate the representation of him as a monumental solipsist, a figure of mastery whose comprehension of being is determinative of being, and in serving Levinas as the culmination of Western philosophy, Heidegger is made to fit seamlessly into the Western henological tradition that begins with Parmenides. Given this movement of consolidation and homogenization, when Levinas turns to consider being *per se*, he seeks to effect the final displacement of Heidegger’s conception of Dasein and, along with it, of being. More specifically, he seeks to displace Heidegger’s being (being for Heidegger is most fundamental because most fundamentally determinative of what is) and to replace

it with a conception of being that, having “escaped” the clutches of Dasein’s transitivity, reveals itself to be “neutral,” a neutrality that can only be understood within the framework of Cartesian subjectivity we have encountered above. This neutrality of being will, then, prepare for the final displacement of Heidegger’s thought of being which, in *From Existence to Existents*, he treats under the heading of the *il y a* and the “hypostasis.” The *il y a* is the name Levinas gives to being, whose destiny is not only to effect a certain displacement of subjectivity, but to be displaced, first by the dwelling subject and, ultimately, by the Other to be displaced.

If in *En Découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* Levinas addresses the relation of Dasein and being and the homogeneity of beings within Heidegger’s circuit of self-enclosed intellection, he does not discuss in much detail the being of beings other than Dasein. However, he does explicitly remark on this distinction—between *Sein* and *Seiende* (which he later says he prefers to translate as *exister* and *existant* rather than the more usual *être* and *étant*⁵⁰)—and it is of considerable significance for understanding how Levinas displaces Heidegger’s thought of being and introduces his own notion of being that gives pride of place to the “beyond being”—ethics as first philosophy:

Heidegger initially distinguishes between that which is, “beings” (*das Seiende*) and “the being of beings” (*das Sein des Seienden*). That which is, beings—gathers all objects, all people into a certain sense, God himself. The being of beings—this is the fact that all these objects and all these people are.⁵¹

The being of beings is the fact that they are, that is, that they exist or are real rather than being simply nothing, that is, not being at all. One might call the reality of a being its taking place in the world, its self-same presence throughout all its modalities, past, present, future. Beingness here is reminiscent of Aristotle’s *energeia* and as such is the actuality or activity of beings regardless of modality. This is the context for Levinas’s construal of the activity of being in *Being and Time*, for it is precisely from the transitivity of Dasein that Levinas will seek to disengage being, and to do so in such a way that being and the being of beings doesn’t become a question, much less as the most pressing question as it did for Heidegger, but rather so that being shows itself as a sort of impoverishment.

Of Dasein, Levinas says we will have misunderstood Heidegger completely if we sharply distinguish between “essence” and “existence,” for these are unified (or the former is reduced to the latter) in the “fundamental fact” of *Seinsverständnis*. This, of course, is part and parcel of the reduction we have already seen. As for nonhuman beings, Levinas says Heidegger reserves the

word presence-at-hand—"presence pure and simple" (*présence pure et simple*) (DEHH, 58)—for the being of beings and points out that he insists upon distinguishing between them (*das Seiende*) and human being (Dasein). What must be underscored is that for Levinas the novelty in Heidegger is that there is no longer anything above or beyond human being that would be the source and origin for the revelation of the being of beings; rather, Dasein becomes the sole source of the revelation (truth) of the being of beings, such that "my *Da* is the very occurrence of the revelation of being, that my humanity is the truth."⁵² Hence, Dasein is that being whose energetic being determines the being (truth) of beings other than Dasein—everything comes down to existence, the act of *Seinsverständnis*, as we have seen. Levinas must negotiate a subtle strategy: he must show that, in fact, Dasein's transitivity does not completely determine the being of beings, that being really is, in itself, something beyond the solipsistic positings of Dasein. If Dasein is the consummate solipsist whose auto-affective transitivity determines being, then it will be impossible to escape the gravitational pull of Dasein and break through to a "beyond being." His challenge is both to maintain the absolute transitivity of Dasein and yet to introduce something that eludes that imperious grip without it possibly constituting an object of resistance (viz., noumenal, transcendent beings). Radical passivity in the heart of being is this "something." Presence-at-hand is how Levinas first conceives of this passivity, and therefore his interpretation of the analysis of equipment in *Being and Time* is crucial to his strategy of displacement.

Now, in *Being and Time* Heidegger shows that for the most part Dasein relates to (discloses) things as *zuhanden*, as ready-to-hand or manipulable, as tools: *Zuhandenheit* is their mode of being in being disclosed. For Levinas, this means that Dasein is totally absorbed in its transitive *Seinsverständnis*, as are all beings in the world; in this way they always are only "with a view to" the possibility of Dasein's own being. Because manipulability is not consequent to any representation and therefore is not a matter of "a simple presence (*Vorhandenheit*) [*une simple présence (Vorhandenheit)*], manipulability is a understanding, a vision *sui generis*, an illuminated power."⁵³ For Levinas, the tool in being used does not, in contradistinction to Heidegger, appear for what it is; rather it disappears into the ensemble of relations making up the world; it recedes into its "being in itself." But if manipulability is the primordial manner in which beings are for Dasein, it is neither the only manner, nor even the most basic manifestation of the being of beings in Levinas's view. Beings are something more or other than *zuhanden* [ready-to-hand]:

We have emphasized that tools in some manner are lost in the work that they serve—thus it is that the tool exists "in itself." However, when the tool is dam-

aged, it stands out in contrast to a system in relation to which it is, and it loses, so to speak, its character of utility and becomes, to a certain extent, a simple presence. In this momentary loss of manipulability the "reference to this the life in virtue of which the tool is" is revealed, emerges, comes to light.⁵⁴

When the hammer breaks, it does not simply disappear; rather, it is "momentarily" wrenched out of its absorption in the equipmental totality of Dasein's practical comportment and presents itself in its pure and simple being-present, an event that underscores all the more, as Levinas says, its difference from the system of practical references that has been "momentarily" disturbed. For Levinas this momentary breach of Dasein's transitivity reveals the true being of beings and leads him to ascribe to *Vorhandenheit* an originary status.

While following Heidegger's analysis of tools quite closely in most respects, Levinas's departure from Heidegger is especially significant in ascribing passive *Vorhandenheit* a primordial status. For Heidegger, *Vorhandenheit* is a derivative or privative mode of being with regard to *Zuhandenheit*. By giving *Vorhandenheit* this primordial status, Levinas is filling in a gap in *Being and Time*; while Heidegger is clear in stating that *Vorhandenheit* is a derivative mode of the being of beings, he does not take up the question of the being of nonequipmental beings in *Being and Time*; the project of *Being and Time* does not require it. However, when Heidegger abandons the project of fundamental ontology, he does turn to it with increasing urgency in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. No doubt within the context of *Being and Time*, *Zuhandenheit* is the simplest, most basic modality of a thing's presenting itself as being what it is, namely, as other than Dasein even while presenting itself to and for Dasein; it is the mode of a thing's being as part of the practical referential totality characteristic of Dasein's being-in-the-world, and yet as what cannot be reduced to that referential totality—precisely what the hammer as broken makes evident. It is this nascent difference that Levinas exploits in elevating *Vorhandenheit* to a primary status over *Zuhandenheit*. For Levinas *Vorhandenheit* represents the simple givenness of things, whereas in *Zuhandenheit* he sees their "having been taken," so to speak. As *vorhanden*, the broken tool reveals what Levinas calls its mere "fact" of being, a factuality that bespeaks not so much a loss of significance (referentiality) as it does its elemental, passive being. In breaking and presenting itself as *vorhanden*—reposing in its factual presence—the tool wrenches itself momentarily from the solipsistic enclosure of Dasein and the determination as *zuhanden* that it had there, and it reveals itself for what it is. For Levinas, being is *vorhanden*. To be is to be given—to a subject.

If we recall an earlier passage, "The being of beings—is the fact that all these objects and all these people are," then one might even say that, inasmuch

as the *Zuhandenheit* of tools indicates their having been “lost” in the referential totality of Dasein’s world where they exist only latently, “in itself,” the breaking of the tool and its “recovery” of its *Vorhandenheit*, its “simple, pure présence,” means that it has recovered its being a being from out of its oblivion as a tool. The simple fact of being, the being of beings other than Dasein, is given in and as *Vorhandenheit*, and *Vorhandenheit* itself is (the form of) the givenness of the given, or even the giving of the non-practical givenness of the given to a subject: in the “simple, pure presence” of *Vorhandenheit* Levinas sees the being of a being that falls neither within the luminous interiority of *Zuhandenheit* nor that falls into the pure nothingness outside the closed circle of Dasein’s being-disclosing. Neither inside nor outside, reduced to its most elemental, neutral, passive being, *das Vorhandene* has “recovered” its being from the oblivion inflicted upon it by Dasein’s usury and is, for this reason, an originary experience of being for Levinas. There is, then, a fundamental neutrality of beings vis-a-vis that being that would “have them in hand”: Dasein.

Levinas sees this stripping away down to the elemental facticity of being—to the being of a being—also occurring (and profoundly so) with Dasein in Angst: “What, then, is this extraordinary understanding that seizes Dasein as a fact par excellence and that at the same time brings about this effectiveness? This understanding is anxiety.”⁵⁵ However, if in Angst Dasein is stripped down to its elemental and factual being, to the simple fact that it is, to its ‘Da,’ all the beings that Dasein has disclosed in its practical, equipmental comportment concomitantly are stripped of their significance, and in Angst they recede into their indifferent null (non)being, as if, not having had the chance to break with Dasein’s solipsism and to present themselves as *vorhanden*, they had never really been at all. It is as if, sustained in their being by an unmoved mover-like Dasein, from whom they drew all their meaning and being, in Angst the world and Dasein show themselves simply as there, but practically inert, utterly passive and out of reach, so to speak. Or perhaps one should say in Angst what shows itself is the Da of Dasein, a being-in-the-world evacuated of every being-with, of every other being and reduced to its own essential passivity. And inasmuch as on this account beings derive their being from the “with a view to” of Dasein’s practical comportment, the disturbing anxiety that befalls Dasein is even more catastrophic for beings than is being broken, for in being eviscerated of all the meaning (hence all the being) Dasein had revealed them to have, in Angst, they vanish. Beings are swallowed up in the abyss opened up by Dasein’s maelstrom, or so it seems. It will be this seeming evacuation of being in Angst that will provide Levinas his opening moment in *Time and the Other*, where, saying “It is a matter of affirming that being is not an empty notion,”⁵⁶ he means to save being, that is, beings, from their nihilistic dependence on solipsistic Dasein and,

further, to show that the passivity and neutrality of being vis-à-vis Dasein portends something beyond being. His strategy for this salvation will involve distinguishing the subject's being from all other beings in a manner that places the latter "beyond" the transitive power Dasein exercises over beings.

If Levinas hopes to turn the anxious solitude and solipsism of Heidegger's Dasein against itself, there is, nevertheless an important conjunction in Heidegger's and Levinas's notions of *Vorhandenheit* that points in two directions. According to Heidegger, *Vorhandenheit* is indeed the manner in which representational thinking discloses beings; it is the theoretical, observational mode par excellence. But for him, *das Vorhandene* is a derivative modality of a being's presence, for it is a being that has undergone a process of abstraction, isolation and cognitive circumscription that originally was disclosed in the referential unity of the world. *Zuhandenheit*, not *Vorhandenheit*, is the primordial manner of a thing's givenness, and in the differential unity of beings and Dasein arises the question of being.

Levinas too recognizes *Vorhandenheit* as the manner of being of representations; however, for Levinas, representedness manifested precisely an alterity that he sees Heidegger's *Seinsverständnis* to have eliminated; even if it is not our most elemental relation to what is (enjoyment is that relation), representation is for Levinas the most elemental manner in which that which is other can present itself to consciousness, to a subject, to a Dasein, as other, as what is and is other than Dasein. There is, then, for Levinas a certain commensurability between the being of beings and representation (here we again see Levinas's commitment to a dualist ontology); this is why the wrenching away from Dasein's all-encompassing practical comportment that occurs in breakage and anxiety is, for Levinas, a movement revelatory of the most basic fact and manner of the being of a being: givenness to a subject, of which *Vorhandenheit* is but one, albeit a pivotal, mode. And contrary to Heidegger, who he says lacks a notion of fundamental representation and evacuates being by stripping beings away in the moment of Angst, Levinas hopes to show, as he says, that "being is not an empty notion." An examination of *Time and the Other* and *From Existence to Existents* would show that this is the context for understanding Levinas's thought of the *il y a* and of what he calls the "hypostasis."

Concluding Remarks

I have tried to bring into view a certain fantasmatic structure of Levinas's thinking of being and especially of Heidegger. This structure is strategic: Levinas imagines being as the site of a twofold trauma. I have begun to trace the

first trauma in the pages above: being is itself traumatic in being the site of an ongoing egological transitivity, a transitive solipsism that is intelligible only within a Cartesian ontological framework. Being and egology are inseparable, and if the solipsistic ego finds itself at home there, being is the site of a generalized domestic violence, for to be is to-be-stripped-of-alterity. Interpreting Heidegger from within this Cartesian framework that Heidegger explicitly challenges, Levinas sees Heidegger slipping in neatly onto the pinnacle of the tradition (consolidation), and his radical solipsism shows itself in having effected a homogenization of being, in which being, beings, and Dasein are practically indistinguishable. Furthermore, I have shown how Levinas disengages being from Dasein's transitivity in attributing to *Vorhandenheit* a privileged status and that the very passivity and neutrality of this determination presages Levinas's strategy to displace this notion of being with what he will call the *il y a*. An analysis of the *il y a* would show that Levinas continues in *Time and the Other* and *From Existence to Existent* to invoke *a priori* a Cartesian dualism in order to present being as the horrific site, an anonymous site of being and of being's being stripped of all beings. His so-called "hypostasis" of the subject within an alien and alienating being sets the stage for the final displacement of being and the subject posited in it, a displacement that will occur in the form of a diachrony that is the advent of the infinite, the Other that is beyond being. It is his image of being as both the horrific and as the site of the advent of what is definitively other than being that constitutes the second sense of Levinas's fantasmatic reading of Heidegger and ontology. Horrific, anonymous being is only tolerable if it is submitted to a subject that is, for its part, otherwise than being. Such is the second fantasmatic structure of Levinas's reading of Heidegger.

Notes

1. The present essay is extracted from a longer work. An earlier version was presented at the annual North American Heidegger Conference, 2002.

2. See, for instance, Jean-François Mattéi, "Lévinas et Platon, sur l'"au-delà de l'être," in *Noesis: Revue de Philosophie—La Métaphysique d'Emmanuel Levinas*, 3, 1999, pp. 9–26.

3. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987) [*Le temps et l'autre* (Paris: PUF, 1983)], pp. 42/20. Henceforth cited as TO followed by the English and French page numbers. The French passage that is cited reads: "un pluralisme qui ne fusionne pas en unité, . . . et, si cela peut être osé, rompre avec Parménide."

4. A notable exception is Jacques Taminiaux's "The Early Levinas's Reply to Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology," in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 23/6 (1997), pp. 29–49.

5. What is important here is that Levinas takes Heidegger to truly represent being and therefore treats being as a metonym of Heidegger. Whether and when Heidegger may have given us a true discourse on being is another matter.

6. Levinas surely understands something deeply in Western philosophy and its principle of identity. However, Reiner Schürmann, for one, has given us readings of ontological thinkers for whom unity, identity, and sameness is far from its last word. See his *Broken Hegemonies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003).

7. Levinas notes that Husserl almost loses sight of the extraneity of things by virtue of which they stand over against consciousness as independent beings. But he adds on page 50 of *En Découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris:Vrin, 1994) that "It is not solipsism but the possibility of solipsism. It characterizes a manner of being in which existence exists on its own." The French passage reads: "*Pas de solipsisme, mais possibilité de solipsisme. Elle caractérise une manière d'être où l'existence est à partir d'elle-même.*" (*En Découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* is henceforth cited as EDHH followed by the page number. All translations of EDHH are mine.) Of course—and he's named in the following sentence—Heidegger is the one who, in Levinas's eyes, fulfills this possibility. Bettina Bergo in *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), p. 41, recognizes the charge of solipsism but does not examine its strategic character for Levinas.

8. Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant* (Paris:Vrin, 1978), p. 10. Henceforth cited as EE followed by the page number. All translations to *De l'existence à l'existant* are mine.

9. EE, 17. The French passage reads: "*Détaché de l' 'étant' qui le domine, l'événement d'être, l'être en général, qu'est-il?*"

10. This is one of the critically flawed readings Critchley gives of Heidegger in "*Il y a: A dying stronger than death* (Blanchot with Levinas)," in *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 15, 1993, pp. 81–131.

11. The question is: Why did he do this? I think he sensed the challenge that our "singularization to come" (Reiner Schürmann's expression) poses to ethics, that mortality can never be the basis for an imperative (viz. the impossible connection between death and positive language), and this, in the end, is precisely the core link in Levinas's philosophy, namely, the fragility of being—death—and the "don't kill me!" Why can't the fragility of being yield a prohibition against killing? Our mortality is not a matter of death management. By not killing one is not avoiding death. One is avoiding particular circumstances of death. Levinas seems to want to manage death, to compensate for the fragility of being with an ethics. But there simply are no compensatory strategies that can be commensurate and apropos to the singularity of my being. No doubt killing someone is grave, but it is secondary to an ontological trauma that admits of no solution, a trauma that we know in and through our mortality. Levinas commits, then, a sort of category mistake in confusing the fragility of being and the singularity of being, with

an ethical law. Laws may manage life well (sort of), but they can never reach and never address the founding ontological trauma that is our singularizing death to come.

12. DEHH, 57. The French passage reads: “*La compréhension de l'être est la caractéristique et le fait fondamental de l'existence humaine.*”

13. “*Das Dasein ist ein Seiendes, das nicht nur unter anderem Seienden vorkommt. Es ist vielmehr dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, daß es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht*” (SZ, 12). All translations to SZ are mine.

14. “*Die Gewinnung des Grundbegriffes ‘Sein’ und die Vorzeichnung der von ihm geforderten ontologischen Begrifflichkeit und ihrer notwendigen Abwandlungen bedürfen eines konkreten Leitfadens*” (SZ, §8, 39).

15. For a discussion of fundamental ontology, ontology, and metontology as three distinct moments in the question of being, see R. Lilly, “Toward the Hermeneutic of *Der Satz vom Grund*,” in *Collegium Phenomenologicum: The First Ten Years*, eds. J. Sallis, G. Moneta, J. Taminaux (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), pp. 199–224. Most simply, the issue is the status of the *Seinsfrage* as a project of rendering explicit the genuine meaning of being, a project whose methodological exigencies inform the very conception of SZ as a propaedeutic.

16. The departure from the standpoint of SZ is clear by 1930 with the publication of “On the Essence of Truth” and other texts of the 1930s and is irrevocably abandoned in the thought of *Ereignis*. See also Jean Greisch, “Ethique et Ontologie,” in J. Greisch and J. Rolland (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas: L'éthique comme philosophie première* (Paris: Editions du Cerf), 1993, pp. 15–45.

17. “*Dès lors, l'étude de la compréhension de l'être est ipso facto une étude du mode d'être de l'homme. Elle n'est pas seulement une préparation à l'ontologie, mais déjà une ontologie*” (DEHH, 59).

18. “*Sein und Zeit qui developpe cette corrélation nécessaire entre l'être et l'intelligence de l'être, se désintéresse donc initialement d'anthropologie*” (DEHH, 94).

19. “*L'existence humaine n'apparaît que dans cette perspective.*” “*Mais Sein und Zeit est également une anthropologie*” (DEHH, 94).

20. Levinas writes: “In reality, the impassivity of theoretical thought is precisely its purchase on the infinite. Theoretical thought is impassive not because it is not an action, but because it has detached itself from its condition and because it is, if one may say, behind itself. In this sense the thought of the finite is already the thought of the infinite. Descartes was right. Every awareness is a definition, which is to say, apperception of the infinite.” [*En réalité l'impassibilité de la pensée théorique est précisément sa prise sur l'infini. La pensée théorique est impassible non pas parce qu'elle n'est pas action, mais parce qu'elle s'est détachée de sa condition et qu'elle est, si l'on peut dire, derrière elle-même. Dans ce sens la pensée du fini est déjà la pensée de l'infini. Descartes a raison. Toute prise de conscience est définition c'est-à-dire apperception de l'infini*] (DEHH, 101–102).]

21. “*Nous sommes la question de l'être, nous sommes dans un monde et nous comprenons. . . . L'ontologie c'est notre existence même*” (DEHH, 79).

22. Levinas clearly has either missed or misunderstood Heidegger's critical discussion of Descartes in SZ, §§18–19.

23. It is all the more remarkable that Levinas never makes mention of Heidegger's criticism of metaphysics, ontology, or the history of Western philosophy when one considers that Heidegger's critique of metaphysics is, perhaps, the theme most widely associated with the name of Heidegger.

24. To fully untangle this interpretive web would require one take into account the Hegelian milieu of Heidegger's reception in France, above all as influenced by Kojève.

25. There may be less of an ethics in Heidegger than even he would have imagined, but there is a profound experience of the singularity of being that undercuts every idealism. See my "L'incapacité originaire de l'éthique heideggerienne," *Cahiers philosophiques*.

26. "C'est la transitivité introduite dans la notion de l'être, qui a permis de préparer la notion de l'existence telle qu'on l'emploie depuis Heidegger et, depuis Sartre, en France" (DEHH, 99). Or, "This possibility of conceiving contingency and facticity not as facts presented to intellection but as the act of intellection—this possibility of demonstrating the transitivity of understanding and a 'signifying intention' within brute facts and data (a possibility discovered by Husserl, but attached by Heidegger to the intellection of being in general) constitutes the great novelty of contemporary ontology," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (NY: Columbia University Press, 1998) ["L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?": "... cette possibilité de montrer dans la brutalité du fait et des contenus donnés la transitivité du comprendre et une 'intention signifiante'—possibilité découverte par Husserl, mais rattachée par Heidegger à l'intellection de l'être en général—constitue la grande nouveauté de l'ontologie contemporaine,"] in *Entre Nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), p. 13

27. "En résumé, le problème de l'être que Heidegger pose nous ramène à l'homme, car l'homme est un étant qui comprend l'être. Mais, d'autre part, cette compréhension de l'être est elle-même l'être; elle n'est pas un attribut, mais le mode d'existence de l'homme" (DEHH, 59).

28. "En résumé, être, pour le Dasein, c'est comprendre l'être. Comprendre l'être, c'est exister de telle sorte qu' 'il y va, dans l'existence, de cette existence même'. 'Il y va de l'existence même'—c'est être-dans-le-monde ou être-là" (DEHH, 66). Here one sees the danger in failing to grasp the formal, methodological problematic that drives the analysis of care (and which more generally, seeks an attestation of Dasein's being a whole) and of construing these for the answer to the question of being. One should note, however, that Levinas is subtle and careful in writing "être, pour le Dasein, c'est comprendre l'être" ["being, for Dasein, is to understand being"]. This, of course, literally is true: being cannot be—for Dasein—anything other than as it is understood. But one must also see that Heidegger has in view the meaning or experience of being which the Dasein that is the subject of the Dasein analytic hasn't (yet) been shown to have had, which is to say that there are at least two understandings of being in *Being and Time*: there is that understanding of being that Dasein has while still being underway to the explicit understanding for which Heidegger's hope is to find attestation through the Dasein analytic, and there is the under-

standing of being that Heidegger must have had in order to be able to write *Being and Time*, namely that very understanding of being toward which the Dasein analytic is moving and the possibility—necessity—for which *Being and Time* is to establish phenomenologically. And there is, moreover, the understanding of being as fundamentally historical: *Seinsgeschichte*.

29. “Il est important de souligner cette réduction au temps, de tout ce qu’on serait tenté de nommer supratemporel, la réduction à l’existence de tout ce qu’on voudra appeler rapport. C’est là l’ontologisme fondamental de Heidegger qu’il nous importe de mettre en relief dans ce travail” (DEHH, 70f).

30. “On a raison de voir dans l’intentionnalité [de la phénoménologie] une protestation contre un idéalisme qui veut absorber les choses dans la conscience. L’intention vise un objet extérieur” (DEHH, 50).

31. “Dire que l’acte de penser équivaut, pour le sujet, à l’acte d’exister—et la conception husserlienne est précise sur ce point—c’est modifier la notion même de l’être. La pensée n’est pas seulement un attribut essentiel de l’être; être, c’est penser. Dès lors la structure transitive de la pensée caractérise l’acte d’être” (DEHH, 98).

32. He says (DEHH, p. 105): “la notion d’existence remplace l’ancienne notion de la pensée—telle que depuis Platon elle domine la philosophie” [“the notion of existence replaces the ancient notion of thinking—the one that has dominated philosophy since Plato”]. And he explicitly refers to care as “comprehending” what, within a classical different framework, would be a “réunir des concepts par une synthèse pensée” [“a combining of concepts by a synthetic thought”] (DEHH, 75).

33. “L’acte de sortir de soi pour aller aux objets—ce rapport de sujet à objet que connaît la philosophie moderne—a sa raison dans un saut accompli par delà les «étants» compris d’une manière ontique vers l’être ontologique, saut qui s’accomplit de par l’existence du Dasein et qui est l’événement même de cette existence et non pas un phénomène qui s’y ajoute. C’est à ce saut par delà l’étant vers l’être—et qui est l’ontologie elle-même, la compréhension de l’être—que Heidegger réserve le mot de transcendance” (DEHH, 65).

34. “On pourrait dire que le temps c’est l’élan par lequel l’homme s’inscrit dans l’être, par lequel il l’assume” (DEHH, 88).

35. See SZ, §69.

36. “Le monde n’est rien d’autre que cet «en vue de soi-même» où le Dasein est engagé dans son existence et par rapport auquel peut se faire la rencontre du maniable” (DEHH, 65).

37. “Le monde intérieur, le monde d’une époque, le monde d’un Goethe ou d’un Proust, n’est plus une métaphore, mais l’origine du phénomène du monde” (DEHH, 65).

38. “. . . trace une limite à l’intellection” (DEHH, 96). That the limit is intellectual and not practical should be emphasized.

39. “. . . une réalité tranchant sur la compréhension” (DEHH, 96).

40. “Exister c’est se préoccuper de l’existence, exister c’est se soucier de l’existence. Dans ce souci l’existence humaine esquisse, d’ores et déjà, l’horizon de l’être en général, de l’être verbe, seul

en question dans ce souci: elle l'esquisse précisément parce qu'il n'est pas un concept mais ce que nous avons à assumer; il est si j'ose dire un gérondif" (DEHH, 79).

41. "La formule totale exprimant le souci se compose donc de ces trois éléments: être-au-delà de soi avoir d'ores et déjà été dans le monde—être auprès des choses. Leur unité n'est pas celle d'une proposition qu'on pourrait toujours établir arbitrairement, mais celle du phénomène concret du souci révélé par l'angoisse."

"C'est même là un excellent exemple du mode de penser heideggerien. Il ne s'agit pas de réunir des concepts par une synthèse pensée, mais de trouver un mode d'existence qui les comprend, c'est-à-dire qui saisit en existant les possibilités—d'être qu'ils reflètent" (DEHH, 75).

42. "La philosophie de Heidegger à la fois renoue avec la grande tradition de l'antiquité en posant le problème de l'être en général et répond à la préoccupation de la pensée moderne de rendre à la personne la maîtrise de son destin. Mais dans l'idéalisme occidental la souveraineté du moi n'a jamais été séparable du prestige du Transcendant qu'il soit Dieu ou qu'il soit simplement l'Eternel mais toujours un Existant" (DEHH, 88–89).

43. "Cette relation avec l'être est l'intériorité originelle véritable. La philosophie de Heidegger est donc une tentative de poser la personne—en tant que lieu où s'accomplit la compréhension de l'être—en renonçant à tout appui dans l'Eternel" (DEHH 89).

44. "... d'ores et déjà dans un circuit d'intelligence avec le réel. Et rien ne peut y échapper" (DEHH, 77).

45. "... intuition fondamentale [est] du circuit fermé de la compréhension" (DEHH, 78, emphasis added).

46. Here we encounter one of the most important thematics in the works of Maurice Blanchot, as well as the Levinasian context for an understanding of it.

47. "L'originalité de la conception heideggerienne de l'existence par rapport à l'idée traditionnelle de conscience interne consiste en ce que ce savoir de soi-même, cette illumination interne—cette compréhension—non seulement n'admet plus la structure sujet-objet, mais n'a plus rien de théorique. Ce n'est pas une prise de conscience, une constatation pure et simple de ce qu'on est, constatation capable de mesurer notre pouvoir sur nous-même, cette compréhension c'est le dynamisme même de cette existence, c'est ce pouvoir même sur soi" (DEHH, 67).

48. "... l'illumination interne que connaissaient les philosophes de la conscience, devient inséparable de la destinée et de l'histoire de l'homme concret: l'une et l'autre ne font qu'un. C'est l'homme concret qui apparaît au centre de la philosophie: par rapport à lui, la notion de conscience n'est qu'une abstraction, séparant la conscience,—l'illumination en tant qu'illumination—de l'histoire, de l'existence" (DEHH, 68).

49. "Passer de la compréhension implicite de l'être à la compréhension explicite, c'est se proposer une tâche de maîtrise et de domination au sein d'une naïve familiarité avec l'existence qui fera peut-être sauter la sécurité même de cette familiarité" (DEHH, 57).

50. TO, 44/24. This translation, which must strike one as odd, rigorously advances the line of argumentation in which Levinas endeavors to show the reduction of being

to the “factual isness” of Dasein (the reduction of *das Sein* to Dasein, or *Existenz*), and generally the reduction of being to beings.

51. “Heidegger distingue initialement entre ce qui est, ‘l’étant’ (*das Seiende*) et ‘l’être de l’étant’ (*das Sein des Seienden*). Ce qui est, l’étant—recouvre tous les objets, toutes les personnes dans un certain sens, Dieu lui-même. L’être de l’étant—c’est le fait que tous ces objets et toutes ces personnes sont” (DEHH, 56).

52. “. . . mon *Da* soit l’événement même de la révélation de l’être, que mon humanité soit la vérité” (DEHH, 59).

53. “. . . est une compréhension, une vision sui generis, un pouvoir illuminé” (DEHH, 63).

54. “Nous avons souligné que l’ustensile se perd en quelque façon dans l’œuvre à laquelle il sert—c’est ainsi qu’il existe en soi. Cependant, lorsque l’ustensile est endommagé, il tranche sur le système par rapport auquel il est, et perd, pour ainsi dire son caractère d’ustensile pour devenir, dans un certain mesure, une simple présence. Dans cette perte momentanée de la maniabilité le ‘renvoie à ce en vue de quoi l’ustensile est’ se réveille, ressort, se met en lumière” (DEHH, 64).

55. “Quelle est donc la compréhension hors rang qui saisit le Dasein comme fait par excellence et qui à la fois accomplit cette effectivité? Cette compréhension est l’angoisse” (DEHH, 37, my emphasis).

56. “Il s’agit d’affirmer que l’être n’est pas une notion vide” (TO, 39/18).

Three

THE THOUGHTFUL DIALOGUE BETWEEN MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND JEAN BEAUFRET: A NEW WAY OF DOING PHILOSOPHY

Pierre Jacerme

On the threshold of the twenty-first century, thirty-two years after the death of Martin Heidegger and twenty-six years after the death of Jean Beaufret, their relation remains, for the general philosophical public, generally unknown. This is even more the case, perhaps, concerning the singular fate of the great thinker who was Jean Beaufret.

What remains withdrawn also remains in silence. But that silence needs us in order for it to exist as a speaking silence that can always prod the questioner, as long as he or she is not being distracted by noise or chatter.

Jean Beaufret did not introduce Heidegger to France, he was neither his commentator nor his mediator. He did not play the role of a go-between between France and Germany. Stranger still, we know that Jean Beaufret was a philosophy professor at the highest-level class of *Première Supérieure* (a preparatory class for the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* entrance examination). He met with Heidegger for thirty years, seeing him several times each year, but he never gave an actual course on Heidegger in his classes.

In 1978, four years before his death, Beaufret would speak of the “singularity” of his own teaching that consisted in the fact that, although he “never gave a course on Heidegger, he remained in direct contact with Heidegger’s thought.”¹ When the students insisted, he would occasionally make some very brief remarks about *Being and Time*, but that was all. He only assembled his articles and lectures after his retirement in 1972.

Why did Beaufret never teach a course on Heidegger’s work?

In 1955, the year of the Cerisy conference, Beaufret wrote in the *Le poème de Parménide* that “one cannot summarize Heidegger’s thought. One cannot even present it. Heidegger’s thought sheds a singular light on the modern world itself, a speech that destroys the security of instrumental language and destabilizes the foundation of man in the midst of beings.”²

In other words, it is not a question of speaking *about* something. What configures Heidegger’s discourse is the way in which Being opens in a

clearing as world, and that is what we must seek to *see* and to *hear*, acquiring thereby a new language.

Nevertheless, Beaufret was not Heidegger's main translator, and when he did translate him, he always did so in collaboration with others (Axelos, Brockmeier, Janicaud, Fédier). What interested him was, to use the metaphor from the end of the "Letter on Humanism," to plow furrows in his own language.³ For example, he marveled at noting that by saying *il y a*, the French language had already named Being, and he cited Rimbaud, "*Au bois il y a un oiseau . . .*" ("In the woods there is a bird . . .") He also marveled at noting that the French word *représentation* preserves the relation between presence and presentation better than *Vorstellung*.

Further, Jean Beaufret was not a peasant who would have met, in the Black Forest, another peasant. His encounter with Heidegger was not predetermined by the physical or social environment. It is true that Beaufret was born, in 1907, in Auzances in the Creuse region near the center of France, a region where, he would say later in 1962, the stone is hard, the earth is fallow, man is a peasant in winter and a bricklayer in summer.

But in *Notre Creuse*,⁴ Beaufret notes that the Creuse region is near the Loire and Descartes' Touraine. It is as if Beaufret left his fallow land to connect fantastically with the sweet Loire and Descartes, that thinker of whom he had spoken so well, and with whom he would always relate so strongly, living, like him, in the margins, while also being eager to live thought as an adventure; this will be indeed his third question in the "Letter on Humanism." Like the author of the *Discourse on Method*, Beaufret was secretly fascinated by adventurous thinking and rejected "official" philosophy and abstract knowledge. Jean Beaufret was thus ambiguous in this homage to the Creuse region, which he succeeded in escaping in an imaginary sense, in order to go to the Loire and its light.

While, like Heidegger, he lived in the country as a child, he was not the son of a sacristan. He was raised by two elementary school teachers in a system founded at the end of the nineteenth century by the secular Republic that taught the values of tolerance and freedom of thought. Hence, his passion for pedagogy, his decision to be a teacher and to teach in a preparatory class for the Ecole Normale Supérieure, and even his interest in the Popular Front in 1936, as well as in the thought of Marx.

One should not be mistaken, then, about the so-called peasant soul of Jean Beaufret. He left his home in the country at eighteen to pursue his studies in Paris, where he lived later from 1945 to 1982, for thirty-seven years. Beaufret was much more a city person than Heidegger. The fact that he was a private man did not prevent him from being a "Parisian intellectual," loving the social life, enjoying witty conversations, well connected in the so-called

left-wing circles, keen on theatre, painting, poetry, and himself tempted by writing. From this perspective, it was quite possible that he and Heidegger would never have met.



What brought about their encounter was the war. “War [*Polemos*] is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as men; some he makes slaves, others free.”⁵ With the war, for Beaufret, came the time of risk, but also the time of adventure, the time of decision, and the time of the experience of freedom. Jean Beaufret, having been taken prisoner, actually managed to jump from the train en route to the German camps. He taught in a free zone in Grenoble in 1941, then at Lyon, from 1942 to 1944. He began to read Husserl and then Heidegger. It was as if the fight against Nazism should not prevent the study of the greatest German thought. It was as if the necessity to act involved the necessity of a more concrete philosophy that was less abstract than Marxism and in a more direct grasp with proper existence, facing the risk of death: a death that no one can die in my place.

In Lyon, Beaufret read *Being and Time* with his friend Joseph Rovin at the same time as they fought the Nazis as part of the resistance group called *le Service Périclès*, which specialized in the production of false identity papers. In 1945, with the Liberation, Beaufret was appointed to Paris and became professor in Première Supérieure at Lycée Henri IV in September 1946. This period of the liberation of France was also a period of the liberation of ideas through existentialism. Beaufret felt the urgency to act through thought, and he grasped the importance of a clarification which would avoid confusion between Jaspers, Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, and Heidegger, and of taking a position—in a very lively debate between communists and existentialists—that would put things in their proper places.

Hence, from March through September 1945, a series of his articles appeared in the Journal *Confluences: A propos de l'existentialisme*;⁶ an interview appeared in *Le Monde*,⁷ and he gave a lecture on April 9, 1946, at Saint-Germain des Prés that was attended by influential people in Paris. It is then *chance* that made the encounter between Heidegger and Beaufret possible. The facts are known but I want to discuss the role of chance and then that of necessity.

A young French soldier named Frédéric de Towarnicki, who was involved in a cultural service as part of the Occupation Forces near Freiburg, visited Heidegger and gave him two issues of *Confluences*. Beaufret then by chance met Towarnicki, who told him about Heidegger. Impressed by this coincidence, Beaufret decided to write to the German thinker in November 1945,

and Heidegger answered him on November 23, 1945.⁸ Let us pay attention to the context of this first letter. First, there is the mediation of the writing and the reading. Heidegger told Beaufret he had only read issues 2 and 5 of *Confluences*. Issue number 2 dealt with Kierkegaard and the idea of existence in Heidegger. The article ended by evoking the future examination of the “ethical and political consequences” of “Heideggerian existentialism,” which will be, almost a year later, Beaufret’s second question in the “Letter on Humanism.” Issue number 5 addressed the influence of Husserl’s eidetic method on Sartre’s work. Heidegger continued by writing: “As early as the first article (in issue number 2) I saw the high concept that you have of the essence of philosophy” (Q III 129). Beaufret had understood, at that very time, that the main point was to raise anew the question posed by Plato and Aristotle, namely the question of Being on the basis of existence, such as it may be for each of us a proper existence.

Hence, what is striking is that the Heidegger-Beaufret relation occurred through a symbolic mediation in which both are involved from the beginning, namely, through the philosophical tradition. But their involvement is ambiguous because nothing says that the philosophical tradition simply coincides with its “essence.” And we know this because Heidegger said in 1955 at Cerisy that it is necessary to be already outside of philosophy in order to speak of its “essence.” Hence it is as if Beaufret and Heidegger were situated both outside metaphysics and within it. Philosophy intervenes in this text (Cerisy) as that which is to be rethought in its proper essence. A few lines later, Heidegger writes, while referring to the reading of the articles of *Confluences*, not unlike Kant faced with the beginning of the French Revolution: “I sense, in the thinking of the young philosophers of France, an extraordinary *élan* which shows clearly that a revolution is imminent in this domain” (Q III, 130).

Why think that a revolution is imminent? Why was this the case for both Heidegger and Beaufret? Because they both lived through a total war for the first time in human history; because three months earlier, the first atomic bomb exploded at Hiroshima, inaugurating what Heidegger called, in the “Letter on Humanism,” “the uprooting of all beings.”⁹ For these reasons one must realize that the destruction also affected the symbolic mediations and thus the philosophical tradition as the development of reason.

This is why, when Heidegger and Beaufret met—and first through the writing and the reading—chance took the form of a *philosophical necessity* that would commit them *equally* to the dialogue. When I say that their encounter involved philosophical mediation, this means that the philosophical tradition was the medium for their encounter—an encounter that had to reconstruct what had been shattered and destroyed, that is to say, which had to invent a

new way of thinking, an encounter that was therefore always open to the future and in that sense always *to come*, even if it was to take place, even if it had already *taken* place.

“The high concept that you have of the essence of philosophy,” Heidegger had written: and hence philosophy was approached in terms of its essence because it has to undergo a “revolution,” that is to say, it had to be raised beyond the destruction by a common work because both of them—one fifty-six and the other thirty-eight at that time—found themselves on an equal footing in front of what was to be entirely rethought and because philosophy *had reached its end*. I insist on this crucial point: because Heidegger and Beaufret happened to experience together, in 1945, the impact of total destruction, including that of the rational philosophical tradition which led to Hiroshima, it was therefore necessary for them to offer an entirely new thinking.

This means at least two things: first, that their relation was on an equal footing and was not the relation between a master and his disciple. Second, that each would learn to decipher the language of the other on the basis of the failure of his own language. And this would require that their relation be a *dialogue*.



I would like to develop these two points, which seem essential to me in order to have the right vision of their encounter and of its future developments. Heidegger wrote, at the end of his letter, “Fruitful thought requires, in addition to writing and reading, the *sunousia* of dialogue and of that work which is teaching, received as much as it is dispensed” (Q III, 130). We know the master-disciple relation in philosophy, for example, between Socrates and Plato, Plato and Aristotle, and even between Husserl and Heidegger. What characterizes this relation is its nonreversibility: when the disciple achieves his or her own proper thought, he or she does not become the master of the master and the master does not become the disciple; there is a break, after a rather long period of joint work (eighteen years in the case of Plato and Aristotle). Between Heidegger and Beaufret, the relation lasted thirty years. And there was no rupture, but a deepening, because both had had to break with philosophy, and their manner of doing so was to attempt the “step back” from philosophy to get access to its essence. They were thus *equally* involved in the “matter of thinking,” which became the heart of the experience of their relation, rather than the relation between a master and a disciple. This is what Heidegger calls *sunousia*, a term borrowed from Plato’s seventh letter, which expresses the enduring contact with the presence of the very thing which is to be thought, from which alone the clearing can light up.¹⁰

Now this contact was established by language, and this is why there could be a teaching that was “received as much as dispensed,” because language is always both the language of the other and one’s own language. The result was an *apprenticeship* rather than a relation of a master and a disciple; the Heidegger-Beaufret relation was based on an *equal* footing. That relation is reversible. The teacher is taught, the person taught is a teacher. This *apprenticeship* unfolded for each, in his own language, through the experience of the language of the other. For example, in his experience with the Greek term *ousia*, Heidegger discovered in the play between *Anwesenheit* and *Gegenwart* the relation between being and time that was unthought by the Greeks. It was necessary to learn how to read and to decipher the philosophical text in a new way; to learn as one learns a language, from the grammar. Preparing oneself to think would be first like learning to spell the letters. Beaufret said to Towarnicki:

Heidegger is like a school teacher who, in the darkness of the text, teaches us to distinguish between the letters, to form the syllables, to group the words. Before him . . . the words were already grouped into sentences; as for the letters, even more so . . . Heidegger, on the contrary, reveals it all: the result is a totally new thing that is called reading. Heidegger did not do an ‘explication de texte,’ as we say in French, but teaches us to hear: and he does nothing but that . . .¹¹

After 1972, when Beaufret would assemble his texts for publication, he gave us a word to translate *sunousia* and *Gespräch*. That word was *dialogue*: *Dialogue with Heidegger*. He would say that to dialogue is “to become capable of hearing.” He told Towarnicki, “Heidegger’s question is quite simply that of the possibility of the opening of a dialogue with the other.” The stake of listening to languages is also present in the letter of November 23, 1945. At one point, Heidegger, citing Beaufret, emphasizes: “Equally excellent is the following remark: ‘But if German has its resources French has its limits,’” and he goes on: “Here is an essential indication of the possibility of learning from one another within a productive thinking in a mutual exchange” (Q III 130).

The French language would provide Heidegger the limit of clarity and the sense of the right nuance, protecting him from the risk and excess of being overly prophetic (the danger Jaspers felt). The German language gave Beaufret speculative depth, allowing him to avoid being simply witty, thanks to a style that was more baroque rather than pedantic. This “mutual exchange” of languages does not occur without a struggle between them in the sense of a *polemos* since there is a genuine engagement. One is reminded of Kafka, when after Heidegger’s death, Beaufret recalled what he told him in 1964 when he trans-

lated with Fédier the *End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*. “I told him in jest that my only strength, in my struggle with him, was precisely to be able to write in French without being under his control. . . .”¹² And, “It is the French language that protected me from Heidegger.”¹³ The resistance of the French pushed Heidegger always to be clearer. This is what happened at Cerisy and at the Thor Seminar. When one is listening to the other, the risk is to be colonized by him. Now the aim of the dialogue is that we have, Beaufret told Heidegger on September 26, 1969, for his eightieth birthday, “to try to learn from our own language, to hear what it tells us, to speak it as it speaks.”¹⁴

We need the other to reach our own—what Beaufret called “going outside of ourselves to reach ourselves”—and at the same time we have the experience of the impossibility of identifying with the other. Hence we have to let the other one be. The experience of the dialogue, then, takes on a deeper meaning: *dia-legein*, *logos*. “Logos,” Beaufret recalled, “enjoins us to deliver what is in the position in which . . . it exposes itself, and as it appears, proposes itself.”¹⁵ A site is opened for the very thing that appears in its site. This is what took place on September 10, 1946, during the first meeting between Heidegger and Beaufret at Todtnauberg, again when a site was cleared for the dictation of Being.



That day Beaufret asked Heidegger two questions: “Who is Husserl for you?” “And you, who are you?” Heidegger dictated his answer to the second question, a text Beaufret presented in 1976–1977 during a seminar. It was published in 1985, and then in 1986 in *Heidegger Studies* under the title *Die Grundfrage nach dem Sein selbst*, and finally republished by Towarnicki in 1993.¹⁶ It is very important for us to grasp, through this remarkable text, a central feature governing the Heidegger-Beaufret relation. This feature concerns temporality.

We know that Heidegger’s thinking was formed over the course of many years with moments of rupture and reversal, but also of continuity and deepening. We were able to reconstitute a part of that path—a path that needed time—with the 1989 appearance of the *Beiträge*. But on September 10, 1946, when there was neither the *Beiträge* nor the “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger dictated to Beaufret a clarification of his work according to a perspective in which all the moments of time become co-present, following a re-orientation of time, which was seen from the *location* of Being. *Being and Time* was presented to Beaufret as if seen from the perspective of the marginal notes. The past became present through the future that was already there, the future also made present.

The entirety of Heidegger's work suddenly appeared to Beaufret. This presentation would have a very deep effect on him which was twofold: one effect of "*contemporaneity*" and the other effect of "*concentration*." The first will require *turning* around the thing itself (the question of the "turning" will not be for Beaufret a question of *interpretation* of Heidegger's thought), and the second will push thought ahead (*en avant*, to borrow Rimbaud's expression concerning poetry). According to Beaufret, in authentic time "everything is contemporary." The most surprising thing is that he said in 1977, with respect to September 10, 1946, "I did not need more than one hour to understand."¹⁷

This sentence is often understood in a metaphorical manner. But I think this sentence must be read literally because of the relation that Beaufret himself had with time. When I met Beaufret, I was struck by his readiness to evoke past events in minute detail, and by his capacity, in particular, to remember a conversation from ten or twenty years earlier as though it was happening now, along with the nuances of the words that were said. For a long time I believed that Beaufret had an exceptional memory. Now I think he had a tremendous capacity of being present by remaining in a questioning attentiveness (Heidegger would say while speaking of Beaufret to his friends: "he does not let go") that produced a great power, not of memory, but of reminiscence. In this way, the dimensions of time are gathered together, and time as a whole was present in the same time. Reminiscence, that *a priori* of any memory, was making time be, that is to say, time opened on the clearing of being in the form of a world. An unpublished note that Beaufret wrote in 1964 confirms this. "Time translates *Zeit* poorly. Season would be better. Being and Season. The epochs of history are the *seasons* of being. A season in hell." When time is in *season*, a world begins to exist. Beaufret loved citing the passage from *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* where, in a flash, the singing of the thrush restores the forgotten world of Combourg to Chateaubriand. This is a passage that much later will particularly inspire Marcel Proust in his way of "retrieving" time.

That very day, on September 10, 1946, Jean Beaufret's Proustian nature enabled him "to understand" in one hour the entirety of the development of the thought of Martin Heidegger in such a way that he was the only one able to understand it at that time. This enabled him to *learn more quickly* and then to seek to *go farther* once the thinking of being was presented to him as a world. In 1946 Heidegger said to Beaufret: "If my thinking interests you, you should know that it will take you twenty years." What is amusing is that Beaufret will himself date the end of his apprenticeship in 1964, that is to say, the moment when he was on an equal footing with Heidegger, and he will say to him that it only took him eighteen years, which seemed to perturb Heidegger. Why 1964? We will try to address this shortly.

The Thoughtful Dialogue Between Martin Heidegger and Jean Beaufret

For the moment we can use the date given by Beaufret himself to clarify the main periods of his relation to Heidegger. The period of apprenticeship spanned from 1946 to 1964. Then he tried to go “further.” That attempt culminated in 1974, the year of the *Twelve questions posed to Jean Beaufret*.¹⁸ Heidegger recognized the fact that he went further in his letter of February 22, 1975: “I know nothing comparable with respect to the transparency and the density of his saying.” Finally, after Heidegger’s death in 1976, Beaufret continued to work with the perspective of preparing for thinking “the other beginning,” and, feeling like the surviving witness of a unique adventure, he increasingly gave indications of Heidegger’s path that he had noted, in passing, in his private notebooks.

We are going to try to characterize the major features of the style of the apprenticeship, and then wonder in what sense Beaufret can be said to have gone further.



After his visit of September 1946 to Todtnauberg, Heidegger had given Beaufret his work on Plato’s Doctrine on Truth¹⁹ to read. The last seven paragraphs of the work concern humanism and the necessity to think the privative essence of *aletheia* positively. Very moved by this text, Beaufret had sent a second letter to Heidegger with three questions, and suddenly on December 12, 1946, G. Blin brought Beaufret the surprising “Letter on Humanism.” In this text, Heidegger answers the three questions by developing and unfolding them from the perspective of being itself, that being which is, as Heidegger told Beaufret after ten minutes, “like a nothing.” Beaufret learned that the thought ‘to come’—that thought for which everything comes from the Nothing, while for ancient thought nothing could come from the Nothing—began in 1927. This is why Beaufret would say shortly before his death that “all the verbs in the last paragraph of ‘Letter on Humanism’ are in the present tense and not, as they have been translated wrongly, in the future tense.”²⁰ This point is decisive. Thanks to the “Letter on Humanism,” Beaufret could understand that the “other beginning” had already begun in *Being and Time*. Still now that aspect of the book remains hidden. Beaufret even thinks that *Being and Time* did not become “entirely present” for Heidegger until 1964 (that is, the lecture *The End of Philosophy . . .*), and Heidegger confirmed: “It is the ultimate stage I wanted to reach.” The apprenticeship involves seeing what refuses to show itself and to see it from the perspective of that refusal.

Here the dialogue is no longer simply a preparation for listening but a way toward the thing insofar as it withdraws and thus calls for thinking. Quite clearly, when we say apprenticeship, we have in mind both the context of the craft and that of the workshop in the twofold sense of the craftsman and the

artist. Beaufret often spoke of Heidegger's "workshop": each learned his craft like Cézanne, each day, "sur le motif." Receiving from the Nothing is as inexhaustible as the appearance of Sainte-Victoire.

How does the "craftsman-philosopher" work in his "workshop"? In a text published in 1976, *The Enigma of Z 3*, Beaufret reports on a seminar given by Heidegger's on Aristotle in September 1948 at which "I was," he wrote, "the sole and unique participant." Let us look carefully at this extraordinary document. What was at issue, Beaufret says, was "to determine the meaning of Greek Philosophy on the basis of Kant."

The "step back" puts a twist in time which then begins to turn "against the grain," or "going backward"; hence an unhinging that brings Aristotle's thinking into view as it refuses to reveal itself, like a "phenomenology of what is present," but not as a "metaphysics" (a sentence of Heidegger's that was preserved by Beaufret). It is a matter of thinking the unthought on the basis of what it has given us to think. Kant is situated with Aristotle and Plato, because he experiences the presence of things on the basis of the horizon of their appearance, hence on the basis of a Greek horizon. This is followed by a phenomenological exercise which consists in having Aristotle himself speak by returning towards "the source of the source" in order to free from that source the entire force of the withdrawal which has remained unthought.

Heidegger gives the example of a rustic fountain where the spring water flows from the hollow trunk of a tree and reveals how this entity needs wood, that is to say a material (*hulē*), but according to a certain *eidos*, that of the fountain (an angle more essential than wood), then the composite of the two together (the *sunolon*). The *eidos* plays, in relation to *hulē*, the role of *morphē*. At that moment, the exercise allows one to see, that is to say, reveals that the horizon of Aristotle's interpretation is production (*poiēsis*), the movement of which is revealed by the gesture of the carpenter. This is a movement that is ruled by a *technē*. Beaufret writes: "In the humble gesture of the carpenter the highest knowledge is held in reserve" (Dia. IV, 22). The exercise also shows how the matter/form composite is able to appear, in a way that withholds itself from presence, when I simply speak of the fountain. But if now I speak of it, then everything begins to turn: the wood becomes inapparent, and that which shows itself as the *subjectum* is now the fountain insofar as I speak of it, that is to say, seized in the categories of my discourse. In so far as the logos has joined its being, the appearance is other. "In other words," Beaufret writes, "it is the entire scenery that changed, although what is at stake is always the same thing." The apprenticeship was provoked by the thing to be thought itself, which is the core of dialogue.

What Aristotle experienced there and what we just learned at the same time (the phenomenological approach produces this contemporaneity) is the

multiplicity of the “senses of Being,” *to on legetai pollachōs*. This clarification has also taught us that, for beings, the two horizons of *poiēsis* and *categoria*—and not only the categorial horizon—are determinative. Finally, we learned that Being’s self-unfolding takes place according to a continual turning which goes both forward and backward, both appears and becomes inapparent, a movement of being that “withdraws while it discloses itself in beings.” Hence Beaufret can say that Heidegger’s thought is a “unique path towards the question of the meaning of Being” and that “it always brings about a turning.”

With respect to this *Kehre*, we should remember what Gadamer explained: the word is to be taken “in the dialectal sense proper to the region where Heidegger had withdrawn. The turning designates the bend in the path that goes up the mountain. We do not reverse the direction of the path, when one turns it is the path itself that goes in the opposite direction in order to continue . . . to go up.”²¹ It is like a light that progressively changes as one goes forward. Let us imagine this continual turning, present at the same time, that gives us the possibility of “contemporaneity” and reminiscence. What has been the result of Beaufret’s thinking from such contemporaneity since September 1946? Contemporaneity is the way in which the realm of the site of origin appears. That also produced for us the equivalent of what was for the Greeks the overwhelming presence of *aletheia*, namely an effect of *Ereignis*.

The apprenticeship allowed by the step back outside philosophy in order to take it into view produces an *Ereignis* effect because metaphysics is the only complete epoch of the history of Being that one can see from beginning to end. In 1946, Beaufret’s sudden view of Being that is turned toward us and awaiting us produced in him another effect, one of concentration. It is this concentration that will allow him to go farther by developing what could be called, in reference to poetry (René Char), a “cutting-edge craft” (*métier de pointe*), or “a cutting-edge thinking” (*pensée de pointe*), which would be of the same rank as poetry. Beaufret’s repetition of the Same produces a difference. He thinks with a sharp clarity that makes thinking always more profound. In 1980 he translated the famous sentence from *On the Way to Language*: “Herkunft aber bleibt stets Zukunft,” not, as Fédier had it, by “the lineage is always to come” (*provenance est toujours avenir*) but by “the lineage, for the one who goes further, remains always to come” (*provenance, à qui va plus loin, demeure toujours avenir*).²² What does “going further” mean?



Here the dialogue between Heidegger and Beaufret becomes still more thorough and concerns us even more; what is at stake is what is handed down, the

heritage. Heidegger once wrote: “Each of us, each time, is in dialogue with one’s ancestors, and perhaps even more and more secretly with one’s descendents.”²³

Beaufret considered himself to be on an equal footing with Heidegger in 1964 when, translating *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* with Fédier, he rendered *Unverborgenheit*—the word that, for Heidegger, translates *aletheia* in *Parmenides* (verse 29 of fragment 1)—by *ouvert sans retrait* (the open without withdrawal) and in the rest of the paper as “state of non-withdrawal” and “state of being without any withdrawal.” In that same text, *Lichtung* is rendered as *clairière* (clearing).

What plays in this difference, the difference between Being and beings, is the difference between Greek thinking and the “other beginning,” that is, the thinking “to come,” which goes “farther” than the Greeks. The *Lichtung*, or clearing, delimits and guards the site of the withdrawal; with *aletheia*, on the contrary, the withdrawal is rendered invisible, as it were, by the excess of visibility (which does not mean it does not exist). The withdrawal is not thought; it remains unthought, that is to say, not yet thought, and it is as such that it is offered to the meditative thinking “to come,” that is, as the trace of a forgetting of Being (in the subjective genitive sense) that must be transformed into a positive experience.

In his *releasement* (*désinvolture* in the French is the word Beaufret used to translate *Gelassenheit*), Heidegger frees himself from Being. Freeing oneself from being means trying to think positively the forgetting of being. “Heidegger told me one day that at the dawn of the Greek world there was an undecided or indecisive time, *in der Schwelbe*, with respect to the path of history.”²⁴ The “going further” itself is governed by the holding-sway of the origin. What is handed down is this: the “gay science” of the indecisive *releasement* points toward another dawn, for which it is perhaps in season to decide. To decide for the undecided. To go further brings us nearer to the source of the source. A “thinking ahead”—a cutting-edge thinking—eventually reaches the latent undecided.



I would like to conclude with a reminiscence. I was almost twenty years old. I enrolled in September 1957 in the class of Beaufret at Lycée Condorcet. That year Beaufret had chosen to comment on the *Discourse on Method* and to give a long course on Bergson. He paced in the space between the board, the podium, the first row of seats, and the door, while holding, often vertically, a cigarette he had made and on which he drew, following the rhythm of his philosophical reflection, contemplating the smoke as it rose until the moment when, once the idea was sufficiently developed, he could start a new cigarette.

Beaufret's gestures, like the space of a dream, opened a world of indecision where anything could happen. Amused and bewildered, we listened attentively. This freedom of a thought in motion enchanted us. A sentence from Descartes found an echo in Nietzsche and Paul Valéry and extended finally to Husserl and Heidegger, whom Beaufret had seen recently and of whom he spoke with the warmth and kindness of friendship in his voice. When the bell rang, we often followed Beaufret to a café across from the Saint-Lazare train station. There our thinking continued while opening a universe of "correspondences." Beaufret told a thousand anecdotes of a past still present, sharing them as one shares a piece of bread with guests while following the thread of a single question which would suddenly reopen with great force precisely because it had remained in withdrawal until then: yes, what was important was to learn to distinguish between Being and beings and not to confuse Being with a privileged being such as God. At the same time, one must hold firmly to the other aspect of things: Being cannot be without beings nor beings without Being.

We had to manage with this "unavoidable [fact]" (*unumgänglich*) and return to it constantly.

It is like a butterfly, Beaufret used to say: "When a butterfly [*der Falter*] lights on a flower, its two wings are together so much so that one only sees one when in reality there are two. And, suddenly, here is the wonder, when the butterfly takes flight, its two wings separate. What was one becomes two. It is in this way that to the wonder of the Greeks, the twofoldness [*Zwiefalt*] of Being-beings happened, in the apparent unity of Being, each of the two referring to the other without ever merging with it. But on the contrary differentiating itself from the other, so that philosophy appears itself as the study of the entity in its Being. This time, the wings separate as they open and the "Greek butterfly," as Nietzsche says in the *Gay Science* [§83], has taken its flight" (Jean Beaufret, Lecture of March 29, 1982). While we the students were immersed in the heart of the question, the moment seemed to deepen and sharpen, and we were all together as if at the cutting-edge of time.

Translated by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew

Notes

1. Jean Beaufret, *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. IV (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1985), p. 81.
2. Jean Beaufret, *Le poème de Parménide* (Paris: PUF, 1984), p. 7.
3. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

4. Jean Beaufret, "Notre Creuse," in *Recueil* no. 2 (1985).
5. G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 193. (Heraclitus 212 fr. 53)
6. Jean Beaufret, *Confluences: A propos de l'existentialisme*, no. 2–6 (1945).
7. Interview with Henri Magnan, *Le Monde*, December 11 and 15, 1945.
8. Martin Heidegger, *Questions III et IV*, trans. Roger Munier (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 129–130. Henceforth cited as Q III followed by the page number. A bilingual version appears in an earlier text, Martin Heidegger *Lettre sur Humanism* trad. Roger Munier (Paris: Editions Aubier, 1957) pp. 176–180. Also see Martin Heidegger, "Ueber den 'Humanismus': Brief an Jean Beaufret, Paris," from *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1947).
9. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 268.
10. Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 1574–1598.
11. Frédéric de Towarnicki, *À la rencontre de Heidegger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p.143.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
13. Frédéric de Towarnicki, *Martin Heidegger. Souvenirs et chroniques* (Paris: Payot, 1999), p. 161.
14. Jean Beaufret, *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. I (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1973), p. 18.
15. Jean Beaufret, *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. III (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), p. 65.
16. Frédéric de Towarnicki, *A la rencontre de Heidegger*.
17. *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. IV, p. 102.
18. Jean Beaufret, Eryck de Rubercy, and Dominique le Buhan, *Douze questions posées à Jean Beaufret* (Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1992).
19. Martin Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
20. *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. IV, p. 58.
21. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Le Rayonnement de Heidegger" in *L'Herne* (1983): 142.
22. *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. IV, p. 59.
23. Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz and Joan Staumbaugh (New York: Harper & Row, Inc., 1971), p. 116.
24. *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, Vol. IV, p. 104.

Four

POSTSCRIPTS TO THE “LETTER ON ‘HUMANISM’”: HEIDEGGER, SARTRE, AND BEING-HUMAN

Dennis Skocz

The “Letter on ‘Humanism’” is exceptional among Heidegger’s works. Although Heidegger’s influence is evident in the work of many French philosophers—Levinas, Derrida, Irigaray, and others—and while many implicitly or explicitly critique Heidegger’s thought, the “Letter” is one case in which Heidegger responds to the thinking of a French thinker, Sartre, whose early work so clearly shows the inspiration of Heideggerian concepts.¹

The Makings of a Dialogue?

Heidegger characterizes the “Letter on ‘Humanism’” as an inadequate substitute for dialogue—for “direct conversation.”² We think of dialogue or conversation as a live, face-to-face exchange of views on a given subject which unfolds iteratively over time. The interlocutors trade comments. The discussion flows back and forth, and if it is successful, each participant walks away from the experience more enlightened, having benefited from the encounter. If this is a fair description of dialogue, the “Letter” falls far short. It is hardly an “even exchange.” We have only a few questions by Beaufret. All of the “argumentation” is unidirectional, from Heidegger to Beaufret. There is no response from Beaufret to Heidegger, no continuation of the discussion, at least not within the “Letter” itself. A few questions, and then a long reply. End of discussion. But these drawbacks are not the problem in Heidegger’s estimation. In written exchange, which Heidegger credits as offering precision of expression, thinking suffers the loss of its movement (*Beweglichkeit*) and the ability to maintain itself in its realm (*seine Bereich*). With this comment Heidegger implies that the “standard” for dialogue, written or spoken, is how well it thinks what is to be thought: does it enter into what Heidegger calls the “multidimensionality” of thought’s realm?³

The “Letter” addresses Jean Beaufret on the subject of humanism. Notwithstanding its explicit addressee, “Jean Beaufret, Paris,” we shall take the “Letter” as a dialogue whose proper interlocutors are Heidegger and Sartre. To be sure, Beaufret supplies questions to which Heidegger responds. It is Sartre, however, who proffers a response to the question of humanism itself in his essay, “Existentialism is a Humanism.”⁴ It is Sartre whom Heidegger seems most eager to engage. And it is Sartre whom Heidegger challenges to think the issue of estrangement—an issue that takes us well beyond the letter to Beaufret.

We shall measure the “exchange” between Heidegger and Sartre in being-historical terms. If dialogue is a way of thinking and thinking is measured by what it thinks, if, moreover, humanity as what-is-to-be-thought is being-historical to its core, then any thinking of humanity, being-human, must be a being-historical thinking. Such thinking seems to give unfair advantage to Heidegger, who already has more to “say” in the “Letter” than Sartre. Ultimately, however, the dialogue must do justice to the subject, humanism, or, more basically, being-human, and do so as that issue addresses the interlocutors. Since Jean Beaufret, Paris, raises the question of humanism, then it seems incumbent upon Heidegger to address that question as it unfolds historically and specifically for the French. Both Heidegger and Sartre, moreover, should be held to thinking human-being “transnationally,” as its historicity may require, and in its “multidimensionality.”

We shall argue that both Sartre and Heidegger fall short of a satisfying being-historical reflection on being-human. Sartre’s formulation of the question inscribes him in a metaphysical conceptuality from which he never breaks free. Heidegger, who helps us see this with respect to Sartre, fails to engage humanism in its historicity, that is, fails to think in the time-place-bound manner to which he has so often called us to think, and is silent on the political dimensions of human-being, notwithstanding what Heidegger calls “multidimensionality of the realm peculiar to thinking” (LH, 241). Initially we may put it this way: if Sartre does not think being-human in being-historical terms, then Heidegger leaves out the historical in being-historical, at least in its most pointed and pertinent political-historical sense.

Rethinking Humanity

Both Sartre and Heidegger eschew a definition of human-being. In this way, they situate themselves outside the tradition of humanism with its effort to define the essence of humanity, or what it is to be human.

For Sartre, there is no essence (definition) of human-being which would somehow precede me and determine my existence. Rather, I first exist and

then freely define what it is to be human. Since I determine what I shall be, my essence, then that essence can only come after my existence. There is no pre-existent essence of humanity. Existence precedes essence. Humanism, in so far as it presumes to posit a priori a definition of humanity, is fundamentally at odds with the facticity of human being. From "Existentialism is a Humanism":

Atheistic existentialism, which I represent, . . . states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man, or, as Heidegger says, human reality. What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. (EH, 19)

Heidegger also avoids a definition of human being. The problem is not with speaking of the "essence of human-being." Indeed, Heidegger says outright that the essence of human being is ek-sistence (LH, 247). Nor does the problem have to do with order of essence vis-à-vis existence. The problem derives from characterizing the essence of human-being in definitional terms, in particular, in terms of one definition (of the human as rational animal) and its terms (rational and animal), terms which are not thought through but taken as already understood. We may put it this way: it does not matter whether there is a universal, pre-existing definition of humanity (as humanism would have it) or whether I undertake to define humanity in myself (per Sartre). In either case, humanity ends up being something defined. Definition itself thinks any being as a being among beings, but, as we shall see, the human being is a being with a relation to being itself, and that relation determines the being-human of the human being (LH, 246).

Heidegger's meaning becomes clearer in his critique of Sartre. It does not matter, Heidegger says, whether I say that existence precedes essence or essence precedes existence. At root, either formulation is metaphysical (LH, 250). In the "Letter," Heidegger does not expound at length on the import of calling Sartre's existence/essence formulation metaphysical.

A clue to understanding the distinction can be found as early as 1927 in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. There the distinction is grounded in the "productive" orientation of *Dasein*.⁵ Essence—variously understood as idea,

form, whatness, and definition—is given as the *look of* what is to be produced, which one *looks to* in producing a thing. Existence is the actuality of the thing brought forth through the productive activity which makes it available, present-at-hand, and able to be found.⁶ Both essence and existence, then, derive from an understanding of being in terms of production. To employ the concepts of essence and existence without further ado is to acquiesce in an understanding of being in terms of production. Essence signifies the “what” or “how” of producing; existence, the “producedness” of the produced, its disposability, presence-at-hand.⁷

That the early Sartre takes this orientation in relation to production is clearly evident from Sartre’s own “letter” or rather “talk on humanism,” that is, “Existentialism is a Humanism.” The “first principle of existentialism,” Sartre says, is that “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (EH, 19). Existentialism is atheistic, but Christianity does not differ from it insofar as Christianity also understands human-being on the basis of a making. “God produces man, just as the artisan, following a definition and a technique, makes a paper-cutter. Thus, the individual man is the realization of a certain concept in the divine intelligence” (EH, 18). For Sartre, essence and existence are thought on the basis of the paradigm of production. Sartre invites us to consider the production of a paper-cutter, “some object that is manufactured.” The artisan has a concept of the paper-cutter on the basis of which he not only produces it but also knows its proper use. That prior concept of the paper-cutter, understood in relation to its producibility, is its essence. “For the paper-cutter, essence, that is, the ensemble of both the production routines and the properties which enable it to be both produced and defined, precedes existence.” Sartre continues, “we have here a technical view of the world whereby it can be said that production precedes existence” (EH, 17–18). “Essence precedes existence” can become “production precedes existence” because the paradigm of production governs both essence and existence from the outset.

Taking Measure

How does this “productive” orientation distort or occlude human being?

Heidegger’s own description of human being is grounded in the ek-static being of Dasein. Dasein is always already out beyond itself in the midst of things and exposed to being in such a way that it becomes the site or clearing of the truth of being. That the essence of human-being lies in its ek-sistence means: “The human being occurs essentially in such a way that he is the ‘there’ [*das ‘Da’*], that is, the clearing of being. The ‘being’ of the *Da*, and

only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of being" (LH, 248).

Existence as ek-sistence is not a making or production, whether the individual existent is seen as maker or made. Being human is not about conforming to a pregiven essence of humanity, nor about producing itself in a productive orientation to things.⁸ To think within the existence/essence distinction is to persist in a forgetfulness of being.⁹ To think in these terms is to occlude the exposure of *Dasein* to being—that which "gives" human-being its being and that in virtue of which the existence/essence distinction itself and any production of beings becomes intelligible in the first place. Metaphysics can only understand the clearing of being in terms of idea or categorial representation, the objective or subjective. This means the clearing remains concealed for such thought (LH, 252). The problem with metaphysical conception in terms of the essence/existence distinction is not that it is erroneous or useless but that it misses the truth of being. If metaphysics cannot attain to a thinking of the clearing of being, it can only think too little of being-human, since it is in maintaining itself within the clearing, in guarding the truth of being, that human-being has its "proper dignity" (LH, 251–252).

If Sartre's thinking falls short of the mark for laboring under the sway of metaphysics, does Heidegger succeed in his effort to think the being of human-being?

Heidegger defines being-human in relation to the truth of being. By his own account, however, the truth of being is historical through and through. Notwithstanding his insistence on being-historical thought, Heidegger's discussion of being-human in the "Letter on 'Humanism'" is curiously ahistorical. This statement itself might well seem curious. Does not Heidegger's learned sketch of the history of humanism, tracing its roots to the Romans, belie the charge that Heidegger fails to think historically?¹⁰

To be sure, his history is enlightening; its account of origins fully philosophical. What is remarkable about the history, however, is that it completely ignores the Enlightenment, the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen," the French Revolution, and the Terror. How strange that a letter addressed to the Frenchman Beaufret, inserting Heidegger in a debate of historical moment to the French, should make no reference to the preceding and none at all to any of the *philosophes*, the quintessential humanists of modernity!

Heidegger's German precursor in historical-philosophical thinking, Hegel, clearly saw the significance of the "Declaration" and the Revolution to the essence of humanity, history, and truth. Hegel identifies Freedom of the Will *per se* as "that by which Man becomes Man," thereby venturing a definition of the essence of human-being in terms of Will—a Will that "wills itself alone."¹¹ The

definition, however, goes beyond this abstraction. Freedom of the Will “wills specific rights and duties,” and as “Natural Right,” it comes to be determined as “Equality of Rights before the Law” in the “Declaration” of 1791. Thus, the “Declaration” comes to represent a concrete, historical definition of humanity, French in origin but universal in scope (or perhaps pretension) (PH, 444). As for the French Revolution, Hegel’s remarks tell us that he saw that event as a historical manifestation of the very truth of philosophy. Hegel essentially affirms the view, prevalent in his time, that philosophy “made” the French Revolution by characterizing truth as not only “Truth in and for itself, the pure essence of things,” but also as “Truth in its living form as exhibited in the living affairs of the world” (PH, 446). For Hegel, then, history—specifically French political history—is a site for revelation of both truth and human-being.

These glancing references to French historical experience, viewed by a German philosopher we link with decisively historicizing philosophical thinking, serve to underscore Heidegger’s silence about any of this. We could attribute Heidegger’s omission to author’s privilege and excuse it, except that it is Heidegger who in our time has accustomed us to thinking of the historical being, destiny, and *Dasein* of a people. One might justifiably reject such expressions as *volkisch* obfuscation, but none other than Derrida, hardly a fascist, recognized national philosophical understandings and called for a French reflection on the question of humanism and being-human.¹² Can one address the question of humanism as raised by a French thinker speaking from the historical and political context of France after World War II and not address the sense of *humanité* which is the legacy of the French Enlightenment or the political expression given to the concept of humanity in the “Declaration”? Can thought be called being-historical or address the truth of being and not address truth “as exhibited in the living affairs of the world,” including political events like the French Revolution?

Beyond the “Letter”

We can only speculate about how Heidegger might have responded to his neglect of arguably pertinent historical-political context. We do, however, have his words on what we must now confront with being-historical thinking. Heidegger tells us that the being-historical situation of our time is one of homelessness defined as the “abandonment of beings by being.” Homelessness, which is “coming to be the destiny of world,” is “evoked . . . in the form of metaphysics” and manifest in the “estrangement” described by Marx as well as in the “essence of modern technology” whose truth, “lies in oblivion” (LH, 258–259).

The word *Postscripts* in the title of this paper suggests that it looks at what Sartre and Heidegger wrote after the "Letter" concerning issues raised within it. How do Sartre and Heidegger, after the time of the "Letter," address the being-historical condition, that is, destiny, of homelessness?

First, Sartre. In the "Letter," Heidegger implicitly commends Marx to Sartre, describing Marx as a thinker who "by experiencing estrangement attains an essential dimension of history," a dimension he finds lacking in Sartre "as far as I [Heidegger] have seen until now" (LH, 259). Heidegger subsumes estrangement under homelessness,¹³ and his conflation of homelessness and alienation is certainly debatable. To do justice to the issue of how much the two have in common, however, would require a separate reflection. It is enough for our purposes that in each we see the human condition thought in essential terms as one of separation: the human being is understood as being at a distance from being-human. However differently the notions of alienation and homelessness play out in Sartre and Heidegger, Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* could be seen as one extended reflection on estrangement or alienation variously addressed under concepts such as seriality, the practico-inert, totality—although there is no reason to think that Sartre took Heidegger's advice in coming to reflect on Marx.

As we trace his thought, we should bear in mind what Heidegger says about the essence of (Marxian) materialism, "a metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as the material of labor" (LH, 259). The early Sartre, we noted, never breaks free of what Heidegger calls a metaphysical orientation. That orientation we traced to the paradigm of production implicit in the essence/existence distinction. By the time of Sartre's *Critique*, the essence/existence distinction does not enjoy the centrality it had in Sartre's earlier work. Nevertheless, production serves as the very basis for Sartre's understanding of history and the human condition. Between "Existentialism is a Humanism" and the *Critique*, a contribution to dialectical materialism (at least in Sartre's intention), there is an underlying metaphysical orientation grounded in the relationship of production—of making and being made. If the "productive orientation" of the early Sartre precluded his attaining an understanding of being-human grounded in the truth of being, then that same orientation in the later Sartre seems to describe an alienation that traps human being within a maker-made dialectic.

Human beings are both the makers of their existence and the products of their history. This theme is formulated repeatedly in various ways, whether the issue is history itself, materialism, or the human project. Obviously we cannot repeat in the course of short paper the whole of Sartre's thought in the *Critique*. We can only cite passages which betray their grounding in concepts related to production, making, and being made. A quotation from *Search for a Method*, Sartre's prolegomena to his *Critique*, frames the issue well:

If one wants to grant to Marxist thought its full complexity, one would have to say that man in a period exploitation is at once both the product of his own product and a historical agent who can under no circumstances be taken as a product. This contradiction is not fixed; it must be grasped in the very movement of *praxis*. (M, 87)

Sartre's version of materialism is determined through and through by the notion of production and related concepts: "worked matter, as an exteriorization of interiority, produces man, who produces or uses this work matter in so far as he is force to re-interiorize the exteriority of his product."¹⁴ Sartre describes the human project this way: "For us man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation, and by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made—even if he never recognizes himself in his objectifications" (M, 91). Writing of history, Sartre says, "my formalism, which is inspired by Marx, consists simply in recognizing that men make History to precisely the extent that it makes them" (CDR, 97).

Totality, a synthetic unity produced by past labor, "the vestige of a past action," is a concept which plays a dominant role throughout the critique. While totalities such as institutions, as passive and "inert" and "lie heavy on our destiny," they are "human objects," both made and utilized by labor; in a word, "they are products" (CDR, 45–46). Totalization, a companion concept to totality, "continues the synthetic labor which makes each part an expression of the whole [which is the totality]" (*ibid.*). Human labor, Sartre says, is the "original *praxis* by which man produces and reproduces his life" (*ibid.*). Sartre's description of the human habitat illustrates these related concepts: "The synthetic unification of habitat [totality] is not merely the labor [*praxis*] which has produced it [in totalization], but also the activity of inhabiting it [another form of totalization]; reduced to itself, it [the totality] reverts to the multiplicity of inertia" (CDR, 46). With these few but key concepts, we can sketch the dialectic of history as a *praxis* or labor. *Praxis* carries out a totalization which brings others and material things into an ensemble or synthesis called the totality. The totality owes its existence to the original and free *praxis* of totalization, but as an already constituted organization, it comes to dominate, limit, and determine those who make it up. *Praxis* or labor, which produces the totality, becomes the product of what it produces. The maker becomes a being made by what it makes, a totality which presents itself as a practico-inert. With the concept of the practico-inert in the *Critique*, the for-itself of *Being and Nothingness* comes up against its limit in the congealed mass of what has already been made by others; making meets the made, totalizing confronts the inert totality.

What Does This Mean for Being-Human?

Praxis always finds itself situated within an existing historical context, that is, within already constituted totalities (CDR, 54). Individuals are related to each other and the whole, defined by their discrete roles within an ensemble defined by its division of labor and hierarchies.¹⁵ As such, individuals are connected in disconnection.¹⁶ This alienated condition can be overcome, but only momentarily, in the fused group. Threatened from the outside, a serial group can fuse into a whole, a singular being (third party) defined by its project. In such a fused group, each individual is one with the group and all others but fully free and one with itself in a way which does not leave it alienated.¹⁷ But terror is at the heart of the matter. Exterior terror fuses the group, which confronts the threatening terror with terror of its own and ensures its own fusion with a terror that pervades its membership.¹⁸

Within the dialectic of maker and made, the only escape from the alienation of organization and seriality is episodic and terror-filled. Organizations, classes, the market, the factory, the state—all these already established totalities are so many ways in which *praxis* finds itself confined, if not trapped, within the alienation of the practico-inert. The metaphysical paradigm, which underlies Sartre's thinking from "Existentialism" to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, seems to preclude a satisfying response to the being-historical challenge of alienation.

And What About Heidegger?

In the "Letter" Heidegger links homelessness to the sway of modern technology. Recall that technology in its essence is a "destiny . . . in the truth of being, a truth that lies in oblivion"¹⁹ and that homelessness is a "symptom of oblivion of being."²⁰ Homelessness, then, is the manifestation of the condition of oblivion which technology has as its destiny. In "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger tells us that the essence of technology is not itself something technical.²¹ The essence of technology is a way in which being holds sway or reveals itself.²² But it is a way of revealing that is peculiar in two ways: it is a revealing which conceals not only other ways of being or revealing, but also conceals being itself as a revealing/concealing.²³ The threat posed by the *Ge-stell* of modern technology is not primarily a question of mastery and control—that human beings who create technology come to be dominated by it, not that the maker is made into an accessory of the machine. The threat is that the essence of modern technology "alienates" one from the truth of being.²⁴ If human being has its proper destiny in

giving shelter to the truth of being, being at home with being, then to be alienated from the truth of being amounts to being homeless.

Heidegger tells us that the salvation from the threat of modern technology is already implicit within the essence of technology.²⁵ The saving grace comes when the essence of technology manifests itself as a truth of being, as a way in which the revealing/concealing of being happens. There is no revolution here, only a turning—not a movement initiated by human being, but rather a turning effected by being itself. The turning is a turning within being itself, yet one which is needful of human being as the site where the turning happens. If the problem is a forgetfulness of being, an abandonment of beings by being, then the solution would seem to lie in a remembering of being, a thoughtful recovery of the being that has abandoned us.²⁶

If we understand Heidegger rightly, all seems to transpire within the realm of thought, within the conceptuality of the individual. Yet, the planetary domination of the essence of technique is not a mental construct. Agribusiness is a fact. Mining and heavy industry have changed the face of the earth. Hydro-electric power projects have produced real changes in the courses of rivers.²⁷ Mass communications and jet transportation have altered the tempo of human existence and expanded the scope of human dominion across and between continents.²⁸ Heidegger himself has noted all of this. Nevertheless, while Heidegger's description of the scope of technological transformation deals with the "real world," his remedy seems intellectualistic. This predicament suggests that perhaps the history of being is nothing more than a history of ideas. Perhaps Heidegger's thought has no application to relations among human beings, the circulation of commodities, power, conflict between classes, or the hegemony of the state. Or perhaps he can address these things and understand them in their being-historical significance but is powerless to suggest redress for the real dislocations of homelessness.

One might argue that the omission of the political—in the "Letter" itself and in Heidegger's discussion of technology *post scriptum*—is a political omission: "burned" by his involvement with National Socialism in Germany, Heidegger steers clear of any political discussion. Others more versed in such matters may make the case. Here we should recall what Heidegger says of the political in the Ister book and the *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In both, the political is understood from out of the *polis*, a word with wide scope and being-historical significance. To speak of the *polis*, Heidegger says, is to invoke the temples, the games, the festivities, the gods, the whole life of the ancient Greeks as it revolved around the city-state. The *polis*, in being-historical terms, means the space of appearance, the site wherein things come to the fore and have their being. It is the place in which, out of which, and for which history happens.²⁹

The *polis* also includes the more narrowly political—the state and statesmanship—as derivative from the “pre-political” sense of the *polis*.³⁰ The sense of the political evoked here is, in one sense, very specific, referring to the historical existence of the ancient Greeks. In another sense, it is very broad, encompassing the breadth of human existence as a multi-stage being-spectacle.

If the political is taken in its being-historical sense—as site of history—then Heidegger’s discussion of technology is quite arguably already political. *Polis*, in the widest sense, names that space of appearance, wherein the truth of being emerges, establishes itself, plays out, and endures. The essence of technology, Heidegger tells us, is precisely that revealing/concealing which establishes beings in their way of being, that is, in how they come to the fore and make themselves evident and accessible. The essence of technique establishes the space of appearance: it is essentially political!

But this explanation does not help. After all, the revealing/concealing of technology is one which covers over the truth of being. With regard to the *polis*, Heidegger does not discuss concealing, either as a mode of the truth of being within the *polis* or as something that might come to be exposed in the site of the *polis*. How does one go from the self-concealing truth of being which defines the essence of technology to a truth of being whose self-concealing is manifest? Identifying technology and the *polis* as “forms” of the truth of being blurs their difference. Moreover, sorting out their relationship would not address the problem we delimited: dealing with the “real effects” of technology’s monopoly on truth. In looking for “real means” to deal with these, we naturally turn to the practice of statecraft and use of state power. We look not to the *polis* broadly described in terms of truth, but to the state whose nature we are accustomed to defining in terms of power.

In his strictly philosophical writings, Heidegger has little to say about the state as distinct from the *polis*. He is, however, rather explicit about the state in a speech he gave in 1933 as Rector of Freiburg University. The theme of the speech is the role of the university and its students in the National Socialist state. “The state,” Heidegger declaims, “is the structure that awakens, and that unites, and when we submit to it, we put ourselves into it as a totality.” He continues, “It is only through the state that it is possible to raise ourselves to glory. We are in the power of this imperious force for the sake of a new reality.”³¹ Structure, totality, “imperious force”—these are the attributes of a sovereign being; they do not describe the *polis*, a “homely” site of “abode” from out of which “springs forth whatever is granted stead [*gestattet*]” (I, 82). The state which Heidegger describes in his 1933 speech is one in which “the great powers of existence” (to include “history, art, technical structures, [and] economics”) are placed. The “tangible character of these powers,” Heidegger asserts, “is

the measure of Truth.” Pulling together these characterizations, we see the state described here by Heidegger as a totality which not only gathers to itself all the powers of existence but through these powers defines the very nature of reality, that is, tangibly establishes the “measure of Truth.”

In 1940 Heidegger describes the metaphysics of modernity in a way that allows us to see the metaphysical character of the state he described seven years earlier. Modernity, Heidegger says, entails humankind’s “absolute dominion over the entire earth,” a dominion secured on the basis of the “self-development of all capacities of mankind.”³² This modernity has its “historical ground . . . in metaphysics” (N, 100). Within the metaphysics of modernity not only is “the relationship to beings . . . a domineering proceeding into the conquest and domination of the world,” but the human being as *subiectum* “gives beings their measure by determining independently and with reference to himself what ought to be permitted to pass as being” (N, 121).

In Heidegger’s state concept, the fluid and dynamic being of the political seems to reify in the state as a being—a dominant and sovereign being. The *topos* of the *polis* yields to *Staatsherrschaft*. Metaphysics, which understands the being of beings as being itself a being (the *subiectum*), establishes itself politically in the sovereignty of the state. Given this understanding of the political in terms of the state, so described, Heidegger cannot render a political account of being-human or technology or the humanization of technology without lapsing into metaphysics. If both technology and the state evince the prevailing of the metaphysical in terms of domination, mastery, and control, then it cannot fall to a politics based upon a state so conceived to offer a “remedy” to the hold of modern technology. Given the lack of a political comportment which escapes the hold of metaphysics, is it any wonder that Heidegger looks to a turning within the realms of thinking and poetizing to release humanity from the grip of technology?

A Final Accounting

At the “end of the trail,” Heidegger and his early disciple Sartre are burdened by metaphysics, albeit in different ways. The practical political outcome is much the same. For Sartre, the state is a totality whose organization and seriality make it an exemplar of the practico-inert, at best, a limiting regime on a creative *praxis*. Its solidity mocks the solidarity of the fused group, a group whose fraternity is a fraternity of terror. For his part, Heidegger does not articulate a politics apart from a *Staatspolitik*. Between the broad expanse of the political, as understood from out of the *polis*, and statecraft, as determined by the meta-

physics of the state, there is no middle ground, at least none that Heidegger stakes out. For Sartre, the state offers only the resistance of an inert totality to a free practice. For him, a politics fully equal to the freedom of *praxis* will be a *praxis* of revolution. For Heidegger, the state cannot be the solution to the problems of technology because it essentially belongs to the *Ge-stell* whose essence is technology. Nor can this same state illumine what it means to be human apart from metaphysics. A state whose defining character is sovereignty can only mirror the subjectivity of the subject as posited in metaphysics.

The long Franco-German reflection on being-human as pursued by Heidegger and Sartre before and after the "Letter on 'Humanism'" concludes with unsatisfying responses to the human condition understood as alienation or homelessness, but the "dialogue" on being-human continues. Hannah Arendt worked from a concept of the *polis* as a "space of appearance" to describe a politics founded in the action of speech. Habermas yet finds inspiration in modernity and a basis for political discourse in the intersubjectivity of communicative action. Perhaps it belongs to these and others to point the way in *post* postscripts.

Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 38. Henceforth cited as M followed by the page number.

2. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 241. Henceforth cited as LH followed by the page number.

3. Martin Heidegger, "Über den 'Humanismus': Brief an Jean Beaufret, Paris," from *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1947), pp. 55–56.

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism," trans. Bernard Frechtman, in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 19. Henceforth cited as EH followed by the page number. The essay goes by several titles: "Existentialism," "Existentialism is a Humanism," and "Existentialism and Humanism." The essay is based on a lecture which Sartre gave on October 29, 1945, which "overnight" made Sartre a "European cult figure," according to Rudiger Safranski, cf. his book, *Martin Heidegger, Between Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 356.

5. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 105. Henceforth cited as BP followed by the page number. "We shall attempt solely to show that the determinations adduced for *Sacheit* [thingness, reality], *essentia*—*form*, *natura*, *quod quid erat esse*, *definitio*—are obtained with regard to the producing of something. Production stands in the guiding horizon of this interpretation of whatness."

6. BP, 106–107.

7. BP, 109.

8. LH, 249. “. . . for existence is not the realization of an essence, nor does ek-sistence itself even effect and posit what is essential.”

9. LH, 250. “For even if Philosophy wishes to determine the relation of *essentia* and *existentia* . . . it remains to ask first of all from what destiny of being this differentiation in being . . . comes to appear to thinking. . . . We have yet to consider why the question about the destiny of being was never asked and why it could never be thought. Or is the fact that this is how it is with the differentiation of *essentia* and *existentia* [i.e., that the differentiation has not been thought from out of the destiny of being] not a sign of forgetfulness of being?”

10. LH, 244–245.

11. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, New York, 1956), pp. 442–443. Henceforth cited as PH followed by the page number.

12. Derrida, “The Ends of Man,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 111–115. Derrida says, “Every philosophical colloquium necessarily has a political significance. . . . The possibility of an international philosophical colloquium . . . implies . . . philosophical nationalities have been formed.” Derrida asks, “Where is France as regards man?” and notes that “after the war the thought that dominated France presented itself as essentially humanist.”

13. LH, 258. “What Marx recognized in an essential and significant sense, though derived from Hegel, as the estrangement of the human being has its roots in the homelessness of modern human being.”

14. Sartre, Jean-Paul, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol. 1, Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, NLB, London, 1976, p. 71. Henceforth cited as CDR followed by the page number.

15. Sartre, *Critique*, p. 446–447.

16. CDR, 66–67. Sartre describes series as a “type of human gathering and alienation,” thereby combining in what he calls the “anti-dialectic” or “dialectic of passivity” the contradictory vectors of connection and disconnection.

17. CDR, 367–368.

18. CDR, 405–406.

19. LH, 259.

20. LH, 258.

21. Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” trans. William Lovitt, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 4, Henceforth cited as QCT followed by the page number.

Postscripts to the "Letter on 'Humanism'"

22. QCT, 12.

23. QCT, 27.

24. QCT, 28.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Martin Heidegger, "The Turning," trans. William Lovitt, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 43.

27. QCT, 14–16.

28. Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," *Poetry, Language, and Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 165.

29. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), p. 128.

30. Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 82). Henceforth cited as I followed by the page number.

31. Martin Heidegger, Speech given at Tübingen, November 30, 1933, reported in Tübinger Tagblatt and Tübinger Chronik, December 1, 1933, excerpted at length by Oscar Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism*, trans. Gabriel R. Ricci (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1989), pp. 143–144.

32. Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Vol. 4, Nihilism*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (Harper, San Francisco, 1982), p. 99. Henceforth cited as N followed by the page number.

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Five

MERLEAU-PONTY'S 1959 HEIDEGGER LECTURES: THE TASK OF THINKING AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PHILOSOPHY TODAY

Wayne Froman

With the publication in the early 1960s of the unfinished text of Merleau-Ponty's *Le visible et l'invisible*, and shortly thereafter of the English translation by Alphonso Lingus,¹ readers were struck by, among other features, the prominence of Heidegger-like terminology in that work. To some readers of *Phenomenology of Perception*, this marked a break from that earlier work. To others, this was not the case. But assessments at the time had to remain in large part speculative. Now, with the publication in 1996 of the *Notes de cours: 1959–1961*,² we can return to that moment and we can understand all of this in more depth, including the direction indicated by Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work. The *Notes de cours: 1959–1961* contain the most extensive discussion of Heidegger's thought that we have from Merleau-Ponty. That discussion comes from the notes for his 1959 course at the Collège de France "*Possibilité de la philosophie aujourd'hui*." The plan for the course is divided into two parts: "*Notre état de non-philosophie*" and then "*La philosophie en face de cette non-philosophie*." The second is divided into two parts: "*Husserl: la philosophie comme problème*" and then "*Heidegger: la philosophie comme problème*." The part that addresses Heidegger's thought is divided into the following sections: (1) "De l'analytique du *Dasein* à la *Seinsfrage*," (2) "*Sein ou Sein*," (3) "Être et parole," "*Zeit und Sein*."

Merleau-Ponty wrote at the outset that his task here is not the exposition of Heidegger's work but rather to bring out in the later Heidegger what pertains to the question for the course, that is, what pertains to the possibility of philosophy. Still, I think it fair to say that in 1959 this text shows Merleau-Ponty remarkably perspicacious and well out ahead in terms of understanding what Heidegger was saying, before the at-length expositions of Heidegger's work would appear. I also think that even with those readings, and further, after two generations in French philosophy have now sought a way through a terrain marked out by Heidegger, when it comes to a relatively concise (comprising fifty-nine pages) and at the same time remarkably insightful study, the reading

that we find here remains difficult to surpass. What I propose to do is to track the route taken by Merleau-Ponty, specifying first how he understood the transition from Heidegger's earlier work to his later work and then specifying the implications, as Merleau-Ponty understood them here, for the questions that concern humanism, language, and history. Next I will address how Merleau-Ponty understood Heidegger's determination regarding, in effect, "the end of philosophy and the task of thinking," as Heidegger would call this in the lecture by that title that he first published, in 1966, in French translation. Finally, I want to suggest what light this reading of Heidegger sheds on the task that lay before him when, in 1961, Merleau-Ponty's work on *The Visible and the Invisible* was interrupted by death.

First, what of the transition from the earlier Heidegger to the later Heidegger? There is no reversal, if that means taking a position that is somehow basically contrary to what is said in *Being and Time*. The transition from the earlier to the later work deepens the questioning concerning Being. With the help of a number of passages that he pinpoints in the lectures and essays that had come after *Being and Time*, from which I will cite several that are pivotal, Merleau-Ponty goes directly to the new depth. Already in *Being and Time*, Heidegger refused to speak in terms of "I," "subject," "consciousness" (even purified of all objectification), "center of acts," and "experiences" (*Erlebnisse*), because if one does, Being becomes "non-I" or "object," making ipseity prior to Being (NdC, 96). Still, Merleau-Ponty observes that in *Being and Time* a unity *Dasein-Welt* had at times been expressed subjectively and thereby in anthropological-sounding terms. *Weltlichkeit* (worldhood) was considered as the "character of Dasein itself [*Charakter des Daseins selbst*]," and it is said that "[a]ll truth is according to its essential Dasein-related mode of Being, relative to the Being of Dasein [*Alle Wahrheit ist gemäß deren wesenhaften daseinmäßiger Seinsart relativ auf das Sein des Daseins*]" (NdC, 97). Now in "Was ist Metaphysik," in the 1949 Preface added to the essay to be precise, we find that "with 'Dasein' what is meant is what once, first of all, is to be experienced as place, that is, as the site of Being's truth, and then accordingly thought [*ist mit 'Dasein' solches genannt, was erst einmal als Stelle, nämlich als die Ortschaft der Wahrheit des Seins erfahren und dann entspreched gedacht werden soll*]" (NdC, 97–98).

Truth, *die Wahrheit*, when experienced as "correctness," first depends on a pre-openness in regard to the beings. This "opening to . . .," this "liberation for . . .," as noted in "*Wesen der Wahrheit*," comprises the *Seinlassen von Seien-dem* (letting be of beings), which does not lose itself in the being, but which maintains a distance in such a way as to reveal it. The "light" of *Dasein* is the distance reposed in (*distance ménagée par*) this Openness. The *Da* (is) then "*die Offenheit des Offenen*" (the openness of the Open). In order to express this truth

that is not to be understood in terms of any relation of exteriority or receptivity, any more than in terms of immanence, it will be said of truth not that it is "given" but rather that it is "not hidden," and this means *aletheia*. This is not a matter of "evidence," Merleau-Ponty observes, and that is because the distance of the *Seinlassen* (letting-be) is maintained, consequently making for a "hiddenness" (*Verborgenheit*) in the unveiling. The mystery, or the secret (*das Geheimnis*) lies in the way that all unveiling of a being is the forgetting that not all is unveiled, the hiddenness that is what gets hidden first. In keeping with this finding, it is necessary to say that the bestowal (*le don*) of Being is also withdrawal. Merleau-Ponty cites the Heraclitus fragment (123) *physis kruptesthai philei*, which Heidegger renders as "Rising (out of self-concealing) bestows favor upon self-concealing."³

Now comes a rather stunning observation from Merleau-Ponty, surely for 1959, to the effect that on the basis of *Offenheit* (openness) and *Wahrheit* (truth), the Heideggerian understanding of Being is not difficult. As he puts it, there is, in fact, a certain simplicity here. Merleau-Ponty cites several descriptions, most of which come from Heidegger, others from Proust. For example, there is the description in *Introduction to Metaphysics* of the high school where the Being of this being is accessible in how it is for both the students and those who recall it. Another such description is that of the difference between two mountain ranges, the Alps and the Pyrénées, a difference that Merleau-Ponty characterizes in terms of "modulating" Being differently. This is where we find a verbal sense of essence, *das Wesen*, by virtue of which "world worlds" and "thing things."

Heidegger finds his text *Das Wesen des Grundes* lacking in so far as it spoke of "ground" only in the sense of a being, rather than showed how Being amounted to a pure acausal principle. Merleau-Ponty notes how the sense of this pure acausal principle does come across in *Der Satz vom Grund*, where Heidegger makes evident that "there is no ground of Being but rather it is Being itself that is ground of all the rest, which actively founds all 'taking account of,' all grounding [*Be-gründung*]," and that "this is given with the very idea of Being as that which is of its own accord, as a rose that 'blossoms because it blossoms.'" (NdC, 109) At this point, *Seyn* or ~~Sein~~ replaces *Sein*.

Humanism, which relies always on its initial identification of the human being as the rational animal, misses what is of its own accord, that is to say that it never can get to the point where it could raise the question concerning Being. As one might expect, Merleau-Ponty cites Heidegger's rejoinder to Jean-Paul Sartre's declaration to the effect that the plane we are on is one where there are human beings only. Heidegger replied in the *Letter on Humanism*: "We are precisely on a plane where there is principally Being. But from whence

does it come and what is the plane? Being and the plane are the same . . . : there is Being: ‘*es gibt*’ *das Sein*. But ‘*il y a*’ translates the ‘*es gibt*’ inexactly. This is because the ‘*es*’ in ‘*es gibt*’ is Being itself” (NdC, 113). Merleau-Ponty clearly takes the point of Heidegger’s rejoinder to Sartre, but for his part, Merleau-Ponty replies that the French *il y a* renders the German *es gibt* quite well and does so because the *il y a* is “not centrifugal,” which is to say that it does not exceed itself toward anything beyond that of which it is said, and because *es gibt* does not mean *donner*, that is, “to give.” Here in his text Merleau-Ponty notes for further development (and the questions marks after Heidegger’s citation from Goethe are a mark of the lecture-note character of the text):

Cite Apollinaire, *il y a*. This is entirely what is meant by Heidegger when he cites Goethe particularly:

“über allen Gipfeln ist Ruhe” d. h. ???.

An “is” that means “reigns,” and “*il y a*” [“*is there*” (calm)]. (NdC, 114)

A-propos the human being, Merleau-Ponty cites *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

The there-being of historical human beings means: to be set out as the breach in which Being’s overpowering breaks in, in appearing, whereby this breach itself shatters on Being. [*Da-sein des geschichtlichen Menschen heißt: Gesetzt-sein als die Bresche, in die (die) Übergewalt des Seins erscheinend hereinbricht, damit diese Bresche selbst am Sein zerbricht.*] (NdC, 121)

Further: “The violence against Being’s overpowering must shatter on that. [*Die Gewalt-tätigkeit gegen die Übergewalt des Seins muß an dieser zerbrechen.*]” (NdC, 121)] And again:

There-being is the constant distress of the defeat and resurgence of the violent one against Being, and indeed in such a way that the all-powerfulness of Being disempowers (taken literally) there-being to the point where there-being is a setting. [*Dasein ist die ständige Not der Niederlage und des Wiederaufspringens der Gewalt-tat gegen das Sein und zwar so, daß die Allgewalt des Seins das Dasein zur Stätte seines Erscheinens vergewaltigt (wörtlich genommen) und als diese Stätte Umwaltet und durchwaltet und damit im Sein einbehält.*] (NdC, 121)

Merleau-Ponty makes the point that this does not amount to pessimism, that this is not a question of pessimism versus optimism, and he cites Heidegger’s rejoinder to Schopenhauer’s “life is a business arrangement that fails to

cover its costs," where Heidegger says that in the first place, life is not such an arrangement altogether. This "setting" is "the openness of the Open." In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty addresses this "openness of the Open" in specifying how perception gives us not only what is perceived, but along with it, what he describes as a certain "strange distance in proximity to the world." I am going to return to this at a later point.

Merleau-Ponty makes a crucial point in this discussion where he emphasizes that no compromise is needed in order to reconcile the texts from Heidegger in which the human being appears passive with the texts that deny exteriority to Being. This is precisely because in fact, Heidegger's thought is in essence a thinking of *aletheia*, understood as emerging of latency, never unhidden altogether, and in that sense, as "mystery." Late in life, Heidegger would confirm that all along, the thinking of Being was aimed at thinking "*aletheia* as such." The openness upon which all thought of truth as correctness would depend is "not receptivity with regard to an exterior term but rather it is the relation, prior to any representation, to a 'vicinity' or a 'surroundings' [*ein Bezirk*], the 'prior bestowal' of a measure" (NdC, 99). Merleau-Ponty's finding is that it is on this priority of a "vicinity" or a "surroundings," specifically in contrast to a receptivity to an exterior term, that an assessment (such as Jean-Paul Sartre's) of the later work from Heidegger as mysticism would eventually founder. In effect, what Merleau-Ponty detected in this reading in 1959 is a point that we now find explicitly in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie: Vom Ereignis*, namely, that Heidegger, in his later work, no longer held that space is derivative with respect to time, but rather that the two are equiprimordial.

With regard then to the transition from the earlier work to the later work in 1959, Merleau-Ponty's understanding is that "[t]he development is not [a] reversal from an anthropology into a mysticism of Being: the start is not anthropology and the end is not mysticism" (NdC, 93).

What are the implications where the question regarding language is concerned? First, Merleau-Ponty makes the point that language and speaking comprise "the cardinal problem of philosophy." It is as a result of a certain devolution that the word as spoken has been deprived of its ontological significance. It gets understood as an object to which a semantic meaning is attached as a property. Heidegger understands the essence of language and the essence of Being as indissociable. It is necessary to understand how words say what they say, in contrast to understanding words' semantic assignments. The divorce effected between a phonetic character of words, on the one hand, and a semantic character of words, on the other, must not be decisive. All of this accords well with the findings made by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* to

the effect that what is missed in both the empiricist and the intellectualist accounts of language is that “words have their meanings.” It also accords very well with determinations made by Heidegger in the 1951 essay “Logos (Heraclitus Fragment B50)” based on the 1944 course called *Logic*. Here Heidegger is convinced that the representation of language involving an “externally contrived” separation between a phonetic character of language and a semantic character of language sets in historically precisely when the opportunity is missed to think the essence (in a verbal sense, *das Wesen*) of speaking, saying, and language from out of the essence (in a verbal sense, *das Wesen*) of Being, and moreover, as that very essence (EGT, 77).

Merleau-Ponty draws on *Was heißt Denken* where Heidegger specifies the need for a transformation of logic within the question concerning the essence of language, a question that is different from “language philosophy” (*die Sprachphilosophie*), and Merleau-Ponty takes note of the fact that Heidegger’s understanding of this goes back to the early logic lectures. This means, in effect, a reversal of those developments that set in along with the dissociation between the phonetic and the semantic in language, namely, the transformation of *physis* into *idea* (and thus “visibility”) and the transformation of *logos* understood as “gathering” into *logos* understood as “discourse,” “recitation,” and “pronouncement,” and along these lines, the reduction of the truth of opening to the truth of correctness. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes how Heidegger’s understanding, for example in the following passage from *Introduction to Metaphysics*, runs contrary to those developments:

The denomination does not come afterward to charge a being that is already disclosed with a designation or a mark called a word, but rather inversely; it is the word that devolves from the high and originary, violent operation that is the opening of Being, to the condition of a simple sign, in such a manner that the sign in its turn slips in between ourselves and the being. (NdC, 126)

How are we to understand meaning? Again, Merleau-Ponty tracks the transition from Heidegger’s earlier to his later work. In *Being and Time*, meaning is understood in terms of the “as,” in terms of apprehending, interpreting, and conceiving “as.” But already, it is not a question of an intentional act, but rather it is a question of a “project.” Then, citing the Preface “What is Metaphysics?” that Heidegger added at a certain point, Merleau-Ponty observes how “subjective elements” are left further behind:

The domain, which sets itself up in the projection as open, in such a way that within it something (here Being) as something (here Being itself in its dis-

Merleau-Ponty's 1959 Heidegger Lectures

closedness) shows, is called meaning. [Der Bereich, der sich im Entwerfen als offener zustellt, damit in ihm etwas (hier das Sein) such als etwas (hier das Sein) als es selbst in seiner Unverborgenheit) erweise, heißt der Sinn.] (NdC, 132)

Merleau-Ponty continues:

The meaning comports [an] element of “spatiality” (*Bereich*) not as a condition without which there would be no object (Kant), i.e. a restrictive condition imposed on being by right,—but as synonym of Being: (. . .) Being is “*Gegend*,” is “that to which there is openness” [*ce à quoi il ya a ouverture*], that in which intentional acts deploy themselves. The relation to itself of Being, i.e. the relation of Being as *Seiend*, derived, to the being as Being, the “while” or “whiling” [modulating] it is [*estant*],—becomes the definition of meaning. This is no longer an attribute of subjectivity, it is the relation Being-being or the ontological difference. (NdC, 132–133)

Meaning understood in this way pertains to the way in which the word as spoken marks a relation of Being to itself by virtue of Being's withdrawal. It is precisely the point that marks the transition from Heidegger's earlier work to his later work, namely, the priority of a “vicinity” or a “surroundings” (*der Bezirk*), of “the region” (*der Bereich*), which allows Heidegger to regain that prior intimacy of word and meaning that was sundered when philosophy settled on the representation of language involving an “externally contrived” disassociation of a phonetic and a semantic character within language.

It is in terms of the priority of “the region” (*die Gegend*) that we are to understand that language has us rather than vice-versa. Merleau-Ponty cites Heidegger (from *Vorträge und Aufsätze*): “The human being speaks first and only, in so far as there is a correspondence of the human being to language, in that the human being heeds language's lead. [*Der Mensch spricht erst und nur, insofern er der Sprache entspricht, indem er auf Ihren Zuspruch hört.*”] (NdC, 133) There is a “play of words,” understood in a genitive sense. It is not we who play but rather, as Heidegger puts this in *Was heißt Denken*, it is language that plays with us. Merleau-Ponty proceeds to describe this as follows:

Its play consists in arranging, “behind our backs,” that [the] superficial significations of the word, lead us to saying something that has more meaning than we could know from considering the significations that are associated “fortuitously” in the same word. [This is] the life of language giving us a depth. “*Es ist als ob der Mensch Mühe hätte, die Sprache eigentlich zu bewohnen.*” [“It is as though the human being had difficulty in properly inhabiting speech.”] (*Was*

heißt Denken?)] From there, the appearance of passivity, of language that knows more than we, and nevertheless, this “unconscious” that plays there is, at the highest point, ours. . . .” (NdC, 134)

It is on this basis that we are to understand the mystery-character of language. Merleau-Ponty cites *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

The mystery-character belongs to the essence of the origin of language. Therein is found, however: language can only have begun out of the overpowering and uncanny, in the breach of the human being in Being. In this breach, language was in the manner of the becoming-word of Being: poetry. [*Der Geheimnischarakter gehört zum Wesen des Ursprungs der Sprache. Darin liegt aber: Die Sprache kann nur aus dem Überwältigen und Unheimlichen angefangen haben, im Aufbruch des Menschen in das Sein. In diesem Aufbruch war die Sprache als Wortwerden des Seins: Dichtung*] (NdC, 135)

Merleau-Ponty ends the discussion of language with a line from Hölderlin cited by Heidegger: “*Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos* [A sign are we, lacking sense]” (NdC, 135), which reminds us of humanism’s shortcoming in addressing what is of its own accord, and hence of raising the question concerning Being.

Where language is concerned, it is again crucial that this is not a matter of a receptivity to exteriority, and there need be no compromise where the refusal of exteriority to Being and the apparent passivity of the human being are concerned. This is precisely how Heidegger’s thinking is a thinking of *aletheia*, understood as emerging of latency, never unhidden, and in that sense as “mystery,” and this is precisely how it is from of Being that language is to be thought.

With regard to language, it has to be said that what Merleau-Ponty specifies in *The Visible and the Invisible* as the enigma of our “strange distance in proximity to the world” is definitely not made so by our saying it, but rather that language intensifies, or to use Merleau-Ponty’s term, “redoubles” the enigma.

After language, Merleau-Ponty addresses the question of history in relation to the transition in Heidegger’s work. As was the case with humanism as well as with language, it is the priority of “the region” (*die Gegend*) that marks the transition from the earlier to the later work, and here it facilitates, in effect, our understanding of the way in which the sense of historicity that comes to the fore near the point where *Being and Time* ended required that time be understood otherwise than within the tradition. The temporal sense of “the region” (*die Gegend*) is that of a play, a *Spielraum*, which provides a “margin that is not nothing, where the [temporal] ec-stasis can take place” (NdC 136). This is what makes it necessary to relinquish decisively the sense of a succession of now-

points, a “running-off” of such points that amounts to a diminution of Being. In fact, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes—in what amounts to a clue pointing toward Heidegger's *das Ereignis*—this is a question of a certain burgeoning (*bourgeoisement*) of Being. This marks a sense of history, but rather than speak in terms of history in the sense of *Historie*, which conveys a sense of successive actions and passions of human beings, and with this, that same sense of diminution, it becomes necessary to speak of history in the sense of *Geschichte*, which is related to *Schicksal*, fate, as well as to *Geschick*, and *schicken*, to send, and in this regard to the release by the Open that does not exhaust itself by the release, and finally, it becomes necessary to speak of *Seinsgeschichte*, “onto-history.” Once again, it is a question of Being's withdrawal by way of bestowal. This makes for the sense of the whiling of Being. Again, this is not a question of receptivity and exteriority but rather of *aletheia*.

The sense of history is to be understood now basically along the same lines as was meaning in language, and there is an intimate relation between the two. For each installation in onto-history there is a setting in which it proves its project. Thereby, Being is related to itself. By virtue of a sameness that this relation marks in the installations, onto-history displays a certain unicity. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that this understanding of the sense of history admits of neither devolution nor progress. This pertains to human history, and it also pertains to the history of philosophy. In regard to the former, Merleau-Ponty points out that while Heidegger finds the age of technicity marked by a certain severe and deeply rooted deterioration, still, technicity is ambiguous. For Heidegger, it is a mode of disclosure and in that regard it can harbor the means of “getting over” it, in contrast to destroying it or abandoning it. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that it is never a question for Heidegger of bringing a golden age back. Then, with regard to the history of philosophy, Heidegger finds a history of forgetting, beginning with the pre-Socratics, but at the same time, Merleau-Ponty points out, Heidegger understands classical Greek thought, and Plato specifically, in terms of an exemplary term to the great beginning, an exemplary term that took until Hegel to bring within reach.

Finally, in regard to history, Merleau-Ponty raises the issue of Heidegger's understanding of an identity between philosophy and human history, as well as a relation between philosophy and its own history, whereby that history is altogether true in what it affirms but untrue in regard to what it denies. Merleau-Ponty raises the issue concerning a certain “absolute knowledge,” such that all the rest that is interior to it, the entire past of philosophy, and with it the entire past of human history, turns out to be, at one and the same time, true and untrue. Would not such “absolute knowledge” thereby turn out in the end to be nihilism? In *Was heißt Denken?* the question as to whether the forgetting of

Being is not “the only possibility for mortals to arrive at truth” is asked directly by Heidegger (NdC 145). Heidegger understands nihilism to be no more and no less than metaphysics’ other side. It has its truth, Merleau-Ponty observes, but then nihilism’s truth is not nihilism. The question that remains is: in the end, from whence does Heidegger think?

First, Merleau-Ponty responds, ultimately what Heidegger thinks is not a matter of reflection but rather comes from the fact itself, of thinking. Its light comes from that very fact, where the light is the openness of the distance maintained in so far as Being’s bestowal is not exhausted in a being. What is illuminated is the fact of the light, and the light is this fact’s self-illumination. The leap involved here goes from reflection to this thinking per se. Another name for such thinking is *Besinnung*, tracing a path already taken by what is to be thought. The leap sets the thinking in relation to “Being’s topology” and thereby puts the thinking “underway” (*unterwegs*) (NdC, 146). Not reflection any longer, neither is this thinking still philosophy per se, although Merleau-Ponty adds, using a term suggested by Jean Beaufret, neither is such thinking “extra-philosophical.”

Now one may ask, Merleau-Ponty points out, not only whether the path of truth indicated is possible or if it is of a sound nature, but first of all if it can be divulged, which is to ask if it can be said. He cites *Was heißt Denken?* where Heidegger says:

... now, the possibility remains always—and it is just so in reality—that from now on one does not follow a way such as this, either because one holds that it is hopeless or superfluous, or because one holds that it is folly. Then, it would be necessary to renounce foreseeing the way, be that from without. Perhaps it is not in any case even indicated to render it possible [sic] openly [*ihn öffentlich sichtbar zu machen*]. (NdC, 147)

But, Merleau-Ponty says, this may, in fact, amount to just what Heidegger understands by “to be old” when Heidegger writes in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*:

To be old means: at the right moment to halt there, where, swung in, in its ramification, the single thought of a thought pathway, is. [*Alt sein heißt: rechtzeitig dort innehalten, wo der einzige Gedanke eines Denkweges in sein Gefüge eingeschungen ist.*] (NdC, 147)

In the first instance then, the issue is whether it is at all possible to make the way openly visible. In the second instance, however, the issue that remains is whether the single thought of the pathway can be said by the thinker even to

himself, the source perhaps, of what Merleau-Ponty characterizes as a certain discomfort that accompanies this thinking all along. Late in his life, Heidegger expressed a strong affinity with the painter Paul Cézanne, noting that like Cézanne, he worked alone, far from the contemporary currents, and with few results. Merleau-Ponty wrote on Cézanne in 1947. His essay, "Cézanne's Doubt" closes with the following:

Just as we may observe the movements of an unknown animal without understanding the law which inhabits and controls them, so Cézanne's observers did not guess the transmutations which he imposed on events and experiences; they were blind to his significance, to that glow from out of nowhere which surrounded him from time to time. But he himself was never at the center of himself: nine days out of ten all he saw around him was the wretchedness of his empirical life and of his unsuccessful attempts, the leftovers of an unknown party. Yet it was in the world that he had to realize his freedom, with colors upon a canvas. It was on the approval of others that he had to wait for the proof of his worth. That is the reason he questioned the pictures emerging beneath his hand, why he hung on the glances other people directed toward his canvas. That is the reason he never finished working. We never get away from our life. We never see our ideas or our freedom face to face.⁴

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty had referred to an "open or indefinite subjectivity" that displays this sense of never getting away from our lives all the while never seeing our ideas or our freedom face to face. Here is how he put it at that time: "One day, once and for all, something was set in motion which, even during sleep, can no longer cease to see or not to see, to feel or not to feel, to suffer or be happy, to think or to rest from thinking, in a word, to "have it out" with the world."⁵ This "open or indefinite subjectivity" marks what Merleau-Ponty would specify later as an imperception in perception. While Merleau-Ponty never appealed to Heidegger's analyses, in *Being and Time*, of conscience and the correlative senses of authenticity and inauthenticity, all of which looms so large behind Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, these 1959 lectures make abundantly clear that Merleau-Ponty was more than well prepared indeed for the later work by Heidegger. In the priority of the open that distinguishes Heidegger's later work, illuminating the later sense of Dasein as setting for appearing, the later thinking of language from the thinking of Being, and the way in which the question concerning history is posed in the later work, Merleau-Ponty found that sense of a strange distance in our proximity to the world, which is to say, that imperception in perception to which his *Phenomenology of Perception* had led. That earlier work by Merleau-Ponty can well

be understood as a de-struction, in a Heideggerian sense, of perception, which in the tradition, as Heidegger points out in *Basic Problems in Phenomenology*, had long been thought of as a bringing together of a concept and a sensory manifold, and understood in this way, had indeed served as the longstanding model for the tradition's ontology of production.

Here is how Merleau-Ponty takes note of the imperception in perception in a Working Note for *The Visible and the Invisible* dated September, 1959:

The perceiving subject, as a tacit, silent *Being-at* (*Être-à*), which returns from the thing itself blindly identified, which is only a *separation* (*écart*) with respect to it—the self of perception as “nobody,” in the sense of Ulysses, as the anonymous one buried in the world, and that has not yet traced its path. Perception as imperception, evidence in non-possession: it is precisely because one knows too well what one is dealing with that one has no need to posit it as an object. Anonymity and generality. (VI, 201)

Merleau-Ponty would thematize this anonymity and this generality, which characterizes the strange distance in our proximity to the world, in terms of *la chair*, *the flesh*, and *l'Être sauvage*, “wild Being,” which he would associate with “prehuman nature” and with a “pre-intentional present.” What the anonymity and the generality mark Merleau-Ponty specifies as an “inextricable involvement” with the world, and he describes it in terms of the way one's life is “enshrouded by those mists we call the sensible world or history, the one of the corporeal life and the one of the human life, the present and the past as a pell-mell ensemble of bodies and minds, promiscuity of visages, words, actions, with between them all, that cohesion which cannot be denied them since they are all differences, extreme divergencies of one same something” (VI, 84). He goes on to say that there are two types of error where this inextricable involvement is concerned: to deny it under the pretext that it can be broken up by the accidents of my body, by death, or simply by my freedom, or to husband it in advance for a system of a priori conditions. The “principle of principles” here, as he puts it, is that “one cannot judge the powers of life by those of death, nor define without arbitrariness life as the sum of forces that resist death,” which is to say that life does not amount to “death nullified” (VI, 84–85). It is this “principle of principles” that determines the enigmatic relation between on the one hand, the fact no one sees his or her ideas or freedom face to face, and on the other hand, the way that each of us can nevertheless say that he or she indeed is here. In his last work, neither duplicating nor renouncing the insights from Heidegger's thought that he understood so readily and so extensively, Merleau-Ponty set out toward phenomenological philosophy via a philosophical inter-

rogation of the world that he explicitly distinguished from reflection as well as from dialectic and intuition, an interrogation and a philosophy for which this “principle of principles” would serve as a touchstone.

Notes

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964). *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968). [Hereafter, VI.]

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours: 1959–1961* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996). [Hereafter, NdC.] [When cited, English translations are mine. Where passage appears in German in the original, the German citation is included along with my English translation.]

3. Martin Heidegger, “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B16),” in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 114 [hereafter, EGT].

4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” in *Sense and Non-sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia A. Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 25.

5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 406–407.

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Six

SELF-FASHIONING AS A RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF "ETHICS":
A FOUCAULT/HEIDEGGER *AUSEINANDERSETZUNG*

Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg

One should avoid the impression that dogmatic theses are being stated
in terms of a Heideggerian philosophy, when there is no such thing.¹

In staging this *Auseinandersetzung* or critical encounter, our focus will be on how Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger each responded to what we believe was for them a profound crisis of "ethics" in the modern world, our world. We want to begin by indicating the contours of the *Auseinandersetzung* that we shall undertake in this essay, and what insights we might expect from this critical encounter between these two thinkers.² We are not looking at these two thinkers to reveal influences, overt or hidden, of Heidegger on Foucault, though such influences abound. Our focus, then, is not on the traces of Heidegger in a purported Foucauldian oeuvre. Nor are we concerned with how our two protagonists understood the philosophical tradition from which each emerged, though here too, scintillating insights would arise. How, then, do *we* read Heidegger and Foucault? Our readings are informed by the distinction between "doing" philosophy in order to find definitive answers to general questions, or reading a philosopher to get him "right," to arrive at the "correct" interpretation of her thinking, in contrast to doing philosophy with a view to the kind of self one fashions on the basis of one's answers to the questions asked or the interpretations of a philosophy that one makes. This latter is linked to the kinds of "spiritual exercises" that Pierre Hadot has examined in the ancient philosophers. In their view, philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory—much less in an exegesis of texts—but rather in the art of living. It is a concrete attitude and determinate lifestyle, which engages the whole of existence. The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and being. It is a progress which causes us to *be* more fully. . . . It is a conversion which turns

our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it.³ This is what Alexander Nehamas has pointed to in his own attempt to articulate the meaning of philosophy as a way of life or an “art of living.” Thus, in discussing how he reads Nietzsche, Nehamas tells us the question is not “‘Does Nietzsche get it right?’ but rather, ‘Who do I become as a result of trying to understand what he is saying.’”⁴ Indeed, according to Nehamas, with whom we are in basic agreement on this point, the understanding of a thinker and its impact on the interpreter are intimately connected: “. . . to understand Kant you must try to imagine what kind of life you would live if you accepted his views and lived according to them.”⁵ So, as Nehamas says, “. . . when you read people like Nietzsche or Socrates, Montaigne, or Foucault you should not ask, ‘Were they right in the way they lived?’ or ‘Did they themselves live the way they said life is to be lived?’ but rather ‘How does that affect me? What am I to do once I read them?’ The philosophical question is not about them, but about you and your life.”⁶ What is at stake here is what happens when one takes something to be the truth? How does it affect my life when I take something to be the truth?⁷ Our concern in staging this *Auseinandersetzung*, then, is to grapple with the crisis of “ethics” that we believe confronts us today, the very crisis that we believe confronted both Foucault and Heidegger.

The insights of these two thinkers can assist us in both grasping the elements of that crisis, and in beginning to fashion a response to it. In that sense, we want to follow Foucault’s injunction to use his thinking as a “tool box:”

. . . a book is made to serve ends not defined by the one who wrote it. The more there are new, possible, unforeseen uses for it, the happier I’ll be.

All my books . . . are, if you like, little tool boxes. If people want to open them, use a particular sentence, idea, or analysis like a screw-driver or wrench in order to short-circuit, disqualify or break up systems of power, including eventually the very ones from which my books have issued . . . well, all the better!⁸

Such a vision seems to us to be consonant with one of the ways to read Heidegger, the way we have chosen to read him: that which places the emphasis on Heidegger’s insistence that his thinking is constituted by “ways, not works” (*Wege—nicht Werke*), that there are a plurality of ways, and that it is the matter (*Sache*), the question, and not even the author’s own interpretation that must guide the reader. At the opening session of his seminar in Le Thor, France, in 1968, Heidegger clearly disavowed the appeal to authorial power or finality in the matter of interpretation:

Self-Fashioning as a Response to the Crisis of "Ethics"

There can be no authority, since we work in common. We work in order to reach the matter itself [*Sache selbst*] which is in question. Thus, the matter itself is the sole authority. On the basis of the text in question, the issue is to touch, and be touched by, the matter itself. The text is therefore ever only a means, not an end.⁹

Heidegger's acknowledgement leads us to believe that the many *Holzwege* along the way may not be paths that led nowhere, the "wrong track," or a dead end on the way to the Truth, but rather that going "off the beaten track" may yet be the best way into the *Sache* to which he devoted his life. However, that said, talk of "wrong tracks" and dead ends may also indicate that for Heidegger there was, ultimately, a right track for which he searched, a position that contrasts with Foucault's thoroughgoing perspectivism and nominalism. Foucault is especially insistent in rejecting "a priori theories of the subject," or ahistorical claims about the structures of subjectivity, when he analyzes "the relationships that may exist between the constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power, etc."¹⁰ For Foucault, that means that the subject "... is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself."¹¹ Here we confront the question of the self-reflexivity of the subject: the subject thinking on the subject, on itself, which seems to imply the existence of two subjects, a pre-existing one that is the locus for reflection, and the subject that arises from the processes of subjectification. The English translation of Foucault's *Le souci de soi* (1984) as *The Care of the Self* carries with it the implication that there is such a pre-existing self (a subsistence?) that is engaged in the reflection or that is the object of care or concern. The French carries no such implication, inasmuch as Foucault does not speak of the self (*du soi*), but care of self (*souci de soi*). His claim is that the reflexive practices entail no substantial self. As Timothy O'Leary has put it: "... if we take Foucault to be writing a history of reflexive practices, rather than practices which target a substantial entity called 'the self,' then we can more easily avoid the illusion that Foucault's late work consists of a return to the subject, a return to a definite self."¹² It is for reasons such as this, perhaps, that Hubert Dreyfus concludes that:

In the last analysis Foucault is more radical than Heidegger, in that, consistent with his opposition to *all* totalizing, he avoids any account of what human beings essentially are and are called to do. . . . Although Foucault does attempt to be receptive to the problematisations in our current practices "through which being offers itself as having to be thought," he does not claim that in so doing he is fulfilling his human essence.¹³

Dreyfus's reading has much to recommend it. However, his focus on *Being and Time* to the exclusion of the *Denken* of the young Heidegger, especially the Heidegger of the early Freiburg lecture courses and writings, to which we shall refer, may obscure an important dimension of Heidegger's thinking. Indeed, our own reading that there is not one way, but a plurality of ways, has led us to conclude that Heidegger's youthful writings and lecture courses on the way to *Being and Time* may provide us with some of the tools that will be most useful in confronting the crisis of "ethics" that preoccupies us here.¹⁴

However, if we take Heidegger, like Foucault, to be a postmetaphysical thinker, then "... incompleteness and imperfection belong to the very style" of his *Denken*, "which can only pursue traces [*Spuren*] and hints [*Winke*] and is ever 'on the way.' Metaphysics strives for perfection, completion, in the sense of having thought in the actualization and presence of its end [*entelecheia, perfectio*], whereas the work [*ergon*] or text of postmetaphysical thinking puts itself forth as *energeia ateles*, i.e., being at work that never reaches its end and is thus imperfect."¹⁵ We are, then, seeking no transcendental ground for knowledge as we confront what we see as a crisis of "ethics." Were it possible to simply discard the grammatical rules or canons within which our own tradition constrains us, we would end our sentences not with a full stop or period (.), but with ellipses (...), to indicate that our thoughts are always on the way, provisional, that there is still something lacking and unfinished there. The conviction that we are ever on the way, that there are a plurality of ways, presupposes the incomplete nature of both our own thinking and our own text.¹⁶

What then of "ethics," the crisis of which is our focus? We are taking ethics here not in the sense of code morality, the moral law or commandments in its manifold forms, that has been the hallmark of human communities, but rather, as in Foucault's last writings, as the self's relationship to itself, its *rapport à soi*, which includes its self-practices (*pratiques de soi*) through which we become ethical subjects, and the way in which the subject constitutes itself in relation to what it takes to be the truth. This is ethics "... understood as the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct."¹⁷ An "ethical fourfold" is how Paul Rabinow has described the modalities through which "the free relationship to the self" that constituted the basis for ethics, according to Foucault, could be examined.¹⁸ This ethical fourfold entailed one's ethical substance, the part of oneself that is the primary focus of ethical behavior; the mode of subjectification, the way in which the subject recognizes or acknowledges his/her ethical obligations; the ethical work or self-forming activity that one engages in so as to become an ethical subject; and the telos or goal of one's ethical activity. The actual content of this ethical fourfold unfolds and is transformed historically,

shaped and reshaped through periods of crisis. Integral to such an understanding of ethics, then, is Foucault's emphasis on the "care of self" and the unending task of fashioning a self. As we shall see, this became the focus of Foucault's thinking in the final years of his life (1980–1984), and accounts for the eight-year hiatus between the publication of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* (1976) and that of the final two, as well as the dramatic change in the project's content.

That conception of ethics has links to Heidegger's understanding of Dasein as an entity whose way of being (*So-Sein*) entails "care" (*Sorge*), especially as instantiated in Heidegger's early Freiburg lecture courses (1919–1923), and then developed in the Marburg lecture courses as well. Thus, in his Marburg lecture course for the summer semester of 1927, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger says: "Each of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of."¹⁹ It is on the way to *Being and Time* that it is most clear that Heidegger's focus is on Dasein's *So-sein*, in contrast to a purported "essence" of its being, its *Was-sein*, with its overtones of metaphysical fixedness, that stalks Heidegger's breakthrough work of 1927. A few words on Heidegger's treatment of Dasein in *Being and Time*, in relation to its treatment in the writings and lecture courses on the way to the work that established his philosophical reputation are in order here. While too hard and fast a periodization is risky here, we do agree with the thrust of John van Buren's interpretation of *Being and Time* as overdetermined by Kant:

Thus, his earlier experimentation with a plethora of different thought-paths narrowed and hardened for a time into a quasi-Kantian transcendental self-interpretation. . . . In [*Being and Time*] Heidegger effected a reconfiguration of his earlier articulation of the intentional senses of being. Here the 'it worlds' of content-sense, the 'Dasein of personal life,' and the freewheeling *Ereignis* and *kinesis* of temporalizing-sense came to be reinscribed respectively as the existential-transcendental 'structures' of the 'worldhood' of the world, of the 'existentiality' of Dasein, and of the 'schemata' of temporality.²⁰

Nonetheless, if we are prepared to read Heidegger's analytic of Dasein, in *Being and Time*, through the *Geschichtliche* (historical) lenses with which the early Heidegger apprehended factual life (*factisches Leben*), or the later Heidegger sought to grasp the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*), the very categories of *Sein und Zeit* come alive, and add depth and dimension to the young Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity, with its nonobjectifying *Denken*, suffused with a sense

of the “historicity” of being, including the very categories with which we seek to grasp the entities of our world. Dasein then reveals itself as living not just amidst an enviroing world, but to inhabit both a self-world and a with-world, a communal world; a being that is described as early as 1919 as an “I-self, the ‘historical I’ [which] is a function of ‘life-experience,’” and which “is necessarily of a social nature. . . .”²¹

We take Dasein, in the words of Charles Guignon, “. . . to be an unfolding *event* or *happening* that is so thoroughly enmeshed in a shared lifeworld that there is no way to draw a sharp line between either self and world or self and others. Given this conception of our existence as agency embedded in a field of relations, the substance ontology simply has no real role to play in grasping who we are.”²² On this view of Dasein, “[we] are . . . self-making or self-constituting beings; we just *are* what we make of ourselves in the course of living out our lives.”²³ Because Dasein is communal, inhabiting a with-world, it also has a political dimension, which Heidegger couldn’t ignore because, as Christopher Rickey has insisted, “. . . philosophy shares with political science the question ‘How should we live?’”²⁴ Dasein, then, is a question for itself. Glossing Heidegger’s claim that “the ‘essence’ [*Wesen*] of Dasein lies in its *Existenz* [*liegs in seiner Existenz*],”²⁵ John Haugeland tells us that Dasein is “extant” (his translation for *Existenz*) “if what (or ‘who’) it is, in each case, is its own efforts to understand what (or who) it is. . . .”²⁶ Here, William Blattner’s interpretation is apposite:

The “essence” of Dasein lies in its be-ing, its going about the business of being in the way that it does. The term “essence” always occurs in scare-quotes, because Dasein actually has no essence in the normal sense. . . . Who Dasein is is not settled by some essence that defines it, but rather is an issue Dasein must confront and address in existing. We can say that who Dasein is is questionable, in the sense that it is always in question.²⁷

That vision, in which, as Hubert Dreyfus puts it, Dasein takes a stand on its own being,²⁸ a being integrally linked to a determinate time and place, to what for Foucault is our historical era, and in which Foucault’s call for a permanent critique of our self seems to us to be tantamount to taking a stand on one’s own being, links Heidegger to the same kind of ethical concerns that preoccupied the final Foucault. For both thinkers, as we read them, what was at issue was the challenge of constituting a way of life and, linked to that, the understanding of philosophy as a way of living. As Jean Grondin has pointed out: “In this way, the ‘ontology’ of Dasein was not only unmistakably directed towards ethics; even more, it was itself an ethical enterprise.”²⁹

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What is the crisis to which such a Heideggerian ethical enterprise responded; what led Foucault to focus on ethics in the last years of his life; and what is the crisis of ethics to which we believe it is necessary to respond today?

It seems to us that the origins of that crisis can be found in Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. With the death of God perished the code morality the authority for which God, or his transfiguration into a transcendental subject, had provided. As Foucault pointed out, Nietzsche was not the first thinker to signal the death of God: Hegel and Feuerbach had already made that claim. But whereas Hegel filled the space vacated by the death of God with Reason and Feuerbach with Man, according to Foucault, "for Nietzsche, the death of God signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man, and the space remains empty."³⁰ It is that space, vacated by the death of God, a space that has remained empty, which has generated the profound ethical crisis through which we have lived now for more than a century; a crisis exacerbated by the many efforts to fill that space with one or another transfiguration of the ascetic ideal, with "new" gods to be worshipped. And the death of God was, as Foucault pointed out in the final page of his *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*), the prospective basis for the death of man; not human being, but the historical form of the subject that had shaped the modern West:

As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble . . . then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea.³¹

Foucault was convinced that the subject of humanism, and the metaphysical and epistemological bases upon which she had arisen, was indeed in the process of disappearing. That subject can be traced back to Descartes, for whom, according to James Bernauer, ". . . the discovery of the *cogito* was actually the transference to man of God's function in medieval metaphysics as source of the world's reality and intelligibility. . . . After Kant and Hegel had completed the transference and Nietzsche had declared it a cultural fact, it was Foucault who saw that the death of God necessarily entailed the death of the figure who had taken on his role as the Absolute."³²

What would fill the void left by the death of God and of his placeman, the humanistic subject? How might the historico-cultural crisis to which Foucault

was responding, and which Nietzsche had first signaled, unfold? In the absence of an alternative to God or to the existing transcendent values, for Nietzsche, there was a risk that new manifestations of “metaphysical need,” the need for the world and its suffering to have an ahistorical, transcendent, meaning inherent in it, would arise. In their wake new forms of “metaphysical comfort,” to gratify the longing for some meaning to be found in the world’s suffering—what Nietzsche described as “healing, comforting worlds of illusion,”³³ even new forms of the ascetic ideal, the goal of which is the establishment of an incontrovertible ground for *absolute truth*—might emerge. And beyond that, there was the danger of falling into the abyss of *nihilism*, where all that remained was the will to nothingness, and the brutal ideologies and structures that could arise on its basis. According to Aaron Ridley, “the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal leaves us entirely bereft of a goal; and without a goal we will be catapulted into nihilism.”³⁴ Yet nihilism, for Nietzsche, can be a positive as well as a negative phenomenon. It “can be a symptom of increasing *strength* or of increasing *weakness*. . . .”³⁵ Indeed, nihilism can open up the space for the re-valuation of values, for transfiguration, for a project of self-fashioning: “It is a measure of the degree of strength of will to what extent one can do without meaning in things, to what extent one can endure to live in a meaningless world *because one organizes a small portion of it oneself*.”³⁶ In that sense, while nihilism and the death of God means the devaluation of the highest values, or a world in which the very meaning of values becomes arbitrary, as Arthur Danto glosses Nietzsche the realization “that life is without meaning” can also be “the most liberating thought imaginable.”³⁷ But as Ridley also points out, “Nietzsche’s deepest fear is not nihilism.”³⁸ Rather, it is that into the void created by the death of God, there will step the “last man,” a subject form who lacks the very capacity to will, even to will nothingness. Nietzsche’s frightening vision of the last man is that of the living dead, a species of humankind whose pre-eminent feature is total conformism shorn of any capacity to create meaning within the ambit of its social and cultural existence. In contrast to the prospect that man may “. . . give birth to a dancing star,” the overman (*Übermensch*), with the capacity to create meaning in a meaningless world, that Nietzsche advances in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he also signals another, ominous, possibility: “Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*.”³⁹

Heidegger’s ontology of Dasein and his focus on factual life in his early Freiburg lecture courses, as well as a reading of *Being and Time* that accentuates the historicity of Dasein and its analytic of finitude in contrast to its essentialism, is no less evocative of such a crisis. Indeed, the very categories that Hei-

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degger wields in *Being and Time*—anxiety, death, inauthenticity—bespeak the presence of just such a crisis of ethics, including the danger, on the one hand, that *das Man* (the anyone) will not even recognize or care about such a putative crisis, as well as, on the other hand, an understanding of the possibilities for confronting it.

While the death of man is the historico-cultural soil upon which this crisis of ethics manifests itself, both Heidegger and Foucault also saw that crisis instantiated in the institutional-political world in which they lived. Thus, Heidegger saw the Weimar university and its transformation into an institution for technical-professional training as one more manifestation of the distress (*Not*) that afflicted Germany and the West: the fragmentation of the modern university into a multiplicity of separate disciplines made it virtually impossible to see either the danger to *Dasein* or the possibilities for a response to this crisis.⁴⁰ Foucault's role as a "specific intellectual," who makes no absolute claims to knowledge and who seeks to confront the power relations instantiated in the institutions and structures within which he lives and works, also confronted him with the impact of the broader cultural crisis that he had diagnosed on the actual political struggles in which he was engaged. Thus, the failures of university reform, the limits of his efforts to make an impact on the penal system in France, and, perhaps most importantly, the silence of the left government in France in the face of martial law in Poland and the crackdown on Solidarity, are all linked to the project of self-fashioning which became the focus of his intellectual efforts in the period after 1980. Indeed, those failures appear to have compelled him to conclude that resistance to the domination and control instantiated in the ambient forms of power/knowledge, despite the enormous obstacles it faced, necessitated a radically new form of relationship to self:

And perhaps in this series of undertakings to reconstitute an ethic of the self, in this series of more or less blocked and frozen efforts . . . I think we are compelled to suspect that the constitution of an ethic of the self may be impossible today, even though it might be an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task, if it is, after all, true that there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship of self to self.⁴¹

The urgent need for an ethic of self-fashioning and the prospect that such an undertaking might be "impossible today" are the measure of the stakes of the crisis of ethics as Foucault understood it.

Both Heidegger and Foucault also found a basis for their own responses to the ethical crisis provoked by the death of man in Nietzsche. If nihilism or the last man was one outcome of this crisis, the fashioning of a self, its transformation from

a dispersed self into a shaped self, and the ability to generate values without transcendentals, was another. The point of departure for both Heidegger and Foucault was to be found in their responses to Nietzsche's question "How One Becomes What One Is," which serves as the epigram to his autobiographical reflections, *Ecce Homo*.⁴² This is a question with which both of our protagonists wrestle, and which is a response to the crisis of ethics. Thus, for Heidegger, "And only because the being of the there gets its constitution through understanding and its character of project [*Entwurfcharakter*], only because it *is* what it becomes or does not become, can it say understandingly to itself: 'become what you are!'" (*werde, was du bist!*)⁴³ Foucault also responded to the Nietzschean question, as Herman Nilson's gloss shows:

Foucault's genealogy, directed at the future, did not prophesy or promise, but was founded on present-day problems in the here and now, and the possibilities for their change. The future for him was an open horizon and dispensed with any ultimate purpose[. . .] The future was the yet to be fashioned freedom, the challenge, reaching into the present, to make one's life a work worthy of recollection for future generations. For Foucault, the future was an open-ended game, in which—in Nietzsche's affirmative sense—"one becomes what one is."⁴⁴

Our *Auseinandersetzung*, however, reveals that Heidegger and Foucault grapple with very different facets of this complex issue. Heidegger's exceedingly rich description of Dasein's factual life, of what he designates in his comments on Jaspers's *Psychology of Worldviews* as "an essentially 'historical' phenomenon," and especially his gloss on the experience of the "I am," in which "(t)he 'I' should be understood here as the full, concrete, and historically factual self that is accessible to itself in its historically concrete experience of itself," and in which the "am" of the "I am" "takes the form of the nontheoretical 'objectivity' that belongs to *what is of significance to us* in our experience of the enviroing world, the social world we share with each other, and also the world of the self,"⁴⁵ provides us with both a framework for grappling with this crisis and a point of departure for an inquiry into the kind of *self* that might historically emerge from it. Here, shorn of any essentialism, are the bases for the rich description of the nothing, anxiety, death, resoluteness, authenticity, indeed, of the whole complex of experiences of *finitude*, for which there is nothing comparable in Foucault's tool box. By contrast, despite his groping towards Dasein's individuation, its prospects for being a self, there is nothing in Heidegger comparable to the richness of the exploration of the actual modalities for the fashioning of a self to be found in the final Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure, The Care*

of the Self, or his last lecture courses at the Collège de France, especially *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. We believe that early Heidegger and late Foucault compliment one another, providing us with vital elements for an understanding of what might be entailed by a project of self-fashioning as a response to the crisis of ethics through which we are now living.

One facet of such a project is instantiated by the mode of doing philosophy wielded by each of our thinkers. The young Heidegger's mode of doing philosophy, with its basis in the being-there of Dasein as a being-in-the world, necessitated his repudiation of the subject-object schema, which "fundamentally and forever obstructs access to that which we indicated with the term 'factual life' ('Dasein')." ⁴⁶ In its place, Heidegger developed a modality based on philosophical concepts as "formal indications" (*Formale Anzeige*), one that eschewed universals and transcendentals, which did not seek to reveal or cognize what was present-at-hand, and which rejected any foundation or ground for its own tentative conclusions. Heidegger's challenge, as Daniel Dahlstrom has aptly described it, was to find a way to "address and determine manners of being . . . without thereby reducing them to something on hand. In various ways between 1919 and 1930 he attempts to solve the problems of thematization . . . by stressing what he calls the 'formally indicative' character of philosophy and philosophical concepts." ⁴⁷ For Heidegger, formal indication "should be seen to make up the fundamental methodological sense of all philosophical concepts. . . ." ⁴⁸ Concepts, as formal indications, signal or provide a direction towards something, an aspect or feature of factual life or being-in-the-world. Thus, in contrast to the cognition of what is present-at-hand, concepts as formal indications eschew fixity and closure. This last is a point upon which Heidegger had insisted in his winter semester 1920–1921 lecture course: "In the formal indication one stays away from any classification; everything is precisely kept open." ⁴⁹ What the young Heidegger was searching for when he insisted that philosophical concepts are formal indications was a nonobjectifying language, the emphasis of which, as John van Buren claims, was on ". . . how the absent, nonobjectifiable, noncalculable depth-dimension of the futurity of being is temporalized and individuated in unique situations." ⁵⁰ This modality or way of doing philosophy, with its focus on the experiential as opposed to the substantive, the contingent as opposed to the absolute, marks a radical break with the dominant tradition in Western philosophy, and especially with the turn it took with Descartes. Thus, as Lawrence Hatab has pointed out: "Formal indication also does not provide any foundational or metaphysical comfort that would supersede the flux of life, but only a rough sketch that prepares a leap into the irreducible movements of existence. . . ." ⁵¹ The vision of philosophy that Heidegger articulated in these texts and lecture

courses meant that philosophy was constantly questioning itself with respect to what it is all about. The method of formal indication that Heidegger acknowledged still shaped his analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time*⁵² and that he elaborated upon in his winter semester 1929–1930 lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, then, was steeped in a vision of philosophical categories as thoroughly historical and therefore provisional.

Moreover, in that 1929–1930 lecture course, Heidegger also explicitly linked the method of formal indication to “a transformation of human Dasein:” “We can only understand the *concepts* . . . as long as they are not taken to signify characteristic features or properties of something present at hand, but are taken rather as *indications* that show how our understanding must first twist free from our ordinary conceptions of beings and properly transform itself into the Da-sein in us.”⁵³ In his own detailed inquiry into the method of formal indication, Daniel Dahlstrom has shown that “. . . what is ‘formally indicated or signalled’ is not given as something already complete and understandable through comparison, contrast, and classification; instead, what is ‘formally indicated’ is understandable only insofar as the philosopher performs or carries out some activity himself.”⁵⁴ That activity entails a transformation of her Dasein. The concepts generated as formal indications become embodied in the self, gripping the person whose life is transfigured in terms of them. Indeed, unless philosophical concepts as formal indications grip us, challenge the prevailing modes of conceptualization, and lead us to question the very bases of our existence, they will remain lifeless and mute.⁵⁵

With respect to formal indication, some of the most sensitive interpreters of Heidegger, whose work has informed our own, such as Hubert Dreyfus, John Haugeland, and William Blattner, by virtue of their realism do not seem to appreciate the significance of Heidegger’s methodological move here. Thus, in his Forward to the Dreyfus *Festschrift*, Richard Rorty tells us that “Dreyfus and I have always held divergent metaphilosophical views: we have differed about whether to read our favorite philosophers as telling you how things really are or as recontextualizers—people who do not reveal the essential nature of anything, but simply tell you how things look when rearranged.”⁵⁶ Meanwhile, in his responses in the same volume, Dreyfus distinguishes himself from Haugeland, who, he says, “is no Heideggerian. He has gotten Heidegger’s priorities reversed. *Dasein* does not disclose itself in order to disclose the being of entities; *Dasein* discloses the being of entities in order to disclose itself.”⁵⁷ However, it would seem that, for both Haugeland and Dreyfus, their differences notwithstanding, what is at issue is the essence of Dasein, its existentiality, precisely what Heidegger’s understanding of concepts as formal indicators would appear to preclude.

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Foucault's genealogies share with Heidegger a commitment to historicity, both of the categories wielded and the experiences to be disclosed. For Foucault, then, the focus of genealogy is on the singularity and contingency of events, institutions, relationships, and the forms of knowledge that seek to comprehend them. As Foucault claimed:

Three domains of genealogy are possible. First an historical genealogy of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, an historical genealogy of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; thirds [*sic*] an historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.⁵⁸

Ethics, then, for Foucault, was linked to a genealogy of subjectivity and to a history of the multiple historical forms of the self's relation to itself. Such a genealogy, for Foucault, was integrally linked to an ethics of self-fashioning as a response to the ethical crisis, the contours of which he had delineated.

Let us now turn our attention to the understanding of philosophy as a *way of life*, a vision that Heidegger shared with Foucault. With his return to Freiburg to assume Husserl's chair in 1928, Heidegger provided his students with a daring redescription of philosophy as philosophizing (*das Philosophieren*). Philosophizing as Heidegger articulated it in his winter semester 1928–1929 lecture course, *Einführung in die Philosophie* (*Introduction to Philosophy*), and again in his 1929–1930 lecture course, about which we have already spoken, was the active working out of the question of being, specifically the facticity of Dasein's being as a way of living experimentally. Moreover, as Heidegger had explained in his now-famous August 19, 1921, letter to his student Karl Löwith, his own factual life was the veritable source for his philosophizing: "I work concretely and factically out of my 'I am,' out of my intellectual and wholly factic origin, milieu, life-contexts, and whatever is available to me from these as a vital experience in which I live."⁵⁹ That kind of redescription of philosophy and its source in the lived experience of the thinker, in her *Faktizität*, which Heidegger had articulated so powerfully in the 1920s, had its counterpart in Foucault's articulation of philosophy as a way of life, and in his understanding of his own writings as "experience books":

... the books I write constitute an experience for me that I'd like to be as rich as possible. An experience is something you come out of changed. ... I write precisely because I don't know yet what to think about a subject that attracts my interest. In so doing, the book transforms me, changes what I think. ... When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before.⁶⁰

What seems particularly important here is that Foucault's vision of philosophy as a way of life not only arises from his own experience, but also transforms or transfigures it. This is linked to the role that truth plays for him in philosophy:

What is philosophy if not a way of reflecting, not so much on what is true and what is false, as on our relationship to truth? . . . There is no sovereign philosophy, it's true, but a philosophy or rather philosophy in activity. The movement by which, not without effort and uncertainty, dreams and illusions, one detaches oneself from what is accepted as true and seeks other rules—that is philosophy. This displacement and transformation of frameworks of thinking, the changing of received values and all the work that has been done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is—that, too, is philosophy.⁶¹

Moreover, for Foucault, philosophy, linked to its Greek origins, is conceived as a kind of therapeutics, or what the final Foucault termed a “conversion of self” (*conversion de soi*), the bases for which he found in Hellenistic and Roman culture, and which entailed: “A liberation within the very axis of immanence, a liberation with respect to that of which we are not master so as to finally achieve that of which we can be master.”⁶² Such a therapeutics, which has its point of departure in an interrogation of our selves, holds out the prospect that a new form of subject could emerge on the basis of philosophy as a way of life.

Both Heidegger's and Foucault's redescriptions of philosophy entail one more dimension integrally linked to the sense of crisis in which they are embedded and upon which we have already touched in connection with formal indication: the need to grip one's auditors or readers and the acknowledgement that the very concepts wielded by the philosopher will be neither comprehensible nor have any resonance “. . . unless we [the auditors] have first been gripped [*ergriffen*] by whatever they are supposed to comprehend.”⁶³ Indeed, absent the phenomenon of *ergriffen*, the experience that the philosopher seeks to articulate and perforce the crisis that it instantiates will not be felt by the community to which the philosopher is “speaking.” Here is the significance of accounts such as those of Hannah Arendt and Hans Georg Gadamer about the profound impact of Heidegger's lectures, the analogue to which are the dramatic openings and closings of Foucault's books, which like Heidegger's lecture courses, have gripped those exposed to them with the sense of a crisis, uncomprehended until it is actually felt.

Let us now see how Heidegger's treatment of Dasein's finitude, its temporality, can be linked to a project of self-fashioning that we see as a response to the crisis of ethics. John Haugeland provides us with a key indication for the

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understanding of Dasein when, in the face of the diversity of its kind of being, he claims that: "We can make sense of this astonishing diversity if we understand *Dasein* to be the anyone [*das Man*] and everything instituted by it: a vast intricate pattern—generated and maintained by conformism—of norms, normal dispositions, customs, sorts, roles, referral relations, public institutions, and so on."⁶⁴ For Haugeland, then, "[t]his is to remain dispersed in the worldly."⁶⁵ According to Heidegger, Dasein, so understood, including its dispersal, or "[b]eing lost, however, does not have a negative, depreciative significance but means something positive belonging to the Dasein itself."⁶⁶ Thus, Dasein's average understanding of itself as inauthentic, no less than the prospect of authentic selfhood, is genuine. Indeed, that understanding of itself as inauthentic, like the experiences of nothingness, anxiety, and death, constitutes the horizon within which a project of self-fashioning can be generated. In his winter semester 1921–1922 lecture course at Freiburg, Heidegger provided an early elucidation of nothingness: "The nothingness of factual life is life's own proper *non-occurrence of itself in ruinant existence*, a non-occurrence brought to maturation by and for factual life itself, within life and within the surrounding world (facticity)."⁶⁷ It is this nothingness, which is something, this ruinant existence, which can be one spur to a "counter-ruinant movedness," to a project of fashioning a self: "It is precisely in questioning that factual life attains its genuinely developed self-givenness."⁶⁸

While anxiety (*Angst*), as John Haugeland points out, can be resolved inauthentically, so that the person, as a case of Dasein, just slides and takes "at each moment the path of least resistance," it can also be resolved authentically, where "[a] case of Dasein is genuinely self-critical when, in response to discovered tensions among its roles, it does something about them."⁶⁹ Indeed, this latter potentiality plays an important role in *Being and Time*:

Angst individuates Da-sein to its ownmost being-in-the-world which, as understanding, projects itself essentially upon possibilities. Thus along with that for which it is anxious, *Angst* discloses Da-sein as *being-possible*, and indeed as what can be individualized in individuation of its own accord.

Angst reveals in Da-sein its *being toward* its ownmost potentiality of being, that is, *being free* for the freedom of choosing and grasping itself. *Angst* brings Da-sein *before its being free for . . . (propensio in)*, the authenticity of its being as possibility which it already is. But at the same time, it is this being to which Da-sein as being-in-the-world is entrusted.⁷⁰

Dasein does not respond to anxiety by finding the resources for its resolution in a solipsistic self; rather, its own historicity, its own historical being-in-the-world,

is what has taken us here to the very threshold of a project of self-fashioning. As Haugeland reminds us, to be “self-owned” or authentic is “to embrace” some part of what one’s historical, communal life makes available; to choose from the range of options provided by *das Man*—though to choose in a “selective way.”⁷¹

That threshold of self-fashioning is also reached when we consider Heidegger’s understanding of death, about which considerable debate has arisen, though we can only touch on it here. In his 1924 lecture, “The Concept of Time,” Heidegger tells us that:

The end of my Dasein, my death [*mein Tōd*], is not some point at which a sequence of events suddenly breaks off, but a possibility which Dasein knows of in this or that way: the most extreme possibility of itself, which it can seize and appropriate as standing before it. Dasein has in itself the possibility of meeting with its death as the most extreme possibility of itself.⁷²

Death, then, for Heidegger is not the biological death of a person, the breaking off of a sequence of events: that is what Heidegger designates as demise. Rather, as William Blattner shows, death (*Tōd*) “does not refer to something that could happen to Dasein, but rather to a possible way to be Dasein.”⁷³ As such, for Blattner, it is a limit-situation “in which one’s ability-to-be is anxiously stifled, rather than as the ending of one’s life.”⁷⁴ Blattner explains that “this stifling arises only when all the possible ways to be Dasein that are available to one become irrelevant, and thus the world as a whole becomes insignificant, meaningless.”⁷⁵ For Carol White, death is a “world-collapse,” a cultural crisis in which Dasein “is not able-to-be Dasein anymore.”⁷⁶ While White argues that the only “death” of a person is his/her demise, it seems to us that she short-circuits the possibility that beyond the end of the sequence of events that make up a person’s biological life, one aspect of the death of Dasein is the prospect of the “end” of the person who is a case of Dasein, and the possibility of an authentic being-toward-death in that respect. However, what concerns us here for the moment is the prospect of cultural crisis and world collapse, Blattner’s limit-situation.⁷⁷ Here, it seems to us, Blattner overlooks the possibility that beyond the seeming impossibility of existence, the prospect of death may lead not only to the death of a cultural world but to the birth of another and to new disclosures of being. In his forward to White’s posthumously published *Time and Death*, Hubert Dreyfus lays out the possibilities that White explores:

What, then, for White is death as a cultural way to be? A culture is an ungrounded world. (1) Ungrounded worlds harbor the constant “possibility of the impossibility of an existence at all.” (2) Thus cultures require world-pre-

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servers who make sacrifices to keep them alive. But (3) being-towards-death is a world preserver's readiness to give up a culture and let the world go, when the culture no longer makes sense. (4) This is a prerequisite for receiving a new understanding of being.⁷⁸

Confronted by such a world collapse, from where or what do the possibilities for receiving a new understanding of being come? A world or a culture, besides its dominant institutions, practices, and forms of self, also contains practices that in the course of its historical trajectory have become marginalized, or even discarded, constituting no more than an anomalous cultural heritage. Such marginal practices ensconced within a culture can sometimes be retrieved, albeit in refunctionalized ways. Similarly, certain cultures, by virtue of the place that they have historically given to critique, can generate new cultural forms and new understandings of being. Therein lies the possibility of projects of self-fashioning for which Heidegger's analytic of finitude, his ontology of Dasein, can prepare us.

While Heidegger's *Denken* can take us to the threshold of such a project, it is Foucault, especially the final Foucault, who grapples with the actual modalities of self-fashioning as a response to the crisis of ethics. Let us elucidate the key elements that mark Foucault's understanding of self-fashioning.

Faced with the cultural crisis in which we are enmeshed, Foucault, for whom the subject is a form not a substance, insists that precisely on the basis of the possibilities immanent to our historically contingent culture, a work of desubjectification (*déassujettissement*), getting free of the forms of subjectification within which we have been historically constituted, is the veritable basis for the work of fashioning a self. For Foucault, the complex historical processes through which Western humankind has been constituted as a subject, the processes of subjectification or *assujettissement*, entail subjugation and subjection in the form of bio-power and relations of domination. However, they also entail a considerable degree of autonomy and the possibility of critique for the *assujetti*, the one who is subjectified, as well. As Judith Butler has claimed, "A power exerted on a subject, subjection,⁷⁹ is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming."⁸⁰ What Butler terms "The double aspect of subjection,"⁸¹ its ambivalence, may be clear to Francophone readers of Foucault, but it is severely restricted when *assujettissement* is translated as "subjugation" or even "subjection." The very contingent cultural modalities, with their possibilities for critique and autonomy, that Foucault has elucidated, then, create the historical space for the work of desubjectification.

They also forge a close link between ethics and freedom. In a 1984 interview, only months before his death, the question was put to Foucault:

Q: You say that freedom must be practiced ethically . . .

MF: Yes, for what is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom?

Q: In other words, you understand freedom as a reality that is already ethical in itself.

MF: Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection.⁸²

Foucault's conviction that freedom is the ontological condition of ethics should be understood in light of Foucault's own claims for an historical ontology of ourselves, and not as a belated lapse into essentialism. Ontology here is not about the eternal or ahistorical conditions that shape the world, for example, the essential structures of *Dasein* that we believe Heidegger claimed to discover in *Being and Time*, in contrast to his exploration of *Dasein*'s facticity, but rather the contingent historical experiences and cultural practices that have produced successive "worlds" and made us the subjects that we are.

One vital element in the processes of subjectification is constituted by the deployments of truth. In his 1981–1982 lecture course at the Collège de France, Foucault contrasted two different relations of the subject to truth, corresponding to very different modes of being-in-the-world, to use a Heideggerian trope. There is a deployment in which the "the subject objectifies himself in a true discourse,"⁸³ one model for which is submission to the law, the moral code, to the Book or the Text. Historically, this objectification of a subject in true discourse has been instantiated in the Christian Church, though its legacy persists in modern philosophy with its subject-object relation, and in the sciences, which see both the natural world and the human being as objects, the nature of which it is their task to discover and classify. Foucault links this objectification of a subject in true discourse to a renunciation of self.⁸⁴ However, there is another deployment that Foucault introduces in this lecture course, one that in our view both constitutes a new way of grappling with the question of the subject, though one which he did not live to develop, and which is directly linked to an ethics of self-fashioning. It is the deployment that Foucault designates as "the subjectivation [*subjectivation*] of true discourse," which "enables us [*soi-même*] to become the subject of these true discourses, which enables us to become the subject who tells the truth and who is transfigured by this enunciation of the truth—transfigured precisely by the fact of telling the truth."⁸⁵ Subjectivation, as Foucault articulates it, entails "rejoining oneself with, as an essential moment, not the objectification of self in a true discourse, but the subjectivation of a true discourse in a practice and in an exercise of self on self."⁸⁶ At the heart of the Foucauldian distinction

between objectification and subjectivation of true discourse is that in the case of the former one accepts a truth whose authority is purportedly beyond question, while in the case of the latter the enunciation of the truth arises from the subject's practices of freedom, from a choice. With the processes of subjectivation, it is through what Foucault terms "practices of the self" that one makes the truth one's own. The process of subjectivation is integral to fashioning oneself as an ethical subject. Foucault's introduction of the term *subjectivation* does not seem to be intended to replace *subjectification*, but rather to indicate one of the possibilities opened up by the actual forms of subjectification produced in the modern world.

Such possibilities are also linked to Foucault's bold redescription of *asceticism*, one that has its basis in Nietzsche. In his lecture course on the hermeneutics of the subject, Foucault pointed out that when we speak of asceticism or ascesis today, it is within a Christian tradition of ever-greater degrees of renunciation, culminating in "renunciation of self" (*rénonciation à soi*).⁸⁷ However, Foucault claimed that:

. . . ascesis [*askêsis*] had a very different meaning for the ancients. First of all, because it obviously did not involve the aim of arriving at self-renunciation as the goal of ascesis. It involved, rather, constituting oneself through ascesis. Or, more precisely, let's say it involved reaching the formation of a full, perfect, complete, and self-sufficient relationship with oneself, capable of producing the self-transfiguration that is the happiness one takes in oneself. Such was the objective of ascesis.⁸⁸

Foucault's refunctioning of asceticism, by advertence to its meaning in the ancient world, has not only given it a positive charge but has firmly linked it to a project of self-fashioning.

This is accomplished by elucidating the different sets of practices and exercises related to incorporating true discourse into one's life, one's conduct, through ascesis. Foucault will designate these practices and exercises as:

Ascetics [*L'ascétique*], that is to say, all the more or less coordinated exercises that are available, recommended, and even required, utilizable in any case by individuals in a moral, philosophical and religious system in order to achieve a definite spiritual objective. By "spiritual objective," I understand a certain mutation, a certain transfiguration of themselves as subjects, as subjects of action and as subjects of true knowledge. It is this objective of a spiritual transmutation that ascetics, that is to say, the set of given exercises, must make it possible to achieve.⁸⁹

Thus, in addition to the practices through which one makes true discourse one's own, there are the exercises and practices of ascetics through which one puts "... these true discourses to work, activating them, not simply in memory or thought which grasps them by regularly returning to them, but in the subject's very activity; that is to say, how to become the active subject of true discourses."⁹⁰

It is by virtue of his focus on the practices through which, in an historical era marked by a profound cultural crisis, one can become an active subject and a subject of true discourse that Foucault began to cross the threshold into a different cultural world or understanding of being. In beginning the process of re-activating the hitherto marginal practices of our cultural world, Foucault took a step beyond the pathmarks that Heidegger had left for us. In making that claim, we do not intend to construct a two-stage process in which one first *questions* one's existence, and only then proceeds to a *reconstitution* of the self. Rather these are two facets of the same temporal process, propelled by a crisis in the factual life of the person and the culture. We can briefly expand on this point by reference to how two important Heideggerian concepts, the *dispersion* of life and being-toward-death, can be linked to Foucault's "ethical fourfold," the elements of which we have already referred to.⁹¹

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger articulates a vision of the self as lost in *das Man*, as an aspect of the "falling prey" (*die Verfallenheit*) of inauthentic Dasein. There, "[f]alling prey is an existential determination of Da-sein itself. . . ."⁹² John Haugeland, as we have already pointed out, has described that mode of being of Dasein as "dispersed,"⁹³ also linking it to the very existential structure of Dasein. However, earlier, in his 1921 lecture course on "Augustine and Neo-Platonism," now published in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, the young Heidegger had examined "the dispersion of life" (*Die Zerstreuung des Lebens*) as a feature of Dasein's facticity, its historicity, through an examination of the concrete life and world of Augustine.⁹⁴ While the specific forms in which Augustine responded to the dispersion of life, the "trouble" (*molestia*), "a burden of life,"⁹⁵ were circumscribed by his own historico-cultural world, the factual life of Dasein in our world also confronts that dilemma of dispersion. Dispersion and *molestia*, which cannot be taken as negative, can result either in the enactment of "endangering itself" or "the full, concrete, factual 'opportunity' to arrive at the *being* of its ownmost life."⁹⁶ For the young Heidegger:

"Thus, *molestia* determines itself according to the How of having-oneself in the How of the factual enactment of experience. (How 'life' has itself, how it can have itself, historically factically.) . . . In self-concern, the self forms—in the How of its ownmost being—the radical possibility of falling, but at the same time the 'opportunity' to win itself."⁹⁷ The overcoming of what Heidegger understood by dispersion and falling, through an historical enactment, can

be refunctioned within the ambit of the Foucauldian fourfold. The opportunity to win itself, "the formation of the possibility of the self-willed mere looking-about-oneself precisely in the seriousness of the radical effort at confronting and desiring to know the world,"⁹⁸ can be seen as the telos of ethical activity as Foucault adumbrated it, in this instance, the goal of which is an overcoming of dispersion and the fashioning of a self as a unified whole. The *ethical substance* on the basis of which such a project is possible is, in Foucauldian terms, the "will to truth," the veritable basis upon which the subjectivation of true discourse occurs. The *mode of subjectification* is the form-giving activity, the way in which one *styles* a life. The *ethical work* that one performs on oneself consists in establishing a coherent relationship between *thought* and *experience* and a recognition of the actual historical possibilities open to the subject.

Similarly, Heidegger's understanding of being-toward-death can be linked to the ethical fourfold through the final Foucault's examination of the spiritual exercises, the ethical work, or what the ancients designated as *melete thanatou* (death meditation), in the last hour of his 1982 lecture course on the hermeneutics of the subject. This is not to say that the two are the same or that Foucault believed that the ancient death meditation could be re-appropriated today. However, authentic existence, for Heidegger, the transfiguration of the subject, for Foucault, did entail a confrontation with death. Indeed, for Foucault death was not just "a necessary event;" rather, "for man it has absolute gravity."⁹⁹

While Foucault's examination of these questions and the development of his ethics were cut short by his own untimely death, we believe that Foucault's refunctioning of the concept of asceticism and his linking of it to new modes of *subjectivation* constitute an especially promising path to take in response to the crisis of ethics. Both Heidegger and Foucault, as we have argued, opened new ways to respond to the crisis with which we are confronted. Their heritage is one on which philosophers of the future can build.

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, "Phenomenology and Theology" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 55. This was a lecture first given by Heidegger in 1927. While this is how we intend to read Heidegger, as will become clear in what follows, Heidegger did not adhere to his own injunction, did not always resist the temptation to dogmatically craft a "philosophy." For that reason, one must often read Heidegger *against* Heidegger. John van Buren, for example, while arguing that the young Heidegger had an "an-archic" vision, also points out that in later years Heidegger often "looked back on his early Freiburg and Marburg courses as imperfect anticipations of the way, which purportedly first showed itself in SZ [*Being*

and Time] and then in his later writings.” John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University press, 1994), p. 6.

2. For a more thorough discussion of how we understand a critical encounter, and the various possibilities opened up by such a Foucault/Heidegger *Auseinandersetzung*, see Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “Toward a Foucault/Heidegger *Auseinandersetzung*” in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, ed., *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

3. Pierre Hadot, “Spiritual Exercises,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1995), p. 83. Hadot’s writings had a profound influence on Foucault.

4. Alexander Nehamas, “On the Philosophical Life,” in *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, Volume 8, 2000, p. 31.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 27. Nehamas elaborates on this point in the introduction to his *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 1–4.

7. This is closely linked to the question of self-fashioning, with which we are primarily concerned, inasmuch as Foucault in his 1982 lecture course at the Collège de France, on the hermeneutics of the subject, focused on the way in which the subject constitutes itself in terms of what it takes to be the truth.

8. Michel Foucault, “From Torture to Cellblock” in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), p. 149. In speaking of power, here, Foucault also includes “knowledge,” the two being for him inseparable.

9. Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars: Le Thor 1966, 1968, 1969, Zähringen 1973*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 10. We want to acknowledge John van Buren’s *The Young Heidegger* for pointing us to this citation.

10. Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Foucault Live*, p. 440.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics* (London/New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 120.

13. Hubert Dreyfus, “On the Ordering of Things: Being and Power in Heidegger and Foucault,” in *Michel Foucault, Philosopher* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 92–93.

14. This particular *Weg*, and its many byways, has been retraced by Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren, and our own reading of Heidegger has been informed throughout by theirs. See Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*.

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15. John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, p. 7.
16. As we shall see, both Heidegger's claim that philosophical concepts are formal indications, and Foucauldian genealogy, are consonant with this way of thinking.
17. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 251.
18. Paul Rabinow, "Introduction: The History of Systems of Thought," in Michel Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. xxvii.
19. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 159.
20. John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, p.365. This is also how Kisiel reads *Being and Time*.
21. Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* (London: The Athone Press, 2000), pp. 175 and 178. This is from the summer semester course of 1919, "On the Nature of the University and Academic Study."
22. Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self: The Role of Authenticity in *Being and Time*," in *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, ed. Charles Guignon (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 120. Here Guignon wants to separate Heidegger's understanding of Dasein in *Being and Time* from the metaphysics of presence that van Buren and Kisiel see as haunting that work.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
24. Christopher Rickey, *Revolutionary Saints: Heidegger, National Socialism, and Antinomian Politics* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 1.
25. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979), p. 42.
26. John Haugeland, "Heidegger on Being a Person," in *Nous*, Vol. 16, No.1, 1982, pp. 21–22. Haugeland has expressed this same view in his contribution to the *Festschrift* for Hubert Dreyfus: "Dasein is the entity for which, in its being, that very being is an issue. . . . This is the most basic definition of Dasein; all the others follow from it." See John Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism," in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Volume 1*, ed. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 73.
27. William D. Blattner, "The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*," in *Man and World*, 27, 1994, p. 58. When Blattner tells us that Dasein has "has no essence in the *normal sense*" (our emphasis) we take him to mean that Dasein has no fixed or ahistorical content. However, it seems to us that, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger does claim that Dasein has a fixed structure, an essentialism that Blattner appears to share.
28. That is how Hubert Dreyfus understands one of the pre-eminent features of Dasein. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Responses," in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity*, eds. Wrathall and Malpas, p. 314.

29. Jean Grondin, "The Ethical and Young Hegelian Motives in Heidegger's Hermeneutics of Facticity," in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, eds. Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 348.

30. Michel Foucault, "Philosophy and the death of god (1966)," in Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 85.

31. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 387.

32. James Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life," in *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience*, ed. James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette (London and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 88.

33. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 319.

34. Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the "Genealogy"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 147.

35. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 319.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

37. Arthur C. Danto, "Some Remarks on *The Genealogy of Morals*" in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 46.

38. Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience*, p. 148.

39. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), p. 129.

40. For a more thorough treatment of this aspect of Heidegger's thinking and its link to his surrender to the lure of Nazism, see Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, "Martin Heidegger and the University as a Site for the Transformation of Human Existence," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 1, Winter 1997.

41. Michel Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001), p. 241.

42. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 671. This idea shapes Nietzsche's thinking and, in our view, had a decisive impact on both Heidegger and Foucault. To cite but one more example: "The man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily; let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: 'Be yourself!'" Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 127.

43. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 136. Heidegger's mar-

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ginal note in his own copy of *Sein und Zeit* reads: "But who are 'you'? The one who lets go—and *becomes*."

44. Herman Nilson, *Michel Foucault and the Games of Truth* (New York; St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 78–79.

45. Martin Heidegger, "Comments on Karl Jaspers's *Psychology of Worldviews* (1919–21)" in Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, pp. 25–26.

46. Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 63. This was his Freiburg lecture course for the summer semester of 1923.

47. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Heidegger's Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 242. Though Dahlstrom has elsewhere referred to formal indication as Heidegger's *method*, a term we avoid, preferring instead *modality*, what is significant for us here is Dahlstrom's insistence that formal indication refers to all of Heidegger's concepts, and, indeed, to the very "character" of philosophy as he understood it.

48. Martin Heidegger, "Comments on Karl Jaspers's *Psychology of Worldviews*, p. 9. This same point, in almost identical terms, will be made a decade later in Heidegger's 1929–1930 lecture course. See Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 293.

49. Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 44.

50. John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, p. 270.

51. Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), p. 13.

52. Heidegger makes this point, for example, in a letter to Karl Löwith in 1927: "formal indication . . . is still there for me, even if I do not talk about it." Cited in John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, p. 366. However, the fact that there is no explicit reference to formal indication in *Being and Time*, though it shapes Heidegger's thinking both before and after the publication of his *opus magnum*, is consonant with our view of that work as containing as one of its features a quest for the ahistorical or transcendental structures of Dasein.

53. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 296.

54. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Heidegger's Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications," *Review of Metaphysics*, 47 (June 1994), p. 784.

55. This resonates powerfully in Heidegger's 1935 lecture course, by which time explicit reference to concepts as formal indications had ceased, when he acknowledges that "'You can't do anything with philosophy,'" but that a counter question arises:

“... even if *we* can’t do anything with it, may not philosophy in the end do something *with us*, provided we engage ourselves with it? Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 13.

56. Richard Rorty, “Forward” to *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity*, ed. Wrathall and Malpas, p. xii. Dreyfus represents the first position and Rorty the second.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

58. Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 351.

59. Cited from Kiesel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, p. 7.

60. Michel Foucault, “How an ‘Experience-Book’ is Born,” in Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), p. 27.

61. Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher,” in Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, p. 327.

62. Michel Foucault, *L’herméneutique du sujet*, p. 202.

63. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 7.

64. Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person,” pp. 19. That “vast intricate pattern,” Dasein, corresponds to Foucault’s “historical era.”

65. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

66. Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, p. 160.

67. Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 110.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

69. Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person,” p. 23. Here, we would add, Heidegger’s understanding of the “call to conscience” and “resoluteness” are especially pertinent.

70. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 176.

71. Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person,” p. 24.

72. Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 11E.

73. Blattner, “The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*,” p. 50. Thus, as Larry Hatab puts it: “The disruptive effect of being-toward-death also opens up the possibility of ontical, existentiell authenticity by breaking the hold of common, established patterns and allowing an individual to shape its own resolute existence, to discover modes of being that are more appropriate to its particularity. See Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, p. 26.

Self-Fashioning as a Response to the Crisis of "Ethics"

74. William D. Blattner, "Heidegger's Debt to Jaspers's Concept of the Limit-Situation," in *Heidegger and Jaspers*, ed. Alan M. Olson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), p. 163.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Carol J. White, "Dasein, Existence and Death," in *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 28, spring 1984, p. 62.

77. We shall return to the question of Dasein's being-toward-death and its links to Foucault's ethics below.

78. Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Forward" to Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude*, ed. Mark Rakowski (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), p. xxx.

79. Butler's translation of *assujettissement* by "subjection" weakens her own argument, as subjection privileges the element of domination and control in *assujettissement* to the detriment of the very autonomy and agency for which she is here arguing. That is why we prefer to translate the French as "subjectification."

80. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 11.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

82. Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in Foucault, *Foucault Live*, pp. 434–435.

83. Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, pp. 316–317.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 316. It is only after 1980 that the term *subjectivation* makes its appearance in the Foucauldian lexicon. This is a development that has been largely ignored until now.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, p. 398. At the very beginning of this lecture course, Foucault had introduced a distinction between "philosophy" and "spirituality" (*spiritualité*), in which the former has as its focus "how to have access to truth?" while the latter asks "what are the transformations in the very being of the subject necessary to have access to the truth?" *ibid.*, p. 18. Philosophy, so understood, achieves its apotheosis in the West in what Foucault terms the "Cartesian moment," a significant turning point for Heidegger as well. Spirituality, with its focus on the transfiguration of the subject, and its self-fashioning, for Foucault, plays a powerful role in the ancient world and potentially in our own crisis-ridden cultural world too.

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 397–398.

- 91. See above pp. 7–8.
- 92. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
- 93. See above, p. 26.
- 94. Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, p. 151.
- 95. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 96. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- 97. *Ibid.*
- 98. *Ibid.*
- 99. Foucault, *l'herméneutique du sujet*, p. 457.

Seven

CONTAMINATION, ESSENCE, AND DECOMPOSITION:
HEIDEGGER AND DERRIDA

Andrew Mitchell

Contamination names a thought that contests all claims to purity and integrity. If metaphysics thinks pure presence in opposition to pure absence and relies upon the purity of the divide between them, then a thinking of contamination, of intermingling and interpenetration, would appear to be one of the most direct means of “overcoming” metaphysics. Insofar as the latter is a task undertaken by Heidegger, one could expect a thought of contamination to surface in his work. Yet for Derrida it does not. In the eighties and nineties, Derrida’s critical engagements with Heidegger increasingly concern themselves with Heidegger’s inability to think contamination from out of his adherence to a logic of purity. For Derrida, Heideggerian thinking remains a thinking of purity, both ontologically and conceptually, and nowhere more so than in regards to essence, which Derrida views as a refuge of purity within Heidegger’s thought.

Derrida writes *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*¹ in the center of these concerns, culminating in two chapters devoted to Heidegger’s second Trakl reading, “Language in the Poem: A Discussion on Georg Trakl’s Poetic Work.” In this very text, however, a Heideggerian response to Derrida’s charges can be found. Heidegger’s Trakl interpretation develops a conception of decomposition (*Verwesung*) as the “departure” of essence (*Wesen*), which renders contentious any claim to a privilege of purity in Heidegger’s thought. Properly understanding Heidegger’s mature sense of “essence”—as found in the period of the *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*—and its intimate connection to decomposition—as indicated by the Trakl interpretation—allows for the formulation of a response to Derrida, not only in terms of ontology, with decomposition serving to “corrupt” essence originarily, but also “conceptually,” with Heidegger’s insistence upon the pivotal role of poetic ambiguity. In what follows, then, my purpose is not to say that, *pace* Derrida, Heidegger already thinks contamination, but instead that contamination itself remains motivated by a conception of purity that Heidegger has already abandoned via decomposition.

Contamination

The contamination critique is a critique of essence, directed toward Heidegger's supposed overcoming of metaphysics. If, as Heidegger has identified and Derrida agrees, metaphysics is a thinking of presence, then a nonmetaphysical thinking would have to refuse itself any basis in presence. Presence would no longer form the standard for being, for time, or for thinking itself. But how are we to think beyond presence, especially when precisely such attempts to go "beyond" or to "overcome" metaphysics have only served to further entrench us within metaphysics, as both Derrida and Heidegger have so carefully shown? The Derridean response to this situation of metaphysical confusion is to propose an "essential" con-fusion of his own, that of contamination. A "fatal necessity of a *contamination*" (*Of Spirit*, 10) already compromises all claims to purity for Derrida. Everything is already intermingled, if not permeated, by a "contact originally impurifying thought or speech" (*Of Spirit*, 10). In the face of such a (supposedly) nonmetaphysical state of affairs, Derrida's Heidegger desperately struggles to maintain a preserve of purity and identity buffered from all contact with whatever might compromise it, the technological and the ontic first and foremost. Heidegger secures his preserve through his notion of "essence."

As exemplary of Heidegger's strategy of protection, Derrida takes Heidegger's famed claim that "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological" (VA 9/QCT, 4), though his criticisms are by no means limited to technology. For Derrida, Heidegger incubates the essence (of technology) to protect it from the technological domination of the earth. Operative in Derrida's reading is obviously a rather bleak view of technology, an unstated technological fatalism. Derrida also seems ready to attribute such a view to Heidegger. Essence must remain unperturbed by the ever darkening world-night, by the ever tightening frame of the *Gestell*, for this fatalistic Heidegger. He will therefore construe essence in a manner that allows him to demarcate a region of purity. The situation would no longer be one of Heideggerian "hope" as Derrida diagnosed it at the end of "Différance," hope for the rescue of a saving power, but one of Heideggerian "certainty," the certainty of a preserve against the advance of technological power.² Essence would unquestionably remain beyond the reach of technology, "protected from any original and essential contamination by technology" (*Of Spirit*, 10).

The same agenda or "desire for rigorous non-contamination" (*Of Spirit*, 10) requires that essence be uncontaminated by the ontic as well. This too can be found in the claim that the essence of technology is nothing technological, for Heidegger could here be said to affirm a division between the ontological

essence of technology and the ontic particulars of the technological, but given the “fatal necessity of a contamination” this division cannot be maintained. The ontological cannot be spirited away from the ontic; the two necessarily come into contact and intermingle with a resulting ontic contamination of essence. At a colloquium around the time of *Of Spirit's* composition, Derrida explains that contamination will “put at risk the central theme of Heidegger’s thinking—that of the ontological difference” (Reading, 172–173).³ This difference which lies in the fact that being (*Sein*) is no being (*Seiende*) is read by Derrida as claiming that being simply has nothing to do with beings, as any contact between them would be fatal to the former’s purity. Without the ability to draw such a clean division between the ontic and the ontological, the entire Heideggerian enterprise of thinking being collapses.

In both cases, the avoidance of the technological and the ontic, Heidegger is said to attempt “in a classically philosophical manner to shelter the thought and language of essence from contamination” as part of an overall “strategy of protection” (Reading, 172). Derrida cites several elements of this strategy, all of which cluster around the importance of withdrawal and refusal for Heidegger’s notion of essence, including “Being’s self-veiling, its withdrawal, reserve, reticence, holding-back” (Reading, 173). Derrida groups these quite diverse moments together as so many attempts to sequester being away from its ontic/technological contaminant. Derrida interprets withdrawal, in other words, as a complete and utter separation of the essence from the ontic-technological. The idea of withdrawal is taken to mean that being disconnects itself entirely from the worldly and hides somewhere beyond the ontic. In this manner, Heidegger attempts to maintain his preserve somewhere beyond the metaphysical.

Derrida’s charge of noncontaminative thinking attains its widest scope in *Aporias* (1993), where Derrida detects a will to strict “conceptual demarcation or rather the logical de-finition” in Heidegger’s thought (*Aporias*, 41). Heidegger thinks in terms of definite concepts, each of which is clearly delineated and distinct from the rest. Conceptual demarcation, “if it were possible, would tend to oppose rigorously two concepts or the concepts of two essences, and to purify such a demarcating opposition of all contamination, of all participatory sharing, of all parasitism, and of all infection” (*Aporias*, 41). To carry out Heidegger’s project of purifying and defending essence from all contaminants, he must also attend to the border between concepts and essences. The very barrier that the withdrawal of being establishes between being and beings must be decontaminated. Essences are to be pure and self-identical, the space between them a zone of absence, equally pure. There can be no contact between the contaminant and the preserved, not even a conceptual one. All of Heidegger’s essential

distinctions fall prey to this charge. According to *Aporias*, then, Heidegger thinks in terms of clear and discrete oppositions with no overlap or “participatory sharing” of terms. Heideggerian thinking would be a clean and rigidly compartmentalized thinking, ultimately no different from the technological frame that he seeks to keep in quarantine.

The claim that Heideggerian thinking is engaged in a project of conceptual demarcation can likewise be found in nascent form in the discussion immediately following Derrida’s remarks to the Essex Colloquium. A question is asked about the role of *Unwesen* in Heidegger’s thought, as one finds in “On the Essence of Truth,” and whether this relation between essence and unessence would already go against the perceived “demand for purity” in Derrida’s reading.⁴ Derrida’s reply is univocal: “this reversal, or this quasi-negation, or nonidentity of essence with itself, is not contamination, I would say. It is a reversal, it is the *Un-*. . . It is still too pure, too rigorously delimited . . . the *Unwesenheit*, the *Unwahrheit*, are as pure as *Wesen* and *Wahrheit*” (Reading, 180). One could say that between essence and unessence there is certainly a difference, but it is one difference for Derrida, and this unity attests to its purity. Strict opposition as a mode of difference is a pure difference and thus nothing foreign to a thinking based upon purity of essence. Pure essences are purely distinguished from one another, and nothing could be more appropriate for them. Instead of such rigid demarcations, Derrida seeks “some instability which is not simply of the yes and no” (Reading, 180); he seeks “undecidables.”⁵ For Derrida, the Heideggerian concept of essence cannot accommodate such a thought.

Obviously, to respond to these charges, an analysis of the Heideggerian notion of essence is called for, and the next section of this paper will focus upon the treatment of essence found in the *Contributions*, where the contested role of withdrawal in Heidegger’s thinking comes to the fore. My contention in the following is not only that Derrida’s contamination critique cannot stand, but that the very logic of contamination is inappropriate to what Heidegger seeks to think through essence, departure, and remainder. The next section of this paper, then, articulates essence as the remainder of withdrawal and abandonment. Though the withdrawal of *beyng* leaves the thing to remain a thing, while there is withdrawal there is also what yet remains.⁶ In the same essay that Derrida takes to task in *Of Spirit*, “Language in the Poem,” Heidegger augments this conception of remainder through an analysis of decomposition (*Verwesung*), a term which, not coincidentally, bears an etymological connection to essence (*Wesen*). The third section of this paper thus presents Heidegger’s reading of decomposition as a countermove to Derrida’s thinking of contamination. Since decomposition presents a mode of “essencing” located

somewhere “between” the metaphysical thought of presence and a thinking that would be entirely other to it, thinking is faced with the demand of thinking an irresolvable and essential ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*). In the conclusion, I will turn to this notion of ambiguity as a response to Derrida’s concern with “conceptual demarcation.”

Essence/*Wesen*

In Heidegger commentary, there has not been sufficient attention paid to essence (*Wesen*).⁷ Early interpretations of Heidegger that stressed his “existentialism” wanted nothing to do with essence, and the term was avoided for fear of falling back into a substantialist metaphysics. But Heidegger is no existentialist, and one of his major contributions to philosophy is a thorough rethinking of essence. Across the history of philosophy, essence has served both epistemological and ontological roles. As the “whatness” or *quidditas* of an object, essence determines “what” a thing is and what it means to know that thing. This whatness is nothing peculiar to the particular thing in question, however, but something held in common by other things of the same sort. Epistemologically this means that to know what the thing is, one must know its essence. Due to the general nature of this essence, however, one never knows the thing as a particular, but always only comprehends it in its “essentials.” Ontologically, essence is identified (some would say conflated) with the substantial basis for the thing, whether this basis stands beneath the thing supporting its properties (*substantia*) or simply underlies the thing in its appearance (*hupokeimenon*).

Heidegger’s sense of essence differs from these traditional views at almost every point. As will be shown, essence is nothing substantial, it is an “event” or “occurrence”; essence does not lie beneath or below the object in question, but is found at the “limit” of the object; essence is nothing general, but what makes the thing a unique singularity. Traditional conceptions of essence have tried to undergird the *presence* of the thing by means of a similarly present essence, while Heidegger views the essence that grants the thing as a matter of *withdrawal*. Derrida’s contamination critique of Heideggerian essence falls short due to its failure to think this withdrawal. Withdrawal orients us toward the nonpresent character of essence and leads to a consideration of the thing not as present object but as remainder.

In the *Contributions*, Heidegger draws the reader’s attention to the transitional (verbal) character of essence through his use of the strange nominalization “essencing” (*Wesung*). The “action” of essence, however, is nothing other than an “occurrence of the truth of beyng” (GA 65: 288/202–203; tm). In considering

essence as an occurrence (*Geschehnis*), Heidegger could be said to “temporalize” essence. It is no longer anything eternal but something that takes place historically at a particular place and time. The *Contributions to Philosophy* cast the “truth of beyng” in terms of a “clearing for self-concealment” (GA 65: 346/242; tm). Two points follow from this determination.

First, in regards to the relationship between the essencing of the thing and the clearing, the clearing constitutes the space of appearance for things in the world. It is an area beyond the boundaries of the thing, yet also that wherein the thing appears. By essencing, the thing exists in such a manner that it is opened onto this clearing. The thing exists, in other words, in need of and in an essential relation to the clearing. The idea of a completely encapsulated object is here abandoned in favor of a conception of things whereby they open onto what lies beyond them so thoroughly that this beyond, the clearing, is involved in their very essence. In the occurrence of the truth of beyng, a clearing is opened through the essencing of the thing. But essence does not open the clearing by protruding into a pre-established reality. Essence does not present itself in this clearing, nor does its presence open this clearing. Instead, essence enters the clearing through withdrawal.

The second point to be understood from the determination of essence as an occurrence of the “clearing for self-concealment” turns upon the notion of self-concealment. This should not be understood in terms of the somewhat hackneyed notion that all appearance appears on the basis of a prior concealment. Instead, the idea that Heidegger struggles to formulate throughout these pages of the *Contributions* is that precisely what appears in the appearance of the thing is concealment. But this does not mean that the appearing thing conceals the departure of something else. The situation here is one of “self-concealment,” where the thing conceals through its own self-presentation the departure that is inherent to essence, or withdrawal. With essencing as withdrawal, what it means for a thing to “be” essentially is for it to occur in such a way that there is simultaneously a self-concealment. Essencing is a way of *not* showing oneself. Essencing is the occurrence of a thing whereby it announces its self-concealment. The essence of a thing is nothing general, it *is* nothing at all; instead, essence marks withdrawal.

Both of these clarifications require us to think further into the role of withdrawal in essencing. For Heidegger, what withdraws is beyng. But this does not mean that beings are without beyng. Instead, withdrawal serves to connect beings all the more strongly (essentially) to beyng. What the logic of withdrawal struggles to articulate is the difficult thought that beings would be in relation to beyng without being identical to or coincident with beyng. Essencing is the way that beings remain *near* to beyng. Essence describes the surface of contact

and separation between appearance and withdrawal, where beings touch being. It draws the limit between concealment and revelation. This liminal structure of essence requires a seemingly paradoxical formulation in terms which themselves divide upon both sides of this line: essence is the appearing of a self-concealing. The self-enclosed object of modern metaphysics knows no withdrawal. The thing of Heidegger's determination, however, exists as thing on account of a withdrawal which interrupts the self-enclosure of the thing, holds it open and spills it out onto the world—essencing as occurrence of clearing. Essence brings the thing into community and communication with the world and others. Withdrawal extends things beyond themselves and connects them with what is not present, with what is no thing, with the other, with being. Withdrawal makes room for what lies beyond the being.

For these reasons, withdrawal cannot be identified with lack. Withdrawal does not mean that a portion of the object is missing. In fact, withdrawal does not take anything away from the thing at all. It is not a reserve into which a portion of the object would steal away, absent in regard to what remained. In other words, withdrawal is never partial; it affects the whole of the thing. There is no missing piece of the being that would be lacking here or hiding somewhere else. That which withdraws into its essence lacks nothing, even though the thing does not appear in its entirety. What essences cannot be identified with what is present. For this reason, withdrawal reveals the thing, not as stock at our disposal—the culmination of presence—but simply as thing. Withdrawal lets the thing remain a thing. This determination of the very being of the thing as a matter of withdrawal has nothing to do with absence.

Withdrawal is consequently nothing negative. It does not leave the being lacking anything. The withdrawal of being is just as much an abandonment of being, where it is the whole being, not just a piece, that is abandoned. But to be abandoned, to be in an abandoned manner, is to have belonged once at an earlier point (we will explore the nature of this “earliness” below). In the same way, withdrawal is a severance and an attachment, the positive character of which Heidegger terms a giving: the essence of self-concealing is a “giving self-withdrawing [*schenkenden Sichentziehen*]” (GA 65: 249/176; tm). In concealing itself, the thing gives itself as the marker of withdrawal. Withdrawal is a positive event of appearing.

The appearance of what essences is thus an announcement of self-concealing. The same withdrawal that opens the clearing places the thing in the clearing as well. Withdrawal conceals itself, but this withdrawal must nevertheless give itself to view and occur in the clearing. If concealment passed unremarked, there would be no relation between it and ourselves or between it and the world. Concealment would be an absence, but such an absence is itself only the flip-side of

the metaphysical privilege of presence. A nonappearing concealment would be a pure concealment, and this purity would annihilate it. Therefore, concealment must *appear* in order that it might announce itself *as concealed*. Such a thought eludes the metaphysical categories of presence and absence. Essencing is consequently neither a matter of presence nor absence but of singularity.

The remainder is a singularity. The withdrawal of being that lets the thing remain and opens the clearing for its self-concealment singularizes the thing. Essence is just this way of being of the singular: “The essence [*Wesen*] is not the general, but instead precisely the essencing [*Wesung*] of the respective singularity [*jeweiligen Einzigkeit*]” (GA 65: 66/46; tm). The particular being, in essence, is never fully present. Because it is not all here, it cannot be accounted for in an inventory of stock at our disposal or comprehended within the bounds of a concept. Because the thing remains to this extent unaccounted for and unknown, it cannot be replaced by another thing identical to it. The thing is not present for comparison and equation with another present entity. Because essencing withdraws the thing from replacement, essencing acts as a singularizing force. With this thinking of singularity, Heidegger has not abandoned the thought of commonality that is endemic to essence. For Heidegger there can be no community of individuals when these are considered identical in essence. What results from such a grouping is a homogeneity, an increase of the same (*das Gleiche*). Instead, by opening the thing onto the clearing, the thing is placed in communication and irreplaceable community with others. It entertains relations and is itself constituted through such relations.

These relationships include relations with us. The singularity of the remainder is overlooked in our own technological demand that the thing show itself completely as present, available, and accounted for. When allowed to “essence,” beings are able to be what they are and remain free of this demand. As we have shown, the being essences through a withdrawal from availability, and its singularity requires that we recognize its outstanding, or ecstatic, character. Withdrawal is thus something of a double operation. It concerns both a withdrawal of being, of the thing to itself, and a withdrawal of our demands upon the thing. This should not be understood as stating that *we* would make the thing a thing. Instead, it means that when we essence, that is, when we stand at our limit and do not transgress it through demands and challenges levied at the things around us, we too enter and remain within the clearing of things.

But the objection may still be raised that precisely this conception of essence and its integral relation to withdrawal are themselves protective strategies attempting to safeguard the essence of being from beings. Heidegger, however, is quite clear on the coincidence of being and beings:

Contamination, Essence, and Decomposition

Wanting to separate *beyng* from some snatched-up being is impossible, especially since “any being whatsoever,” if it is only experienced as the true, is ever already the other to itself—not like *some other* as the opposite that belongs to it. Rather *the other* means that which as sheltering the truth of being [*Sein*] lets a being be a being. [GA 65: 264/186; tm]⁸

Beings are already *beyng*, and not as its “opposite” (not as the same’s other). *Beyng* and beings cannot be separated because they belong together in abandonment. *Beyng* has abandoned beings, and this is again the gift of self-withdrawing. *Beyng* “belongs to it [the particular being] and only to it” (GA 65: 115/80; tm). Essence is ultimately a name for the co-appearance of *beyng* and the being, that is, for the site of *beyng*’s withdrawal which occurs at the being itself and singularizes it into a world of differences and relations.

Derrida’s critique of contamination is aimed at a presumed purity of essence in Heideggerian thought. This supposes a movement to isolate essences on Heidegger’s part. But as we have seen, Heidegger does not isolate essence from the thing. To the contrary, essence gives the thing and places the thing within the world, letting the thing be what it is. The withdrawal sketched by essence is not a departure from the being, but a bestowal of it and a giving of itself along with it—where else would *beyng* “be”? For this reason, the claim that essence is uncontaminated by the ontic cannot stand. If the essence lies in a self-revealing concealment, then it makes no sense to speak of a purity of essence or to accuse Heidegger of failing to consider the contamination of all essences when even concealment itself cannot remain “pure,” but must make itself known and announce itself.

The same can be said of Derrida’s worry that the essence of technology would remain uncontaminated by the technological. The essence of technology is nothing technological, we can claim, precisely because essence “is” nothing at all. Essencing is a withdrawing. If essence and technology were as stringently and conceptually demarcated as Derrida would have us believe, then it would be impossible to speak of an essence of technology at all. Technology seeks to steadily draw out and reveal everything which it encounters. It transforms the world into stockpiles of available resource precisely by demanding that everything show itself as unconcealed and available. To say that there is an essence to technology—that technology essences⁹—is to say, in effect, that this project of technological revelation can never reach an end. What Derrida overlooks in Heidegger’s thinking of essence is that there is always yet a remainder.

If contamination is a critique aimed at the purity of essence, then it already falls short of Heidegger’s own subversion of the purity of essence. But we have only seen one side of essence. We have focused upon the withdrawal

and abandonment of *beyng*. But what of its strange remainder, and exactly how does the remainder remain? Answering these questions will take us still further into the Heideggerian problematic of essence. In the very text that Derrida reads, “Language in the Poem,” Heidegger develops this necessary complement to his thinking of essence (*Wesen*) through a treatment of decomposition (*Verwesen*) as found in Trakl’s poetry.¹⁰ Decomposition is the being of the remainder, and for a full understanding of Heideggerian essence, it cannot be neglected. Its ensuing analysis will also aid us in formulating a response to Derrida’s third concern over Heideggerian purity, conceptual demarcation.

Decomposition/*Verwesen*

In “Three Questions to Jacques Derrida,” Françoise Dastur writes of Derrida’s contamination critique, “I can understand what is at stake, but I wonder how a thinking of contamination could escape the confusion of the Same and be the thinking of the Other.”¹¹ She goes on to ask, “Is a new logic required here?”¹² We can respond affirmatively to this question, as Dastur herself does, for the logic in question is that of decomposition. This new logic circumvents the problems of contamination through a radicalization of essence. The addition of the prefix *Ver-* to *Wesung*, in *Verwesung*, which we are translating here as “decomposition,” serves to destabilize whatever stability might remain in Heidegger’s thinking of essence as *Wesung*. Among other meanings, the *ver-* prefix can indicate that the action of the verb is to be understood with an outward motion (as in *verdrängen*, to drive out) or that the action of the verb in some sense miscarries or goes awry (as in [*sich*] *verfahren*, to go astray).¹³ Putting these together, *Verwesung* thus adds a sense of errancy to *Wesung*, a movement away from stability and without discernible destination. The importance of this notion of departure for Heidegger’s thinking of essence and decomposition should not be underestimated. This errancy of decomposition ensures that essence will never be fully present. In translating *Verwesung* by “decomposition,” therefore, I have left it to the *de-* of *decomposition* to mark the fact that attempts to make essence into something purely present always remains incomplete. Decomposition, then, names the hint of an essencing even within objective presence, as we will see in what follows.

Decomposition is likewise a matter of the remainder. It is not enough to say that essence would bear the mark of abandonment, what has to be shown is the status of this remainder. How does the abandoned remain? As early as the *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–1938), decomposition surfaces in Heidegger’s thinking as a name for the denial of abandonment, as a name for the metaphys-

ical. But it is not until the second Trakl interpretation, “Language in the Poem,” some sixteen years later, that decomposition comes to name the rich essencing of essence. In this later text, the focus is not so much upon the abandonment of *beyng*, but upon the being that remains. With this shift in focus, there is also a change in Heidegger’s conception of decomposition. Decomposition is no longer solely a matter of metaphysics, but likewise a matter of departure from the metaphysical. Decomposition comes to name a relationship to abandonment itself. Consequently, we might say, though this will only become clear after the elaboration which follows, that it is not enough to abandon the being, as per the Contributions. The being must be abandoned *to abandonment*.¹⁴

The *Contributions to Philosophy* already show Heidegger grappling with decomposition as a way of thinking what remains of abandonment. Important here is the connection that Heidegger draws between abandonment and a theatrical “staging” of full presence. In a section of the text entitled “Abandonment of *Beyng*,” Heidegger writes of the beings that bear this abandonment that, “The particular being appears so, it shows itself as object and as the present-at-hand, *as if beyng did not essence*” (GA 65: 115/80–81; tm, emphasis mine). The crucial notion to be drawn from this is the “as if.” The abandonment of *beyng* leaves beings to a world where they ape objective presence in a denial of their condition, as if withdrawal did not take place. The “as if” operative in this claim attests to the persistence of essencing (by which we now understand withdrawing and remaining), even within the metaphysical tradition of objective presence. Consequently, the abandonment of *beyng* coincides with a movement of dissembling or of what Heidegger will call the “stage”—“Stage [*Bühne*]*—the formation of the actual as the task of stage-designers!*” (GA 65: 347/243; tm). The world which is formed by these stage-designers is one which presents itself as actual and real, a construction of metaphysics. In such a world, *beyng* has abandoned the stage but it does not do so without a trace (the “as if” says nothing less than this). We could even go so far as to say that *beyng* requires the stage so that a trace of its disappearance still might remain. Nevertheless, what gets produced on this stage is in complete denial of the disappearing trace.¹⁵

Heidegger identifies this construction of presence in the *Contributions* with decomposition. Insofar as this stage-design results from the abandonment of *beyng* and places the mark of abandonment in those beings themselves, Heidegger can claim that “The abandonment of *beyng* is at ground a decomposition [*Ver-wesung*] of *beyng*” (GA 65: 115/81; tm). Abandonment leads to the illusion of things as present-at-hand objects standing opposite us. But this is now construed in terms of “decomposition.” Decomposition, therefore, is not so much the falling away of what is present (*verwesen* is not *verfallen*), as instead the agglomeration of reality into what is present. Decomposition does not

dwindle away to nothingness but builds up to completion. And yet, due to the nature of withdrawal, it can never attain the completion it seeks.¹⁶

The *Contributions* present decomposition as the projection of metaphysical completeness onto beings. While this idea of a “staged” presence will return in the Trakl reading “Language in the Poem,” Heidegger will show this metaphysical role to be inadequate for a full understanding of decomposition. Decomposition as understood in the *Contributions* will be termed “decay” in the Trakl reading, with “decomposition” coming to name the essencing of essence itself. Essence decomposes, and this now means not only that essence falls towards decay, but that it likewise stretches out beyond itself. Decomposition is this twofold movement of essence. To understand decomposition, then, we must understand two aspects of the Trakl interpretation, departure and decay.

Departure (*Abgeschiedenheit*), a term which Heidegger takes to name the paradoxical “place” (*Ort*) of Trakl’s poetry (US 52/OWL 172; tm) and which forms something of a corollary to *abandonment*, must be thought in terms of a journeying which no longer remains at home but which is not yet at its destination. In Trakl’s poetry it is the soul that departs, and Heidegger’s analysis takes its own departure from a line of the poem “*Frühling der Seele*” (“Spring-time of the Soul”) which names the soul “a stranger upon the earth.”¹⁷ Heidegger etymologically links the soul as stranger (*ein Fremdes*) with being underway (*unterwegs*, from the Old High German *fram*). This is not a matter of the soul’s Fall. Heidegger stresses that the soul is not a stranger in the sense of being lost upon the earth while actually belonging somewhere else above. The soul has not been struck down (*verschlagen*) from the super-sensible realm to subsequently lose its way upon the sensible earth, nor has it fallen into this world. Instead, the soul is here as departed (or, following Trakl, as called into its “*Untergang*,”¹⁸ its going under, a term whose connection with “*unterwegs*” should not be overlooked).

We would go astray were we to think this journey of the soul as starting out from an origin in order to finally reach a destination. What is so alluring in Trakl’s notion of departure for Heidegger is that departure is not thought in regard to origin or destination. Instead, it is a matter of being underway and between these two poles, without, however, being first thought from out of them, that is, departure is not derived from two present points, but is itself the originary condition upon which such conceptions of destination and origin implicitly depend. In fact, the departed soul itself is nothing fixed and stable. It, too, must be thought as “underway” in the sense that it is not at home with itself either. It is driven out along its path by spirit, which darts out ahead and draws the soul along after it. Departure then upsets the notion of a fixed ori-

gin, a fixed destination, and a fixed individual who would journey between the two. On the contrary, departure is thoroughly transitional, something that Heidegger highlights by drawing attention to the setting for this scene of departure: it occurs at twilight and under skies of crepuscular blue.⁹

The transitional space of the soul's departure is thought by Heidegger in terms of the limit "between" origin and destination. For this reason, the soul underway is eventually conducted to the edge of the forest without entering that forest.²⁰ But this liminal position is equally an exposure to what lies beyond. In taking a stance at the limit, the soul is brought into community with what lies beyond in a manner that is foreclosed to the self-enclosed subject of metaphysics. In fact, it is precisely this status of metaphysical subject that is shed at the limit, as the encounter that Heidegger now presents makes clear. At the forest's edge, the soul catches sight of a figure up ahead, the wild form of a blue deer who returns the wandering soul's gaze. For Heidegger, the blue deer is a figure of the animal that is no longer thought from out of the sensible/supersensible distinction native to the metaphysical definition of the human as *animal rationale*. The metaphysical determination of the human, in other words, is equally a determination of animality, an animality that the blue deer abandons: "Where and when it essences, the blue deer has abandoned the hitherto essential configuration of the human [the *animal rationale*]" (US 46/OWL, 167; tm). The deer has achieved this, however, by taking up its position at the forest's edge, that is, by acceding to the limit. To abandon the *animal rationale*, as both the blue deer and the soul do, is to become one of the "mortals" (*die Sterblichen*) and the blue deer is just this. "The name 'blue deer' names the mortal" (US 46/167; tm).²¹ For a logic of departure, then, to depart is to abandon, but at the same time to encounter; both occur at the limit. It is here that departure and decay will come together, where they will coalesce into decomposition. Before turning to that, a few words are in order regarding decay.

Heidegger does not draw explicit attention to the distinction between decomposition (*Verwesung*) and decay (*Verfall*) in his text, but it is operative throughout (though unremarked in the English translation).²² Our word *decay*, like the German word *Verfall*, is etymologically linked to the notion of a fall (as we speak of an orbit's "decay"), and for Heidegger this means that the word is likewise associated with a logic of the Fall, the metaphysical Fall of Christianity and Platonism, a falling away from a better place above to a worse one below. For Heidegger, Platonic-Christian thinking views this realm below as an unabiding and mutable world of "untrue being," a realm of the "decomposing" (*Verwesende*; US 40/OWL, 162; tm), but his reading will demonstrate that this Platonic-Christian-metaphysical viewpoint fails to truly think decomposition due to its allegiance to a logic of the fall and its concomitant conception of

pure presence (the eternal nature of ideal reality). The world of metaphysics for Heidegger is instead the world of decay, and he provides us with a clue for thinking decay when he writes that the stranger is called into an *Untergang* which is “neither a catastrophe, nor a mere disappearance in decay [*Wegschwinden in den Verfall*]” (US 42/OWL, 164; tm). In other words, decay drives towards disappearance without remainder.

But this disappearance in decay is at once a reintegration. When the organism dies, decay sets in and feeds on the death. Decay performs the self-perpetuating work of a nature that outlives death, completing the cycle of nature’s self-sufficiency. It should come as no surprise that a Heideggerian view of decay would align it with a certain Nietzscheanism. Decay is the unending circulation of biological life which must consume to live, the nightmare world of Nietzsche where to exist is both to consume and to be consumable, and where everything has already been consumed in a closed system which feeds on its own waste:

The new world conception.—The world exists; it is not something that becomes, not something that passes away. Or rather: it becomes, it passes away, but it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away—it maintains itself in both.—It lives on itself: its excrements are its food. (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* §1066)

Decay maintains nature at the height of economy, feeding on the death that nature produces. In so doing, nature loses nothing. Nature prevails through the offices of decay, recuperating every loss, even its remainder, and works eternally until nothing remains. Decay is the officer of totality.

Returning to the figure of the blue deer who, as mortal, abandons the determination of *animal rationale*, Heidegger draws an appropriately subtle distinction between decomposition and decay. After noting the blue deer’s abandonment of the *animal rationale*, Heidegger writes, “The hitherto human decays [*verfällt*] *insofar as* he loses his essence [*sein Wesen verliert*], i.e. he decomposes [*verwest*]” (GA 12: 42, cf. US 46/OWL, 167; tm; emphasis mine). This is not an adequation of decay with decomposition, but a recognition that decay is never found without decomposition.²³ We know from what was said above in regards to essence that one can never “lose” one’s essence. Things may stage a completion of presence, but they never attain it—or they do so only “theatrically.” The key term in Heidegger’s statement is *insofar*, insofar as he loses his essence he decays. If essence is always a matter of withdrawal, as we have seen, then to lose essence would be to move towards full presence. This is precisely the sense of decay that is operative in the text, as will presently be shown. Insofar as the human loses essence, he decays. But the fact that the human does not simply

give up its essence completely, the fact that the human is not simply obliterated by decay, means that there is something that remains to suffers this loss. That decay is never without remainder, this will serve to designate decomposition. This tension between fall and remainder is knotted into the unassuming word *insofar*. Insofar as the human decays, it decomposes.

Bringing together departure and decay, we can begin to make sense of decomposition. In departure, something remains behind what departs to follow after it. This same remainder is subject to the fall into decay. In neither case, however, is the transformation complete. What remains behind departure does not remain “behind” in a state of detachment from what departs. Instead, the remainder remains in a relation to the departed, following it as the soul does spirit and the blue deer. So, too, with decay. Decay is the seat of the metaphysical world of pure presence and absence, where everything goes towards the formation of a self-sufficient totality. For Heidegger, however, this metaphysical world is a staged world which presents itself “as if” *beyng* did not essence. Decay, then, is never without remainder either. Departure and decay serve to bracket the much-threatened remainder. It stands as the limit between departure and decay. The name for this always departing and always decaying liminal position is decomposition, and it stands as the truth of essence for Heidegger. Essence decomposes.

The soul which Heidegger finds in Trakl’s poetry, then—a soul which functions as another name for “essence” for Heidegger—is caught between both departure and decay, remaining after them. Spirit departs and the soul follows. In departing, however, it leaves behind its metaphysical determination as *animal rationale* and leaves it to decay. The soul is what remains of departure and suffers the loss of decay; it decomposes. If we conceive of departing as abandoning, and understand decay, too, as an abandoning of the metaphysical, then decomposition is the abandonment to abandonment, an existence in-between the threat of both isolation (losing the trace of what departs) and totality (the assimilation into decay).²⁴ Without decomposition the world would be either a completed totality or a heap of discrete individuals without relation to each other, the two are metaphysically the same. Decomposition prevents this state of affairs. It is always ongoing and never reaches a completely decomposed (*verveste*) state; it remains essentially incomplete and “underway.” Decomposition names the limit that holds the two apart. For this reason, to speak of decomposition is to speak ambiguously.

Conclusion: Ambiguity/*Zweideutigkeit*

A consideration of Heidegger’s renewed thinking of essence made possible a reply to Derrida’s charge that Heidegger would think essence as uncontaminated

by both the ontic and the technological. Essence is indissociable from a thinking of decomposition, where decomposition itself operates *between* the still metaphysical logic of contamination. Decomposition also allowed us to note that “unessence” is no more pure than essence would be (a passing charge of Derrida’s). But while these two concerns have been addressed, Derrida’s third charge against Heidegger still awaits answer, that Heideggerian thinking is involved in a project of conceptual demarcation. Heidegger’s concern with ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) throughout the Trakl interpretation, however, belies this claim.

The emphasis upon poetry in Heidegger’s thought brings about a change in his conception of ambiguity. In *Being and Time*, ambiguity was a regrettable and unavoidable part of our everyday being, extending over the entirety of our relations with world, self, and others (see BT §37: Ambiguity). By the time of the *Contributions*, however, Heidegger is able to write positively of an “essential ambiguity” in regard to truth and concealment (GA 65: 353/247). This reconsideration of ambiguity crescendos in the Trakl interpretation where it finds an “ontological” justification.

The place of Trakl’s poetry is departure, a place that is neither here nor there, but rather is a transition. Heidegger thinks this place from out of decomposition, which is itself between decay and abandonment. Being is never simply here, nor is it simply absent, the essential role of withdrawal makes this clear. Being withdraws but is not absent; the remainder decomposes but is not present. What sort of language could address this situation? It would have to be a language of decomposition, one that named both decay and departure or, as Heidegger puts it here, what is abandoned and the goal of departure:

Because the language of this poem speaks from out of a departure that is underway, it therefore speaks constantly at the same time from out of what is abandoned in departure and towards that which departure is directed. The language of the poem is essentially multiple in meaning [*mehrdeutig*] and this in its own way. We hear nothing from the saying of poetry so long as we only encounter it with this or that dampened sense of univocal meaning. (US 74/OWL, 191–192; tm)

Against this univocal sense of meaning, Heidegger draws attention to the plurality of meaning operative in Trakl’s poetry throughout his reading. This culminates in a list of twenty-two terms from Trakl’s poetry and Heidegger’s discussion that cannot be given a single meaning, but which respectively “say each time a manifold” (US 74/OWL, 192; tm). It is startling that Derrida’s criticisms ignore this list, one to which *decomposition* could very easily be added. Existence

is never univocal, why should we expect any less of language? The language of the poet must remain “ambiguous.”

Ambiguity is not simply a matter of multiple meanings to the same term, however. Were Heidegger to think ambiguity solely in this manner, we would be faced with words which would have either one meaning or another. Ambiguity would still be defined as a movement between the two present terms and meanings. Such a weak sense of ambiguity actually reaffirms the staging of presence and denial of abandonment. Contrary to this, poetry speaks “from out of an ambiguous ambiguity [*zweideutigen Zweideutigkeit*]” (US 75/OWL, 192; tm). This doubling changes everything. Ambiguous ambiguity cannot be thought of as an undecidable alteration between present meanings. The second ambiguity renders the two opposed meanings unstable. Or rather, it does not derive ambiguity from present meanings at all, but instead locates it in the space “between” these meanings, a place which itself is neither one nor the other.²⁵

Precisely in the text that concerns Derrida, Heidegger demonstrates a subtlety of thought which cannot be limited to a form of conceptual demarcation. Heidegger draws limits. These delimitations do not act as barriers which encapsulate a single meaning, but open and expose the space of meaning (the between). The limits of Heideggerian thought are essentially ambiguous, those of the Derridean contamination critique are not. In thinking essence as decomposing, in bringing the *Ver-* to *Wesen*, Heidegger announces the singularity and fragility of finite and mortal existence.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), hereafter cited parenthetically as *Of Spirit*. Other concerns with contamination in Heidegger are to be found in “On Reading Heidegger: An Outline of Remarks to the Essex Colloquium,” in *Research in Phenomenology* XVII (1987): 171–185, hereafter cited parenthetically as “Reading,” and *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), hereafter cited parenthetically as *Aporias*. I take *Of Spirit* to be Derrida’s broadest contextualization of the contamination problematic within Heidegger’s work.

2. On Heideggerian “hope,” see “Différance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 1–27, p. 27. We should also note, however, that Derrida, too, is not afraid to speak with certainties and assurances. In regards to contamination, he holds that there is a “fatal necessity” of contamination (*Of Spirit*, p. 10), one that, “foils every strategy of protection” (Reading, p. 172).

3. The remarks date from 1986–1987 and Derrida makes reference to them in the opening pages of *Of Spirit*, p. 8.

4. Reading, p. 180; the interlocutor is John Sallis.
5. See Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 42–43.
6. I will render *Seyn* as “beyng” to distinguish it from *Sein* (“being”), the distinction between these is largely the work of the *Contributions*. Beyng names being as not only distinct from particular beings, but distinct even from traditional conceptions of “being” itself, as beyng is the withdrawal which grants beings in the first place (and metaphysical notions of “being” only the abstraction from these abandoned beings).
7. A step toward remedying this lack, though by no means an unproblematic one, can be found in Alfons Grieder’s historical treatment of Heidegger’s changing views on essence, “What Did Heidegger Mean by ‘Essence’?” in *Macann*, Vol. I, pp. 183–212.
8. “Essencing does not lie ‘above’ the being and separated from it, rather the particular being stands in beyng and, standing therein and lifted away, has its truth as what is true only in beyng” (GA 65: 287/202; tm).
9. “Technology essences in the realm where revealing and unconcealment, where *alétheia*, where truth, occur” (VA 17/QCT, 13; tm).
10. For a contextualization of Heidegger’s relationship to Trakl via a review of his correspondence with Trakl’s friend and associate Ludwig von Ficker, see Diana Orendi Hinze’s “Heidegger und Trakl: Aus dem unveröffentlichten Briefwechsel Martin Heidegger-Ludwig von Ficker” in *Orbis Litterarum* 32 (1977), pp. 247–253. The correspondence in its entirety is now available in *Martin Heidegger-Ludwig von Ficker: Briefwechsel 1952–1967*.
11. Françoise Dastur, “Three Questions to Jacques Derrida” in Arleen B. Dallery and Charles Scott with P. Holley Roberts, ed., *Ethics and Danger: Essays on Heidegger and Continental Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 25–41, p. 32.
12. Dastur, p. 32.
13. See the description of the prefix *ver-* in *Duden: Grammatik der deutschen Gegenwartssprache*, §775, pp. 445–446, where it is spoken of as indicating “an action with a mostly negative result, a spoiling [*Verderben*], a closing off [*Verschließen*], or a distancing [*Entfernen*]” (p. 445). The first and third of these terms are of interest to our conception of *Verwesung*.
14. Something of this doubling may be seen in Heidegger’s coupling of the abandonment of beyng (*Seynsverlassenheit*) with the forgetting of beyng (*Seynsvergessenheit*) in the *Contributions*, particularly in the second section (joint) of the text entitled “Echo” (*Anklang*). Nonetheless, the consequences of this conjunction of abandonment and forgetting are never cast in terms of the being as remainder; such is the task of the Trakl reading.
15. On this theme of the staging of presence, compare Timothy Clark’s remarks on mimesis as operative between Heidegger and Derrida in “Being in Mime: Heidegger and Derrida on the Ontology of Literary Language,” in *Modern Language Notes* 101: 5 (Dec. 1986), 1003–1021.

16. The dissembling of presence that is “staged” by metaphysics is likewise a dissembling of pure absence. If we follow Heidegger in thinking the abyss (*Abgrund*) as the “remaining away” of ground, then it follows that the abyss, too, is no mere absence of ground. Metaphysics can see only the absence of ground, the unground (*Ungrund*). Heidegger confirms this theatrics of absence in regard to unground when he writes “the abyss is fully dissembled by the unground” (GA 65: 380/265; tm). Such a remark provides us with an insight into Heidegger’s thinking of the “un-” in terms such as “unworld,” the “unholy,” and, apropos our concern with Derrida’s contamination critique, “unessence” (*Unwesen*). A diagram in the *Contributions* links dissemblance and decomposition both under the heading “unground” (see GA 65: 308/216). The unground, too, is a denial of withdrawal, as if being did not essence. Contra Derrida’s objection to the purity of the “un-” in *Unwesen*, the prefix names no simple opposition, but, as in the case of *Ungrund*, a staging of absence.

17. Heidegger cites this poem from the first volume of the three-volume *Gesamtausgabe* of Trakl’s work: Georg Trakl, *Die Dichtungen*, 6th edition (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1948), p. 149. It is also found in the historical-critical edition of Trakl’s poetry (2nd edition), ed. Walther Killy and Hans Szklenar, *Dichtungen und Briefe* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1987), p. 78.

18. See Trakl, *Die Dichtungen*, p. 107, *Dichtungen und Briefe* 90.

19. It should be noted that the color blue here is not accidental. Twilight’s blue color lies between the bright light of day and the dark black of night. The soul that is underway enters into this blueness (*die Bläue*), the color of the between.

20. Instead of the forest’s “edge” we might more rightly speak of the forest’s “seam,” *Waldsaum*, which is a recurrent image in Trakl’s poetry yet one that goes unremarked by Heidegger in his interpretations. The seam of the forest, its hem, poetizes the nature of the limit that separates what is here from the beyond. This limit stitches the two together in a peculiar bond which separates, spaces, and punctures each while joining it to the other. For further reflections on stitching and lacing, see Derrida’s own “Restitutions,” in *The Truth in Painting*, pp. 255–382, esp. p. 331, p. 340.

21. The mortals (*die Sterblichen*) are defined by their death, as opposed to the animal understood as living being (*Lebewesen*) that would be defined by its life. The importance of this shift lies in the fact that, following *Being and Time*, one does not “possess” one’s death, but instead is always “towards” that death. That the animal would be thought on the basis of what is present to it, either as itself or as its possession, that is, that it would be thought on the basis of its life, can be traced as far back as the Ancient Greek determination of the human as the animal “possessing” reason (*Zoon Logon Echon*). Heidegger’s thinking of mortality thus recasts not only the determination of the human, but of the animal as well, and this renewed thinking of animality far outreaches his earlier determination of the animal as “world-poor,” etc.

22. The English translation of Heidegger’s “Language in the Poem” does not distinguish between *Verfall* and *Verwesung*. The Emad and Maly translation, *Contributions to*

Philosophy (from *Enowning*), for its part, translates *Verwesung* by “disswaying,” which loses the common meaning of the term. The term *decomposition* maintains a connection with the putrefaction of Trakl’s poetry.

23. In order to make explicit that “*verwest*” or “decomposed” in the passage above is not synonymous with a “loss” of essence, Heidegger amends the line in his personal copy of *Unterwegs zur Sprache* from “i.e. decomposes” to read “i.e. he decomposes” (the latter reading was adopted into the *Gesamtausgabe* version of *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, GA 12).

24. With this, perhaps we attain an answer to David Farrell Krell’s question as to “why the *eidos* of man must dwindle to the *verweste Gestalt des Menschen*” in his essay “*Schlag der Liebe, Schlag des Todes*: On a Theme in Heidegger and Trakl,” in *Radical Phenomenology: Essays in Honor of Martin Heidegger*, ed. John Sallis (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), pp. 238–358, this reference p. 256. Like Dastur, Krell rightly wonders whether this “may demand a new kind of thinking” (p. 256). It is the pretense of this paper to have discovered this new kind of thinking in the thinking of decomposition, as will be shown.

25. For this reason, Derrida’s charge that Heidegger would seek to preserve Trakl’s words from a Christian contamination cannot be maintained; see *Of Spirit*, pp. 109–113.

Eight

BETWEEN DELEUZE AND HEIDEGGER THERE NEVER IS ANY DIFFERENCE

Jonathan Dronsfield

There is never any difference—not because it comes down to the same in the answer, but because it is never anywhere but in the question, and in the repetition of the question, which ensures its movement and its disguise.

—Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 107–108¹

Thoughtful men exchange greetings by posing questions to one another.

—Heidegger, “Modern natural science and technology”²

It is not always easy to be Heideggerian.

—Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?*, 108³

In answer to a direct question from a member of the audience after his paper “Nomadic thought,” Deleuze says, “If I understand you correctly, you’re saying that there is reason to suspect my loyalties to the Heideggerian point of view. I’m glad there is.”⁴ “Most of the time,” Deleuze writes elsewhere, “when someone asks me a question, even one which relates to me, I see that, strictly, I don’t have anything to say.”⁵ But this is not a problem for Deleuze; on the contrary, “There is no resemblance (nor should there be) between what one points out and what one has been asked.”⁶ For Deleuze the aim of answering direct questions, in an interview say, or in a debate, is to get out of the question, but most philosophers, Heidegger among them as we will see, go back over the question in order to get out of it, which for Deleuze is futile: “Getting out is already achieved, or else it never will be” (ID, 1). The problem is *history*: the binary machine of question and answer is devoted to taking stock in such a way as to orientate us towards the future in terms of a view of the past, thus serving only

history. Philosophers think too much in terms of the history of philosophy, as if philosophy began at an origin and is moving towards a pre-given destination as its future. The history of philosophy so conceived “has always been the agent of power in philosophy. . . . It has played the repressor’s role,” and Deleuze takes Heidegger to be one of the repressors, one of those responsible for a “new injection of history of philosophy” (*ibid.*, 12–13). For Deleuze, Heidegger is historicist (WP 95). We might question this but at the same time wonder whether Heidegger went far enough, whether his “destinal” thinking did break with history, understood as a progression in Deleuze’s sense. Heidegger no less than Deleuze wishes to transform our understanding of what it is to question. The question, for Deleuze, does not “depend on our preferences, or on an order of abstract causality,” but it must be seen as something which “varies according to the structure under consideration” (DI, 188). It is not a means of establishing a progression from an origin to a destination, it is “the beginning of the world,” without origin (DR, 200). Deleuze acknowledges that Heidegger too sees the question this way: “Might the question, along with the imperative which it expresses, have no other origin than repetition? Great authors of our time (Heidegger, Blanchot) have exploited this most profound relation between the question and repetition” (*ibid.*). The problem, then, would seem to lie in where for Heidegger the questions leads.

To regard as “fundamental” the “‘correspondence’ between difference and questioning, between ontological difference and the being of the question” brings Deleuze, or at least the early Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, according to the writer himself the first texts written in his own voice, very close to Heidegger, a thinker whose thought Deleuze otherwise never ceased to contend was different from his own (DR, 65–66). If indeed it is recognised at all, the correspondence, if we can call it that, between the thought of Deleuze and that of Heidegger is scarcely accepted in the literature on Deleuze, or we might say by those who take Deleuze to be in need of defending, in particular against Heidegger; the notable exceptions are Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, and Len Lawlor.⁷ Yet not only does Deleuze insist on the correspondence between ontological difference and questioning and remind us of the extent to which “modern thought and the renaissance of ontology is based upon the question–problem complex” (DR, 195), he does so by conceiving of being as a question. The most remarkable thing about being for both Deleuze and Heidegger is its being a question. On this principal point the degree of correlation between Deleuze and Heidegger cannot be overestimated. Deleuze unequivocally states that being should be understood as a question: “More profoundly still,” by which he means more profoundly than questioning being part of objects themselves, more profoundly than the problematic

structure of objects being part of our knowledge of them and our grasp of objects as signs being enabled by their questioning being, more profoundly even than this, “Being ‘corresponds’ to the essence of the problem of the question as such.” “It is as though,” says Deleuze, “there were an ‘opening,’ a ‘gap,’ an ontological ‘fold’ which relates being and the question to one another. In this relation, being is difference itself.” So great is this correspondence between being and questioning that the infinitive of the verb to be, *esse*, “designates less a proposition than the interrogation to which the proposition is supposed to respond” (*ibid.*, 63–64). At this moment the nomination “(non)being, or better still, ?-being,” is introduced. What is of note here is that for Deleuze the parenthesising of the *non* of *nonbeing*, putting the *non* into question or, were it not phenomenological, we might even say into suspension, marks what he argues is his difference from Heidegger. It is as if Heidegger did not sufficiently put being into question, or at least did not see nonbeing to be part of the questioning that being is. Comprehending the question of being in Deleuze and Heidegger involves a transformation of what we understand by question. Indeed, it is open whether and to what extent the question in “question of being” can be understood to be a question in the conventional sense at all. And we might suppose this to be the motivation for both Heidegger and Deleuze inventing words, or rather word-signs, to indicate that the question of being is a question which cannot be answered: being and ?-being respectively. These signs were later discontinued by their inventors, an acknowledgement that they had finally asked themselves why no such sign had been used before.

Deleuze introduces ?-being in place of being because Heidegger’s striking being through encourages the misunderstanding that Heidegger conceives the *non* of (non)being, negatively or as negation (*ibid.*, 64). The *non* of (non)being is not negative, it is part of the question of being, questioning the oppositionality of being/nonbeing, affirming nonbeing as part of the difference of being, not as being’s opposite but as a question. The negative, for Deleuze, is made up of two aspects, limitation and opposition, both of which agencies are located in consciousness, to which Deleuze opposes the productive resistance of the unconscious. Deleuze argues, but without going on to obviate the misunderstandings of Heidegger to which he adverts, that the *non* of (non)being is affirmative in that it keeps open a being as the question that it is, problematises a being in such a way as to open it for the mark of its difference. It appears that for Deleuze questioning is co-extensive with openness, and a being’s openness is what calls for a response. The *non* of (non)being is that which, in questioning, calls for a response: “Is it not the peculiarity of questions to ‘draw’ a response?” (*ibid.*, 78). But the response cannot be constitutive of the difference. To construe difference as in any way constituted or mediated by that which is

external to it would make of difference a function of consciousness and mitigate against the “in itself” of difference. In accordance with what he calls “Heidegger’s ontological intuition,” difference for Deleuze “must be articulation and connection in itself; it must relate different to different without any mediation whatsoever by the identical, the similar, the analogous or the opposed.” The latter are effects produced by difference. With the “in itself” of difference the emphasis is on immediacy: “difference must *immediately* relate the differing terms to one another . . . the different is gathered *all at once* rather than represented on condition of a prior resemblance, identity, analogy or opposition” (*ibid.*, 117; my emphasis). Moreover, “the important thing, for the in-itself, is that the difference, whether small or large, be internal” (*ibid.*, 121). Thus the response that being as a question draws is not constitutive of the difference; rather, the questioning of being is the difference, from which all responses, in the form of explicit differentiations, are effects, thereby displacing the response not just from being in any way an answer to the question that being is or a solution to the problems that being poses but as at all a part of the questioning process. The question for Deleuze is auto-immunological, giving rise to effects that serve to protect its questioning force.

For Heidegger too the question is not simply the lesser part of a dualism destined to disappear the moment it is provided with the answer it momentarily lacked. Deleuze accepts that Heidegger is after a sense of the question which does not presuppose its binary opposite, an answer the privilege of which would be to put an end to the force of the question, and that he seeks to put forth an understanding of the question less as a term of opposition than as an essential and ineliminable constituent of the problem. He admits that for Heidegger explicit conceptions of being “must not follow on from” the pre-ontological and implicit understanding of it. But this pre-ontological and implicit understanding is nonetheless a subjective presupposition (*ibid.*, 321 n11). Heidegger may have given up objective presuppositions, concepts explicitly presupposed by a given concept, but he does so without ever abandoning, indeed as a condition of retaining, subjective presuppositions, by which Deleuze means “those that are contained in opinions rather than concepts, what is meant by self, thinking, and being” (*ibid.*, 129). Subjective presuppositions—which anyway “are perhaps the same ones in another form”—are characteristic of understanding difference derivatively, in terms of the same, and according to the subject-object split. In other words, Heidegger remains phenomenological.⁸ It is this subjectivism, a “subjective emptiness . . . attributed to being,” which corrupts Heidegger’s “modern ontology” of the question, for it introduces “the indeterminate as an objective power of the question” (*ibid.*, 196), something which can be put

down to the impoverishment of what has already been said or the stereotypes inhabiting common sense and everyday discourse.

Deleuze displaces the question from consciousness to the unconscious. Questions and problems are “fundamentally unconscious.” They are not speculative acts which might indicate a provisional and momentary ignorance of the empirical, they are “the living acts of the unconscious” corresponding to the displacement of the virtual object which causes what Deleuze calls the “reality series” to develop in which the virtual object circulates (*ibid.*, 106). Indeed, by maintaining their openness the questions to be found in the unconscious may be more powerful than desire, which is seen as merely oppositional and tending towards its satisfaction.⁹ Residing in the unconscious ensures that questions are never exposed to the force of a response which might pose the question of the question’s openness. (Non)being is an openness which is not open to the question of its openness: it is in this sense that Deleuze argues that the (non)being of the question posed “with sufficient force” quells rather than incites a response, and yet that it is here that the question “discovers its properly ontological import,” the (non)being of the question rather than the non-being of the negative (*ibid.*, 107). Thus this “quelling” is a closing of possibilities of openness, and the openness of unconscious questions is something decided in advance and inaccessible even to questions, closed off from the future of an experience of even a question. We never encounter the question other than through the response it draws. Deleuze insists “that on the path which leads to that which is to be thought, all begins with sensibility” (*ibid.*, 144). The task then is to think the question that can never be encountered, the question which forever provokes responses which will never be constitutive of its difference and from which it itself is protected, in the form of a “problem complex.” Such a complex would conserve the question at the very moment of expressing its openness, something which makes of the disruptive potentiality of the questioning a continuity, always open. It is a task which can be accomplished by art.

Its being a question traversing all its cases is what unites art with itself in the form of complexes in which the responses drawn by the question are inseparable from it, but not constitutively part of the difference that the question is. The question resists the variation of responses which it calls upon to return and always reunites with itself. This is what makes all artworks ontologically one whilst at the same time keeping each one open. For Deleuze the work of art is a problem complex comprising a “theatre of problems and always open questions,” enabling us to encounter questions of being (*ibid.*, 192) “without the question thereby becoming lost or overtaken” (*ibid.*, 195). In construing art as a questioning Deleuze is indistinguishable from Heidegger, albeit in his

descriptions of artworks incomparably more evocative of the way in which they are animated by the sheer ontological scope of the question and the responses it draws. An artwork takes as its object its own difference; it poses the question of its own difference. In particular Deleuze extols those works which are *nothing but* the question “what is writing?” or “what is cinema?” In his appeal to the propriety of artworks over their own question, and their possession of a sensibility proper to their questioning, “a transcendent exercise of sensibility,” Deleuze’s first “own voice” is nothing if not modernist. For this Deleuze the history of twentieth-century art is the history of the discovery of the question. Such is the extent to which works of modern art present the problematic and essentially questioning that Deleuze describes their “new language” as that of the “‘Enquiry’ or ‘Questionnaire’” (*ibid.*, 195). James Joyce is Deleuze’s favoured example of this “method of questions and answers which doubles that of problems—the Inquisitory which grounds the problematic” (LS, 56).

Works expressive of responses drawn by the question of being are inseparable from two components of an otherwise debased moral language: decision and imperative. Decision in the form of two fundamental procedures: adjunction and condensation; imperative in a form wholly different from a moral one: to throw the dice. The imperative is to toss the die, and with every throw to toss it in such a way as to affirm chance, the whole of chance not just this chance over the last one. With the affirmation of all chance in one throw, we approach the “essence of what is called a question” (DR, 200). The combinations which follow from the throw are not to be understood as arbitrary (or “perhaps” are not [*ibid.*, 199]) but as problematic structures adequate to the conditions under which the throw takes place. Now it is, says Deleuze, “the most difficult thing” to make chance an object of affirmation (*ibid.*, 198), hence the “particular manner of the question” being the only way in which chance can be so affirmed (*ibid.*, 200).¹⁰ It leads to a relation between problem and imperative that Deleuze describes as a distorted circle, one in which problems are consequent of the imperative to throw the dice and where imperatives follow from problems—“the always displaced circle of the eternal return” (*ibid.*, 283), a “secret, much more tortuous, more nebulous circle, an eternally excentric circle, the decentred circle of difference” (*ibid.*, 91). It is this distorted circle which is expressed by the question: “Questions are imperatives—or rather, *questions express the relation between problems and the imperatives from which they proceed . . .*” (*ibid.*, 197–198). To throw the dice, then, is to question. Each time the dice are thrown the question is repeated, but it will be repeated in such a way that the chance is each time taken all at once. In this sense a repetition is each time the same, but a repetition which results from the different in the form of the question motivating it. Each throw is ontologically unique, a uniqueness

which is the same across all throws. We have here an image of what Deleuze means by differential ontology, formally distinct cases each of which refers to being as to a single entity, ontologically one. Deleuze describes this univocity of being as follows: “the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. . . . Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself” (*ibid.*, 36). The throw of the die divides up and distributes nomadically the univocity of this simple presence. “There has only ever been one ontological proposition,” says Deleuze, “Being is univocal” (*ibid.*, 35). It is precisely the difference of the responses drawn by the questioning that being is that attests to this univocity and which must therefore be preserved in the works created by the artist’s throw of the dice.

The dice throw sets up a kind of “open space” (*ibid.*, 283) in which the outcomes are distributed as singularities.¹¹ The singularities are not those of an I, they are pre-individual and nonpersonal and can only be understood to be singularities if at the same time they dissolve all prior identities (LS 52, DR 202).¹² Hence the artist’s power to decide is not his own. Indeed it is the impossibility of self-consciousness, not the place of an I at all but a “blind spot.” It is a transcendental element called by Deleuze a fracture or fissure, one that an artist never succeeds in filling because essentially it is a question: “The imperatives and questions with which we are infused do not emanate from the I: it is not even there to hear them” (DR, 205). Only the “to be thought” emanates from the fracture, it is the highest power of thought in virtue of its designating the “unthinkable or the inability to think at the empirical level” (*ibid.*, 144). The fracture is the place from where ideas that derive from imperatives enter and leave, and is displaced by them each time. “Difference emerges from and re-enters a fissure that swallows up all things and beings” (DI, 159). It is here that Deleuze appeals to the notion of the other in me. The fracture is nothing less than “another always think[ing] in me, another who must also be thought” (DR, 199–200). This other is my powerlessness, which I must make the object of my thought. That it is not I that thinks Deleuze shares with Heidegger: twice in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze cites Heidegger’s insistence that we are not yet thinking: “What gives us most cause for thought is the fact that we do not yet think” (*ibid.*, 275). The “possibility alone” that man can think “is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking” (*ibid.*, 144),¹³ whilst in *What is Philosophy?* he describes as Heideggerian the “veiling-unveiling on the plane of a thought that does not yet think” (WP, 56). We might note that Heidegger also describes a rupture *internal* to Dasein (*Gebrochenheit des Daseins in sich selbst*) and names it the finitude of Dasein¹⁴ and “the Dasein in man” (FCM, 21, 174).¹⁵

Dasein can be seen as a double or split structure. But for Heidegger this split occasioned by the question of being maintains Dasein in an irreducible proximity to itself in that one is called upon to respond to the being that one is, but at the same time one is not the being that one is until one has responded. Thus the question both divides and unites one's presence to oneself. Dasein is both divided from and united with itself by the doubly genitival way one is subject to and of the question of being. Whereas for Deleuze to think the "other in me" is to affirm one's powerlessness through the acceptance of never being able to gather the other in me back to oneself. On the contrary, the task is to affirm the disjunction. It is the direction which is at issue. Heidegger speaks of man having to perform a leap (*Sprung*) across the rupture or split (*Bruch*) as a questioning interpretation going back (*das Zurückgehen in die fragende Auslegung*).¹⁶ And it is this "going back," the retrieval at the heart of Heidegger's thought, that Deleuze objects to.

For Deleuze the thought of an other in me is a relation to the exterior, it is what leads me radically out of myself, it is dispersal, or deterritorialization, and it is this which we must affirm. Traversed by the question that is being in the form of an absolute relation with the outside means that we are the decided rather than deciders, and our task is to express the "open space" in which we are decided and where we are nothing but the impersonal and the pre-individual. Deleuze reserves the term *intensity* for that which carries us "always further out, ever further toward the exterior" (DI, 257). Moreover, we are at once many singularities and intensities, we are multiple in our responses to the question of our being, "singularities are imprisoned within individuals and persons" (LS, 140–141). For Heidegger too it is a question of intensifying, but by this he means the opposite to Deleuze's sense; to intensify our finitude is to retrieve ourselves from dispersal. When Heidegger says that "it is precisely a question of becoming certain of this finitude in order to hold oneself in it [*um in ihr sich zu halten*]," he does so not to do away with "ability, duty, and allowing, [and] in this way to extinguish finitude, but rather the reverse" (KPM, 147–148). And whilst it is the "liberation [*Befreiung*] of the *Dasein in man*" that is at issue here, at the same time this liberation is "the task [*Aufgabe*] laid upon us to assume [*sich . . . zu geben*] once more our very Dasein as an actual *burden* [*Bürde*]" (FCM, 171–172). In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger affirms a retrieval from dispersion as a moral task of gathering the self back to itself (*Sammlung*: ingathering) from out of its dispersion (*Zerstreuung*), recapturing it (*sich wieder auffangen*) from the impermanent and its confusion in appearance (IM, 169). A necessary act of violence vouchsafing a need (*Not*): that man achieve his fit (*Fug*) in the totality of being, a need (*Not*) which "intrinsically requires violence to ward off dispersion [*Zerstreuung*]" (*ibid.*, 174). Heidegger describes language

too as dispersed, as a concealing as much as an uncovering (*Unfug*) and thus in need of a gathering apprehension (*vernehmen*) (*ibid.*, 173). *Vernehmen* is articulated as an historical necessity (*Notwendigkeit*) born of the need (*Not*) of historical Dasein, and requires a necessarily violent decision, a necessarily violent interrogation if it is to be created (*geschaffen*) (*ibid.*, 176) or earned (*erworben*).¹⁷ Even when in Heidegger the ontological emphasis given Dasein over being is shifted, and man becomes “used” or “needed” (*brauchen*) by being for being’s disclosure, there is still a reconciliation at work. Thus in *Beiträge* (§133), being needing man is understood by Heidegger to mean the “belonging” of man to being for the attainment of being’s limits. He calls this the counterswing (*Gegenschwung*) of need and belonging in which, in order to become that which belongs to being, “man has to abandon his being-lost in the midst of beings [*wenn er doch seine Verlorenheit an das Seiende daran geben muß*],” man is appropriated (*Er-eignete*) by being.¹⁸ The problem in Heidegger is not the disproportion or the asymmetry of “being uses man” or, in his very late work, “language speaks man,” it is that Heidegger does not affirm the disproportion enough, does not affirm the difference that alone would attest to the univocity that being is. To be sure Heidegger gives “renewed splendor” to the univocity of being (D, 66), yet he does not follow this all the way through and affirm the difference that would attest to the ontology of its questioning. This would be a problem were being indeed a question.

At the same time Heidegger asks: does not being become dependent on something other, if this need or usage, rather than being simply a consequence of its essence, constitutes its essence? Moreover, in what way is this a *dependence* if the usage transforms that which it needs, in such a way that it gains its own ground (*Grund*) by way of this transformation, and hence is unable to dominate being, which is why in Heidegger we have something of an equivocation, perhaps even an oscillation back and forth along the line between the two opposing directions taken by Deleuze and Heidegger alluded to above. Deleuze writes, “the philosophy of Difference seems to us badly established as long as it is content with the terminological opposition between the platitude of the Identical as equal to itself and the profundity of the Same which is supposed to incorporate the different” (DR, 301). The critical reference is to “. . . Poetically man dwells . . .” in which Heidegger again seems to emphasise the “gathering” of what “belongs together,” in a way which for Deleuze implies that the same incorporates difference into one thing. But Heidegger here speaks of a “carrying out” of difference, even if those differences appear settled. The gathering is “by way of difference,” into a same which “banishes all zeal always to level what is different into the equal or identical. [whereas] The same gathers what is distinct into an original being-at-one.”¹⁹ It is as if for Heidegger one could not see

their difference until they are gathered together. He is speaking, within the confines of “a short parenthetical remark,” of the “one and the sameness” in which poetry and thinking meet each other “only . . . as long as they remain distinctly in the distinctness of their nature.” We must take care not to harmonise under the proper name *Heidegger* the differences proper to it, as if it occupied a single historical place. Not to acknowledge Heidegger’s thought as a struggle internal to Heidegger is to historicize the name.

For Heidegger violence must be exerted for man to think and to say I. It is with Heidegger’s appeal to the historical destiny of man to take on this burden of violence for his finitude, and “once more” to do so, that we arrive at the matter of Deleuze’s fundamental disagreement with Heidegger: the question of history, the history of the question of being, and what Deleuze calls Heidegger’s historicism. For Deleuze the force of the other hidden in us destroys subjectivity and calls for new thinkers, and Deleuze announces Heidegger (together with Nietzsche and Marx) as a candidate (DI, 74–75). But Heidegger does not go far enough for Deleuze, he does not break with history. Philosophy in Heidegger becomes co-extensive with its history, a history understood as a progression between two points, an origin and a destiny. We find the same tendency in Heidegger’s conception of artworks as revealing of a world as “the self-opening openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people.”²⁰ Even the call in *Beiträge* for a lack of art (*Kunstlosigkeit*)—“a moment of history that lacks art can be more historical and more creative than times of a widespread art business”—is made averring that it could only ever be transitory, until such time that is as “essential decisions” are forced by it, decisions about the historical destiny of a people (B, §277).

Each time the die is tossed there is a repetition. Being is repetition. With each throw the recommencement of being happens again, the recommencement is what is repeated, not what is recommenced (DR, 202). The questions to which artists give rise are not then to be understood as origins or as copies, and neither is each ?-being an instance at all of the negation of another. Rather, their relations are described by Deleuze as “reciprocal relations between differential elements” (*ibid.*, 203). If there are no origins, there are no original responses, “there are only problem-questions, in the guise of a mask behind every mask and a displacement behind every place,” with profound consequences for how we understand right or wrong answers, for truth or falsity does not occur at the level of the answer or solution but at the level of the problems and questions themselves, “in other words, in conditions under which the false becomes the mode of exploration of the true, the very space of its essential disguises or its fundamental displacement” (*ibid.*, 107), an exploration Deleuze, like Heidegger before him, terms errancy. But wouldn’t this imply that the problem

with Heidegger is not so much his political affiliations as with his having any affiliations at all (D, 12)? If Heidegger lost his way because he saw philosophy as an historical progression from an origin in which directions are given in the form of a destiny and a choice, then this is why he chose the wrong people, because he saw it as a choice at all. But does not Deleuze too appear to be subject to this madness of choice, to see himself faced with an either/or so deplored in his account of the banality of philosophical questioning, for does he not also posit a people, albeit a dispossessed one? “Perhaps this strict professor was madder than he seemed. He got the wrong people, earth, and blood. For the race summoned forth by art or philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race” (WP, 109). To “think without origin” is to think without destination, without the thought of being clamped between the two points of departure and arrival, between Being and being (DI, 159). But does not this thought necessitate relinquishing choice in the form of any content to the outside towards which we are ceaselessly drawn, something attested to in the form of a dice throw or a wager to the question that being is? Deleuze believes philosophy and art converge to call for a people that do not yet exist. So too does Heidegger, most notably in the figure of Hölderlin, “the poet most futural of the ones to come” (B §252). When Deleuze says that “art and philosophy converge at this point: the constitution of an earth and a people that are lacking as the correlate of creation” (WP, 108), he means a people that is not yet, a people which does not pre-exist the work, the condition of something new happening, something which until the event of that work we could not see happening and which requires us to invent ourselves as another people, or in other words to put into question the people that we are. But this raises the question of whether we can describe such a people at all—*oppressed* and *anarchic*, *nomadic* and *bastard*, are not abstract, they refer to empirical, if unnamed, peoples—and whether a people to come can be seen in advance to be in opposition to the sort chosen by Heidegger, and it is this which leads to a choice: an affiliation to who we are not, where the “not” is problematic precisely because it is not purely negative or simply opposed to who we are. Heidegger sees this, which is why he goes the other way to Deleuze, back to who we are. The “ones to come,” for Heidegger, would ceaselessly expose themselves to the disquiet and strife of questioning, but it is a questioning which shelters and is innermost (B §250). Heidegger goes back the other way in the sense that he goes back to the beginning, a recommencing repetition beginning again with the Greeks. If Greece is seen as the origin of philosophy, then for Deleuze it is a point of departure of a history internal to the West: “However close he got to it, Heidegger betrays the movement of deterritorialization because he fixes it once and for all between being and beings,

between the Greek territory and the Western earth that the Greeks would have called Being" (WP, 95). To reduce philosophy to its history is to disallow philosophy from creating new concepts. "It is only in the name of new creation that you can oppose, and then you have other things to think about" (DI, 141).

We have already pointed out the discontinuation of the word-signs ?-being and being. And at one point in his late work Deleuze appears to discount the value of a question and instead to shift the creative emphasis onto problems: "as the creation of thought, a problem has nothing to do with a question, which is only a suspended proposition, the bloodless double of an affirmative proposition that is supposed to serve as its answer" (WP, 139). It might appear that Deleuze is merely distinguishing between questions which problematise and questions which, seen from the perspective of the logical form of the interrogative, subsume what is meant by question beneath a certain conception of truth as identity, questions which in their asking serve more as assertions than questions. After all, does he not also remark in the same text that "Every sensation is a question, even if the only answer is silence" (*ibid.*, 196)? Is not the very title of the book in which the above assertions are made itself a question? But the warrant for this question, What is philosophy?, provided on the very first page in an introduction entitled "The question then . . .," is that the question concerning "that which is" is asked because there is "no longer anything to ask" (*ibid.*, 1). Heidegger too dropped his insistence on the interrogative: the reversal (*Die Kehre*) is "above all not an operation of interrogative thought."²¹ In "The nature of language" he remarks: "to let ourselves be told something and not to ask questions, we must strike the question mark out again when a thinking experience is at stake."²² Is there no longer anything to ask because we accept that no answers can be given which put a stop to the questioning that being is? Or is there no longer anything to ask because there being no such answers brings into question whether being is a question at all? If Deleuze is right and "there is" never any difference because "it is never anywhere but in the question, and in the repetition of the question," then Deleuze and Heidegger are the same, as each in his own way performs a disguise of the question. But if there never was a question, then Deleuze and Heidegger are the same, as each in his way questions in disguise. Either way, there is never any difference between them.²³

Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (1968), trans. Paul Patton (London: The Athlone Press, 1994). Henceforth cited as DR, followed by page number.

Between Deleuze and Heidegger There Never Is Any Difference

2. Martin Heidegger, "Modern Natural Science and Technology" (1976), in John Sallis, ed., *Radical Phenomenology: Essays in Honour of Martin Heidegger* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), p. 3.

3. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1991), trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994). Henceforth cited as WP, followed by page number.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–74* (2002), trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 188. Henceforth cited as DI, followed by page number. The question was posed by André Flécheux.

5. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (1977), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 1. Henceforth cited as D, followed by page number.

6. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (1969), trans. Mark Lester (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 135. Henceforth cited as LS, followed by page number.

7. "Deleuze carries out the gesture of a philosopher who, despite Deleuze's lack of fondness for him, is certainly closer to Deleuze than is any other representative of phenomenology in the twentieth century. . . ." "The history of the relations between Heidegger and Deleuze, through Blanchot for example, and the often unacknowledged Heideggerian dimension of contemporary French philosophy, remains to be written. In any case, however, it is certain that the Heidegger of Deleuze is altogether different from the Heidegger of Levinas and Derrida." Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute immanence," in *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 225 and 300 n13. "How does Deleuze differ from Heidegger? . . . This is an extremely complex question: for my part, I would maintain that Deleuze is, on a number of critical points (difference, the open, time . . .), less distant from Heidegger than is usually believed and than he no doubt believed himself to be." Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (1997), trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 21. "Under Heidegger's influence, twentieth-century ontology has appropriated interrogation in order to define being itself. In the second half of the twentieth century, we can see the appropriation of interrogation to define Being in Merleau-Ponty and in Deleuze. . . . But when we turn to Deleuze, no one seems to recognize that, like Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze too develops an ontology that develops around the question." Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 2003, p. 96.

8. See "An unrecognized precursor to Heidegger: Alfred Jarry," in Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical And Clinical* (1993), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 91–99, and "How Jarry's pataphysics opened the way for phenomenology" (DI, 74–76), in which Deleuze subsumes the thinking of the being of phenomena beneath a pataphysics of epiphenomena. Agamben refers to the Heidegger in the first of these texts as "the 'pataphysical' Heidegger of the wonderful article on Alfred Jarry, the Heidegger with whom Deleuze, through this incomparable Ubuesque caricature, can finally reconcile himself." Agamben, *op cit*, p. 225.

9. “In truth, should it not be asked whether desire is only an oppositional force rather than a force completely founded in the power of the question?” [DR, p. 317 n17]

10. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), trans. Daniel W Smith (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 93–96. The Deleuze of the Bacon book does not discuss artworks as explicitly questions at all. Rather, art is nothing but sensation. However, in the later *What is Philosophy?* “every sensation is a question” (WP 196).

11. The “open space” in which this nomadic distribution takes place is developed (in *The Logic of Sense* and “How do we recognise structuralism?”) into the notion of the “empty square,” an aleatory point or mobile element that determines the questions posed therein. In *What is Philosophy?* the square becomes the plane of composition. The empty square is the locus of the question traversing the entire series of singularities (LS, 56). Examples other than works of art would be the “sexual structure,” in which the phallus becomes “the locus of a question,” or commodity exchange, in which “generalized labour” becomes the locus of the question (DI, 188).

12. But this does not mean that singularities are not moral, for “moral characters are also made of prepersonal singularities.” Characters in a novel, for instance, are the adjunctions and condensations thrown into problematic combinations of human events, complexes in which the characters are “displaced or rearranged from one problem to another” (LS, 55).

13. “Thought thinks only when it is constrained and forced, in the presence of what ‘gives thinking,’ in the presence of what is to be thought—and what is to be thought is really the unthinkable or the nonthought, that is, the perpetual fact that ‘we have not yet thought.’” Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (1954), trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 3.

14. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929–30), trans. William McNeill & Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 170. Henceforth cited as FCM, followed by page number.

15. See also *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), enlarged 4th edition, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 156, Henceforth cited as KPM, followed by page number; and “Davos disputation between Ernst Cassirer & Martin Heidegger,” *ibid.*, p. 177.

16. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935, revised 1953), trans. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 176. Henceforth cited as IM, followed by page number.

17. Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928), trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 15.

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Between Deleuze and Heidegger There Never Is Any Difference

19. Martin Heidegger, "... Poetically Man Dwells ..." (1951), in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 218. (The citation is wrongly referenced at DR 333 n11.)

20. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1936, revised 1956), trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Basic Writings*, revised edition, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 174.

21. Martin Heidegger, "Letter to Father Richardson" (1962), Preface to William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, second edition (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), p. xvii.

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23. I would like to thank Jessica Brotman, Neil Chapman, Stephen Dunne, Erinn Gilson, Len Lawlor, Michael Pedersen, John Protevi, Aaron Schuster, and Sverre Spoelstra for their thoughtful comments on this paper.

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Nine

ON A DIVINE *WINK*

Jean-Luc Nancy

1

In number 44 of a text he titled, with a philosophical wink, “Faith and Knowledge,” a title that is subtitled, with another wink, “The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” a wink that could be considered double or triple if we reflect that “at the limits” constitutes a malicious, in the strong sense, and thus perverting allusion to “within the limits”—in that number 44, Derrida alludes to a wink, or makes a gesture in its direction that is as vague as it is precise (as the oxymoron of all winks must be). It is a theological wink, or rather, a theophanic one, since it is precisely a question, in that wink, of not speaking, which doubtless carries us immediately, in the twinkling of an eye, “to the limits of“ *-logy* alone, whatever its prefix or pretext. Indeed, he quotes Heidegger apropos of the “last god”: “The last god: his occurring is found in the sign (*im Wink*), in the onset and absence of an arrival (*dem Anfall und Ausbleib der Ankunft*), as well as in the flight of the gods that are past and their hidden metamorphosis.”¹

At least provisionally, I designate the German word *Wink* as “*clin d’œil*” [“wink of an eye”].² This word is kept, in parentheses, in German in this translation [Derrida cites one by J.-F. Courtine]. It is not the only instance of German here, since it is followed by an entire German phrase. Nevertheless, this

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word captures our interest; we must retain and observe it, for two reasons. First, a more extended analysis of the entire sentence and its context in Heidegger would demonstrate that the terms in apposition to *Wink*—namely, “the onset and the absence of an arrival” (i.e., of the last god), and “the flight of the gods that are past and their . . . metamorphosis”—are, in truth, less appositions than explications of the *Wink*. That analysis will be carried out later, but I anticipate its result. Second, mention of the word *Wink* imposes itself on the translator, whoever he or she may be, in a far more imperious (dare I say “sovereign”?) way than does mention of the other terms. *Wink*, properly speaking, is untranslatable. In a conceptual context, and where the use of the French word *signe* [“sign”] is clearly unavoidable, it is the translator’s duty to point out the presence of this irreducible word. *Clin d’oeil*, an expression to which we shall return, would introduce other connotations just as suspect, and of an order more fraught or more carefree than that of *signe* understood in the sense of *Zeichen*, of signifying sign, of meaning-to-say—precisely because that is not what is involved here.

In a general sense, the mention of a word in the original language (as, e.g., to stick to German, the words *Witz* or *Wesen*) indicates that the word chosen as an equivalent translates the original one poorly or inappropriately. Thus the translator informs us of the impropriety, warns us of it, without going into all the intentions, implications, and idiomatic innuendos. When the translator must, or wants to, avoid an explanatory and hermeneutic note on the untranslatable that thus remains untranslated (a note that quite often would run the risk of becoming a philological, philosophical or, in my case, theological compendium), the translator must be satisfied with a gesture that does not produce sense but indicates, on the contrary, the proximity of a sense that is other, a sense that does not mean in the language into which the text is being translated, a sense that does not succeed in making sense from one language to another. A sense whose arrival is suspended between its onset and its absence, to return to our original motif.

Now it is quite true that the general situation of translation is to be subject to the double postulate in the form of the *double bind*³ of an integral signifiability and a residual in-signifiability, which turns out also to be originary, an exception that is the rule, since it exposes and imposes the irreducibility of the language, its idiosyncrasy, without which there would be no need for translation—nor any languages, for that matter.

To this consideration of the mention of *Wink*, that is, a consideration intended to open up a passage toward the thing or the role that is “essentially deployed” in this word and to which Derrida alludes here, two scholia should be added.

1. The translator's gesture, indicating that the word is improperly translated, is itself a *Wink*, that is, a "sign" (the term used in place of a translation), in the sense of a "signal," a "warning," a "portent" [*intersigne*], as one used to say not so long ago. It is an indication given at once from afar and in passing, without explanation, without any true sense, evasive as to sense but specific as to direction: pay attention to this area. This should be translated differently, but later or elsewhere: for the moment, we'll put this word on hold—awaiting its own true sense.

We will return to this question. The *Wink* is a sign of awaiting, or of putting expectation in the position of a sign. It is suspended between hope and disappointment. We must await its interpretation, but that waiting is, in itself, already a mobilization, and its mobility or motility is more important than its final interpretation. The most current model of the *Wink* (model in the sense of example or of modalization), is given in the *clin d'oeil*. A wink is always to be translated, but at the same time it has already gone beyond its translation by its gesture. It has jumped in one bound, in the twinkling of an eye, beyond the sense it has prompted us to await. It is still, it will always be, to be translated. It will not have its own fully accomplished, determined, saturated sense. The *Wink*—and the word *Wink*, for the French translator, but also, in the final analysis, for the German reader . . . appropriates the impropriety constitutive of a sense that is defective or excessive, labile, evasive, allusive, or deferred. (As I write "deferred," I add here, in parentheses, a word that is all the less translatable for not being a word: *différance*.)

2. The exception of the untranslatable constitutes the law of translation. The latter's logic is a transportation of sense made possible by a general law of language [*langage*], according to which a sense can be said in multiple languages [*langues*], but entailing the fact that *some* sense, if not *the* sense, refuses or eludes that possibility. That retention or subtraction appears in exceptions, in the form of such and such a word, *Wink*, or *Witz*, or *Wesen*, but these exceptions reveal the truth of the language [*langue*], that is, the retreat of the idiomatic this side of or beyond the law of sense. Where there is exception, there is sovereignty. What is sovereign is the idiom that declares itself to be untranslatable. (And as we know, in the end it declares itself such in all of its words and all of its turns of phrase.) Each signifier in a language signifies and *winkt* at the same time. There is always excess, lack, or curvature of sense: *winken* is, in fact, first and foremost to curve or bow, to angle, vacillate, wobble, list. I speak here of the *clinamen* of sense without which there would be no languages, but only characteristics. I speak of the *clinamen*, which creates a world of sense, while hinting at its truth in non-sense.

Sovereign is the translator who decides to suspend the translation, leaving instead the word in the original. Equally sovereign, moreover, is the translator

who, taking it to the next level, decides in favor of a solution by “equivalence,” as we say, or by periphrasis, analogy, or some other procedure. But the latter’s decision, too, consists in leaving the order of signification proper (if there is such an order) for a different one: that of sense in the sense in which each language is a world of sense, and in which translation jumps from world to world by winks, with neither instruments nor passageways. From the genius of one language to that of another there can be nothing but winks, blinks, and scintillations in the universe of sense, in which truth is the black hole into which all these glimmers are absorbed. Sovereign here is thus, as in the State, he who appropriates the absence of ownership, of a suitable foundation, an available code, of guaranteed attribution and secure presence.

Thus it is that we can establish, on the one hand, that the *Wink* is sovereign, and on the other, correlatively, that the sovereign *winkt* (as it can be expressed in German, a language in which it is impossible, however, to adequately render “sovereign”). (*Herrschaftsbereich des Winkes* is an expression used by Heidegger three lines further on the same text.) The fact is, a *Wink* departs from the established order of communication and signification by opening up a zone of allusion and suggestion, a free space for invitation, address, seduction, or waywardness. But that departure beckons toward the ultimate sense of sense, or the truth of sense. Here, sovereignly, sense excludes itself from sense: such is the wink’s monition.

But the fact is also, correlatively, that the sovereign *winkt*. Nothing is more specifically characteristic of sovereign majesty than the frown, the wink, the expression said to be “imperceptible,” the reply to which is called a “sign of complicity” [*signe d’intelligence*], in the sense that, in that complicity, connivance precedes and exceeds understanding, in the sense that complicity has already understood whatever it is that has not been openly offered up to the understanding, but is expected. The *Wink* opens an expectation at the same time as an impatience to which the decision to understand without waiting, in the twinkling of an eye, responds.⁴

2

To return to this topic for a moment, just as the mention of the word *Wink* is a sovereign gesture on the translator’s part, so this gesture confers upon the German word a sovereignty whose ambivalence is immediately obvious. It is a composite of a subtraction of sense and an access of (or to) literalness, according to one of those privileges regularly invoked by the Cratylism and the idiomaticity that are irresistible to philosophers (and of which Hegel’s *Aufheben*

is the most outstanding example). It is by being untranslatable that the *Wink* takes on its (un- or hyper-) signifying charge. And it is by being noted, not translated, by the philosopher-translator that it acquires the force of a concept or thought. We may even note in passing the following remark: All the interrogations of the difference (with or without *a*) between philosophy and literature can be reactivated and deployed on the basis of the simple fact that a literary translator does not normally mention the terms used in the text being translated. Literature loses the sense essentially, while philosophy thematizes the sense to the point of excess, to the point of an incalculable exceeding that approaches literary expenditure.

Here, in this text by Heidegger to which we are led back by its translation, it is a philosophical sovereignty that is invested in the *Wink*:⁵ that is, a position in excess of sense (and, consequently, of “truth”). I could show, by appealing to the entire context of the *Beiträge*, that this word receives no sense more determinate than that of its current value in German. No conceptual work is performed on the regime of sense and signification designated by this “sign.” All one can say is that the *Wink* is regularly associated with several variants of the expression mentioned by Courtine and Derrida: *Anfall und Ausbleib der Ankunft*, an expression that is itself cumbersome to translate and that designates the double nature of sudden surge and sustained absence of, or in, the arrival of the last god (as well as in the “flight of the gods” prior to him, as the rest of the sentence goes on to say, which repeats nearly word for word a sentence from the preceding paragraph). Without exploring in greater depth what is at stake in this context, but in order to give a general sense of the approach, I will just say that the *Wink* has its concept, or quasi-concept, its insight, by and in its association with what Heidegger also calls, in these pages, *Vorbeigang* (“passage,” with the force of “in passing”) or, earlier in the same book, *Blickbahn*,⁶ a rare term with the sense literally of “pathway of the look” and bringing together the values of “perspective” and “glance.” The *Wink*, here, in its function of sign or divine signal—of god-signal, one would have to murmur—is identified as fugitiveness, as the beating of the instant according to which what arrives leaves and, in *leaving* (a word French can use here in a double sense)⁷ remains absent, remains outside its own arrival, while in the midst of or through this throbbing there is launched the glance that gives (and/or?) receives the signal. The privilege of *Wink* consists, in short, in the fact that its sense is spent in the passage immediately stolen away, in the hint suddenly hidden of a sense that vanishes, and whose truth consists in vanishing. This, then, is why the “essence of the *Wink*” (an expression used in §255) is analyzed or determined no further than as the batting or twinkling that harbors, hidden within itself, what the same text expresses as “the secret of the unity of the most intimate approach in extreme

distance.” (Writing these words, can Heidegger not sense some evanescent allusion to Augustine’s *Deus interior intimo meo, superior summo meo*?⁸ I leave this question open for debate.)

Ambivalence, ambiguity, oxymoron, *Witz* as the affinity of opposites, *Aufhebung*, or even—why not?—the meeting of *Witz* with *Aufhebung*, and of the wink with the speculative: such is the character of the *Wink* as outside signification, which confers on it, in the original text, as in its mention maintained by its translators, this sovereign privilege that prompts Heidegger to write, in the same place, that it is a question of “the onset and absence of the coming and flight of the gods and of their sovereignty [*Herrschaftstätte*].”

Ambivalence is constitutive of sovereignty: it combines absolute power and excess over legality, which necessarily belong together. According to the formula of Carl Schmitt, law suspends itself in the sovereign act. In order to be *all-powerful*, *omnipotence* must extend to a point no power precedes, founds, or dominates. In order to be *absolute*, power must absolutize itself, that is, *absolve itself* from any tie or responsibility other than that of being answerable for itself and self-authorizing. Hence this omnipotence is absolutely not of the order of “power” in the sense of potentiality. It is not *dunamis* but *energeia*, an efficacious act that precedes all possibility, a reality of power that cannot simply be equated with a brutality ignorant of laws, since it is the laws, the juridical construction as such, that must not know the arcane secret of their unfounded foundation.⁹

If ownership is always *de jure* and never just *de facto*, if property (whether as sense or estate, wealth, consciousness, or body) is only such by the mediation of a right that signifies and guarantees a grounded and exclusive ownership, then the sovereign exerts—he actualizes and enacts, in the juridical sense of the term—an unmediated ownership that falls short of or exceeds any appropriation. That is why he *winkt*: he sets something in motion by means of a signal, instead of and before establishing it within a signification. The sovereign opens up possible sense, just as much as he closes off or suspends already available senses. That is why there is, in the *Wink*, or in *winken* [“to wink”], an energy that its sign *per se* does not possess. And that is why, definitively, a *winken* accompanies all *bedeuten* [“to mean”], all intending of sense [*vouloir-dire*] and sending of signals [*faire-signer*], which, unaccompanied by it, would not have the power to send a signal or, consequently, the power of its own “willing” [*vouloir*] or its own “doing” [*faire*]. There is in sense an active power that arises at the moment of the signifying act and that, in terms of sense, goes beyond it and gives way to it at the same time.

The *Wink* triggers; it acts and it activates a play of forces on the sly or in counterpoint to the sense. A wink, as we are well aware, can trigger the greatest of surprises, release an incongruous desire, disrupt the norm, just as it can

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confer favor or disfavor at the whim of the prince, whose “gracious majesty” is majestic precisely in proportion to his sovereign power to dispense favor or disfavor—a power whose specificity can be seen in that its omnipotence is exerted not only *by*, but *in* “the blink of an eye.” The rapidity of the wink engages the efficacy of presence in the very blinking of its passing instant.

3

At this moment I happen upon another passage by Derrida, the passage in a much earlier text in which he wrote, picking up on a passage from Husserl:

As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now, perception and non-perception, in the zone of non-primordially common to primordial impression and primordial retention, we admit the other into the self-identity of the Augenblick: nonpresence and non-evidence are admitted into the *blink of the instant*. There is a duration to the blink, and it closes the eye. This alterity is in fact the condition for presence.¹⁰

As we see, this is not just any passage. At issue here are structure and movement; movement—the wink—as the structure of *différance*, whose motif or motivation is in the process of moving Derrida toward what always motivated him: the absenting of presence at the heart of its present and its presentation, and, correlatively, the spreading open of the sign at the heart of its relation to itself, and then the hollowing out of a nonsignifying passage at the heart or *joint* of the sign. The wink gives us the structure of *différance*, and more than the structure, it gives us its excess or lack of signification (it is “neither a word nor a concept,” as Derrida will later say), and it makes its eclipse shine forth. It suspends the present instant for an instant, for the time of a furtive duration during which onto-chronology is suspended.



We could follow in Derrida the destinies of the wink intertwined with those of *différance*, in which the *a* twinkles, scintillates, or *winkt*. In 1986, for example, in *Parages* the wink is introduced to qualify another decisive element, the “supplementary characteristic” that qualifies the genre of a work of art or of a text—the characteristic that itself belongs to no genre and that “belongs without belonging,” in such a way that the “without,” here, “appears as but the time without time of a wink.”¹¹ We could, no doubt, let ourselves be guided by the

hypothesis that the wink always gives the modality of donation of a supplementary or excessive truth.

Similarly, we could follow, in Heidegger, the pathways of the *Wink*. But my purpose lies elsewhere. As the reader will have understood, what concerns me, and what in my opinion should concern us in a necessary, or even imperious (sovereign) manner, is the relationship that must be discerned between this *a* and the *Wink* of the last god. Need I say it? Not only am I not attempting to theologize *différance* (which would be difficult, since it is clearly from the god of onto-theology that presence is being unsealed or removed); I am not trying to theologize the “last god,” whose nature or essence, whose *Wesung* or *Götterung*, as Heidegger writes, I do *not* believe to be theological. It is not theist, in any event, and the same §256 makes a point of rejecting “all the theisms” as being allied with “metaphysics” and “Judeo-Christian apologetics.”

(The fact that Heidegger bypasses, intentionally or otherwise, another dimension of Judeo-Christian faith—and not “apologetics”—and that he either ignores or is unaware of what, within that faith, involves a *Destruktion* of theology is another question, which will have to be taken up elsewhere.)

The idea is not, therefore, to theologize but to discern what is divine in the *Wink* as different, radically different from *theos*, and at the same time as irredeemably deferring its theological being. In other words, and consequently, it is a matter of discerning—even if by winking—a divine trait in *différance*—and yet in so doing to behave quite the opposite of what has accusingly been called a “theological turn in phenomenology.”¹² This is, above all, because it is not a question of phenomenology. As I will show, with the *Wink* and the *a*, the *a* that *winkt*, phenomenology goes to the end of its own reversal. Not only does appearing become that of the non-apparent—which was already accomplished—but the whole problematic of (non)appearing opens the way for a dynamics of passing by, of the *Vorbeigang* of the *Augenblick*.¹³ The question is no longer one of being or of appearing, and it is no longer a question. There emerges an affirmation of passing by, that is, of the passerby. Not being and the individual being,¹⁴ but the individual being and the passerby.



But let us resume.

The *écart* of the wink, the lapse of its instant, the interval at once opened and closed, and, as it were, the self-sameness of the present, like the self-sameness of time itself, which does not pass in its incessant passing, and thus the identity *to* itself grasped in that other “to” [*à*] that relates it to itself—that is what the *a* of *différance* makes scintillate, and what is made to scintillate by it—

by the supplement of a grave accent (the affair is in fact grave; there is nothing more serious). (*Scintiller, clignoter*: these are the values of the English forms *to twinkle* and *to blink*, while in German *ein Winker* is a blinker [*clignotant*].) With and without the accent, positing and eclipsing in turn all the directional value of the *ad*—just as the value of the *zu* must be in *Sein zum Tode*, in the being-toward-death; that is, in the being qua being-in-passing—the *a* forms simultaneously the present's adherence and expectation toward itself. It presents them and retains them.

This is what the *Wink* does, that *winkt zu* and *winkt ab*, that *winkt uns zu dem von woher er sich uns zuträgt*, if I may allow myself to rearrange another passage from Heidegger¹⁵ (it motions to attract, to brush aside, it motions us toward the place from which it came toward us). This is about access to the presence whose threshold, lapse, or wink [*clin*]¹⁶ opens the gap of the present's own self-presentation. That access is formed, then, in excess of itself, or else in lack. Appropriation appropriates presence *to* itself by this wink, by this inclination that, in inclining the same toward (*zu*) the same, even in order to incline itself in this way, to give it that narcissistic inclination, separates itself from itself, renders itself absent and differentiates itself into the other.

The *Wink* stretches and curves the punctuality of the identical and the patent evidence of truth. The complicity of the wink, of *différance* and the *Wink*, is played out in this *clinamen*, in this batting and dynamic diagonal in the midst of the vertical fall of sense, falling infinitely back upon itself.¹⁷ It thus signals sense, it signals the proper signification of sense, its terminal truth, by way of a relation analogous to that which connects the moral law to Kantian freedom: a *ratio cognoscendi* intersecting a *ratio essendi*, which responds to it, but without the former being in a position to unveil the latter. It is *ratio* itself—*ipsa ratio ultima et sufficiens*, sovereign reason—that is curved, disfigured, not coinciding with itself. (The fact is—and I insist on clarifying this point—that this Kantian arrangement does not offer us a simple analogy; or if it does so, it is an *analogia entis*: it is a question of the same thing, just as it would be if we were to consider the relation between the singular and the absolute in Hegel. It is always the slant [*clin*] of the other in the same, which metaphysics never stops declining according to a ruse of reason that thus passes behind reason's own back and from there, winks at us.

There is, then—but “there is” in the most matter-of-fact, chronological way, in the sense of *es gibt* and of *that happens, that comes to pass, and that passes*—there

is a sovereign gesture¹⁸ that signals a literal sense's own nonreturn to self. Différance is not a concept *because* it does not signify but only motions, because it is, or rather makes, a gesture. And because it makes rather than is, its gesture is that of one who passes by.¹⁹ So it is that, willy-nilly, whether inclined by an evil genius or not, Derrida will have (according to this future perfect he favors as the tense of différance), by a parenthesis of untranslatability, winked toward the *Wink* from différance. From différance, since the passage in which the *Wink* is cited concerns the future or the absence of a future, Levinas and Heidegger placed side by side as the double figure of the god who comes and the god who passes, and almost, if I may extrapolate, as two gaits of passing, toward presence and toward absence, *zu* and *ab*, or *à* with an accent, and *a* without one. As if Derrida were winking in putting them before us side by side, *zu* and *ab* the one for the other, the one *with* the other, *apud*, *ad*, in a proximity that dominates the infinitesimal calculus of the touch, the derivative of the difference with and without *a*.

In denouncing the sense of the sign that they are not, but that they make, in withdrawing truth from a present in favor of a *prae(s)ens* that exceeds being, in favor of a pre-sense always shaken by a beating that separates it from itself, the *Wink* and différance engage one another in a sort of co-designation or co-appropriation of what, exceeding sense, must signal that very exceeding. What the passing designates is not something situated beyond being, or, in consequence, beyond the individual being, the being of which is merely being. It is not the sense of the other or of an other, but the other of sense and an other sense, an always other sense that begins freely—if freedom consists in the beginning, and not in the completion, of a new series of events, a new sending back and forth of sense. This inaugural and never terminal freedom accedes to that excess of sense—which is its sense, which is to say also *the sense of being*—as if to a climax, a supreme or a sublime that we cannot (and this is precisely the point) call “supreme being,” and that corresponds rather to the suspension of the supreme or of the foundation by which sovereignty declares itself.

Now, if the sovereign is not the Omnipotent or the Supreme Being, that is, if there is no extremity of being—but only the ex-existence in which it founders—then the access in question cannot consist in accession to the end of a process, no more in the “ontological proof” than in the authorized attestation of some “witness of god,” martyr, prophet, or mystic. But access comes and withdraws. It comes in passing, in withdrawing. Such is the passage, the *Vorbeigang*. But this passage cannot be the passage of the god, either. If the god *winkt* and *is not*, if he is not even the non-being of being, or its withdrawal, since there is no such thing to “be,” it is because he only motions toward, about, and from a distance—that *there is no such thing*. (No such thing as the Supreme

Being or the Supreme Entity, and nothing *of the sort*, absolutely, nothing that can properly exhaust [mean] the *suchness* [talité] or the *quality*: nothing that is properly in and unto itself.)

The god is therefore not the designated but only the designating, the making-a-sign. There is no passage of the god, but this is the passing of the passage, the passage of whoever makes a sign. The passage of the one passing by—whose coming becomes more distant in the instant—makes the gesture that hails from afar and that at the same time puts the distant itself at a distance: the ever-renewed distancing of the other in being, and of the absent in the present.

5

Why must this passerby be named *god*? Why must the *Wink* and *différance* be declared divine? This is indeed the crucial question. It is obvious that one cannot answer by showing how *winken* and *différer* would be the attributes of god or of the god, since what is proper to the divine itself would have to have been presupposed. We must, on the contrary, establish the divine nature of both gestures by a transcendental deduction.

“The last god,” Heidegger specifies, is not to be understood in the sense of the last in a series—or not only so (for it does correspond to a turning point in history, after which there are no more gods). It is last in the sense of extreme, and that extremity, being the extremity of the divine, delivers the divine from itself in both senses of the expression: it frees it from the theological and disengages it from its own gesture. What one should probably understand from this is that the god is gesture: neither being nor a being, but gesture in the direction of the in-appropriable being of beings (an appropriation that Heidegger names *Ereignis*, whose analysis will have to begin by noting that it is toward the *Ereignis* that the *Wink winkt* and within it that *différance* differs, and that it consists, perhaps, in nothing but a wink).

Whether or not it is necessary to speak of a god is uncertain. Be he last, first, or whatever, nothing confers apodictic evidence upon the use of this noun—if it is a noun, and if so of what sort? (Common? If so, common to what class or what type of being? Proper? But to whom or about whom?) Here one can only lie in wait and hope to take by surprise the eventuality that this word, *god*, will turn out to be appropriate to designate the in-appropriation of the wink. Could we not say, in a preliminary way, that the word or name *god* cannot be said without some form of a wink or blink of the eyes? When we say “god,” whether we “believe in him” or not, as they say, we also declare, in one way or another, that we cannot signify properly or without remainder what we

are saying or whom we so name. Only when reduced to the principle of supreme being does “god” have a sense: but then he no longer needs his name, and this is what is announced by saying, proclaiming, and shouting that “God is dead.” But the name *God* does not die with that supreme being. And that should perhaps make us decide to consider it a proper name. A proper name does not die; what’s more, the only thing proper to it is immortality. This proper name, *God*, insists, as if it should be the name that remains in the vacancy left by that individual being, in the vacant heart of sovereignty—and in this sense, as “the last god.” But that expression would then mean that “god” is always the last, the name of the last extremity of all names and all senses. The name, therefore, for an excess and an absence of sense that would not allow this noun to be properly meaningful, would on the contrary demand that it name the unnameable nonmeaningful. I have said that this disposition is valid for all, believers or nonbelievers, “theists” or “atheists” (by which it will be seen, moreover, that if it is simple and necessary to be an atheist, it is not so necessary to be “without God”).

Whatever the unnameable nonmeaningful may be, the retreat of being into its *différance*, the bearer of the name, signals it. (And perhaps all bearers of a name signal it—perhaps *God* is present/absent at the heart of every name; we shall have to return to this point.) It signals the unnameable nonmeaningful without signifying it. It signals it in passing, since it cannot be stabilized in a presence. He who signals in passing is the passer himself. The passer passes, and in order to pass, is someone. Some *one* who passes, is but the tread of the passing, not a being who would have passing as an attribute. One should not speak—Heidegger himself should not—of the passing *of the god*: but God is in the passing. God is the passerby and the step of the passerby. This step is his gesture, which, in passing, *winkt* and differentiates itself from itself (“the step negates itself and carries itself away,” writes Derrida, interpreting [I mean playing] Blanchot).²⁰

Someone who passes: his unity and the truth of that unity are in the passing. The unity is that of the step, and consequently that of the wink, which forms a different step, a different beat, a different syncope. It is someone who is not a subject, or is only one with the proviso that he only exists (and it is, in fact, a question of ek-sisting) step by step, singularly step by step. But it is someone; it is *who* and not *what*. That is the first reason to name it. The name *God* does not answer the question “What?” But neither does it answer the question “Who?” It signals this: that there is no question “Who?” (unless it is a question that comes down to “What?” as when in asking “Who are you?” one wants to obtain a true, substantive identity, not *differant* from itself in itself). The name *God*, or some name of god, whatever it may be, or that way of saying the god

of someone (the God of Akhenaton, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ, the God of Muhammad, and also “my God,” the God of myself, a God in each case mine, *etwa eine Jemeingötterung*). The “last god” would also designate the extremity at which the name *god* expires in that “my God,” in my utterance of a *différance* that is incommensurable and inappropriable in me—to me, and to whomever. It is, moreover, for this reason that *différance* is “neither a word, nor a concept”: it is a calling from one toward the other, from one *to* the other, the calling of a thought to itself as to the unthinkable that is its ownmost.

6

It is not, therefore, a question of the “ineffable being no name could come close to: God for example,” which Derrida contrasts precisely with the other “unnameable,” that of *différance*.²¹ If the last god is also the last, ultimate articulation of the name *god*, it is because this quality of ultimateness belongs to this word not as a signification but only as an utterance,²² and as “my” utterance *to the precise degree that it comes to me from the other who, in passing, gives me a sign*, and whose *Wink* I respond to with “my God!”—without my having actually to say this word, whose “sense” is to name or rather to mark, to remark, and to exclaim the passing itself and the passing not as a thing or a state but as a passerby whom I call to or address, having perceived his step and the signal of that step.

“To address” here does not mean to designate someone and require his or her attention, let alone submission. It only designates the exchange of signals, without which there would be neither signals nor winks. There is no assignment of persons or things. There is no intentionality. The wink in fact closes the phenomenological gaze and opens another one, or rather opens a *regard* [égard] in place of a gaze [regard]. The blink [*clignement*] is also the gesture of one who tries to adjust his eyesight in very bright light. Trying to adjust entails a focusing on objects, but blinking indicates that he is dazzled and discerns poorly or not at all. At most, he catches a glimpse. His blinking attunes itself with the luminous scintillation and loses the distance of vision. In the wink that has the value of a *Wink*, it is not a question of looking or of distinguishing forms; it is, on the contrary, a question of sending toward the other the light of the eye, the eye as *lux*. In fact, the wink brings about that modification or that modalization of the eye: it makes the eye into a signaling, not a seeing, organ. The wink belongs to all non-phenomenological looking, that is, to all looking that looks at the look of the other and takes the other into account in his or

her look. Every reciprocal look is a wink that can go on and on, go to the limit of blurred vision as well as to the height of emotion, which is why it usually does not last, or lasts the length of an eternity in the midst of time. Thus I find myself both close to and far from Levinas . . .

This instant, withdrawn from the instant and from the triple determination of time within it, pulsates only with the difference between those dimensions, with the difference that time properly *is* and according to which it never catches up with itself and defers itself in its being as well as differentiating itself from itself. Now, that difference, as the tread of the passerby, forms the difference of gait, and of the passing as a putting in play of a difference of forces. One cannot take a step without activating the walking machine. But the difference between the forces makes force itself, its essence, if you like, since a force is never present but always raised, upright, activated against another (the foot lifted against gravity). Such is definitely the lesson of Deleuze that Derrida received explicitly in his analysis of *différance*.²³ If, with the passing of the last god, it is only a question of glimpsing and interpellating, that is because everything comes to pass *between*; indeed, everything takes place in the between (which also can be written with the *a* that is not heard).²⁴ The silent force of the passerby activates the difference of gait. And the singularity of the passerby, the singularity of his or her personal unity, if you like—"one passerby"—articulates the singular unity that operates *between* the forces (between his foot and the earth, between his body leaning forward, off balance, and the machine that holds it back, that holds itself back in the advance itself; a machine ahead of itself, on the brink of itself).

If this passerby lets himself be addressed by this name-word (nonword?)²⁵ *god*, by this thought that calls "god" in or to it, it is because this word, which appears to express ultimate power, omnipotence (differing only from the powerlessness of all his creatures),²⁶ in fact says nothing more than a difference. More precisely, it says the difference between omnipotence and the feeble strength of the created. Still more precisely, and to say everything *exactly*, that is, to the last extremity of the act in question (i.e., of divine designation), it says that difference in the sense that the power of everything is nothing, nothing but the instantaneous act in which the world of beings "comes to be," as we say, that is, comes from nowhere and goes nowhere, but thus passes or happens, takes place; it says, therefore, the difference between that power-outside-power of the totality and the feeble strength according to which an individual being ek-sists, that is, is outside of itself in order . . . not to be, but to find itself arrived, taken away, and dedicated to its own self-sameness. (I thus translate very rapidly *ereignet*, *enteignet*, and *zueignet*, while specifying that "dedicated," which I have chosen to translate *zueignet*, was also meant to express "declare" and "reveal.")

“God” says difference as the opening between the excedance of the outside-all and the eksistence of the someone (and/or the something). “God,” in fact, says the difference of day—*dies*—and night, the division light/darkness by which everything takes place, taking place *between* those two modalities, those two accents or those two sides of the same peak or the same height of being, of the same ontological sovereignty that thus reveals itself not to be, and not to be ontological any more than theological. Nor phenomenological, as I have said, and consequently, strictly, passing. The name *god* names the divergence and the step across the gap between nothing and nothing—let us call it the *res ipsa*, the thing itself.

The resource of the Latin *divus/deus*²⁷ should not produce any etymological or Cratylan illusion, not even any properly significant one, not even and especially not, since the name *God* would be the pro-noun of the Unnameable as the superessence of arch-significance. On the contrary, *god* is the common name of the separation between light and darkness, seeing and not seeing, day and night, something and nothing, without that—namely, that separation, that step—being properly named. *God* names, rather—and in all languages, according to their various resources—the opening of the name to its own non-sense, yet also that very opening as a calling out. As we have already seen, “God!” only takes on “sense” in calling, in being called, and even, if I may say so, in calling himself.

We are thus once again approaching a super-appropriate supernomination, where identity would be bound by the name of the unnameable, of the non-nomination of the Name—even the indefinite, poetic or musical, jaculatory, or arch-silent self-transcendence of nomination and of the sign in general. It suffices to point out that, rather than any of these ecstasies of beyond-sense, “god” proposes simply a common name in the guise of a proper name, and in a manner that does not subsume the common under the proper, no more than it assimilates the proper into the common. Let us say, rather, that “god”—with an exclamatory or invocatory intonation that gives it its wink, its accent, its verbal *clinamen*—sends its *Wink* sideways, alongside all names, from the most prestigious to the most modest. In a sense, it is the sovereign word, the name beyond all names, and in another sense it is the non-naming name that twinkles in the open space between all names—a space that is the same as the one that appears between the eksistant *and* the being that “-izes” it (transitive verb) and not that it “is” (supposedly a verb expressing a state).



The signal of the passerby is, then, nothing but his or her footfall. It is not a signalization or overarching signage. The twinkling does not come from a neon

sign but simply from the ordinary alternation of days and nights, comings and goings, births and deaths. "The step of the truth becomes non-reversible into the truth of the step," writes Derrida.²⁸ Such is the divine truth of the *Wink*: it stems from the fact that there is no wink *of* god, but that the god *is* the wink. He does not do it, he winks himself there, just as he states his name in it, properly common and commonly proper—the name, in sum, of every person.

In the midst of the wink, the eye closes, and it is in the batting of the open/closed, the synthesis in syncopation of common sense and the call proper ("You!" goes the *Wink*, "Your turn!" "Come!" or "Go away!") that the passerby passes by. The passing and the existent enter into a fleeting complicity, the *différance* of their senses, passing through the difference between them. When both eyes close at once, whether the eyes of both parties or just those of an existent in response, this is acquiescence. In Latin it is called *conniveo*, formed from *nictor*, the verb "to wink." To wink with both eyes at once—and to wink in the being-together or in the being-with of *the caller* and the called, who can no longer be discerned (or barely can, since one has to blink)—is to enter into *connivance*. Man is in connivance with God. Connivance is mute; it is content with the *Wink*, and, in it, it exceeds sense, the look, and, finally, the god himself. That is the divine trait or gesture: God is exceeded in his own passage. In fact, he comes there and leaves from there; he is the passing of it. God exceeded is not the supreme individual being, put to death. It is god who succeeds God, as Jabe's wrote in another passage quoted by Derrida.²⁹ But it is the succession that is divine. It is the passing—the passing of the witness and the passing of the step [*passage du pas*]. The step is the divine place, the only one, the place in which the power of the passing manifests and transcends itself. There remains, nonetheless, the possibility that the look, in the violence of its fixity, may catch and capture the connivance. Then the god no longer passes: he becomes God. Then *différance* turns—not into transcendence (for in truth, is transcendence not an echo of the movement of transcending [itself?]), but into transcendence installed as domination.

The god who passes is a passerby who is not us, but who is not "an other" either, in the sense of another subject or another being, or the "Other" of all beings and/or all sameness. Rather, an other than the other-of-the-same or than what could be called "the other same," or, yet again, the Same-other (who is usually called "God"). An other who is only his step, and in this step, the *Wink* of/toward that alteration of sense: for, after all, what he shows is more an alteration than an alterity. His step changes even the coming or the advent of the event: it does not arrive, it passes. The *Wink* of the *a* and the *a* as someone who passes—and this passer as this god who passes. *The passing of the god is identical with his retreat.*

On a Divine Wink

In this step, “the time of a wink [*für einen Augenblick*], the e-vent properly arrives, leaves, and is dedicated [*das Er-eignis ist Ereignis*]. This wink, this instant, is *the time of being* [*die Zeit des Seins*].”³⁰ This could be translated: its eternal and instantaneous *différance*. Or again: the transitivity transfixed by which it is communicated to the existent as nothing. It is this sudden communication in the absolute gap that the passerby signals—and passes by.

Rimbaud, that “considerable passerby,” as Mallarmé called him, wrote:

It has been found again.
What?—Eternity.
It is the sea, gone
With the sun.³¹

Translated by Michael B. Smith

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” trans. Samuel Weber, in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 55; trans. modified. The first French edition, “Foi et savoir: Les Deux Sources de la ‘religion’ aux limites de la simple raison,” in *La Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 73, has a mistake in the Heidegger quote (*défection* in place of *accès*), an error subsequently corrected. Courtine’s article quoted by Derrida (“Les Traces et le passage du Dieu dans les *Beiträge zur Philosophie* de Martin Heidegger,” *Archivio di filosofia*, nos. 1–3, 1994) constitutes, along with other texts by Courtine and a set of references he supplies, a well-informed and necessary preliminary work for the examination of “the last god” of Heidegger. If I take a very different, even an opposite direction, this is less a question of differing interpretations than of an interpretation, such as Courtine’s, as opposed to the extrapolation and free use of the texts upon which I venture.

2. This decision is a bit abrupt and requires further precautionary remarks. After the Coimbra colloquium, Ursula Sarrazin presented me with some observations that were both nuanced and knowledgeable, for which I thank her. They can be condensed as follows. *Wink* has more the sense of a gesture (a movement of the hand or the head) than of a *clin d’œil*: the former is indicative or imperious, or else indicates a leave-taking (*Winke, Winke* designates the way little German children wave “bye-bye”); the latter is more complicit. But a rapprochement between the two meanings is entirely possible, and even has in its favor etymological attestations through English. A poem by Goethe titled “Wink” makes explicit connections with the *clin d’œil*. It is quite remarkable that the earliest examples given in the Grimm Brothers’ dictionary are taken from the religious domain. Thus Ursula Sarrazin quoted for me (from a *Reformatorsche Flugschrift*):

“gott hat uns jetzt gewuncken / im folgt manch frommer Knecht [god has now made a sign to us / more than one pious servant is following him].” The fact remains that, with varying degrees of emphasis, this word has its center of gravity in nonverbal indication. Fernanda Bernardo told me that the Portuguese *aceno* presents a semantics very close to that of *Wink*: derived from *cinnus*, a sign or blink of the eyes, it refers to a movement of the hand, the head, or the eyes to suggest or communicate something without recourse to the spoken word. It is a signal or hint of availability, desire, or promise. (“It took no more than an *aceno* for her to throw herself in his arms.”)

3. In English in the original—Trans.

4. Werner Hamacher analyzes the dominating power of the imperial and imperial look (power and violence of the ideal, as well) as that of a look that no longer sees, “not that it becomes lost in its sight, but because it *shows* its sight”; this is “the violence of the showing of staring [*Starren*]” (“One 2 Many Multiculturalisms,” in *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997], 284–325; “Heterautonomien: One 2 Many Multiculturalisms,” in *Gewalt Verstehen*, ed. Burkhard Liebsch and Dagmar Mensink [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003], 157–201). The fixed and petrifying look constitutes the ultimate or central possibility of the blink, and, consequently, the latter’s ever-present ambiguity. I will return to this theme in my conclusion.

5. Of course, the use of the word *Wink* throughout Heidegger’s work deserves a special study—a project that has in fact been partially undertaken in a few works outside France, whose results such a study would have to address. Heidegger makes repeated use of the term, in the commentaries on Parmenides and on Hölderlin, in borrowings from Rilke, and in other circumstances.

6. *Beiträge*, §42. Heidegger seems to favor the word *Blickbahn*, which is little used. That deserves closer examination. [In vol. 65 of Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975–).]

7. The French is “ce qui arrive part et, *partant*.” The last word can mean either “in leaving” or “therefore”—Trans.

8. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 3, chap. 6: “God deeper within me than I myself am, higher than my highest.” My translation. For a different English translation, see *St. Augustine’s Confessions*, with an English translation by William Watts, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 119, 121—Trans.

9. As Kant, that tutelary genius of law, knew and said. See *The Philosophy of Right*, pt. 2, section 1, A.

10. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 65; *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 73.

11. A commentary follows on the fact that the wink allows us to see what it hides for an instant: the day itself (Jacques Derrida, *Parages* [Paris, Galilée, 1986], 264). Further

along, on p. 296, the wink designates the time of an obviousness that would be that of “the folly of the law . . . of order, of reason of meaning, of the day.”

12. This was, of course, the title of the much-noted work by Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud et al., trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); *Le Tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Paris: L’Éclat, 1991).

13. The passage or passing of the moment (literally, the blink of the eye)—Trans.

14. Here and henceforth the French word *étant* is translated as “individual being,” and *être* as “being”—Trans.

15. Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 26; *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1971), 117.

16. The use of the French word *clin* here seems to constitute a bridge between the *clin d’oeil* and *clin* used alone, which evokes the notion of slant or incline and will dominate the next paragraph—Trans.

17. Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 1.216–93. Lucretius theorizes that some atoms, instead of raining straight down, fall at an incline, thus colliding with others and causing things to arise—Trans.

18. The connection between *Geste* and *Wink* is made by Heidegger in the same text.

19. The gesture of this “making,” however, is not a *poiēin*: it is quite clearly a *prattein*. There is, in the *winken*, a *praxis*: that of the god who makes himself divine in this gesture.

20. Derrida, “Pas,” in *Parages*, 31.

21. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 26; *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 28.

22. This should be put in relation to what Derrida proposes, in “Faith and Knowledge,” on the subject of how language generates “God.”

23. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 17/18. This moment is a remarkable point of encounter between the two forces of these two philosophers, a differential encounter on the differences Derrida revisited on the occasion of Deleuze’s demise. See his text on that occasion in Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 189–196; *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), 235–240.

24. The French word for between is *entre*; Nancy is suggesting that it could be written “*antre*,” a natural hole or lair, the home of ancient gods, which, like Derrida’s *différance* instead of the normal *différence*, would be an inaudible difference—Trans.

25. French *nom-mot* is homonymous with *non-mot* (“non-word”)—Trans.

26. The fact that Heidegger gives monotheistic “creation” the most banal, pejorative, and also erroneous interpretation is a different problem, belonging to the larger issue of the entirety of his tortuous relations with Judeo-Christianity.

27. See Jean-Luc Nancy, “A Faith That Is Nothing at All,” in this volume. The root of *divus* is the Greek *dios*, to which *Zeus* is connected. *Gott/god* is linked to a completely different and uncertain etymon, which may refer either to a calling or a libation, but in both to a relationship to distance, to a “hailing” or “pouring far,” constituting another modality of separation.

28. Derrida, *Parages*, 67.

29. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 294–295; *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 429.

30. Heidegger, *Beiträge*, §279. [In vol. 65 of Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975–).]

31. The first (and last) stanza of Rimbaud’s “Eternité,” the third poem in the group “Fêtes de la Patience”—Trans.

STICKING HEIDEGGER WITH A STELA:
LACOE-LABARTHE, ART AND POLITICS

Gregory Schufreider

Who can resist a book entitled *Typography*—assuming that it promises the truth in writing, at least in its modern formation—and especially when it contains a text of the same name that connects *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, to cite another title in translation?¹ In fact, if we connect these two works by Lacoue-Labarthe, *La fiction du politique* and “Typography,” they together trace a line, perhaps too directly, between two critical texts in Heidegger corpus, namely, his 1936 lecture on *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* and a 1955 letter to Ernst Jünger that will eventually be addressed “To the Question of Being” (*Zur Seinsfrage*). If the earlier text presumes to take us back to the origin of art, the original title of the letter to Jünger describes its design to get us “over the line” (*Über “Die Linie”*) through the writing of ~~Sein~~, as a graphic sign of the end of philosophy. And while Lacoue-Labarthe’s treatment of Heidegger goes by way of the 1953 essay on “The Question Concerning Technology,” where the problem of the “framework” of the modern world is formulated in the name of “The Gestell” (1949), he will do so to question Heidegger’s analysis of the erecting of truth through the work of art—on Lacoue-Labarthe view, as a law that is written in stone, as if inscribed on a stela.² In so doing, he will produce what can only be called a documentary reading of Heidegger’s writings or, even more strictly, an orthodox account, as a version that follows a single line of thought by sticking to the letter of Heidegger’s language. As such, Lacoue-Labarthe is able to stick a number of texts together which are, at least chronologically, quite separate. By drawing a straight line between them, he connects the corpus with a kind of stick or skewer that, I think, skews our reading of it by sticking too closely to the Nazi line.

To a certain extent (and it is considerable), we cannot fail to appreciate the attention that Lacoue-Labarthe will pay to the linguistic structure of Heidegger’s thinking. At the same time, this creates the appearance of a meticulous reading of the texts, whose dedication to the letter of language I would like to question. For Lacoue-Labarthe does not take his own title seriously, which is

to say that he never takes *typography* literally. While the term will provide the occasion for the creation of certain figures in his own thinking, most notably, his image of an “ontotypology,” he never turns to the question of typography as such. Consequently, while he aims to treat “the moderns” and the question of “literature,” especially “fiction,” he fails to address what no modern or, for that matter, postmodern writer can avoid, namely, the apparatus of printing; although he does take note of what we might call the passion for standardization in a history that loves to type. Nonetheless, in his reading of *Zur Seinsfrage*, Lacoue-Labarthe never mentions the mark of the ✕, which Heidegger there signs over the word *Sein* as a literal crossing of the line, in what will turn out to be the graphic de-sign of ~~Sein~~. This rather astonishing omission is only one indication of the extent to which his readings are literary, documentary, textual, and anything but typographical, as they suffer from a failure to take Heidegger’s writing literally, rather than literarily.



No doubt, a treatment of Heidegger’s account of the figure (*Gestalt*) and of the problem that Lacoue-Labarthe dubs “figuration,” as well as the question of “form” as it figures into the history of Western thought since Plato, raise a series of questions that have become unavoidable; especially since Lacoue-Labarthe has attempted to connect them in what must be regarded as one of the most sophisticated accounts of Heidegger’s Nazism. The latter will end up being, at least in part, a question of language and not only in the sense that Heidegger lent his voice to the movement in a series of speeches. It is also a question of what we might refer to as a linguistic nationalism, which will be connected to an approach to language that literalizes it: takes the word literally (*wörtlich*), and in terms of the presumed privilege of a specific sign-system—namely, German—thus rendering Heidegger’s thought effectively untranslatable. At this point, however, we are more interested in the question of whether Heidegger is guilty of what Lacoue-Labarthe calls “ontoteleology” than we are in his Nazism, although the former bears on the later. Is there, even in Heidegger’s jingo-linguistic thinking, the presumption of an original legislation of truth that amounts to the laying down of a law that is written in stone? To be precise: Is the “founding of being” (*Stiftung des Seyns*) through work not only like the erection of a stela but, in fact, marked by Heidegger’s own use of the German word *stellen* in a *Ge-stell* that is designed to frame a setting up (*aufstellen*) and setting forth (*herstellen*) of the truth of being in art, although not as a matter of representation (*darstellen*) but as an original creation of truth in the making (*poesis*), in the case in point, as a linguistic operation?

Lacoue-Labarthe quite legitimately turns to the question of writing in this regard, in raising the classical problem of *mimesis* and of how it is treated (or mistreated) in Heidegger's thought, including with respect to the "mimetic" arts. The question remains how Heidegger's picture of truth, in its original rendering through the work of art, figures into the question of the figure (*Gestalt*), that is, into the question of "form," when its execution can no longer be thought under the matter/form model as an operation of "production": under the auspices of an intelligible idea (truth) that is sighted in advance and imposed upon the material in a controlled manipulation. Needless to say, it is just such a metaphysical form that has imposed itself upon both philosophy and art since Plato's historic determination of "being" in terms of the Idea (*eidos*), rendering all artwork as a kind of *mimesis* of truth: a copy or representation in a sensuous form of the eternal forms and, therefore, as the always imperfect imitation (as a material instantiation) of an ideal type. But how are we to think of the figure of the work of art as a "formation" of truth ("figuration") when its creation is thought not as an imposition on matter of a preconceived form ("onto-typology") but in terms of a concrete configuration (*Gestalt*) of the contention between world and Earth that must, according to Heidegger, be worked out in a work whose frame-work (*Ge-stell*) is designed to disclose the Earth in its own self-concealment? Has Heidegger simply imitated the Platonic model in his thinking about art in relation to truth, or is there, in fact, an original *mimesis* at work in the work itself, although one that is not a question of (correct) representation but of a truth that is stranger than fiction as it bears on the structure of the *polis* as a collective formation?

Here, at any rate, is how Heidegger's position is characterized by Lacoue-Labarthe in *The Fiction of the Political*:

On the one hand, it is initially in respect to the work of art that Heidegger seizes upon the word *Gestell* to make it mean the gathering together of all the modes of *stellen*, chief among them in relation to art being *Herstellen* [produce], *Darstellen* [present], and *Feststellen* [institute, constitute]—through which he seeks to ground the work in its essence as truth's being fixed in place in the figure [*Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt*]. The semantic chain of *stellen* does admittedly come into competition, in this passage, which is one of Heidegger's most audacious, with the chain—quite different in scope—of *reissen* [*Riss*, *Aufriss*, *Grundriss*, *Durchriss*, *Umriss*, etc.], in which one can see the outlines of the thinking of *technē*, and, as a consequence, of difference, on the basis of the incision, the trait, or the "inaugural" tracing, of the breaching/broaching [*entame*] or the inscription, in short, of something not unrelated to the archi-trace or archi-writing in Derrida's sense. The work is

nonetheless *Gestalt* or, in other words, *figura* of the truth, and this determination—even if Heidegger certainly does not think in terms of fiction, or even imagination—is consistent with the onto-typological theme of the *Rectorial Address* [or of *Vom Wesen des Grundes*] and distributes the roles of “creators” and “guardians” of the work, that is to say the division of roles constitutive of the “mission” of art. That Heidegger should subsequently have carried over on to modern technology what, almost twenty years earlier (though in the interim a perhaps unprecedented “turnabout” of history had occurred), was seen as being true of the work of art, and that, parallel with this, he had taken up again the problematic of the trait [of the *Riss*] in relation to language, indicates clearly enough what “political” journey thought had to make to arrive at the revelation of Nazism in its “truth.”

Moreover—and this is the second moment when this becomes clear—it was not until 1955, and the letter to Jünger [*Zur Seinsfrage*] that Heidegger in fact denounced onto-typology and came to impugn as a mere overturning of Platonism within the spiritual-historical space of the death of God and the infinitization of the subject (“rescendence” as against transcendence) the whole onto-typological thematics of the figure or build [*Gestalt*], of the stamping and the imprint [*Prägung, Gepräge*], which had nonetheless been his since 1933. In other words, it was not until ten years after the collapse of the Third Reich that Heidegger had the definitive revelation that National Socialism (national-Aestheticism) was the truth of the inversion of Platonism or the restoration of what Plato had fought against—though not without yielding to tyranny himself—in other words, the thinking of the technical or the political as fiction: the last attempt at “mythizing” the West, though not, probably, the last aestheticization of the political. (FP, 85–86)

Let me be as clear as I can in the midst of this maze of claims. At this point, we are not interested in the question of Heidegger’s Nazism but in the way in which Lacoue-Labarthe’s reading of the corpus around it distorts the original rethinking of “form” in “The Origin of the Work of Art” by retrospectively reading it through an expressly un-Heideggerian view of *Gestalt*. The latter account is given in relation to the metaphysical tradition that, for Heidegger, not only runs from Plato to Nietzsche but runs through Jünger’s work. What I want to question, then, is the contention that Heidegger simply “carries over to modern technology what, almost twenty years earlier . . . was seen as being true of the work of art,” namely, the notion of *Gestalt* (and *Gestell*) and, therefore, that “it was not until 1955, and the letter to Jünger [*Zur Seinsfrage*] that Heidegger in fact *denounced* onto-typology” that is, “the whole onto-typological thematics of the figure or build [*Gestalt*], of the stamping and the imprint

[*Prägung, Gepräge*], which had nonetheless been his since 1933.” For I do not think that Heidegger only “denounced onto-typology” in 1955, as if his failure to do so earlier could account for his Nazism. It was already clear in 1933, indeed, in 1931/32, in the original version of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” that he had renounced the traditional approach to “form” as imposition. This is not to deny the claims about national aestheticism that Lacoue-Labarthe develops—of which he, quite rightly, never accuses Heidegger—or his suggestion that Nazism was “the last (?) attempt” at “myth.” It is, however, to deny that Heidegger lacked the philosophical equipment to see this in 1933: as if it would take him twenty years of a “‘political’ journey” to unearth the “truth” of Nazism, that is, its falsehood. In point of fact, while Heidegger denounced what Lacoue-Labarthe calls ontotypology, and quite early on, he never denounced National Socialism, even after 1955.



We might begin by noting that a number of “*stellens*” are omitted from Lacoue-Labarthe’s characterization of this “semantic chain,” which presumes to be relevant to Heidegger’s analysis of the work of art, first and foremost *Aufstellen*. It certainly has some claim to being “chief among them,” if only in the sense that it offers the initial play on a term of art. It is on the basis of the ordinary word for an “exhibition” (*Ausstellung*) or, to be precise, an “installation” (*Aufstellung*) that the discussion gets started in earnest in “*Vom Ursprung des Kunstwerks: Erste Ausarbeitung*,” which will lead to the notion of artwork as “setting up” (*aufstellen*) not only a “show” but a world on the Earth. Of course, the critical question is *how* the world is “set up.” In this respect, we cannot deny that *Herstellen* plays a crucial role in Heidegger’s thinking about art. While it is a standard term for “production” or “manufacturing,” it must mean something quite different here as a literal “setting forth” (*her-stellen*) of the Earth, since the Earth is obviously not “produced” by the work of art. Speaking of the Earth, which Lacoue-Labarthe does not mention in his account, we might also notice that *zuruckstellen* (“setting back”) has been omitted from his short list, although *darstellen* is included—again, a traditional term of art and the primary object of Lacoue-Labarthe’s own interest—but precisely because Heidegger has dismissed it out of hand.

As a result of these omissions, the oppositional relation between terms, so critical, we will argue, to Heidegger’s account in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” is not just overlooked in Lacoue-Labarthe’s treatment but expressly suppressed by dismissing the “competition” that is, for example, admitted between *stellen* and *reißen*. The limited and linear “chain” between “*Herstellen* [produce],

Darstellen [present] and *Feststellen* [institute]” scarcely appears to be differential, let alone oppositional. This is, in part, to say that Lacoue-Labarthe’s account would seem to stress the root more than the prefixes, which are not, in his listing, designed to place a strain on the root, indeed, to pull it in different directions, as in the dynamic setting (*stellen*) of a setting up (*auf-stellen*), setting forth (*her-stellen*), setting back (*zurück-stellen*), and setting down (*fest-stellen*).³ Instead, the order of production, presentation, and institution seems more like a linked chain, laid down in a straight line, than an oppositional structure. Nor, for that matter, are these three “*stellens*” (*her-/dar-/fest-*) even numerically sufficient to construct the four-sided framework that will be named *Ge-stell* in “The Origin of the Work of Art.”

Not only is Lacoue-Labarthe intent upon reading Heidegger’s work in terms of a term that the latter has himself rejected (namely, *darstellen*), but we are, in each case, looking at a later account of an earlier work. In Lacoue-Labarthe’s case, the above citation stands in relation to his own earlier account in “Typography,” while that account, in turn, reads “The Origin of the Work of Art” (and its *Gestalt* and *Gestell*) in terms of the later “The Question Concerning Technology” and “On the Question of Being.” It may help here to cite Lacoue-Labarthe’s own earlier work. Speaking of Heidegger’s discussion with Jünger, he insists that:

Gestalt, therefore, is final name of the Idea, the last word designating being as “theorized” in its difference from beings—that is say, transcendence, or the metaphysical as such. Thus, there is not the least accident in the fact that, just as Plato happens to think of what produces, in the transcendence or in transcendental production (in the *Her-vor-bringen* of the pre-sent [the *An-wesende*] by presence [*Anwesen*], of being[s] by Being), in terms of the “type” or “seal” [*tupos*], Jünger thinks “the relation of form to what it brings into form,” *Gestaltung* [figuration], as “the relation between stamp and impression” [*Stempel/Praegung*]. In both, and answering to the eidetic ontology as such, to onto-ideo-logy, there appears in its contours what must be called, in all rigor, an *onto-typo-logy*. (T, 55)

What is puzzling across these texts is that while it is not clear that “Typography” ever accuses Heidegger of ontotypology, “The Fiction of the Political” seems to be clear that he does not “denounce” it until 1955 and goes so far as to suggest that the *Rektorsrede* is consistent with such themes (“which had been his since 1933”).⁴ Similarly, it is not altogether clear in the earlier text just where Lacoue-Labarthe stands with respect to Heidegger on the question of “ontosteleology,” if the e-recting (*er-richten*) of truth in the figure of a concrete

form amounts to the institution of the law (of being) as written in stone. The association in “The Fiction of the Political” of Heidegger’s earlier account of *Gestalt* with the later account of *Gestell* would seem to suggest that Heidegger was himself subject to this onto-steleo-logical thinking: that the Latin *figura*, which Heidegger later criticizes as a feature of Western metaphysics, applies to his own earlier notion of *Gestalt* in so far as it is articulated with respect to a set of “*stellens*,” designed to establish (*feststellen*) the truth of being in a stable framework (*Ge-stell*). But this, I would insist, is to stick Heidegger with a stela and, as such, to allow a certain rigor mortis to set into a corpus whose rigor lies precisely in a type of mortise.

Part of the problem of following Lacoue-Labarthe’s account is that he reads the texts backwards, chronologically speaking, driven by his desire to account for Heidegger’s Nazism. As such, he effectively takes Heidegger’s political involvement as the key to the corpus, even though he elsewhere regards it as an interruption of thinking—which is not to say that an interruption may not provide a key. But Lacoue-Labarthe’s overview seems intent upon continuity, upon overseeing the corpus, and in an oversight that is characteristic of hindsight. Consequently, he begins with a treatment of “On the Question of Being” (1955) through which he reads “The Question Concerning Technology” (1953) and then, on the basis of its notion of *Gestell*, returns to the 1936 version of “The Origin of the Work of Art” to account for 1933. And while there is a complex, even promising configuration of texts proposed here, as simple-minded as it may sound, I would suggest that the best way to clarify this maze of material is to read the later work in terms of the earlier and not the other way around. But here is how Lacoue-Labarthe initially frames the discussion as he blocks the *mise en scène* in “Typography” so as to set the (word) play up and around the type of *Gestell* that is developed, not in “The Origin of the Work of Art” but in the later “The Question Concerning Technology”:

The set, if you will, is the constellation or chain of some of the major concepts of metaphysics, all of which can be derived from *Ge-stell*: from this unique and philosophically unheard-of word, a word that has never sounded, or ever been employed—although it is very old and in general use in the language—anywhere in (the entire history of) metaphysics, in any metaphysical place (discourse, text, idiom) whatsoever.

It is very long chain, and it would be futile to want to cover or go back over all that: there is *stellen* (to summon, to challenge verbally, “to stop someone in the street in order to call him to account, in order to force him to *rationem reddere*”), there is *bestellen* (to cultivate or appoint), *vorstellen* (to represent), *verstellen* (to simulate), *darstellen* (to portray, to (re)present), *herstellen* (to

produce), *nachstellen* (to track or be after, to avenge), etc.—and still others that will perhaps appear in due time. This chain is a veritable lacework, a sort of vegetal labyrinth proliferating around (or out of) a single root. The “set,” then, is this semantic lacework, this network of derivatives—“centered,” of course, “anchored” upon a primary “etymon,” but also of such exuberance that it is perhaps ultimately impossible to get an overview of it, to “describe” it, or to oversee all of its ramifications.

Hence one inevitably runs the risk of getting lost somewhere—or of losing all continuity of derivation. For example, *between* two or three texts . . . (T, 64–65)

We will notice immediately that we are not only dealing here with a different set of “*stellens*” but that *stellen* itself means something different, other than the “setting” and “placing” that is alone at a stake in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Here it is a “summoning.” Moreover, only one of the “*stellens*” that is at work in “The Origin of the Work of Art” figures into the discussion, namely, *herstellen*, and it now means precisely what it did not before.

This is because the current cluster of terms is relevant to Heidegger’s account of technology and not to the work of art: to the technological notion of the *Gestell* as the all-pervasive framework for an historical unconcealment of being as an onto-technology in which all beings, including the Earth itself, appear as “resources” (*Bestand*) for human use. It is the “humanism” of this technoontology (which can, presumably, be traced back to Plato and his determination of being as idea) that is under attack both here and in the critique of Nietzsche that is the topic of Lacoue-Labarthe’s discussion. For Heidegger, Zarathustra is a *Gestalt* of humanity in its metaphysical form as will to power: a “figure” of the force that forms, shapes, simplifies, and invents, as the self-created portrait of a new human being. As we know, it was Jünger’s analysis of the “total mobilization” of human resources in the form of the worker (*Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*) that inspired Heidegger’s account of technology in the first place and why he would now have us think of *technē* in its original Greek sense—which presumably preceded metaphysics—not in modern terms. But this is precisely to think *Gestalt*, not in its metaphysical determination but in the terms that Heidegger has himself developed in “The Origin of the Work of Art”: in terms of “art” rather than technology, that is, in terms of the sense of *technē* that Lacoue-Labarthe associates with or, indeed, defers to Derrida in the earlier passage, when he dismisses the “rift” (*reissen*) in Heidegger’s text by acknowledging it.

A similar operation is at work in the conclusion of the above passage, from which we might well draw the conclusion that Lacoue-Labarthe has done the

impossible—"perhaps." While acknowledging the "exuberance" that exceeds any overview, he nonetheless insist upon "overseeing" the corpus. As such, he stresses "continuity" in the face of the fear that we may get lost "between two or three texts": lost in the chain of "*stellens*," if it is broken. To secure the continuity, to avoid (or at least minimize) "the risk," Lacoue-Labarthe insures the set-up by assuring us that "The 'set' is, then, this semantic lacework, this network of derivatives—'centered,' of course, 'anchored' upon a primary 'etymon,' . . ."; which is to say that the linguistic operation is primarily centered around the *stellen* and the "set" of derivatives that is named in the *Ge-stell*. But who is doing the anchoring in this setting: Heidegger or Lacoue-Labarthe? Is there a "center" in Heidegger's thinking, and, if so, just how secure is it? Is his thought of the *Ge-stell* centered on the "primary" etymon or on the prefix, or, for that matter, on the hyphen? And what kind of a "network" is Heidegger operating, not only as an operation between texts but within the framework of the text of "The Origin of the Work of Art," which writes of "an open middle" (*eine offene Mitte*) that is created in the design of a rift?

As we have indicated, Lacoue-Labarthe's aim is not to drive a wedge but a stick between the texts and terms; a skewer that, we would insist, skews the difference between them, in fact, as the *between* (as Lacoue-Labarthe underlines it) in which Heidegger is working: a free space not only between texts but between vocabularies. For there may well be two *Gestell* at work here, two different frames or "sets" of "*stellens*," and therefore two quite different *Gestalts*; just as there are clearly two different models of "work" in play, and not just across these works but in "The Question Concerning Technology" itself, where *Arbeit* and *Werk* are designed to provide a clear sign of the difference between "production" and "creation." No doubt, these two rather different "frameworks" for thinking about "work" may well be connected. If they are, their chronology would suggest that it is the *Gestalt* of the work of art (*Kunstwerk*) and not of the worker (*Der Arbeiter*) on the basis of which we are ultimately to understand the *Ge-stell* of modern technology, not the other way around. But this is to think of *Gestalt* in two different "forms" or at least through two different frames of reference to work: to think in terms of an alternative to the metaphysical *Gestalt* that culminates in the technological *Gestell*, in so far as the framework of technology would have to be thought through the frame-work of art.

Heidegger himself says as much in a 1956 addendum to "The Origin of the Work of Art," which mentions "On the Question of Being" as well as "The Question Concerning Technology." There he locates on the question of how a certain "movement" (*rücken*) is required for the "fixing in place" (*stellen*) that is the setting to work of truth.⁵ Rather than repeat his discussion, we would prefer to pursue the question of whether such an event is set into motion in the

configuration of Heidegger's own vocabulary, albeit with an eye to the question: Is art anchored to truth or is truth free to move through art? While we would not deny the complexity involved here—the “vegetal labyrinth”—we are not (for this very reason) inclined to admit that it is “proliferating around (or out of) a single root,” least of all if the only point of such simplification is to avoid getting lost between texts. For there is a complex crossword puzzle at play here that involves not only the crossing of roots but of writings, and in an effort to characterize two quite different ways of thinking. Nor can we think of this “veritable lacework” of linguistic terms and turns of phrase as a “chain.” On the contrary, we would like to break the chains of Lacoue-Labarthe's rather heavy-handed account so as to propose a freer reading of Heidegger's writings, to see what can be freed from the corpus: set free, as it were, even if the question remains just how “free” a “setting” can be.



While we cannot fail to appreciate a certain linguistic orientation in Lacoue-Labarthe's thinking, including in the attention that he has paid to the details of the technical terminology, there can be no doubt that he has provided a “metaphysical” reading of Heidegger's work. Not only does his documentary account assume the orthodoxy of a corpus that is a metaphysical whole, not a set of competing texts, but he has not attended to its distinctive *technē*, let alone as a “work of the word.” Instead, I would suggest that he has imposed a rather rhetorical reading on Heidegger's writings in a certain political imposition (however “sympathetic”), in which case, we are inclined to say that both Heidegger and Lacoue-Labarthe, although each in his own way (and day) has imposed upon the freedom of thought in a political inquisition. Rather than interrogating the texts in an attempt to pin them down, we would have to add yet other “*stellens*” to the movement of thinking in pursuit of the “exuberance” that cannot be overseen, proliferating or, indeed, punctuating the terms to open our account to the space between writings. For I am not as worried that we may get lost “*between* two or three texts” as I am that there may be a lost stela in Lacoue-Labarthe's accounting: *eine offene Stelle* that can never quite be found.

What Lacoue-Labarthe clarifies is that there will be a long history in Heidegger's corpus to the use of *stellen* in its hyphenated forms even if he does not attend in detail to the *Ge-stell* as it is deployed in relation to art. We would prefer to begin from what one might assume is the beginning, namely, the account of *Gestalt* and *Ge-stell* that is proposed in the version of “The Origin of the Work of Art” with which Lacoue-Labarthe is presumably working. Perhaps we had better have a look at the entire passage from which he has lifted his reading of

Gestalt without, I might add, completing the thought that would take us to *Ge-stell*; without, that is, going by way of the intervening sentences, which clearly incorporate the rift (*Riß*) into the thinking of both *Gestalt* and *Ge-stell*. In fact, the definition of *Gestalt* is given in the sentence preceding the one that Lacoue-Labarthe actually cites, which is, technically speaking, addressed to the “creation” (*Geschäftensein*) of work as “the fixing of truth in a configuration.” This critical line is itself framed by references to the rift. For it is not simply that truth takes shape in the work of art but that it assumes the “forme” of a rift:

Der in dem Riß gebrachte und so in die Erde zurückgestellte und damit festgestellte Streit ist die Gestalt. Geschäftensein des Werkes heisst: Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt. Sie ist das Gefüge, als welches der Riß sich fügt. Der gefügte Riß ist die Fuge des Scheinens der Wahrheit. Was hier Gestalt heißt, ist stets aus jenen Stellen und Ge-stell zu denken, als welches das Werk west, insofern es sich auf-und her-stellt.

The figure is the strife that is drawn into the rift and so set back on the Earth and thus fixed in place. The work’s being created means: truth taking place as fixed in a configuration. It is the joining structure along which the rift takes shape. The seam of the rift is the joint through which truth shines. What is here called a configuration is always to be thought from that setting and frame-work through which the work appears in so far as it sets-up and -forth.⁶

Without denying the promise of reading this text in French terms, especially in relation to Derrida (“... on the basis of the incision, the trait or the ‘inaugural’ tracing, of the breaching/broaching [*entame*] or the inscription—in short, of something not unrelated to the archi-trace or archi-writing . . .”), we must ask why Lacoue-Labarthe refuses to read Heidegger in terms of the German terms that are being worked (with) here: why he insists upon thinking of *Gestalt* “in other words,” namely, in terms of the Latin *figura* (*figo*: shaping, fashioning, fabricating, “fictioning”), when it is clear that Heidegger is thinking of an artwork whose origin is no longer centered around a “form” that is imposed upon matter by an efficient cause. It should be clear, in other words, that precisely what Heidegger is contesting through the figure of a work of art—of which, let us recall, the artist is not the origin—is a Humanism that assumes “the meaning of being” is created by human being and imposed upon beings, as if it were stamped out in the production of beings or in a fabrication of being, rather than arising in the rift, as “The Origin of the Work of Art” would have it: quite literally “figured out” in the strife between world and Earth, which is, in that case, worked out in words.

We would like to suggest that Lacoue-Labarthe makes the wrong move precisely at the point at which he insists upon directing our reading of *Gestalt*

in terms of *figura*—a (Latin) word that Heidegger would never use in his own account of art—rather than in the terms in which artwork is actually being thought in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” which include not just *Riß* and *Streit* or even *Gestalt* and *Gestell* but the *Gefüge* and *Fuge* that intervene between them, like the joining structure that they name but which Lacoue-Labarthe fails to mention. No doubt *Ge-stell* here designates the collective frame-work of an operating structure that is itself configured or set into operation in the text in terms of a setting-up (*auf*-), -forth (*her*-), -back (*zurück*-) and -down (*fest*-). It is clear that this passage, as it stands, and which Lacoue-Labarthe regards as among the “most audacious” in all of Heidegger’s corpus, structures its own discussion of *Gestalt* around the *Ge-stell* as a frame-word for a set of words, as it sets the “figure” in a “frame” of “*stellens*.” For it begins its account of “form” with a *zurück*- and *fest*-*stellen* and concludes with an *auf*- and *her*-*stellen*. Between these opposed “settings,” the notion of *Gestalt* is rethought as a dynamic “configuration,” although not, we must insist, without the “rift” that runs through the entire passage, framing it around a slit (*Riß*) or slot (*Fuge*) inserted in the word *Ge-stell*. This is to say that the fourfold frame of “*stellens*” is itself configured around the word for a structure, as they form a linguistic system (*Gefüge*) that is collected and assembled into a “frame-work” in which *Ge-stell* is used as a key word to designate the design of a structure of words, and one whose own hyphen marks a rift in the word itself.

As we shall see, a great deal hinges on the linguistic character of the “gathering” that is at play here and of what we will refer to as a joint-formation, as the hyphen forms the design of a rift in the frame-work, pointing out, through this key-hole in the word that each term in the structure is marked by its own hyphenation: by a line designed to indicate that *stellen* (not to mention *reißen*) is to be thought in its hyphenated form, stressing its reading not simply around the root but in view of a system of opposed prefixes. Strangely enough, Lacoue-Labarthe never attends to the *Ge-stell* in “The Origin of the Work of Art”: neither to the figure of the “frame” nor to the structure of its own dynamic operation in the “assembling” (*Ge*-) of a set of “*stellens*.” Given that he is pursuing an explicitly linguistic motif, it would seem advisable to concentrate rather closely on the exact terms in which Heidegger frames his thinking. For there is, admittedly, a German operation at work here: a word-play that can scarcely be translated, assuming that the “rift/design” is signed in the name of the frame-work itself, namely, in the word *Ge-stell*.

At the same time, a genuinely typographical reading might well lead us to the conclusion that the critical point—or line—in “The Origin of the Work of Art” does not need to be translated, in fact, is literally “un-heard,” although not just as a previously “unheard-of word” with respect to the metaphysical tradi-

tion of Western thought. If *Ge-stell* is designed to provide the key to the meaning of *Gestalt*, then the key to this key may well lie in the figure of the hyphen, which will never be heard. Instead, through this silent sign, the word itself not only appears as a word-structure—as an assembly (*Ge-*) of “*stellens*”—but as a *Gestalt* of letters that is subject to reconfiguration around the rift that is inserted into the middle of the word, like an open “seam” through which “truth shines,” thanks to a breach in the line of speech. As far as we are concerned, then, Lacoue-Labarthe not only avoids the language of the rift but overlooks the rift in Heidegger’s own language. For there is a rift-design to Heidegger’s thinking that is marked in what we would like to regard as the phono-graphic structure of the text itself.



If there is a specific network that is set up in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” a set of structural relations framed in linguistic terms, it is between *Gestalt*, *Ge-stell* and *Gefüge*, on the one hand, and *Streit*, *Riß* and *Fuge*, on the other; between (as we might try to translate it) configuration, frame-work and structure (system), on the one hand, and strife, split (slit) and slot, on the other. On our view, these two sets go hand in hand; which means, to connect them to one another, we will have to think of the configuration of the rift (*Gestalt/Riß*) as taking place in a frame-work of strife (*Ge-stell/Streit*) that is composed through a system of slots (*Gefüge/Fuge*) or structured openings. Attending to the letter of language, then, would require us to think along the lines of the hyphen as a graphic design: as a structural device that forms the seam of an out-line at which a certain truth shows through the written word by disclosing an opening within it—a silent space in which the word is exposed in its own linguistic creation. Needless to say, if we are inclined to translate *Gestalt* (which, unlike *Ge-stell*, Heidegger does not hyphenate) into English as “con-figuration,” it is to characterize the word itself as a dynamic formation, thanks to the operation of a joint that rips it open to create a rift within it.

In more ways than one, the work of art has the structure of a joint-formation (*Ge-füge*), as Heidegger will insist upon thinking of it, as a collective configuration that assumes the “forme” of a joint (*Fuge*). For the truth that shows in the breach between world and Earth is exhibited in the work of art in its joint rendering of the rift (*Riß*), as an outline (*Auf-riß*) of the basic design (*Grund-riß*) of their conflict. The rift-design, however, does not simply appear in the work, as if a theme that is represented in or by it. Instead, the work appears in the design(ing) of the rift. This is to say that the rift only “appears” in the dynamic appearance of the work itself: in the work’s own rend-ering of

the rift as a design, as it tears the rift open (*Durch-riß*) and establishes its openness in an outline (*Um-riß*), holding the rift open by displaying its basic design through the framing of an opening in which the work appears as “art.” As such, the work of art not only shows the marks of its own creation (“erection”) as an original exhibition or installation (*Aufstellung*) of truth in its execution (*einrichten*), but it keeps the rift in operation by attracting (*berücken*) an audience to a beauty of its own design (“dedication”). As a refinement of the rift, the figure of the work of art as a “whole” (*Gestalt*) can only be designed through the instigation of the dispute between world and Earth. As such, the work must submit itself to the breach that it has created: work with it to keep it working and, in so doing, bring the rift to appearance in what will turn out to be a collective creation of truth (*Wahrheit*) in the struggle to preserve it. The ecstasy (*verrücken*) of what Heidegger terms preservation (*Venwahrung*) is not simply a matter of conserving the work in its concrete installation but of creating a framework in which the conflict is sustained in the con-figuration that originally sets it into operation.

We know that Heidegger quite explicitly opposes what Lacoue-Labarthe calls “onto-ideo-logý” to the Heraclitean *polemos*: to strife (*Streit*), struggle (*Kampf*), conflict, contention as the basis for the establishment of law and order. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), where the question of the *polis* is expressly addressed, the *logos* is not thought of as a divine reason or as a preestablished harmony or as an eternal form but in terms of a *Gefüge*, as a joining structure that sets the opposites in relation (opposition) to one another, such that the “law” may be determined in the conflict of their dispute. Consequently, when Heidegger there interprets the Greek sense of an overpowering order, he does not translate *dike* in terms of justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), as is often done, but in terms of the fitting (*Fug*). For Heraclitus, “justice is strife” in so far as the only true law is the one that arises in the struggle of opposition, as a structure (or structuring) of the strife itself: in the dynamic fitting of each opponent with respect to the other in the assembling of a conflict that must set limits on itself by coming to some overriding order, but only by letting the opposition rule. This, we are told, is why the Greeks thought of beauty in terms of restraint (*Bändigen*), as a binding order in which each element serves to set the limit of the other so as to delimit one another, and not as a taming of or refraining from contention but as a refinement of its rage.

Our interest here, however, is not in the work of art *per se* but in the way in which it provided a model for Heidegger’s own linguistic thinking. If we are to think of the *logos* in terms of a harmony of opposites, then *harmonia* would itself have to be thought in its original sense as the fitting together (*harmo-*zo**) of an ordered arrangement through a joint (*harmos*) that creates a framework. The

type of fitting at work here is of special interest, not only because, for Heidegger, “being itself” is thought of as a joining structure, but because the harmonic order that is designed by Heraclitus has its own distinctive character as a *palintropos harmonia*: an ordering that is turned back against itself. Of course, every structure is connected to itself, since this is how its elements gain their structural integrity, although not every framework is turned against itself, as if it were designed to undermine its own stability. In a structure of strife, elements can only be “stabilized” if the tension of their conflict is sustained. The “contension” of opposition, then, suggests a specific sort of structuring, which operates through a counter-strife that we would like to take literally.

Here we would not only have to take a clue from Havelock, who has shown this palintropic operation to be a feature of the linguistic structure of Heraclitus’s thought, but from Heidegger himself, whose account of Heraclitus suggests that the Greek *logos* and *legein* are connected to the German *lesen*: to reading as a “gathering” of letters. If the word *strife* is too strident in this regard, if it misses the subtlety of the “harmony” at issue, then “counterstrife” must not only be taken to indicate the incessant intensification of a strife without relief (as opposites forever counter one another) but would at the same time have to suggest a certain offsetting of the conflict in the establishment of a structure through a strife that must counter itself. Taken literally, “counter-strife” would serve to name the linguistic structure of a thinking that thinks the *logos* not simply as language but in view of an oppositional order on which words themselves depend. In that case, the most obvious place to see the *polemos* in operation would be in Heidegger’s own vocabulary: in the polemical character(s) exhibited in a linguistic design that speaks in terms of a *Ge-stell*, and in the way in which it “stresses” language in a writing that is in opposition with itself.



If the work of art can be said to assume the form (*Gestalt*) of a stela, designed around a framework (*Gestell*) of “*stellens*,” it is not simply to lay down the law but to announce (*feststellen*) the opening of the free space in which it has been erected (*errichten*) in the first place. In that case, the point is not simply to etch the truth in stone but to sketch the hole in the ground (*Grund-riß*) that makes the insertion of a stela possible and through which it becomes clear that “the law of being” must be composed in an original act of creation or, to be precise, in the installation (*ein-richten*) of truth in its execution through work. As such, Heidegger’s own “*offene Stelle*” would have to be read as marking an “open place” that stakes out a new space for thinking through a typographical stela that has been inserted in the word *Ge-stell* to create an opening in it: a punctuation mark

inserted into a line of letters—like a stem between roots, to pursue the botanical figure—that is designed to expose the free space in which words are composed in the first place, as if repeatedly remarking on the freedom that Heidegger creates in “The Origin of the Work of Art” by inserting a “spacer” in the word that makes room in the origin (*Ursprung*) for a primal leap (*Ur-sprung*).

The graphic line of the hyphen—as a stick or *Stift* that lines an opening in language—is not simply designed to hold its letters together, as if stuck on a skewer, but to keep them apart: to open up a word and hold it open, through the lining of a free space (*Spielraum*), in Heidegger’s case, in a play on words that is designed to reconfigure our reading of *Ge-stell*. For the question that is raised by Heidegger’s own writing (and configured in the problem of “figuration”) is not just how to create a more flexible (*fugsam*) framework but how to keep a structure open, so as to keep thinking in play in its own linguistic determination. This is why we will have to think in terms of the framework of an opening that is “fixed” in its openness, and why the “decree” (*Fugung*) of the *logos* must be thought through a literal counter-strife that lays down (*legen*) the “law” of an open system (*Ge-füge*). If truth is, quite literally, in-formed by strife, then the “harmonic” opening of being itself must be set down as the law of the law, in terms of a polemical movement through which law and order are instituted in an open conflict, including in and between words.

If we are right to think of the hyphen as a sign of the rift, it is because it is designed to hold open a space in the line of letters, around which the word is reconfigured in its own linguistic appearance. In that event, the rift-design of the alphabetic sign would have to be thought through the creation of a phonographic rent in language: a fixed opening that is held in place with a hyphen as the lining of a free space in an open design of words. The question remains, then, whether Heidegger has found a way to maintain an original openness in his own text by creating a breach in language; not only displaying the linguistic opening of a world but setting it into operation in such a way that it is held open “*hyphonetically*.” Does Heidegger literally create an “open place” (*eine offene Stelle*) in his writing, beyond simply the use of those words, that is, does he construct his own linguistic structure as a figure (*Gestalt*) of the open through the frame-work of a graphic *Ge-stell*, whose key may be said to lie in the “-” between its letters? If so, then Heidegger’s own linguistic thinking would have to be thought to “work” in his sense of the word: to sketch the outline of an open conflict in and between words that, in so doing, composes a free space in his thought. In that case, we cannot fail to heed the counter-strife that is built into the word-structure of “The Origin of the Work of Art”: the original oppositions that allow it to think in terms of a frame-work of words, assuming that the rift-design is written into a structure of “*stellens*” and graphically marked in the name of the frame itself.

This is to insist that Heidegger is not just describing an opening in words but executing it in his own writing, literally de-scribing an open place in language through a breach of speech that turns a word into another word, or at least gives it an entirely new meaning. For *Ge-stell* has never before meant a collection (*Ge*) of “*stellens*.” As the graphic design of an opening in the text, the “-” opens up a space for the reconfiguration of the word as a *Gestalt* of letters. If we may speak of the hyphen as a design of the rift, it is because it operates as a devise that creates a free space in the line of language, through which a word is reconfigured in its linguistic appearance around an open middle. In effect, the “-” forms a graphic opening at the heart of the word by inserting a line in the middle of its letters, transforming its appearance (in sight as well as sound) and, in so doing, securing the word in its literal emergence as language—fixing it, as it were, in its dynamic operation as a linguistic event. At the same time, *Ge-stell* is not the only word in the text to which the hyphen-effect is applied. As the binding sign of an open seam, the “-” connects an entire network of hyphenated terms in a type of crossword puzzle. As we have already seen, it serves to connect *stellen* and *reissen*, as if in a double frame: in the framework of a *stellen* that has a rift in it (*Ge-stell*), thanks to a *reissen* whose breach is marked by the outline of a set design (*Grund-riß*).

We would, then, like to draw attention to this little line inserted in the middle of a word to display in its own linguistic character, not just in its etymological lineage as a joint-formation (a “compound” word) but as a graphic line of letters, stressed in its alphabetic design. As such, the hyphen is the sign of a rift between speech and writing, a graphic design of the emergence of language in its own phonetic formation, defined not only by the sound of the word but by a silence that is contained within it. As if remarking on the appearance of language in writing, Heidegger’s phonology articulates another way of thinking by means of the word, stressing the accents at the point of a breach of speech. In this respect, it is not exactly the word *Ge-stell* that is, properly speaking, “unheard,” but the “-” that makes it a “unique and philosophically unheard-of” word, as Lacoue-Labarthe puts it—and not just in the history of Western thought but in ordinary language as well. This is why we do not want to confuse what we might call “hyphonation,” for short, with etymology proper, assuming that the hyphen marks an unspeakable breach with tradition through which a new relationship to language is created.

Unlike Lacoue-Labarthe, we do not want to overlook the typography of the “-” or read it simply as an etymological devise. Instead, we would like to propose a more precise reading of *Ge-stell*, not simply by lining up a string of words but by attending to the hyphen as a phono-graphic sign through which a set of “*stellens*” are, in effect, dis-connected to one another, thanks to the

designing of a free space in which words appear in their oppositional relation, in this case, as the prototype of a prelinguistic space that is opened up in language by turning it back on itself to reveal its own creation. This means that if we are to understand the hyphen in terms of “imposition,” it would have to be more in line with the sense in which the word is used in typography. As the setting of type in the forme, the “-” is not the sign of a stela whose words are written in stone or even of the line of language on which writing hangs, as if by a thread. Instead, it marks the design of a typographical sign that is inserted as a spacer in the line of letters: a steel stele that directs their connection and arrangement by fixing a silent rift in writing that is quite literally “un-heard” in the spoken word.



If the “-” is the sign of a rift in language, then it should be obvious that Heidegger’s own textual apparatus is designed to create an opening in the word: to compose a “poetic” breach of ordinary speech in an act of thinking that takes place in “a work of the word.” As “The Origin of the Work of Art” makes clear, the “figure” (*Gestalt*) of the work is the structure (*Ge-füge*) or frame-work (*Ge-stell*) in which the rift takes shape—is first opened up and held open—as it is set within specific limits. In the case in point, a con-figuration of truth is quite literally “articulated” in the text by framing its opening in a four-sided linguistic structure: as a *Durch-*, *Auf-*, *Um-*, and *Grund-Riß*. This four-way reading of the rift stresses a ripping (*reissen*) through (*durch-*) and splitting open (*auf-*) as the outline of a contour (*um-*) that lays out a ground plan (*grund-*). At the same time, as if to set the design of the rift in its own double frame, *stellen* is set in opposition to *reissen* in the configuration of its fourfold setting: up (*auf-*), forth (*her-*), back (*zurück-*), and down (*fest-*). In this linguistic rendering of the rift-design, ripping and sketching can no more be separated from one another than can setting forth and tearing open. If the work of art is an arrangement (*Gestalt*) of the rift, then, the setting and placing that it does must stress the opposition in the rift itself. Without this opposition, the structure would collapse. Consequently, in its own dynamic appearance, the work not only “presents” (*darstellen*) the rift as the site of its setting but sets up the struggle through which it takes place—sets down the law of strife and keeps it in operation, in our case, in the text of “The Origin of the Work of Art” itself. As a “work” (of the word), it must set up a structure for the conflict—a linguistic structure—not only by setting *reissen* in competition with *stellen*, but by setting them in opposition to themselves by breaching each of these roots, dis-closing them in their hyphenated forme, both exposing and opposing the root by affixing prefixes to

it that pull it in different directions. In this respect, the hyphen is designed to operate as a key that sets a certain tension in the text by locking the word open, in effect, joining the rift “linguistically” by keeping its structure free.

If the rift must be conjoined in the joint-formation of the work, in this case, as a *Ge-stell* of words that is set free for its own reconfiguration, then this frame-work, like the frame-word that names it, cannot simply be constructed from the “primary” root, but is designed in the gathering (*Ge-*) of opposition that is “fixed” in its prefixes. This is why we must attend to the connections and their own collective “corrections.” Here it must be clear that “*stellen*” alone cannot create a structure. It may be regarded as a structural element, but only in so far as it is set in a tension of opposition, including with itself. In the “*Ge-stell*,” what is marked is the gathering of the difference that has been set into the “setting”: introduced into the term *stellen* through the trans-fixing of its meaning, which is, in effect, “fixed” across its prefixed forms, which serve to “correct” the direction of one another in their dynamic opposition. Even if we think in terms of a hyphenated root, it is not the *stellen* that creates the connection, let alone to other roots. Instead, there is a connective, a *Fuge*; as if, in constructing a linguistic frame-work, the “*stellens*” form the sides of a frame that has to be connected into a structure of opposition. In this four-sided framework, the frame-words (*auf-/her-/zurück-/fest-stellen*) are joined to each other through the open forme of the hyphen. If we may be allowed to press the figure of the frame, to picture the *Gestalt* of the *Ge-stell* as a literal framework of words, then the “*-stellens*” (as we might write the word to mark its hyphenated forme) are not at the center, nor do they hold the structure together, but form its outer members, like lines of letters, connected at the corners by their hyphens to create the free space of an opening between them (*eine offene Stelle*).

It should be easy to see why we are fixated on the hyphen as a device that is designed to set up a graphic opening in the middle of a word: a free space in the line of language, fixed with a little “stick” that binds it open to mark a literal inter-ruption, however slight, as a breach of speech that is framed between its letters. The “-” does not just create the blank space of a slag, as a printer would say, but operates as a quite precise opening in the word, and one that is held open from the inside out. For Heidegger, what we are calling the counter-strife must be fixed in place in so far as the rift is opened up but always and only in a set design. The rift must be set free: set up as a free space that is literally un-locked with a key. There can be no doubt that Heidegger’s hyphen is designed to effect a *Gestalt*-switch in our reading that creates a new sense of the word by locking it open, whether it be *Grund-riß* or *Ge-stell* or any of the other hyphenated terms. Even if we assume that there is a single root meaning that is isolated by hyphenation, of which the prefixed verbs are seen to be off-shoots, the root is

exposed in a specific way by this prefixing, riddled, as we have said, by hyphens, creating the puzzle of a word structure that breaks the word open, and not only to its own roots. To take the critical point (which is, however, less critical than Lacoue-Labarthe thinks): is the frame-word *Ge-stell* simply designed to collect the network of compound verbs to a single root, or is it expressly composed to create the sense of a gathering of opposition in the word itself, whose collective connection (*Ge-*) is shown to arise in the conflict between its opposed “*stellens*” (*auf-, her-, zurück-, fest-*)? Even assuming a unity of “meaning,” how does the hyphen form the figure of this linguistic connection? Is it designed to create a breach in the word that is built into the structure of Heidegger’s thinking and through which the riddle of the rift (as both a breach and a design) is thought in the competition between its hyphenated forms: as an *Um-, Auf-, Durch-* and *Grund-Riß*? In that case, can one claim that the opposition is organized around a fixed root, or does the meaning of an ambiguous term like *Riß* e-merge precisely in the rift between its own competing designs? In short, if the hyphen marks a primal leap (*Ur-sprung*) in language, can it simply lead back to a root?

I suspect so, if we think of the hyphen etymologically, as Lacoue-Labarthe does, rather than typographically: think of it in terms of the root meaning of the word—including of the word “hyphen,” as “under one” (*hyph-hen*)—rather than viewing it as a graphic mark. As a type of literal punctuation, the “-” is designed to create a break in the line of letters that constitutes the written word as an audiovisual *Gestalt*. This is why the figure of the hyphen would have to be taken literally, not as a word but as a graphic design. For the “-” is not a word or even just a sign but an operational line that describes a breach between letters; which means, for course, that it has no etymology, although it can be employed to reveal the roots of a word by breaking it down into its constituent “parts.” So far as I know, Heidegger never appeals to the word “hyphen” in his thinking, even if he repeatedly appeals to the “-” as one of his signature marks. In fact, I think it is fair to say that no thinker has made more use of the hyphen than Heidegger. But it is not clear that we have thought through the hyphen—given sufficient thought to the operation of this easily overlooked breach in speech by thinking along the line of the “-” as a graphic sign—to see what it is formally indicating. Consequently, we must ask how the punctuating point of this binding line figures into the frame-work of Heidegger’s own hyphenated thought, indeed how it literally lines his thinking with openings. To what does the “-” point, as a graphic design in an alphabetic sign? Does it point the way to an out-line of the open, as it directs us to a free space in the word, or is it simply a return to roots and their well-grounded meanings?



Needless to say, the “-” can be used in any number of ways. As the German would suggest, the hyphen is a binding stroke (*Bindestrich*)—a band that is designed to bind the space that it creates. As a type of all-purpose sign, it can, in fact, function as either a connecting or a dividing line. In the case of etymology, we would be inclined to say that it is the separation that is stressed by the stroke of its graphic line, in the breaking up or down of the word into its components, exposing the alphabetic sign in its compound formation by marking the joint as a point at which it is free to separate, and, in fact, does in the case of compound verbs in German (such as those in the *Ge-stell*). In that event, the hyphen marks the joint-formation of a breaking point, as it breaks into—and, in all our cases, breaks in two—a word that is otherwise read as one and, in so doing, displays it in its own linguistic formation. Assuming, then, that a specific configuration of language is taking place in the hyphenated figures of Heidegger’s own textual constructions, the question remains whether the word-forms of “The Origin of the Work of Art” are fixed or fixated on the root or assume the forme of a more complex linguistic structure. Despite surface appearances, can one still insist that the primary root always comes first, or does the prefix operate, in its own way, prior to it, such that the “primary” etymon may just as well be said to be affixed to it, as is clear when the prefix comes after it, that is, when the meaning of the verb must be deferred until one gets to the end of the clause? What is more central in the “etymo-logy” that is at work in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” if we think through the hyphen: the primary root or the prefix?

Our answer is: neither.

If we are to locate anywhere, it is on the hyphen as the creation of a breach that cuts both ways and through which the meaning of a word will be connected not just to its own roots but to a network of hyphenated terms into which it figures. As a type of linguistic counterpoint, the “-” directs us back and forth, spanning the gap that it has created in the word. This slit, in other words, creates a more complex slot than may, at first, appear to be the case. If we center on the primary root, for example, it makes a single connection, as it gathers a set of prefixed terms under it. If we locate on the hyphen, however, it is the mark of multiple connections, as it draws us into a framework of roots that are ruled by hyphenation as the sign of an open relation between words. Thinking in view of the “-” as the articulation of a joint, this little line is designed to draw us into a dynamic structure of words that literally offsets the sort of one-sided account that Lacoue-Labarthe has imposed on Heidegger’s texts. But how does the simple line of the hyphen operate to structure a linguistic thinking? What sort of frame-work does it create? Is it simply a linear structure or does it assume the forme of a break in the order of language that reorders its priorities, as it were, restructuring the

word in its own kind of *Gestalt*-switch? If so, does this typographical line bind us to tradition or, on the contrary, is it the sign of an historic breach in the meaning of a word that is designed to create a new sense of language?

Part of the answer to this question depends upon whether one thinks that Heidegger is actually doing etymology in "The Origin of the Work of Art." If he is, it is not of a sort that claims to trace words to their hidden roots in history, let alone to roots that are grounded in other languages. Instead of tracing words back to their deep structure, Heidegger is sticking to the surface of language: to a hyphonation that creates a new sense of the word by taking it literally (*wörtlich*). This is why we are more inclined to think that Heidegger's hyphen effects a certain literalization of the word rather than reflecting any etymology proper. For he does not here trace (as he does in other cases) the historical lineage of the word. Instead, the basic line, that is, the repeated device, is the sign of the hyphen. As such, he splits the roots from the start by means of a system of prefixing that does not allow a root to stand alone, does not allow it to take root, if only because, strictly speaking, the prefix is as much a root of the word as what Lacoue-Labarthe calls the "primary 'etymon.'" In fact, we might say that it is the "secondary" etymon that comes first: that gives the word its meaning in a hyphonated form that inflects the primary root by means of a prefix that deflects its "primacy." As a matter of phonology (and "The Origin of the Work of Art" was written to be read aloud, albeit in a kind of secondary orality, as Ong would say), the repeating of the primary root puts the stress on the difference between its prefixes. It goes without saying that prefixes are more pronounced when the root remains the same, which is simply to note that, without the repetition of the root, it would be harder to detect the offsetting prefixes.

If what we have dubbed hyphonation is graphically designed to hold the place of a silent space in speech that breaks a single sound in two, then its effect is to give language a new hearing by systematically stressing words differently. In that case, the repetition of the "primary" root actually stresses the prefix; that is, it highlights the oppositional meaning of each term in terms of the prefixes that distinguish them, just as certain of the roots will be designed to mark the movement in the system. This is to insist that if we follow the line of the hyphen as it cuts both ways, it does not direct us to a single root-word but stresses the system of prefixing itself. As such, it marks a network of roots, and not only in so far as the prefix also counts as a root but in that any number of different roots will be submitted to the same system of hyphonation, such that they will be connected to one another through the hyphens that separate, in each case, the repeated roots from their differential prefixes. Lacoue-Labarthe himself notes a certain "competition" between roots, even if he does not heed it in his own reading. Instead, he mentions in passing the opposition between

stellen and *reissen*—in a passage in which it can hardly be overlooked—precisely to pass over it. If we had time here, we could trace in detail what might well be called the fourfold roots of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” as the text operates in terms of a complex of complexes configured around the opposition not only between the *stellen* and *reissen* complexes but between *rücken* (*berücken*, *ein-rücken*, *ent-rücken*, *ver-rücken*) and *richten* (*er-richten*, *ein-richten*, *Richtung*) as well, where the former marks the “movement” of beauty and the latter a certain “alignment” of truth and art.

While there are, no doubt, other complexes at play, we would locate on these four in “The Origin of the Work of Art” because they so clearly cut across one another in their opposition, marking the crossword puzzle that frames its treatment of the riddle of art in the counter-strife between “setting” and “ripping,” “moving” and “righting.” It is not just that *stellen* and *reissen* are as offsetting with respect to one another as are *rücken* and *richten* but that these four roots are multiplied, not only by their prefixes but as they are crossed with and against each other. *Rücken* is not the sign of a setting (place) or a ripping (rent) but of a movement that relates both *stellen* and *reissen* to beauty as a complex “ecstasy” (captivation, entrancement, transportation, derangement), while *richten* is designed to connect art to truth, not simply as “correctness” (*Richtigkeit*) but in its concrete “installation” (*ein-richten*), as the “beauty” that is happening in art (in the setting to work of truth) is erected (*er-richten*) and dedicated to the creation of a certain collective direction (*Richtung*) that provides a community with an historical “orientation” in its movement over time. Our point just now, however, is that every one of the fourfold roots in the complex word-structure of “The Origin of the Work of Art” would itself have to be thought in terms of the other(s), as if it were its corrective. Each is designed to correct (*richten*) for the one-sidedness of the other(s) in a phono-graphic crossword puzzle that is riddled with hyphens, even when they are not explicitly marked.

The point remains, then, that the “-” not only marks an opening in language but sets that openness into operation in a system that is designed to create a dynamic framework that avoids anchoring (*stellen-reissen*) without being set adrift (*rücken-richten*). The “primary” roots are not only multiplied from the start in their own complexity, as they are drawn in different directions by their prefixes, but are designed to counter one another thanks to a hyphen that connects them to other “roots” in what amounts to an unrooted system. What is shared by each set of terms is not a root but the hyphen, as a joint that holds the framework open through the structure of a linguistic connection that breaks its words, if not simply apart then up and down. Consequently, if we are still inclined to take *Ge-stell* as the paradigm, it is because it operates as the name of a framework that makes use of the hyphen to exhibit its own construction as a word-formation. Strictly

speaking, what the *Ge-stell* gathers (*Ge*) is a set of “-stellens” as a linguistic configuration (*Gestalt*) that creates a new space for thinking in language. As such, its “-” is not designed to return to the root of words or even to a root word but to expose a complex word play that takes place through a gathering of hyphenated terms whose meanings are, at best, “rooted” in other words: in a set of competing terms, designed to create a sense that can only arise in the rift between them. It is, in short, the hyphen in *Ge-stell* that, without a word, provides the key to the system, that shows the way in which a root (-stellen) is breached (*auf, her, zuruck, fest*) and structured (*Ge*) into a linguistic system (*Ge-füge*) that creates a space in which an old word is free to take on new meaning. For *Ge-stell*, as a frame-word, “names” the joint-configuration of “stellens” through its hyphenation: not in their merging or converging at a root but in the structural emergence of these opposed counter-movements in a frame-work that is connected through the only punctuation mark that can be placed in the middle of a word.



To read Heidegger around the root, as Lacoue-Labarthe has done, is not only to miss the point of how he got back to these presumed roots but to fail to appreciate the textual apparatus that is in play in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” It is clearly missing the point of its linguistic structure to isolate a single root meaning or even a single chain to which its vocabulary is anchored, let alone to trace the single line of the *stellen*-complex as a stela that could be stuck like a stake through the heart of the Heideggerian corpus. On the contrary, we would say that the “*Ge-stell*” in “The Origin of the Work of Art” is a clear sign that Heidegger does not structure his vocabulary around a single root, since even the primary “etymon” does not stand alone in so far as the hyphenation that is at work there fixes as much on the prefixes as much as on any other “root.” As we have indicated, the system that is joined by the hyphen cannot work by isolating any single word but only by drawing us into a complex crossword puzzle of hyphenated terms that are off-setting in a dual sense, as different roots do not simply offset each other but set each other off in their dynamic operation with respect to one another. What the “-” is designed to out-line is neither the prefix nor the “primary” root but the opening between them as the space of a creative contention. In effect, Heidegger is fixing—or, to be precise, pre-fixing—a certain strife into the linguistic structure of his own thinking through its hyphenation. If he begins from compound verbs and hyphenates them, then the return to roots serves to establish a certain tension within the word itself—as we have said, a literal counter-strife—as it sets the word against itself as well as in relation to other words, even as it discloses the word as a word by breaking it down into a *Gestalt* of letters.

The hyphen, then, would have to be seen to effect a certain literalization of the word in the *Gestalt*-switch of its own double reading, and not just between the multiple meanings of a word but between its sense(s) and a sign that must be taken literally: as a configuration of letters that is free to be re-de-signed. This is why we are inclined to follow a typographical model, marked by the “-” as a graphic line—not as a stone stela but as a steel sign that is not only without a root but that sets words off in a groundless free play. If we may speak of Heidegger’s hyphen as effecting a literal materialization of the word—as if we see a new meaning emerging in the re-sounding of a word that sticks to the letter of language, phono-graphically speaking—then our drawing attention to the hyphen-effect is designed to distinguish what we are calling literalization from etymology proper. We are not here delving into the history of language or attempting to root our thinking in the tradition. On the contrary, the hyphonation at play in “The Origin of the Work of Art” is clearly designed to upset old meanings by breaking words down; in effect, breaking out of an old sense of the word, not by exposing their roots but by ripping them open so as to frame a free space in the face of a language that is committed to the truth in writing. In this respect, we would have to distinguish between the literal and the figurative meaning of a word, if only to insist that Heidegger takes words more literally than in their literal sense when he treats them as a con-figuration of letters in their phono-graphic design. We might say that he takes words literally as words: literally literally (*wörtlich*), as sets of letters whose meaning must be read (*lesen*) through a gathering (*legen*) that stresses the word in a new way. This is to insist that if language conceals as much as it reveal, then, on Heidegger’s view, words are most revealing when they reveal themselves as words, which is, presumably, what poetry is designed to do in so far as it not only discloses truth in the word but composes a truth that belongs exclusively to language.

While we are not inclined, in the end, to speak with Lacoue-Labarthe in terms of an “ontosteleology,” we cannot deny that a certain “aletheology” connects truth to the divine through language and is decisive in Heidegger’s thinking about community, at least at a certain point in his career. That the “naming of the holy” takes place in the “conversation” (*Gespräch*) of those who “can hear from one another” is not just to be taken figuratively but literally, marking both the limit and the priority a specific(ally) linguistic “community.” At the same time, if we are not inclined to say that Heidegger models the *polis* on the work of art, it is not only because it would be too easily confused with an aestheticizing of the political but because Heidegger has two different models of art at work in his thinking and, therefore, two quite different figures of collectivity: the one more “plastic,” the other purely “poetic.” What we would call the plastic model binds truth to the Earth and, therefore, to struggle and opposition

with an other that can never be appropriated, whereas the poetic model ties art to language as the other that we already are: to the “ownmost” of a “people” (*Volk*), as Hölderlin would say. It is this “poetic” orientation that is directly connected to Heidegger’s nationalism and will lead him to think of the “clearing” (as the time-space opening for the phenomenological appearance of beings that he calls “being”) as belonging to a people precisely because it is primarily a linguistic event. In any case, the double bind of these two models would incline us, finally, to make three remarks concerning Lacoue-Labarthe’s warning about “ontosteleology,” summarily organized around its own hyphenation.

In the first place (to begin in the middle), if, as Heidegger insist (again, following Hölderlin), the gods are “nothing but time” and “the heavenly is quick in passing,” then their signs can hardly be written in stone; or, if they are, the figure of the “stela” must serve to mark the site of its own erection. With respect, that is, to the institution of a law that is written on a stela, we would have to think not only in terms of the wet clay but of its connection to a hole in the ground, through which it is, quite literally, set up(right). This is to say that talk of an onto-*steleo*-logy should make us think in terms of a language that belongs to the Earth, and not just to a people. In this respect, we cannot simply be thinking of the creation of a new vocabulary but of a new relationship to language—as if the insertion of a stele in the word, as a breach in ground (*Grund-riß*) of thinking, is designed to announce (*feststellen*) the Earth as the site of writing; even if we cannot overlook the fact that clay hardens or that ink dries and that this is part of the problem of the “setting up” of truth, in point of fact, as a plastic problem that cannot be avoided by turning to poetry.

In the second place (which comes first in the word), we would have to insist that, technically speaking, Heidegger’s “gods” are not part of the ontological vocabulary but of a mythopoetic thought to which talk of the stela should, by all rights, have recourse. This poetic discourse on the divine presumably precedes both metaphysics and ontology and, therefore, cannot be thought either onto- or theo-logically. In that case, talk of an onto-*steleo*logy is a anachronism, if not an oxymoron. To my knowledge, no ontological theory has ever been written in stone, unless we count Heidegger’s own *Kunst und Raum*. This is not to underrate (let alone berate) the importance of Lacoue-Labarthe’s questioning of the sacred space that remains in Heidegger’s thought. On the contrary, it is out of respect for his isolation of the problem of “figuration” that we would seek a figure of truth in the graphic design of an \times over *Sein* that does not merely point to the *Geviert* but marks the free space between vocabularies in Heidegger’s own bitextual thinking.⁷

In the third place, to come to the end (of the word), Lacoue-Labarthe tends to overlook the *logos* in onto-*steleo*-logy, not only as it must be related in

Heidegger to Heraclitus but in its narrowing into language, which is the real problem or, to be precise: a clear and present danger. While there is an obvious conflict between vocabularies in Heidegger's own work, there is no competition between the linguistic and nonlinguistic arts in his thought, given the unquestionable primacy of poetry. Instead, there is a permanent hierarchy. While we do not have the time here to pursue this form of linguistic fascism, let us just say that if we speak of the "danger" of language, it is in an archaic sense of the term: as a matter of dominion (or domination), such that we would have to question the presumed extent of its range (including in the reach of a Reich that claimed its right to subsume under its reign all those who speak German). Here we would have to reverse the famous lines from Hölderlin on which, for Heidegger, our salvation presumably depends, namely, ". . . where danger threatens / that which saves also grows. . . ." As far as we are concerned, what we must be saved from is the danger of "salvation."

This is why we would insist that poetry cannot be the salvation of philosophy, any more than language is the miracle cure for all philosophical problems; nor do we think, as Lacoue-Labarthe apparently does, that it could have saved Heidegger from Nazism, if he had only gotten his thinking about *Gestalt* straight at the time. It was not the figure of the work of art as a plastic formation that misled Heidegger but his linguistic orientation and its refusal to maintain the model of an uncompromising struggle (with the Earth) in favor of poetry (language) as the final solution. This is to insist, contrary to Lacoue-Labarthe, that Heidegger had all of the resources available to him in his thinking in 1933 to oppose National Socialism. Needless to say, his "poetic" resolution of the riddle of art creates a linguistic limit that plastic works do not: limits all "understanding," not to mention "affection," to a "people" and their historical "mood" as the community of those who speak the same language. And yet, we would have to say that if philosophy (today) can be said to have reached its limit, in so far as it is in a position to sense its own end, then it is in the limitation that limits thinking to the linguistic. For what makes language "great" is not its connection to being or its power of self-correction or, for that matter, its ability to lie, but the freedom that it can create in marking its own breaking point.

Notes

1. *La fiction du politique* incurred a change of title in translation, becoming *Heidegger, Art and Politics* (Basil Blackwell, 1990; hereafter referred to as FP), while "*Typographie*" appeared in English in *Typography* (Harvard University Press, 1989; hereafter cited as T).

2. In what follows, we will refer to Heidegger's texts using the following abbreviations: UK1 for "*Vom Ursprung des Kunstwerks: Erste Ausarbeitung*," in *Heidegger Studies*, 5 (1989), pp. 5–22; UK for "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Harper & Row, 1971); QT for "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); and SF for "On the Question of Being," in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). I have employed the Latinized spelling of "stela" in part because Lacoue-Labarthe will insist upon a Latin reading of Heidegger's "*Gestalt*" (in terms of "*figura*") and in part to distinguish the stone slab from the central channel in the stem of a vascular plant, to which "stele" may (also) refer and to which we will appeal in our account of Heidegger's use of the hyphen. In this respect, while Lacoue-Labarthe will be thinking in terms of a language that is carved in stone, we will be thinking in terms of an opening in the heart of the word.

3. We cannot reproduce the play on *fest* as a setting "firm" or "fast." The best we can do is suggest a setting (or laying) "down" of the law, which, admittedly, may overstate the case.

4. For a quite different reading of the Rectoral Address, see my "Heidegger on Community," *Man and World*, 14 (1981), pp. 25–54.

5. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 82ff.

6. One might like to compare my translation to Hofstadter's: "The strife that is brought into the rift and thus set back into the earth and thus fixed in place is figure, shape, *Gestalt*. Createdness of the work means: truth's being fixed in place in the figure. Figure is the structure in whose shape the rift composes and submits itself. This composed rift is the fitting or joining of the shining of truth. What is here called figure, *Gestalt*, is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing (*Stellen*) and framing or framework (*Ge-stell*) as which the work occurs when it sets itself up and sets itself forth" (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 64).

7. See my "Heidegger's Hole," *Research in Phenomenology*, XXXI (2001); pp. 203–229.

Eleven

DWELLING WITH LANGUAGE: IRIGARAY RESPONDS

Helen A. Fielding

“To a great thinker, Martin Heidegger wrote, it sometimes happens that he is greatly mistaken.”¹

In her introduction to the Italian translation of *L'Oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger*, written as a commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of Heidegger's death in 1976, Luce Irigaray acknowledges that his “thought enlightened [her] at a certain level more than any other” (2001a, p. 315). However, rather than directly following in his path, Irigaray engages with Heidegger's works dialogically. Indeed, it would seem that it is Heidegger's very admission of a “limit in the discovery of truth” that makes a dialogue with him possible for her.

It is the question of the limit that Irigaray takes up in her meditation on Heidegger's work on language. Although language is central to both thinkers, rather than privileging language in terms of the poetic event of being, the arising of something out of itself, Irigaray reveals how language is privileged in terms of its promise of dialogue between two who are different. This difference provides for a limit to what can be known or recognized, as well as for a creative potentiality that is directed towards the future. Despite beginning, like Heidegger, with a critical analysis of Western metaphysics, unlike Heidegger, it is not a relation to language and to being that Irigaray attempts to reveal; rather, it is the relation between two humans who are different, that is, the relation of sexual difference that is at the heart of her project.

In her earlier work, *L'oubli de l'air*,² begun a few days after Heidegger's death, Irigaray first lays out her sustained engagement with his thought.

Thanks are due to Francine Wynn for her ongoing dialogue on these ideas and texts, as well as to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial support of this project.

Although his influence is visible throughout her works, *The Way of Love*³ is both a return to and a continuation of that dialogue in light of the development of her own ideas. Although both works are critical engagements with Heidegger, to merely call them critical is not to recognize how close her thinking is to his even as it is different. Indeed, I would argue that an understanding of the proximity of her thinking to Heidegger's, even while respecting the difference, is necessary in order to allow for an adequate assessment of her central claim for the priority of sexual difference.⁴

In short, the depth of her thinking is brought out only in relation to the thought that dwells near to it. In *The Way of Love*, which is primarily Irigaray's engagement with *On the Way to Language*,⁵ she agrees with his privileging of language, although for reasons other than his. To understand these reasons, I turn first to Heidegger's account of language, according to which poetry (*Dichtung*) provides the privileged measure for the gathering of meditative thinking, and hence for man's dwelling. Rather than a means of individual expression, poetry, as a letting dwell, is instead to be understood not only as a "kind of building," encompassing both "cultivating and caring" as well as "erecting things," but also as a spanning of the measure of human dwelling on earth.⁶ Following Hölderlin in his questioning of god as measure, Heidegger asks how "that which by its very nature remains unknown [can] ever become a measure" when surely a measure must appear, and in appearing be known? He concludes that humans can measure themselves against a god who appears as "the one he is" only by remaining unknown, since to be mortal is to span or measure the dimension that belongs to mortals, and that dimension is to be on earth beneath the sky. Poetry or *Dichtung* is the measure that reveals that this mysteriousness, which belongs to that which is not human and yet which humans are called to reveal, is manifest in the sky's appearance which discloses the concealed as concealed. The poet, then, does not simply "describe the mere appearance of sky and earth" between which mortals dwell, he also calls the alien into familiar appearances, disclosing the concealed as concealed, and the invisible as invisible (1954, pp. 222–223/190–191). To take measure, then, is to dwell by perceiving and listening (*vernehmen*) to what is safeguarded and preserved in language as the destining of being. It is to listen to the "primal call" (*anfänglicher Zupruch*) which has withdrawn and whose silence humans fail to heed.⁷

Accordingly, our relation with language is one of an "experience" that is not equivalent to the gathering of information or the designation of word to thing that arises out of a metaphysical focus on beings. To experience language is to be transformed by it and into it (1959, pp. 73/177). Moreover, such a transformation, such a coming close to language, can only happen through speaking. Since our relationship to language precedes the difference of signification,

it requires that we listen, that we go beyond “hearing only what we already understand,” for when we speak, “our relation to language is vague, obscure, almost speechless” (1959, pp. 58/160). Hence, our relation to language requires an open attentiveness to what is other than ourselves.

This relation is not, however, one that is articulated in terms of the ontico-ontological difference, the difference between being and beings that structured the focus of Heidegger’s earlier work, as Krzysztof Ziarek points out.⁸ Rather, in his later works on language, Heidegger seeks to intuit the relationship of nearness (*nähe*) that precedes any distinction between identity and difference. Specifically, he thinks through the relation or meeting of poetry and thinking as a belonging together in the same (*das Selbe*) that can only occur if each remains “distinctly in the distinctness of [its] nature.” For two things to be the same, they can be neither equal nor identical; equality and identity both rely upon a “common denominator” which ultimately belies difference. Only things that are neither equal nor identical, that is, only things that differ, can be considered as the same, or, in other words, two things can only be the same if we begin by thinking them as different (1954, pp.218–219/187).⁹ It is not, then, that poetry and thinking “first draw near to each other,” thereby establishing a nearness; instead, the nearness “is itself the occurrence of appropriation by which poetry and thinking are directed into their proper nature” (1959, pp. 90/195). For poetry and thinking dwell near to one another, “even before they ever could set out to come face to face one to the other” (1959, pp. 84/189).

For Heidegger, nearness and saying (*Sagen*) are the same, and nearness as saying needs humans (*der Mensch*) to speak it (1959, pp. 95/202). Although we encounter language in speaking, it speaks itself as language in those very moments when “we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us” and we leave it unspoken, though touched however “fleetingly” by language. Yet the poet who is in touch with being might find the appropriate word that relates both to the thing as it is and to “the way it is”; indeed, it is the poet’s word which “gives being to the thing” (1959, pp. 59/161, 62/165). For words arise out of language as out of the house of being. Saying, as the essential being of language, is no mere speaking endlessly about things, a chatting, tattling, or gossiping, a weaving of “inventions, fables and myths,” which is perhaps characteristic of women.¹⁰ Rather *Logos*, as the relation between being and saying, allows presencing to occur (*Anwesen lassen*).¹¹ In presencing through language, through a “Saying as Showing” (*Sagen als Zeigen*), beings are brought into their own (*Ereignis*) (1959, pp. 127/258).

I have focussed here on Heidegger’s account of nearness for the reason that it is central to clarifying Irigaray’s approach to sexual difference that can be

understood more fully through her own intuition of proximity. Yet, as Ziarek explains, Heidegger's move from an emphasis on the ontico-ontological difference towards thinking in terms of the event, language and nearness are ultimately shown by Irigaray to be inadequate for thinking difference beyond the identity/difference framework (2000, p. 147). Sexual difference is produced within this economy of the same only as the negative side of the positive, of nature to culture, and of body to mind. The negative traits are attributed to femininity, which is not equivalent to the feminine that cannot be articulated within this economy of the same.

To think sexual difference in terms of proximity is to begin with the same that is most near but is not yet articulated in terms of standing face to face, that is, in terms of difference. For this Irigaray turns to the sameness of the "maternal-feminine which has been assimilated before any perception of difference." "This gift without measure" of the maternal-feminine might lie on the other side of the symbolic, but it is still materially real: "The red blood, the lymph, for every body, every discourse, every creation, every making of a world" (1984, pp. 98/98; 1983, pp. 32/34). Articulated as the "indeterminable proximity" of fetus and mother, it "defies the logic of identity and difference" (Ziarek, 2000, p.143). Similarly, for Irigaray, the relation between the feminine and the masculine is one of proximity that precedes the articulation of sexual difference itself. Indeed, it is only in terms of the not yet achieved that Irigaray poses the question of sexual difference, rather than as an essential or natural fact. Sexual difference, like poetry, emerges from attending to what is near, through listening and perceiving. What is factual, however, is that human beings are (at least) two,¹² even before this being two is taken up and mediated by culture. We can only think about sexual difference if we begin with the proximity of men and women in the same, that is, if we start by considering the relation between two beings who are different. If we begin with comparing them according to measures of equality or identity, then we must draw upon a common denominator, thereby erasing difference.

Accordingly, when Irigaray asserts that sexual difference is the primordial difference that makes the recognition of other differences possible, she is thinking this difference in terms of a proximity that precedes difference. This proximity is one that cannot be grasped, that does not appear, and so cannot be known as such. And yet, the relation that emerges out of this proximity, if the feminine and the masculine come into their own through their relation while retaining their distinctness, allows for the recognition of other differences. Without such a relation, however, difference is understood in terms of the indifference of the metaphysics of identity; difference is played in terms of the inverse, the other of the same. Irigaray's articulation of a relation between

two rather than as the relation of poetry to thought is her attempt to articulate a futural economy that is prior to difference, that makes the recognition of all differences possible.

Specifically, she anticipates an economy not grounded in the being of the same, but rather one sustained by the groundless ground of the weaving of relations. If man does not acknowledge the first relation which is both the same and different but lies outside his own specular economy, because the giving occurred outside his grasp of appearances, then he is not “confronted with the singularity” of his own representation. Instead, he projects this grounding of the first relation which gave him life before he could actively acknowledge its existence, onto a god who remains a projection of his own image even as it provides him with a measure of the unknowable (Irigaray, 2002a, pp. 70–72). Man is not actually confronted with difference, but rather with comparisons of equality or identity held up to the yardstick measure of himself encountered in terms of the interrelations of his own thought, of his own language, of his own being. Difference is not experienced corporeally in terms of another language, of another being, of another thinking that is both the same in terms of the proximity of being human, and yet different in that it belongs to a being that he cannot know, except as that which is not knowable. The ground of being, which provides the whole of the same, cannot account for the originary whole of the relation with the mother that preceded any differentiation as such. This whole is a “being two” that comes before identity and difference. In not taking this primordial relation into account, the “nature of the relation between subjects is not considered from then on” (2002a, p. 73). Rather than it being the ontico-ontological difference that is the most unthinkable of differences, for Irigaray, it is this elusive yet primordial relation with the mother that needs to be thought. Yet it is unthinkable except in terms of the whole, and it can be “sensed only in that questioning and in the listening that it opens toward the speaking of another subject” (2002a, p. 106–107). Beginning thus from our human capacity to be in relation, rather than with inverse differences between men and women, allows for a rethinking of sexual difference as neither essential nor completely constructed, neither as active nor as passive.

In Heidegger’s intuition of being of the same, this first relation is subsumed into language; the word is a safeguarding memory. *Mnemosyne* (Memory), as mother of the muses, is the “thinking back to what is to be thought.” As memory (*Gedächtnis*),¹³ the maternal-feminine allows for no opening to a relation in the present with a real feminine other; instead it becomes “the source and ground of poesy [*der Quellgrund des Dichtens*].”¹⁴ Irigaray suggests that what is at stake is not the oblivion of being but rather the oblivion of this first giving of life, of air, of blood that makes thought even possible. Instead of recognizing this

gift from another, Heidegger nostalgically mourns the loss of this original dwelling where there was neither identity nor difference.¹⁵ Since this first giving occurs without making an appearance, without “demonstration,” rather than recognizing the one who gave him life as a separate being, he instead mourns the loss of his first dwelling. As Freud explains in his essay on mourning and melancholia, mourning is complete once the lost love object has become part of the self through the process of mourning that is a remembering through language.¹⁶ He introjects it into his own being as he would a lost love object. This internalization of the other allows him to accept her loss, internalizing her gift and assimilating her into himself “in his body and his language.” As Irigaray writes: “Between this expectation and commemoration [*entre elles*], he weaves the oblivion of both, by ceaselessly putting them in relation through himself.” He thus appropriates the other without recognizing the difference. Her concern is that, if our indebtedness to this first giving is not recognized, if the umbilical cord is not cut, allowing the other her own existence, then we remain in a symbiotic relation, taking from nature without acknowledgement and without giving back. Even if he “calls-recalls, or names her—*physis*, for instance,” he is merely assimilating her to himself. “Whereas if he had at least once let her be, he could—perhaps?—remember her absence” (1983, pp. 44–45/44–45).

It is this nostalgia for his first home that prevents the relation of desire that could be engendered between two separate beings since such desire requires a renunciation of fusion.¹⁷ Moreover, it is due to this nostalgia that Heidegger dwells on dwelling as he does, without acknowledging his debt to the other who is other than him. If, for Heidegger, the poetic is the basic capacity for human dwelling, in forgetting the proximal difference between two that exists before it can be tangibly grasped, he forgets the *poësis*, the possibility of creation, of which he is incapable. Instead, according to Irigaray, he allies himself to poetic meditation as a “double of the living,” and to memory as the technique of safeguarding that is “neither simple generation nor simple creation”; it is in short, for her, “founded upon the oblivion of the poetic” (Irigaray, 2001a, p. 310).

In her reading of Heidegger’s interpretation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, that he provides in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Irigaray argues that Heidegger’s intuition of the basic trait of human nature as “violence-doing” is in fact the trait of man estranged from his own becoming; it is his projection of his interior abyss onto the exterior world around him. While, for Heidegger, man’s naming of being in terms of the gathering and revealing into the open of “what holds sway” is a violent revealing of the overwhelming, for Irigaray, Heidegger’s understanding of History as the sending of destining is nothing other than man’s own domination through the instruments of “tools, language,

intellect [and] the passions themselves,” with which he ultimately creates “another world which dominates him” and exiles himself from himself. Man is unknowingly surrounded by the world he has created, cutting himself off from relations with the other and with nature, from those beings whose becoming is other than his own and relations with whom would assist him into coming into his own (Irigaray 2001b, pp. 70/126).

Although in his later work Heidegger moves away from *technē* as the privileged mode of revealing exactly because it discloses being by forcing the concealed into the open, domination is merely exchanged for a certain passivity. Violence gives way to *Gelassenheit*, to the “releasement” towards the things of meditative thinking.¹⁸ Whereas the danger for Heidegger is that humans will lose their essential nature as meditative beings and become indifferent and thoughtless, for Irigaray what is endangered is a futural economy of potential relations. Her point is that letting be is caught up in that which already is, whereby “[e]ach word-thing [is] rediscovered in its sculpted stature within some cleared wood. . . . Nothing but a world already built, which the inhabitant discovers as his own. And reappropriates for himself, by letting it be” (1983, pp. 138–139/125).

It is not that Irigaray wants to repudiate Heidegger’s claim that language is the house of being. But she does question the totalizing nature of his claim “that we reach what is by constantly going through this house,”¹⁹ which means that the phenomena of nature are “produced-reproduced in his language, in accordance with what appears or doesn’t appear to him” (Irigaray, 1983, pp. 134/121). For Heidegger, even that which is not said, even that which remains silent as the concealed, belongs to the horizon of being. In this horizon, silence cannot be an expression of alterity, of difference, of nonunity, nor of noncompliance (1983, pp. 134/121). Rather, for Heidegger, “[t]here is no such thing as a natural language that would be the language of a human nature occurring of itself, without destiny. All language is historical [*geschichtlich*] or destined [*geschichtl*]” (1959, pp. 133/264). In this way, for Irigaray, Heidegger disallows any language of nature or alternate rhythms that would not be appropriated into the destining of being and its structure. Nature cannot speak, cannot appear outside of the destining of Being. Memory is retained in language and epochal destining, and not in the materiality of corporeal rhythms. Being for Irigaray is hence a closed system that shuts out differences that do not appear on its horizon, that draws from the reserves of nature for which it speaks (Heidegger, 1959, pp. 122/253).

She wants to remind him of his own insight that language is rooted in the body. The problem is that Heidegger slides too quickly from the body to the earth, “body and mouth” being, for him, “part of the earth’s flow and growth

in which we mortals flourish, and from which we receive the soundness of our roots." Voicing his concern that any turning to the body could too easily fall into the enframing language of physiology, a concern that some feminists have shared, he effectively evades a path that might have at least brought him to think about the question of sexual difference. Heidegger might remind us that "[i]t is just as much a property of language to sound and ring and vibrate, to hover and to tremble, as it is for the spoken words of language to carry a meaning" (1959, pp. 98/205), yet for Irigaray, the speechlessness of language that exceeds meaning does not lead us back to the earth. Rather, it is this very speechlessness that must be safeguarded in the ways that "meaning quivers and remains unstable, incomplete, unsettled, irreducible to the word" (2002a, p. 28). Rather than this instability of meaning pointing us back to being from whence meaning emerges, it is that which exposes the very possibility and accomplishment of the failure of communication between two who are different, failure that is manifested in the silence and withdrawal that both preserves the limit inherent in difference and that belies any metaphysical claim to ultimately name or designate beings. In fact, in Irigaray's account, it is the very materiality of the voice evident in women's prattling, gossiping, and inventing of myths that is a cultivating of relations between subjects, a sharing and communication that is for the sake of communicating itself.

Air, as the forgotten materiality of being that is the most near, has a presence even as it makes no appearance, even as it cannot be perceived. And breathing is the forgotten rhythm that both accomplishes our birth and separation from the one who gave us life even as it allows us to give back through a circulation of air, breath, "praise," and "living spirit." Breathing is all that is required in order to break from the "fusional proximity" with the one who gave life, and breathing allows one to then enter into relation with her as an autonomous being; separation does not require departure "for a foreign land" (2001a, p. 311).

Heidegger might intuit the way that humans are challenged forth to speak according to a formalized framework that orders, organizes, and flattens. However, Irigaray in turn reveals the saying of Heidegger's intuition of being as yet another framework that filters what appears and what does not appear, so that that which is unspoken, that "dwells in inappropriation," remains unsaid (*l'inappropriation d'un silence*) (1983, pp. 141/126). And in remaining unsaid it is not "yet shown." It has not yet reached appearance (1959, pp. 122/252). The problem is that if saying is that which reveals existence without engaging with another who is there, present and real in her otherness, then it truly is a monologue, as Heidegger intuits.

Even as the philosopher senses that one can only be lonesome because there are others, he does not intuit how one could actually engage with a sen-

sible other. In “A Dialogue on Language,” Heidegger recounts how Count Kuki “occasionally brought his wife along” when the two men met to speak. Her “festive Japanese garments,” Heidegger writes, “made the Eastasian world more luminously present, and the danger of [their] dialogues became more clearly visible” (1959, pp. 4/89). In his view this sensible apparition exposed the danger as hidden in language itself. From another perspective it might seem that the danger for Heidegger would have been to engage in dialogue with a woman known only to us as Count Kuki’s wife, whose double alterity to Heidegger as a Japanese woman might have meant they had nothing the same in common except perhaps that they were both there in each other’s presence. Dangerous as it is, however, he still likes to have her nearby to remind him of “his immediate context and of sensible perception” (Irigaray, 2001b, pp. 22/45). Yet, if the relation sought is with language, then there can be no dialogue, for “speech speaks with itself alone.” Nor can there be silence, for a safeguarded silence allows for a dialogue that has not already been said. It allows for the other to withdraw in silence: “It lets them be before any monstration, any appearing: left to their will, their growth” (Irigaray, 2002a, p. 32).

In short, phenomenology, as the methodology of revealing how things appear, privileges “the word over the real” (Irigaray, 2002a, pp.19, 50). In subjugating the senses to “the power of language,” it elevates language to that which causes a thing to exist; perception alone does not suffice (2002a, p. 31). In “*Geshlecht II*,” Jacques Derrida draws the reader’s attention to Heidegger’s equation of *Sagen* with *zeigen*, *erscheinen*-, *sehen*-, und *hören-lassen*, that is, with pointing, appearing, seeing and letting hear.²⁰ Referring to the French translation of *Zeichen* as *monstre* in Hölderlin’s poem that Heidegger cites in *Was heisst Denken?*, he suggests that the monster is perhaps “man” who points as a sign toward nothing: “We are a ‘monster’ void of sense” (1987, p. 167). The body in this account has a presence, but only as a single monstrous hand that points towards that which withdraws (Heidegger, 1961, pp. 9/6). If the feminine is that which has withdrawn in this age, as Carol Bigwood suggests,²¹ then *Dichtung*, as a handiwork, as a connecting of *Zeigen* and *Zeichen*, of pointing and of the sign as difference, points towards the feminine as that which has *not yet* “been transposed into the language of our speech . . . a sign that is not read” (Heidegger, 1961, pp.18, 52). The hand demonstrates at once an absence of meaning as well as an anticipation that this lack will be transposed into his language in the future, rather than inviting the occurrence of meaning in the present.

For Irigaray, then, to reduce *Sagen* to monstration is to cut off the possibilities of language for opening up the future through a communication between two in the present. Poetic thinking is not sufficient for providing a dwelling, for letting things be that which they are—it might unite us through

a common activity, but it does not provide an exchange that is necessary for such an “alliance”; it does not provide “the link between life and meaning.” As she explains, “[t]o ‘double’ life is both to conserve it and to annihilate it” (2001a, pp. 310–312). Her concern is that preserving and safeguarding in language, rather than safeguarding air and our relation with the other, entails a forgetting of “what we have received from the body, our debt toward that which gives and renews life” (Irigaray, 1984, pp. 100/99).

Language as revealing is an imposing of a verbal construction upon, for example, the living entity of a tree that has its own moving form. In his essay on Aristotle’s analysis of *physis*,²² an essay Irigaray specifically addresses in a short paper, “Being Two,”²³ Heidegger explains that categories “sustain all our habitual and everyday ways of addressing things.” Drawing on categories allows us to “address a present thing as a house or a tree only insofar as we have already beforehand, and without words, addressed what we encounter,” because it has already come into our “field of vision” (1976, pp. 193–194/322–323). Thus that which we have already perceived as something will shape the ways that we encounter the world and others. Irigaray’s concern is that if language merely constrains our vision of objects by revealing them according to the culturally imposed forms of their use value, then we will never see what is really there. To show, to let appear, is to impose a way of seeing upon the living world that might not coincide with the reality of that world. It is to enter into a “complicity with the already known and recognized” and to renounce “a great part of our sight” (Irigaray, 2002b, p. 144). However, if we look together at a living being, a tree for example, it can generally withstand the imposition of forms. Even if they designate it by the same name, two people who look at a tree will likely “keep their two eyes”; they will see the tree differently from each other (2002b, p. 146). As we know, the two eyes of binocular vision, with their two slightly different perspectives, allow us to see depth. Similarly, the vision of at least two people, if not colonized by the language of monstration, will provide different ways of seeing, allowing for a greater depth of field than a monocultural perspective. There is much here at stake, for Irigaray, in this age of globalization if we wish to cultivate “a language of exchange between cultures, traditions, sexes, generations. [For, a] discourse of norms already constituted cannot succeed in discovering another speech, in which the subject is situated differently in the use of language” (2002a, p. 42).

Although for both Heidegger and Irigaray language is central, there is a difference. Rather than accounting for the word in terms of monstration, in terms of relating to objects, for Irigaray the word is “nothing but an invitation to share” (2002a, p. 16). She shifts the privileging of the word over the thing and the other to a privileging of the thing and the other over the word (pp. 29–30). If, for Heidegger, the word safeguards as memory, for Irigaray, “the words do

not yet exist, and they could never exist in a definitive way” (p. 50). For, as she points out, it is not merely the formalization of language in this age of *technē* that shapes our speech in advance, it is also that it is thought to be historical, to “always already exist and impose its norms on whoever speaks” (p. 34). As monstration, the most important function of our language has become that of a tool that allows us to name the “world and its objects.” It is “the *technē*, which the speaking subject uses in order to exist in a world, to dwell in it and to continue to construct it as human” (p. 38). For Irigaray, what is called for is a change in focus from the noun to the verb, and not the verb taken only in its “operation of designation, denomination, monstration,” which still privileges a subject-object relation. Instead, what is called for are verbs that facilitate subject-subject relations, verbs that allow for speech which “can neither seize nor be seized with the calculable, nor be calculated” (p. 24).

If masculine subjectivity derives out of a nostalgic forgetting of his first dwelling as well as of the limits of his own corporeity, it is ultimately accomplished through an appropriation of nature, matter, and the maternal-feminine into the fabrication of his own universe. This masculine subjectivity, Irigaray suggests, is one of producing, fabricating, and cultivating outside of himself in order to exist, in order to separate from the one who has generated him. Indeed, she writes, perhaps the “mystery of the reign of *technē* can be explained beginning from a masculine subjectivity which is unaware of itself” (Irigaray, 2001b, p. 76/135). For the masculine subject sees himself as part of a larger social subject who has fabricated the world both materially and culturally, rather than as an individual with a limited perspective and a sexuate embodied identity. Just as the *es gibt*, which is apparently neutral, covers over the giving of the first matter of the maternal-feminine without which there would be no life and hence no beings, so too does the apparent neutrality of man as the human subject obscure the possibility of sexual difference. Man’s discovery of “himself as the origin of all making” is the result of a dominance that arises out of the forgetting that, as human, he is a “being in relation with the other” and that what follows from this being is the task of leading “the relation with the other from nature to culture without abolishing the duality of subjectivities” (2002a, p. 124). The problem is that since man is not addressed as an individual subject, it is hard for him to respond as one, preventing him from initiating a real and open relationship with the other in the present. Instead, his dialogue reflects his relation to objects rather than a relation to subjects.²⁴ He privileges erection over cultivation in building, focusing on the building of a bridge that connects the two sides of a riverbank, rather than on one that connects people. In turn, what is lacking for woman is a gendered, social, and cultural subjective identity that emerges from a passage of nature to culture.

In his analysis of Aristotle's writings on *physis*, Heidegger highlights the distinction Aristotle makes between *physei onta*, beings that grow by themselves, and *poioumena* or artifacts, beings that are made by others. What is significant for Heidegger is that this distinction covers over an originary understanding of *physis* as the "being and essence" of beings, rather than as merely the branch of being we would now call "nature" (1976, pp. 228–229/369–370).²⁵ But in Irigaray's reading we can no longer make such distinctions between beings of nature and beings made with *technē*. Instead, what is at stake is the becoming of the subject into his or her own nature through the mediation of culture. Technique does not have to refer only to making things or objects whereby the *eidōs* and *telos* of the object stands in view beforehand. Instead, for a human being making can be interior as well as exterior, a technique of the self including perhaps "withdrawals, silences, questionings, etc." (2002a, pp. 112–114). This means that what is essential to being human is not the capacity to manufacture and produce "a world thanks to a technique," nor to make it appear through language; rather what is distinctive to being human is "the ability to create invisibility" (2002b, p. 147). What is distinctive is the human capacity to modulate a relation with the other as part of the subject's own becoming.

For Heidegger, the possibility of a turning out of our subjection to a commandeering order might exist in appropriation (*Ereignis*) as the "insight whose illuminating lightening flash" could enter "into what is and what is taken to be" (1959, pp. 133/264). For Irigaray, however, this commandeering order is not the *Gestell* of metaphysics, but rather the *technē* of *logos* in which the feminine cannot be grasped and hence not encountered, where she "dwells in the inappropriation [*l'inappropriement*] of a silence [as the i]nvisible base for all reproduction of the visible" (1983, pp. 141/126–127). For her, the potentiality for transformation might occur with the recognition that nature, the material, cannot be "bowed to the technical imperatives of the information sciences." The turning out of the danger might occur when the "boundary of man's perceptual field" is made to appear by technology, that is, when it becomes apparent that he sees "every being from his sole and exclusive point of view," and that nature, which has been "excluded from history," might have its turn to speak (1983, pp. 141–142/127).

In her alternate account, what is required is "some lightning strike of love . . . some flash or illumination in order to reopen the path of proximity" which is prevented by a constructed world (2002a, p. 158). For Irigaray, love generates wonder,²⁶ and it is wonder that opens up time and space, creating an interval between two who listen and attend to each other, rather than an abyss that must be leapt over. The place of proximity "where life still palpitates" is perhaps nature itself; it is that place that precedes the constructions of culture, where we

“live together with the other in a communion preceding language itself.” Because proximity precedes identity and difference, it also allows for the openness of identity, whereby it is “never definitively constituted, nor defined beforehand,” where it is always open to the possible (2002a, p. 93). In short, the risks of technology might be averted if the relation between two were privileged over that of our relation to technology, or to the *technē* of language (2002a, p. 42).

In *On the Way to Language* Heidegger distinguishes humans from animals, concluding first that mortals speak only in response to language, and second that since mortals are those who “can experience death as death,” then clearly there is an “essential” if “unthought” relation between language and death (1959, pp. 107/215). For Irigaray, however, what is distinctive about humans is their ability to be in relation with each other, thereby preserving a free space between them, an interval in which they are able to presence; this free space is opened up in the present through dialogue between two subjects and two worlds (2002a, pp. 167, 162). If perception is linked to language as monstration, then the other is seized, named, and reproduced according to knowledge that has already been produced. Rather than death, understood in terms of this safeguarding in language, a “cultivation of Life” calls for a respect for what exists in reality, rather than for what is according to “another end than itself,” that of language and being (2001a, p. 310). This respect is achieved through the encounter or dialogue between living beings.

Although Irigaray’s works can on the one hand be read as highly critical of Heidegger’s thought, on the other hand it is evident that she would not have become the thinker she is without the dialogue she initiated with his ideas, a dialogue that is exemplary of the becoming in relation to others which lies at the heart of her project. Irigaray has been criticized for her prioritizing of sexual difference and her neglect of, or worse, distortion of other differences such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexualities other than the heterosexual norm. The purpose of this paper has not been to specifically address these concerns, but rather to explore the philosophical underpinnings of this claim in their indebtedness to Heidegger’s own thinking, an understanding of which, I would argue, is necessary for adequately considering her claim to the prioritizing of sexual difference. For Irigaray’s concern is that if this first difference that is most proximate is not acknowledged, then we will fail to recognize or adequately take into account other “diversities that compose the human species” in accordance with “their subjective differences”; instead we risk reducing them to “secondary elements” or limiting them “to a simple genetic inheritance” (2002a, p. 120). Similarly, I have tried to show how it is important to begin with this proximate relation between the two thinkers in order to fully assess Irigaray’s project. Heidegger’s insights into the end of metaphysics, identity, and difference, as well as

relations within the same belong, for Irigaray, to a great thinker whose “light” she attempts to gather in, even as she respects the difference between their worlds (2001a, p. 315).

Notes

1. Luce Irigaray, “From *The Forgetting of Air* to *To be Two*,” trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček. In *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington, eds. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001a), p. 315.

2. Irigaray, *L’oubli de l’air chez Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983); translated as *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999): hereafter the first page number will refer to the English edition, the second to the French.

3. Irigaray, *The Way of Love* (London: Continuum, 2002a). Note: there is no French edition of this book.

4. There are now finally a small number of articles on this intersection of thinking between Irigaray and Heidegger. Besides others I will refer to in this paper, see, for example, Joanna Hodge, “Irigaray Reading Heidegger,” and Ellen Mortensen, “Women’s Untruth and le féminin: Reading Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger,” in *Engaging with Irigaray*, eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); David Farrell Krell, “Final Signs of Life: Heidegger and Irigaray,” in *Daimon Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992); Tina Chanter, “Irigaray, Heidegger and the Greeks,” in *Ethics of Eros* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Stacy Keltner, “The Ethics of Air: Technology and the Question of Sexual Difference,” and Ann V. Murphy, “The Enigma of the Natural in Luce Irigaray,” *Philosophy Today* 2001 (SPEP Supplement): 53–65, 75–83; and Alison Stone, “Irigaray and Hölderlin on the relation between Nature and Culture,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003): 415–432.

5. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Originally published as *Unterwegs Zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959). Hereafter the first page number refers to the English edition, the second to the German.

6. Heidegger, “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), p. 215; originally published in German as “. . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . .” In *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954); republished (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta), p. 183. Hereafter the first page number refers to the English edition, the second to the German.

7. Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 148; “*Bauen Wohnen Denken*,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954); republished (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta), p. 142. Hereafter the first page number refers to the English edition, the second to the German.

8. Krzysztof Ziarek, "Proximities: Heidegger and Irigaray on Difference," *Continental Philosophy Review* 33 (2000): 133–158. Ziarek provides a detailed and extremely helpful account of Heidegger and Irigaray on nearness and proximity.

9. See also *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). Originally published as *Identität und Differenz* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1957).

10. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 138; originally published as *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), p. 131. Hereafter the first page number refers to the English edition, the second to the French.

11. Heidegger, *Vier Seminare* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), p. 70. English translation, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 39.

12. Irigaray refers at times to "at least two," but even this structure requires the recognition of the two of sexual difference in order to make the acknowledgement of other differences possible.

13. The German word for memory, *Gedächtnis*, contains the root word *Denken*, to think.

14. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 11; originally published as *Was Heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1961), p. 7. Hereafter the first page number refers to the English edition, the second to the German.

15. Maria Cimitile convincingly argues that "the mourning of air/woman/mother/nature is replaced with Being/language/thinking, in the same way that the symbiotic mother-child relation is replaced with the phallus that symbolizes language and meaning and culture in general." See "The Horror of Language: Irigaray and Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* 2001 (SPEP Supplement): 70. As we learn from Freud, to mourn is to take up the loss of the loved one in language, whereas melancholy results when there is no recognition of the loss, which means it cannot be worked out through language.

16. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *Standard Edition* 14 (1917), pp. 243–258.

17. Irigaray, *To be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (New York: Routledge, 2001b), p. 57; in French, *Être Deux* (Paris: Édition Grasset & Fasquelle, 1997), p. 104. Originally published as *Essere Due* (Bollati Boringhieri, 1994). Hereafter, the first page number given will refer to the English edition, the second to the French. This book also contains a substantial dialogue with Heidegger.

18. Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959).

19. Heidegger, "What are Poets For?," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 132; originally published as "Wozu Dichter?," in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), p. 310.

20. Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand," trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., in *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 167; Heidegger, 1959, pp. 122/252.

21. Carol Bigwood, *Earth Muse* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 29–38.

22. Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of *Physis* in Aristotle's *Physics B*, 1," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); originally published as "Vom Wesen und Begriff der *Physis* Aristoteles' *Physik B*, 1," in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976). Hereafter the first page number will refer to the English edition, the second to the German.

23. Irigaray, "Being Two, How Many Eyes Have We," *Paragraph* 25.3 (2002b): 143–151.

24. Irigaray summarizes this material in her essay, "Importance du genre dans la constitution de la subjectivité et de l'intersubjectivité," *Le partage de la parole* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre of the University of Oxford, 2001).

25. For further discussion, see Helen Fielding, "Questioning Nature: Irigaray, Heidegger and the potentiality of matter," *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003): 1–26.

26. Ziarek (2000) takes this up in some detail, p. 149.

Twelve

FORGIVING “*LA DETTE IMPENSÉE*”:
BEING JEWISH AND READING HEIDEGGER

Allen Scult

I am a Jew who reads Heidegger. Nothing remarkable in that! There are many who do. Of course the relationship does require a bit of maintenance work around the edges in order to preserve an appropriate emotional distance from the man-as-he-lived, while at the same time permitting the most intense intellectual and spiritual intimacy with the man-as-he-thought-and-wrote. In certain moods, the difficulty and delicacy of this maneuver loom large, and Heidegger's active and passive complicity in the horrendous adventure of National Socialism threatens to prohibit a seriously focused philosophical reading of his work. This essay is not written in one of those moods.

Not that thoughts of those times don't occasionally haunt, even immobilize me. But just at the point when one such episode threatened to permanently sever my relationship with Heidegger, I was lucky enough to come across Hannah Arendt's remarkable essay, “Heidegger at Eighty.” The passage with which she ends the piece has served to ground Heidegger's thinking for me in a time neither his nor mine, and therefore safe from both of us:

The wind that blows through Heidegger's thinking—like that which still sweeps towards us after thousands of years from the work of Plato—does not spring from the century he happens to live in. It comes from the primeval, and what it leaves behind is something perfect, something which, like everything perfect (in Rilke's words), falls back to where it came from.¹

But even as the seemingly transcendental reach of his words enables an overcoming of the haunting recollection of his historical time and place, one is still faced with Heidegger's stark silence on the Jews and Judaism, not only after 1933, but before, from the very beginning! I speak here not of his silence on the so-called Jewish question in Germany before, during, and after the war. This again is a personal matter, having to do with philosophy only insofar as it might

hinder a direct encounter with Heidegger's work. The silence I speak of is not personal. Not even political. Rather, it is philosophical—decidedly so, because it is actively constitutive of Heidegger's thought. Indeed, though we might call it a "silence," it is more precisely a silencing—an aggressively uttered *Schweigen Sie*, arguably intended to shut out the Jews and deny their place in the history of thinking. As one considers all the fruitful connections Heidegger might have made with the rich resources of Jewish tradition, the severity of the exclusion seems to call for the inevitable charges to be made once again. John Caputo responds with typical directness: "The ugly truth is . . . that Heidegger is of a mind to make the West *Judenrein*, which is to reproduce on the level of 'thinking' what the Nazis were doing in the streets."²

As the force of Caputo's remark indicates, this silencing cannot be dismissed, for, as he goes on to argue, it effectively limits Heidegger's philosophical horizon to the "small world [bounded by] the tiny triangle traced by Freiburg, Todtnauberg, and Messkirch,"³ and connected by a single line of the tradition to ancient Athens. Perhaps Heidegger's view of the historical lineage of his thinking—how he traces his thought back through one tradition rather than another—need not have called attention to itself had not Heidegger himself placed such importance on a precise delineation of the "effective history" which phenomenologically drives thinking. So many of Heidegger's groundbreaking texts begin with a "correction of course" consisting of a rigorously thought acknowledgement of the debt to the "first beginning" which in turn makes possible a "new beginning." In the light shed by this "correction," Heidegger is able to discover a heretofore undisclosed possibility, where others might have simply seen an historical curiosity. He emphasizes this point in guiding his students to a proper orientation to Aristotle:

It is not merely an annex for illustrating how things were earlier . . . not an opportunity for projection of entertaining world-historical perspectives. The destruction is rather the authentic path upon which the present must encounter itself in its own basic movements; and it must encounter itself in such a way that through this encounter the continual question springs forth from history to face the present: To what extent is it (the present) itself worried [*bekümmert*] about the appropriations of radical possibilities of basic experiences and about their interpretations?⁴

One cannot conduct a properly focused inquiry into the radical possibilities of human existence without being directed (appropriated) by the appropriate "preoccupations." In this lecture course, Heidegger re-enacts his own "apprenticeship" to Aristotle, showing how a fully engaged reading of a classi-

cal text can guide the proper focusing of philosophical preoccupation. This establishing of proper focus, amidst the scattered distractions of one’s present, becomes an essential characteristic of the reading of texts as a framework for philosophical practice. Our capacity to be preoccupied (*bekümmert*) provides a magnifying lens for determining the proper perspective on our factic experience—our take, as it were, on the comings and goings of everyday existence.

But what if the lineage Heidegger lays out to guide the focus of his philosophical preoccupation is deficient, and the rigorously conceived “new beginning” fails to take account of an essential aspect of its own becoming? Heidegger himself seems to suggest that if there lies an “unthought source” within one’s thought, directing its course without one’s knowledge, the careful reiteration of the path of thinking—so crucial to determining its focus and course—is radically thrown out of kilter. The unthought source casts a shadow over the clear view of one’s factual “being-out-toward,” essential for a philosopher of Heidegger’s announced hermeneutical sensibility. The mirror he holds up for hermeneutical self-reflection is concave where it should be convex, convex where it should be concave! And so the work sees itself as other than it is. What are claimed to be clear-sighted indications of the relationship between facticity and ontology are blurred by the subjective content of Heidegger’s own life.

Thinking Heidegger’s Debts

This “wrong turn” is precisely the focus of Marlène Zarader’s remarkable book, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*. Zarader begins with a detailed delineation of the striking structural analogy between hermeneutical phenomenology as we find it in the later Heidegger and in the fundamental revelation texts of the Old Testament. In a recent essay, John Caputo gives us a short, straightforward summation of what Zarader concludes from this similarity:

[Heidegger’s] discourse of call, address and response . . . is borrowed from the biblical tradition of a salvation history, from the religions of the Book, which are set in motion by the Shema, the sacred command or call—‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord Thy God is One’—a command that defines and identifies a sacred people: one God, one people, one place.⁵

Caputo not only correctly identifies a central point of contact between Heideggerian and Jewish hermeneutics here, but he goes on to point out its significance

for contemporary philosophy: by harking back to the ancient rhetorical practice of treating the words of certain texts as personally addressing the reader in a live authoritative voice, Heidegger's hermeneutics "invents" a revolutionary way of doing philosophy:

In contrast to almost anyone else who has studied what Heidegger refuses to call the 'Presocratics' or Plato or Aristotle, Heidegger reads these texts not as discourses about [*peri*] *physis*, *logos*, or *aletheia*, not as investigations of a subject matter, works of theory and thematization, of *episteme* or *Wissenschaft*, but as texts that call to us, that call upon us and ask for our response, that constitute us westerners as being's people, people who belong [*gehören*] to being, who are enowned by being as being's own.⁶

But of course, Heidegger never acknowledges the strong resonances here to Jewish hermeneutics. Zarader attributes this lack of acknowledgement to "other assertions,"⁷ which called for Heidegger's attention. And so this rather mystical relationship to a text, which serves as a cornerstone of Jewish hermeneutics, resurfaces in Heidegger, according to Zarader, "without ever being identified"⁸—with its forgotten and repressed ties to Judaism transfigured: the voice of God becomes the voice of Being; the People of God, the recipients of the call, are relocated in the German *Volk*, with Heidegger himself as bearer of the message. Zarader's intention seems clearly to expose Heidegger's impersonation of a Hebrew prophet (she refers to his appropriation here as "smuggling")⁹ and to introduce a countervailing hermeneutic which puts Heidegger's way of speaking "in its place," leaving us to think, with Richard Rorty, that at best, "Heideggerise is only Heidegger's gift to us, not Being's gift to Heidegger."¹⁰

Caputo goes even further, extending Zarader's contention into an "exordium," arguing that *any* philosophical ethnocentrism which privileges a people or a person as having special access to the hermeneutical resources of language is not only ethically reprehensible but philosophically untenable: the Language of Being could not possibly be "elitist," that is, constituted in a way as to be heard only by certain ears and not by others, simply because of the "racial bodies" to which those ears happen to be attached. As a condition of language, Caputo's "fairness doctrine" knows no exceptions. So, in the following passage at the end of the essay, Caputo suggests that Judaism also must forgo the elitist dimension of its hermeneutic:

We need to break with the deeply hierarchical logic of original and derivative, with the myth of the originary language, the originary people, the orig-

inal land by means of which Heidegger reproduces the myth of God's chosen people, of God's promised land, which is no less a problem for religion and the root of its violence.¹¹

One can easily agree with the sentiments expressed here. The sort of ethnocentrism which lends entitlement to the oppression, displacement, and genocide of those it sees as congenitally inferior is equally contemptible, whether that ethnocentrism be Jewish, German, or Muslim. But this sentiment misses the point. As a hermeneutical principle, the presumption of an "originary language" exists solely for the purpose of constructing a relationship with a text in order to understand that text at the deepest levels of possible meaning. In order to pursue that goal with the single-mindedness required, this approach cannot be pluralistic. It must operate under the conditions of language as we have it—insistently and stubbornly singular. As Derrida puts the matter, "I am monolingual. My monolingualism dwells and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. It inhabits me . . . an absolute habitat."¹² The democratization of this primordially exclusivist relationship with language would require extraditing language from its natural habitat, a fatal mistake for a hermeneutical phenomenology concerned with the authenticity of origins.

The Hebrew in which the Torah comes to the Jews cannot be just another language. It is the language of languages: *Lashon Hakodesh*, the Holy Language. In order to be heard, to appropriately "bear its message and tidings,"¹³ such a language must be loved exclusively, above all others. One is gifted with the possibility of this love, and as with any such gift, can only choose to respond or not to respond. The textual object of one's hermeneutical love is not of one's own choosing. Rather one is chosen by it. We must set aside our judgment of whatever other satisfactions Heidegger may have derived from being able to declare, "Das Wort ' Philosophie' spricht jetzt griechisch,"¹⁴ and examine where it leads him, and where he leads us.

Augustine had given Heidegger the hermeneutical dispensation he needed: *Dilige et quod vis fac* (Love and do what you will). He came to unconditionally value early Greek thought, especially Heraclitus and Parmenides, and concluded that in those texts is found the true dawn of thinking in Western civilization. The intensity of this valuing led Heidegger to read these texts with an extraordinarily careful attention to the words. This is what makes Heidegger worth following: the diligence (*diligere*) with which he follows the words which direct him on his path.

Such a hermeneutic requires that the imagination be prepared to follow the words of the text wherever those words might lead. The faithfulness of purpose here must proceed with the will fully engaged. Paul Ricoeur calls this

moment of unquestioned commitment to understanding the “hermeneutics of affirmation.” It is a way of loving for the sake of the relationship to the beloved. The yield here is understanding as such—for itself, of itself, good for nothing else. Aside from understanding the language of the text as a “thing in itself,” this hermeneutic is not only useless but downright dangerous.

This devotional commitment to the words of a particular text—what Heidegger calls *Hingabe* (translated by Kisiel as “categorical immersion”)¹⁵ is, as Caputo observes, also the message of the prayer which hermeneutically anchors every Jewish service, the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord Thy God is One.” This Oneness is glossed in Deuteronomy with a disposition on the singular love God requires: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee on this day shall be in thy heart. Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children . . .” Zarader and Caputo see this central imperative of the *Shema* as being at the core of Heidegger’s “borrowing.” I would argue that the apparent similarity arises out of the exigencies of Heidegger’s own hermeneutical phenomenology.

Had Heidegger chosen to build his ontology upon two pillars rather than one, as Caputo and Zarader seem to suggest he should have—if he acknowledged this putative debt to Judaism—he would have had to “think it” as a competing preoccupation. In Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology, the narrow intentionality of focus on the “formally indicating historical” serves to forge a bond between the words of the text and the thinker who thinks in those words. At this level of hermeneutical intensity, to acknowledge the bond is to incur an obligation, as Heidegger did in relation to Heraclitus and Parmenides, to be sure, but perhaps most significantly to Aristotle. The rendering of this obligation moves Heidegger to perform his “hermeneutical debt” to Aristotle as ground for the elaboration of his own thinking (see especially *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles* [1922] and the course *Grundbegriffe der Aristotelischen Philosophie* [SS 1924]).

Heidegger’s diligent rendering of his hermeneutical obligation had to be directed solely at the text which inspired it. His primary philosophical preoccupations were aroused by Aristotle, and so it is Aristotle to whom Heidegger owes his debt. Through the carefully worked out acknowledgment of this obligation—and this obligation exclusively—Heidegger develops the basic hermeneutical structure of his ontology.

I find myself in a relationship to Heidegger similar to the one he bore in relationship to Aristotle. “Being Jewish”¹⁶ thus serves a mediating function, enabling a more thorough thinking through with Heidegger of the basic structure of the hermeneutical relationship. It is to that dimension of “Being Jewish” that Heidegger communicates an already existing set of preoccupations:

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Communication accordingly means the enabling of the appropriation of that about which the discourse is, that is making it possible to come into a relationship of preoccupation and being to that which the discourse is. Discourse as communication brings about an appropriation of the world in which one always already is with one another. . . . Speaking with one another about something is not an exchange of experiences back and forth between subjects, but a situation where the being-with-one-another is intimately involved in the subject matter under discussion. And it is only by way of this subject matter, in the particular context of always already being-with in the world, that mutual understanding [*Sichverstehen*] develops.¹⁷

This is Heidegger’s “gift” to me: a communication which brings me, in my being-in-the-world as “Being Jewish,” to a *Sichverstehen*, induced by his words and enabled by the space he leaves. I don’t begrudge him his unacknowledged debt, his apparently unthought connection to the being of Jewish tradition. He wouldn’t have gotten it right anyway!

I am left to read the hermeneutical structure of Heidegger’s relationship to Aristotle as a mutually understood preoccupation, not as the trace of an unacknowledged debt but a thinking on its own of a possibility of existence. The basis of this shared preoccupation is the “formally indicating historical” as it is communicated in Aristotle’s words to Heidegger and Heidegger’s words to me. My understanding of how the formal indication¹⁸ works here—that is, how it is employed by Heidegger to “show” to “Being Jewish” its relationship to reading Heidegger reading Aristotle—requires some elaboration. One of Heidegger’s clearest and most useful explications of this elusive concept is in the introductory section of the *Phenomenology of Religion*:

We shall call the methodic use of a sense which is conducive to phenomenological explication the “formal indication.” Its task is to prefigure the direction of this explication. It points the way and guides the deliberation. The phenomena are viewed on the basis of the bearing of the formally indicating sense. But even though it guides the phenomenological deliberation, contentwise, it has nothing to say.¹⁹

The formal indication must be read, not for its content, but as a “formal” prolegomena to the succeeding argument, guiding and setting a direction through the communication of a preoccupation which extends to the reader the “appropriation” experienced by the author. The formal indication communicates an orientation towards the *Sache*. But in order to properly fulfill its function, the formal indication must be read as a formal indication—given its due,

so to speak. It must be permitted to function as a relational event in and of itself, an invitation to the reader to enter into an intimate collaboration with the author in investigating a universal possibility of existence. If one chooses instead to keep one's distance, to judge the author from afar as simply justifying an already existing biased subjectivity, the hermeneutical bond created with the author is inadequate to the task, for the words guiding the collaborative effort must be entered into in good faith, with respect for their complete adequacy in preserving the given-ness of a universal possibility of existence. Only so can the possibility of existence borne by the words be fully comprehended.

“Being Jewish” and Heidegger’s Hermeneutics:
Acknowledging a *Sichverstehen*

This sort of intimacy with a text rather closely follows the contours of the Jewish tradition’s view of its own unfolding: “Being Jewish” comes about in each generation—indeed in each individual Jew in each generation—through a devoted commitment to a certain way of reading the Torah. That is, the way in which each individual Jew becomes who he or she already is—most fully realizes his or her own-most potential of “Being Jewish”—is through a lifelong commitment to the careful reading of the Torah.

Indeed, I would argue that any serious ontological undertaking requires a particularly intense factual experience in which and through which the ontology will be thought.²⁰ But one must take care that the thinking does not emerge directly out of that facticity. If that were to occur, the ontology would always remain in the service of the facticity from which it was derived. It must go through a kind of temporal filter, which involves more than just the passage of time. I would say (at least on the basis of the two cases at hand) that as the factual ground of thinking, religious experience must be “abandoned,” at least momentarily, as the essential ground of one’s faith.²¹ Or perhaps we might more accurately say that one’s thinking must have been “abandoned by” the experience, cut off from it, as a call to faith. Whichever way one conceives of the occurrence, for purposes of thinking, one’s factic essentiality must no longer be in thrall to religion.²² Dasein must have had the experience of having been “let go”—we might say “set free”—by religion as its primary preoccupation (*Bekümmern*).

It should be emphasized that this “letting go” is not at all complete, though I cannot specify the degree of its “incompleteness.” However, I can say that the “letting go” is sufficiently incomplete as to leave one with the lingering sense of still being fundamentally connected to the originary experience, such that

one is preoccupied with a longing to somehow return to it. In the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger likens this condition to a "homesickness."²³ As the ground of philosophy, the longing to be home directs one not to a particular place but toward "being as a whole": "The philosophical subject longs to be at home everywhere at once, and at all times within the whole."²⁴ This "within the whole" is named by Heidegger "World." The longing to be at home everywhere might be characterized as the unrequited ontological promise which philosophy carries with it from the originary factic experience of religion. Though still decidedly unrequited, the promise of "being at home everywhere at the same time" shows itself differently in philosophy than it did in religion. Originally, the promise seemed contained within the factic particularity of religious experience as a call to faith. However, before one has had the chance to fully "compose oneself" to respond to the call, its "content"—what it seems to be calling one to—becomes other than a call to faith, at least to a particular religious faith. Nevertheless, the personal force with which it "knowingly" addresses each individual Dasein is just as compelling, even though the home Dasein is called to is not identifiable as anyplace local. Whether the promise of homecoming is conceived of as local, universal, or somehow both, "One can't go home again." Probably because there is no such place. Indeed there probably never was. Being-at-home-everywhere-at-once must be philosophically "created," but at the same time still must also be grounded in the originary factic experience of "home," localized within a particular religion. Heidegger explains this phenomenon as part and parcel of Dasein's "being historical":

Dasein, however, is in itself historical in so far as it is its possibility. In being futural dasein is its past. It comes back to it in the 'how.' The manner of its coming back is among other things, conscience. Only the 'how' can be repeated. The past, experienced as authentic historicity, is anything but what is past. It is something to which one can return again and again.²⁵

This repeatable "how" of authentic historicity I identify with Heidegger's reference, in the 1922 "Aristotle Introduction," to the central thematic of philosophy as "The being in the how of its being moved."²⁶ The possibility of return to the "how" provides a certain—though uncertain—indication of the authenticity of the historical moment, now philosophically affirmed as one's essential "I am." Even though this indication of authenticity is merely provisional, put in place to mark the factic ground from which the work of ontology might proceed, it is sufficient to maintain the original factic experience as philosophically available in its "how," as still somehow "there" as *Heimat*, the place to

which one belongs. But now, in philosophy, the call to *Heimat* is made more difficult to hear and interpret because of its refusal to be localized—its insistence on being THERE for philosophical Dasein only everywhere at once.

Heidegger distinguishes “the call,” as it appears in religion from the “call” in philosophy this way: “[In philosophy] Dasein is at once the caller and the one called.”²⁷ Philosophy forces upon the thinker the realization that the originary experience of the call as coming from some “foreign power invading Dasein” was merely a necessary prelude to the earthshaking discovery that Dasein stands alone. Heretofore, the soul-invading power of the call seemed as if it could only have come from God. Indeed, one might have even heard the call as, in some way, spoken in God’s voice. But that celestial voice, heard paradoxically as compellingly local, but at the same time resoundingly universal, was always Dasein-with-itself, the binding together of the particular with the universal. When one returns through philosophy to the “how” of the originary call, “The manner of its coming back, is, among other things conscience.”²⁸ One might also say that what Dasein is calling itself “to” through the call of conscience is (and always has been) “care.” Yet the way to understand care—to think it ontologically—still must be grounded in the facticity of the originary call “being what it was.” Thinking the call as the call to care links its present showing as conscience to its originary factual showing as the call of faith and thus makes a factically grounded ontology possible.

In the case of “Being Jewish,” the locus classicus of the originary factic call of care is in Joshua 1:9: “The book of the law (The Torah) shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.” The conscientious care of the Jew is summoned by and directed to the words of the Torah. “Being Jewish” in the how of its being moved is thus profoundly hermeneutical—a dwelling with the words of a sacred text. Thus the true *Heimat* of the Jew is not so much the Land of Israel as the text of the Torah, a text which has the power to transform a wilderness of desert and sagebrush into a “promised land, flowing with milk and honey.” Even without the land, the promissory power of the word remains, arguably even strengthened by exile from the localized physical place. “Being Jewish” turns out to be an ongoing responsibility, carried along on one’s wanderings from place to place, to interpret and re-interpret the word in order to continue to heed its call. In another Biblical text, central to rabbinic Judaism, this ongoing responsibility to interpret is itself interpreted as “teaching” the word “diligently to thy children.”²⁹ The constancy of one’s relationship to the word is how Judaism is transmitted from generation to generation. The “how” of this originary experience of connection to the word, always available to repetition through teaching, is perhaps most poignantly indicated in the Rabbinic adage that every Jew is responsible to feel

as though he himself stood at Sinai and heard the words of the Law. This originary experience of having been there and "heard" the Word is what drives the teaching of it. The transmission of the word as lived experience is part and parcel of the response one is called to make.

This induced experience of somehow "having been there" accompanies one's ongoing sense of "Being Jewish." One's capacity to hear the words with the originary force of their utterance remains palpably real, such that even if one is no longer observant, one nonetheless can find oneself occasionally "taken" with the words of the Torah in somewhat the same way. This time, however, the implications one draws from the experience are not the same. Still finding that the words of the Torah can sometimes draw one into a powerful and personal relationship with them, but now without any of the familiar, conventional ground for such experiences of connection, frees one to experience that relationship to other words in other texts until finally one finds oneself in philosophy, committed to an ongoing inquiry into one's relationship with words, a relationship which not only gives the text the power to speak, but to speak what seems like the truth. Though the relationship, as it is factually available for philosophical study, is never entirely separate from its original content or context as Torah, it is never again reducible to it. Once its philosophical value is foregrounded, the originary relationship to the words of the Torah becomes a "formal indication" of a possibility of philosophical existence. The hermeneutical work of phenomenology begins with the discovery of such possibilities which remain available in one's facticity, but now only as formal indications of ontology.

The particularity of "Being Jewish" thus becomes a resource to draw on—a pattern of historical connections indicating an ontological possibility. This indication can be relied upon because it is grounded in the particular factic forms through which history continually unfolds. These forms comprise the set of hermeneutical connections indicated by the word *Tradition*. The words in certain texts seem capable of binding successive generations of interpreters together in a community of understanders. The authority which informs this interpretive tradition as it unfolds provides the community with an ongoing warrant to believe that the truth—or at least a version of it appropriate to the community's being-in-the-world—lies somehow within its hermeneutical ken. Not at one time and in one place, but in all times and in all places. This is the wonder which gives rise to what Gadamer calls "The Universal Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection":³⁰ How do we account for the fact that the movement of tradition in history—that is, particular facticities in the how of their being moved—appears everywhere to be basically the same?

It is this most basic question, giving hermeneutical reflection its universal (ontological) scope, which links "Being Jewish" to "Reading Heidegger."

Though historically grounded in religious autobiography, “Being Jewish” is factually gifted with a relationship to the word which throws philosophical Dasein into a lifelong project of questioning the relationship. Of course, this relationship to the word is not at all confined to factually being Jewish any more than Heidegger’s statement to Löwith, “Factically I am a Christian theologian,”³¹ limited the range of the ontological thinking that it grounded.

Can we attribute to religion such a “fundamentality”—even as a way of speaking—without foreshortening the reach of the ontology it gives rise to? I would argue that the basis of Heidegger’s ontology, that is, the way he is given to “speak” it, is, in fact, “fundamentally” religious, but it is not religion identified, or identifiable, as such. Religion here represents a possibility of existence enacted through a deep commitment to a text. When enacted concretely, that commitment yields a formal understanding of the primary hermeneutical relationship. When one allows oneself to be unconditionally intimate with the words of the text, one’s relationship with those words is then open to being fully determined by Dasein’s orientation to the world. This orientation reflects a way of being-with which reveals the “discoveredness” (*Entdecktheit*) of the world as we have it with one another: “It is rather a matter of being-with-one-another becoming manifest in the world, specifically by way of the discovered world, which itself becomes manifest in speaking with one another.”³² This mutual understanding of a discovered world Heidegger sees as coterminous with the articulated discoveredness of Dasein as being-with. The intense bond between a religious community and the text which defines it is but a prime instance of the more universal configuration which accompanies the phenomenon of “discoveredness.”

It is this experience of discoveredness which I find reflected in my own reading of Heidegger, especially Heidegger reading those texts of classical Greece in which he discovered the path of his own thinking. This path arises out of the repeated (and repeatable) hermeneutical configuration which informs the movement of tradition through time. The experience of reading Heidegger I am trying to account for here has been for me a series of returns to the authentic “how” of being Jewish as a way of reading particular texts, whose words seem to connect one to the place from which one comes through a reenactment of the primordial always-already-having-been of the relationship between Dasein and the Word.

Notes

1. Hannah Arendt, “Heidegger at Eighty,” (reprinted in Michael Murray, ed., *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 293–303.

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2. John Caputo, “People of God, People of Being: The Theological Presuppositions of Heidegger’s Path of thought,” in James Falconer, Mark Wrathall eds, *Appropriating Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 91.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

4. *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation*, ed. by Hans-Ulrich Lessing, *Dilthey-Jahrbuch* 6 (1928), 235–274; translated by Michael Baur, *Man and World* 25 [1992, 371 (German 249)].

5. Caputo, p. 88.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Marlène Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 80.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Richard Rorty, “Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and the Reification of Language,” in R. Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 65.

11. Caputo, p. 98.

12. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 1.

13. This is from Heidegger’s very “rhetorical” definition of hermeneutics in “The Dialogue on Language,” in *On The Way To Language*, trans. P. D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 29.

14. *What is Philosophy*, trans. William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde (New Haven, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1958), 28.

15. Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 35.

16. Because in most of the cases that follow “Being Jewish” becomes a sort of “character” in the narrative, with an identity of its own (separate from, though, of course, related “by tradition,” to author), I decided to capitalize it and set it off in quotes, hoping the reader will grant “Being Jewish” its due (whatever that might be) as the narrative unfolds.

17. Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 263.

18. My introduction to the importance of this concept in Heidegger’s thought came from Daniel Dahlstrom, “Heidegger’s Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications,” *Review of Metaphysics* (June, 1994): 775–795.

19. See Kisiel’s translation-summary in *Genesis*, p. 164.

20. Heidegger emphasizes the significance of this “through which” by using the word *Erlebnisse* to characterize the deep impact made by such factic experiences (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], p. 72, fn. 1).

21. I describe below the details of how Heidegger’s factic experience as a “Christian theologian,” by his own admission, serves to hermeneutically ground his ontology.

22. The importance of Dasein’s being “in thrall to Dasein-with and to itself” (*BT*, p. 206), receives particular emphasis in Heidegger’s “charge” to the students in the introduction to SS 1924: “Human life has in itself the possibility to depend only upon itself, to manage without faith, religion and the like.” (*Das menschliche Leben hat in sich die Möglichkeit, sich einzig auf sich selbst zu stellen, auszukommen ohne Glauben, ohne Religion und dergleichen.*) *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie, Gesamtausgabe, Band 18* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), p. 6. Translation mine.

23. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 5.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

25. *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 19.

26. Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen . . .*, p. 373.

27. *Being and Time*, p. 323.

28. *Concept of Time*, p. 19.

29. *Deuteronomy*, 6:7.

30. “On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,” reprinted in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David Linge (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), pp. 18–43.

31. The letter to Löwith in which this is found is reprinted in Kisiel, p. 78.

32. Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time . . .*, p. 263.

Thirteen

THE POVERTY OF HEIDEGGER'S "LAST GOD"

Jean Greisch

In this chapter, I will attempt to analyse the "reframing" that the philosophical and theological question of God undergoes in Martin Heidegger's thought at the time of "the turning."¹ At the moment that I write this essay, that "turning" is confirmed by an important collection of three of Heidegger's books: *Beiträge zur Philosophie*,² written between 1936 and 1938; *Besinnung* (1938/39);³ and *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (1938–49).⁴ My interrogation will focus on one question alone: a question that follows the lead of a previous inquiry into the way Heidegger displaces the question of God in the hermeneutical phenomenology that emerged in the late 1920s as a fundamental ontology, a question that itself opens onto a "metaphysics of Dasein."⁵ This inquiry into the manner in which the "God" does or does not come into the "metaphysic of Dasein" rests on the threshold of a question which I give a deliberately provocative twist: What are we to do with Heidegger's "last God"? This question has troubled me ever since I first walked along the "country path" in Messkirch. In spite of its provocative appearance, it only conveys the perplexities that the figure of the "last God" provokes in me—a figure that emerges in Heidegger's thinking at the time of the "turning." The reflections that follow are an attempt to confront these difficulties anew.

I hope that the careful examination of the different occurrences of the theme of the "last God" in the texts that I just mentioned will not be a simple *paregon* with respect to the guiding question of these essays and that my reflections are neither marginal in comparison with the vast terrain of interrogation illuminated by the work of HJ Adriaanse assembled under the title of *Vom Christentum aus*.⁶ My study would seek to resonate with the particularly stimulating reflections in the fourth section of that book which treats of the problem of God. I would like to explain myself through the somewhat strange trepidation that comes over me when I seek to understand the figure of Heidegger's "last God."

Situated in the context of Heidegger's path of thinking, the expression "starting from Christianity" connotes a painful and irrevocable break which goes along with the recognition of a perhaps insurmountable debt, one which, in any case, has provoked an effort of vertiginous thought on behalf of Heidegger. The following remark in the "retrospective on the path followed until now" that Heidegger had written in 1938 is particularly eloquent:

And who would not recognize the fact that the entire path that I have followed until now tacitly involved the debate with Christianity; a debate which was not and which is not a "problem" gleaned by chance, but the conservation of the most proper beginning—that of the paternal home, of the fatherland, and youth—and it is at the same the painful separation from all that. Only one who was truly raised in the Catholic world, will have some idea of the necessity that has influenced the path of my questioning that I have pursued until now, . . . (GA 66, 415)

Heidegger forbade himself to speak of it any further in intimate biographical terms. "It would be unseemly to speak of these most intimate debates, which do not concern questions of dogma or articles of faith, but concern the unique question of knowing whether or not God is in the process of leaving us and if we ourselves still experience that genuinely, that is to say insofar as we are creators" (*ibid.*). What was an existential debate moves, in the case of the creative thinker that Heidegger was, to another scene because the texts that best illustrate this intellectual debate and that repeated this existential crisis were never published when Heidegger was alive.

The sentence placed as an epigraph of the section entitled "The Last God" in the *Beiträge* shows that what is at stake here is also a confrontation with the God of Judeo-Christian faith: "The totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God" (GA 65, 403/283). Before interrogating the identity of this "totally other" as well as the meaning of the "especially" (*zumal*), it is necessary to clear up a misunderstanding. The expression *die Gewesenen* cannot be limited to the representation of God or of the divine that is the fruit of religious consciousness, and more particularly of Christian faith. It applies as well to the metaphysical concepts of God. I would even add that it is the "totally other in relation to all the concepts of God that span the history of metaphysics," in particular the *Causa sui* God.

How is the "over against" to be understood? This rather tricky question refers us immediately to the paradoxical relation that the thinking of *Ereignis* maintains with metaphysics in its entirety. One of the most interesting suggestions occurs at the beginning of the text *Besinnung*, where Heidegger distin-

guishes "refutation" (*Widerlegung*) from *Wi(e)der-spruch*, a term that I propose to translate as "speaking against." Like Hegel, but for different reasons, he considers that the great thoughts are irrefutable (that is, they cannot be corrected) if one accepts to meet them at the place they occupy and to espouse their logic. But it is precisely for that reason that they need to be "spoken against" by a radically different other saying. Understood in this sense, the term *Wi(e)der-spruch* can be taken in three senses.

1. If one retains the spelling *Wieder*, it is a "repetition" in the sense that it is a question of re-saying the same but in a different way.
2. If one takes away the silent *e* as the play of Heideggerian writing suggests at *wider* takes the meaning that is close to the verb *Erwidern* which means the reply but can also have the polemical meaning of what Francis Wolff in a beautiful analysis of the principle of contradiction calls "interlocutive contradiction."⁷
3. Finally, one should also pay attention to the pregnancy of the term *Spruch* in the thinking of *Ereignis*. It reminds us that we are dealing with a thought that must painstakingly invent new ways of its own saying, modalities attuned to what the term *Ereignis* calls us to think. It is not without a certain stumbling that characterizes the "fugue" of *Ereignis* in which the "last God" plays a particular role.

By applying the three senses of the term *Wi(e)der-spruch* to the expression "last God" just mentioned, we can ask ourselves at least three questions:

1. What "returns" but in an absolutely novel manner through the figure of the "last God"? Or, perhaps, what is the "last God" about?
2. In what sense does the "last God" co-respond to the Judeo-Christian God and the God *causa sui* while speaking against them?
3. How does the last God speak to us? To whom does he speak? What words does he use?

Before looking at the texts themselves, I will make a final introductory remark. Even if at first glance the three volumes seem to treat of the same themes as the numerous references of one volume to the other show, the reader must not allow himself or herself a purely synchronic reading. In fact one must not underestimate the weight of the remark with which the volume entitled the *Die Geschichte des Seins* opens: "These *Beiträge* are still only a context not a jointure, *Besinnung* is a milieu but not a source" (GA 66, 5). This declaration marks a progression which is not, as I will seek to show, without implications for the interpretation of the "last God" and of the thinking of *Ereignis* in general; what

is at stake first is framing the originality of the inquiry into the truth of Being that requires us to depart from the context of metaphysics. Next, what is at issue is to make this thought a “milieu” of another thinking that will no longer be called philosophy but *Besinnung* (Mindfulness), a word that assumes in this case an extremely important meaning. Finally, it is a question of putting oneself in search of the source, that is to say, understanding *Ereignis*, so to speak, at the source. This is an ultimate task and one of extreme difficulty. It is not certain that the thinking that is just beginning to disengage itself from the economy of metaphysical thought is already capable of this. While considering these indications, my inquiry will unfold itself in three parts that focus each on one of the three volumes.

Befremdung: “The Fugue of Be-ing”
and the Figure of the “Last God”

1. *The Strangeness of the “Last God”*

The *Beiträge zur Philosophie* set forth the general context of a postmetaphysical thinking, a thinking that is concerned with the very truth of Being. The fact that the idea of system pertains to metaphysical logic does not mean that Heidegger’s postmetaphysical thinking is purely rhapsodical—disseminated and scattered—whose adequate literary expression would consist in disjointed aphorisms. From the beginning Heidegger clarifies that the overall frame of his *Beiträge* can only assume the form of a sixfold fugue. The fugue that is at issue here corresponds essentially to the outline, that is to say, to the very composition of the work. But it has first an “objective” meaning to the extent that this “outline” relates to the jointure and is also a dispensation of *Ereignis* itself.

Among the numerous questions that this “fugue” raises, we are only interested in the sixth and last “moment,” indicated by the expression “the last God.” Even if, in terms of the number of pages, it is a relatively short section—this short treatment is in part compensated by the numerous references to the term earlier in the text—it is characterized by a twofold singularity. First, its positing in the unfolding of the fugue: it is in this way and only thus that the fugue of be-ing accomplishes itself. Moreover, this is the only section that carries an epigraph already cited above.

The expression “totally other” in this epigraph has a purely comparative meaning. Nothing allows us to suppose that this would be the proper name of God. Its true name is “the Last” (*der Letzte*). If this name is crucial for the translator, it is because any translation presupposes an interpretation. What does this

expression that is substituted for the metaphysical expressions *Ipsum esse subsistens*, *Causa sui*, etc., mean? Nothing guarantees that the most literal translation is the most faithful. Even if I maintain the translation "the Last God," I take the precaution of framing the adjective *last* with quotation marks. A close reading of the text shows that there are two major reasons that make a literal translation difficult.

1. The adjective *last* ordinarily connotes the idea of the end of a series, even the end of a show (the last representation of a show). Heidegger expressly rejects this sense: *last* does not mean here the idea of a cessation (*Aufhören*, for example, "the last shot" before the ceasefire) nor does it mean the "end" (*Ende*, for example, the ending, happily or unhappily, of a story). In fact the "last God" involves a paradoxical relation with the idea of a beginning. The event that only occurs as a "passing" (*Vorbeigang*) of the "last God" does not mark the end but the beginning of a new history. "The last God is not the end but the other beginning of immeasurable possibilities for our history" (GA 65, 411/289). In a sense, we could apply to it the sentence in the Gospel: "The last will be the first." For the same reason, the end cannot be understood either in the teleological sense of an end to be attained.
2. On the other hand, the notion of "the last" refers almost inevitably to the idea of a numerable series, for instance, the last model of the Renault that one can admire in the auto fair. Heidegger explicitly rejects any attempt to inscribe the figure of the "last God" in a series, whether numerical or temporal. The "most unique uniqueness" (*einzigste Einzigkeit*) of this figure of the Divine escapes any comparison with monotheism, pantheism, and even atheism (*ibid.*).

In order to bypass this twofold obstacle, one can imagine two possible translations, each of which involves an interpretation.

1. The Extreme. This translation is supported by the fact that Heidegger himself uses the term "*extreme*" at times to speak of the "last God," for example, when he declares that "the extreme God needs Being" (GA 65, 408). What does "the extreme" mean in this context? It connotes the idea of decision and of risk, that has its source in "the extreme venture of the truth of Be-ing" (GA 65, 289/411). The sequence of the *Beiträge* that treats of the "last God" opens with a brief paragraph entitled "the Last" that ends on a rhetorical question that says a lot about the eschatological scope of the term. "Given that we as yet barely grasp "death" in its extreme, how are we then ever going to be primed for the rare hint of the last God?" (GA 65, 405/285, translation modified).

2. *The Ultimate*. If we must also pay attention to the “eschatological” connotation of the expression “the last” (*der/das Letzte*) the thinking of *Ereignis* goes along with what Heidegger names at times “eschatology of Being.” Just like *parousia* in Christian eschatology, which Heidegger investigated in his first course on the introduction to the phenomenology of religious life, the coming of the “last God” cannot be measured according to a chronology that is obsessed with the question “When will it happen?” The end, such as one usually understands it, “is the unceasing etcetera from which from the beginning and long since the last as the most inceptual has withdrawn” (GA 65, 416/293).

Without losing sight of the specificity of the Heideggerian “reframing,” one can complete this rapprochement with biblical eschatology by a second indicator that speaks also in favor of the translation by “Ultimate.” The “last days” of the book of the Apocalypse are not last because they describe an end but because they signify an accomplishment that might be called a fullness. One also finds the idea of accomplishment and of “maturation” (*Reife*) in the lexical field of the “last God.” Finitude and fullness appear here as almost synonymous terms: “Fullness [*maturité*] is preparedness for becoming a fruit and a gifting. Herein holds sway what is the last, the essential end required out of the beginning but not carried out in it. Here the innermost finitude of be-ing reveals itself: in the hint of the last God” (GA 65, 410/288). Because “the last God is the beginning of the longest history on its shortest path,” the witnesses of its passage will be “the great and unrevealed individuals,” some rare individuals whose associations will never be part of a church.

The arduous discourse of the *Beiträge* about which Heidegger declares, “No one understands what I think here . . . no one grasps this” (GA 65, 6–7/7–8), is addressed to the happy few who accept being “retrieved from the chaos of not-beings into the pliancy of a reserved creating of sites that are set up for the passing of the last God” (GA 65, 7–8/6). This “thinking-saying” is that of a simple suggestion (*Weisung*) which should not be confused with a command (*Befehl*) or with a doctrine (*Lehre*) (GA 65, 7/6). Is this not like the “dysevangile” that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra proclaims?

2. From “Standing” to “Reservedness”

The questioning to which the thinking of *Ereignis* leads us is vertiginous. The ultimate and extreme version of the “hermeneutic circle” which defines our belonging to the truth of be-ing makes us dizzy, at least as much as the Nietzschean *circulus vitiosus Deus*. When it is a matter of honoring the “last God,” that questioning has the feel of real combat: “Standing in this struggle for the

last God, and that means for grounding the truth of be-ing of the time-space of stillness of its passing . . ." (GA 65, 412/290).

In a passage to which I will return later, Heidegger emphasizes that the thinking of *Ereignis* refers to an "originary believing" (GA 65, 369/259) that has nothing in common with "accepting that which offers immediate support and renders courage superfluous" (GA 65, 369/259). The word *support* (*Halt*) which appears in this context recalls the long analysis of the phenomenon of worldview that Heidegger had developed in his introductory philosophy course winter semester 1928/29. Starting with the hypothesis according to which the transcendence of Dasein's being in the world corresponds to a metaphysical "absence of support" (*Haltungs-losigkeit*) he had distinguished two fundamental responses which led to two different ways of looking at being-in-the-world. The first is the mythico-religious vision of the world that compensates for the absence of support by seeking shelter and protection (*Bergung, Geborgenheit*) in the overpowering of the being, in other words, in the Sacred. To this he opposes the worldview that leads to the birth of philosophy: the rational and deliberate choice to face being in its totality transforms shelter into support (*Haltung*).⁸

Against the backdrop of these traditional distinctions, we will question the new perspective opened by the term *reservedness* (*Verhaltenheit*). One will recall that in *Sein und Zeit* the fundamental mood (*Grundstimmung*), closely associated with "care," was anxiety. In the *Beiträge*, *Verhaltenheit* appears as the fundamental mood of the other beginning of the thinking, which substitutes for the role that the metaphysical beginning accorded to "wonder." *Reservedness* is the middle term of a triad of which "startled dismay" (*Erschrecken*) and deep awe (*Scheu*) are the extremes (GA 65, 15/12). The agreement of these three moods is found in a new interpretation of care. In *Sein und Zeit* and in the metaphysic of Dasein, care—that is to say transcendence—signifies that Dasein exists for the sake of itself. After the "turn," it is related exclusively to the very truth of Being. The selfhood of a human being is no longer defined by the fact that he or she exists "for the sake of itself" (*Umwillen seiner*) but it is only there for the sake of be-ing (*Umwillen des Seyns*) (GA 65, 12/15–16). Humans discover their fundamental vocation that makes them the seekers, preservers, guardians, and caretakers (*Sucher, Wahrer, Wächter*) of being (GA 65, 13/17). At the same time they become the guardians of the "silent passing of the last God" (GA 65, 406/286).

Is this a prophetic vocation in the sense that some prophets of the Bible, Ezekiel for example, can be described as "sentinels of imminence"?⁹ For our reflections it is interesting to note that even if these expressions take on a specific meaning because they relate to the very idea of *Ereignis*, they nevertheless resonate with a certain phenomenology of the sacred. Startled dismay, which takes the place

of wonder as the affect that allows for the metaphysical question, “why is there something rather than nothing?” confronts us with the strangeness (*Befremdung*) of being itself. It has a strong family-resemblance with the *tremendum* that the religious consciousness experiences when it encounters the “totally other.”

The analogy with the phenomenology of the sacred becomes even more eloquent if one takes account of the fact that deep awe is “the way of getting nearer and remaining near to what is most remote as such (the last God)” (GA 65, 16/12). Only such a deep awe could be capable of honoring it. Now, if the deep awe allows us to approach the *fascinosum* of “the last God,” is it not the case that startled dismay expresses its *tremendum* aspect? The “last God” is the last because it is the most “dismaying” (*entsetzlich*) of all those that have preceded it. *Dismaying* clearly does not mean “frightening” as divine wrath can be in certain biblical texts. It is in a quite different sense that it can be called *entsetzlich*. It confronts us with what Heidegger calls in *Besinnung*, the tragedy of be-ing (GA 66, 223), and it awaits us in a place that is “in-human” and “atheistic.” In effect, the thinking of *Ereignis* is characterized negatively by a twofold character: it is both “in-human” (*un-menschlich*) and “God-less” (*gott-los*) (GA 69, 24). But its “inhumanity” has nothing to do with what is denounced as an “antihumanism,” and it is not to be confused with what one usually understands by “atheism,” that is to say, the negation of the existence of God.

“Goddling” (“Götterung”): Another Criteriology of the Divine

The preceding considerations have permitted us to accomplish a preliminary reframing and, perhaps even a bit more, of the figure of the “last God.” Let us turn now to the second question: do the texts gathered under the title *Besinnung* indicate the passage from a “framework” to a “milieu,” and if so, to a “milieu” (*Mitte*) in what sense? With respect to the “last God,” the “milieu” looks more like an empty center. The rare occurrences of this expression that we encounter in the volume do not, however, indicate that the “theological” dimension (in the broad sense) of the thinking of *Ereignis* would begin to diminish. It is sufficient to read the kinds of “prose poems” with which the text begins to be persuaded of the opposite: it is the question there among others of “final burning embers of the dark hearth of be-ing which provides us the glimmer of an encounter [*Entgegnung*] between the divine [*Gottschafft*] and humanity [*Menschentum*]” (GA 66, 4) which brings knowledge of the distress of God (*bringe zur Not den Gott*) (GA 66, 7).

From the lexical point of view, the conception of the divine that Heidegger develops in *Besinnung* is indicated more through the terms *Gottschafft* or

Götterung than the term "last God." What is at issue here is the task of clarifying the conditions under which humanity can become again "*capax dei*" *gotfähig* (GA 66, 98). One finds an explicit mention of the "last God" at the end of section XVIII, entitled "The Gods," on which I will focus here. The subtitle indicates its aim: to found a thinking that is "preparatory to any questioning naming of the divination of the Gods" (GA 66, 227). The "knowledge" that the text *Besinnung* seeks is of a very particular kind. It has nothing to do with any sort of quest for certainty, since it has its source in the fundamental mood of startled dismay. It enables us to approach the most important question of all: the abyss of the truth of being.

Nothing offers us the guarantee that this essential knowledge is already in our reach if not the signs left by Hölderlin and Nietzsche, who proclaimed the necessity of another beginning. At first glance the notion of the milieu takes a strange appearance. It designates the situation that is our own: between the increasingly brutal self-affirmation of entities and a primordial installation of the very truth of being, an imminence that nothing allows us to anticipate (that is, to calculate). It is precisely this in-between that has consequences for our relation to the divine: if the forgetting of being (*Seinvergessenheit*) has its origin in the abandonment by be-ing (*Seynsverlassenheit*), this abandonment appears through the absence of gods, which a thinking of the event can conceive of only as a flight. Paradoxically, this absence cannot be assimilated to a pure and simple silence. Under certain conditions, the Gods can still be named (GA 66, 231), but by whom and according to what modalities of speaking? That is the decisive question.

Before responding, it would be necessary to undertake an extensive analysis of the statements relative to the problem of the anthropomorphism that Heidegger develops in the *Besinnung*. I reserve this analysis for another study. For our current reflections, it is sufficient to give thought to the notional couple formed by the expressions *Vermenschung* and *Vergötterung* that reflect the Heideggerian version of what Jean-Luc Marion calls "conceptual idolatry." By affirming that "God did not create humans any more than humans invented God" (GA 66, 235), Heidegger radically displaces the terms of the problem of anthropomorphism, whether Schellingian or Feuerbachian. What is to be thought is the bursting forth of the gods and their divinity on the basis the very truth of Being.

As he had done in the *Beiträge*, Heidegger reiterates his thesis that, quite like metaphysics, philosophical theology and Christian theology have exhausted their possibilities. Neither offers salvation for thinking or perhaps any salvation at all. "In the historical space of the domination of metaphysics . . . the gods have become impossible, or to express this in historical terms, " their flight has

been decided in these epochs and it this flight or occultation of the flight which gives them their allure" (GA 66, 237).

Whether we want it or not, we live in an age of thought that makes us "A-theistic." This does not necessarily mean that we should proclaim loudly that God does not exist just because we have not encountered him. Heidegger's thesis seems to me rather to be that there no longer exists a space of a possible encounter:

A-theism does not consist in the negation or loss of a God but in the absence of the grounding of the divinity of God. This is why the perpetuation of a habitual divine cult and its consolations and elevations can still be an atheism, as well as the replacement of the cult by the excitation of the lived experience and the effervescence of emotion. (GA 66, 238)

The contemporary insistence on the "lived experiences," which in certain cases are reduced to pure "vibrations" as in the New Age religion, is in no way a sign of religious vitality; in Heidegger's eyes it is only a betrayal in the sense of a pathological symptom, the fact that we are no longer attuned to any fundamental truth. This is a statement that Heidegger often repeats: "Man has been without mood for a long time" ("*Stimmunglos ist seit langem der Mensch*") (GA 66, 238–239). It is obviously not a question of stating that humans have become mute, for they have never been as loquacious as today. It is a question on the contrary of the absence of a fundamental mood (*Grundstimmung*) that makes them the recipient of a truth that exceeds them. "Atheism" such as we have just described it, that Heidegger also refers to as a "dedivinisation" (*Entgötterung*) is only the reflection or the inverse image of a false idolatrous (*Vergötterung*) explication of the divinity of the gods (GA 66, 239), an idolatry from which the Judeo-Christian God is not exempt. This thesis reinforces the proximity with the concept of idolatry referred to earlier. The "conceptual idol" bears here a very precise name, the application to God of the concept of causality whose most subtle expression is clearly the concept of *Causa sui*.

With respect to the problem of the divine, the forgetting of being is characterized by the complementarity of *Vergötterung* and *Entgötterung*, by an idolatrous divinization that brings about a radical loss of credibility. It is in this way that Heidegger comes close to the concept of a "criteriology of the divine," in Jean Nabert's sense,¹⁰ although the Heideggerian criteriology has very little in common with that of Nabert.

Is it sufficient to have understood that Platonic and Christian philosophy force us to think of God as the Unconditioned, the Infinite, the First cause of beings, in order to be prepared for a new quite different experience of the

divine? Certainly not if we are still only in the in-between (the *mi-lieu*) where one must first be exposed to the abyssal truth of being before becoming able to accede to another space of encounter between humans who are no longer humans, in the modern sense of the term, and the gods who are gods in an entirely different sense than what has been called, until now, the divine. Humans must strive to learn to become "the caretakers of the truth of be-ing," and the gods must be stripped of a divinity that is nothing other than above humans before it can be a question of a "passing" of a "last God."

Is it to say that we must wager with the Schleiermacher of the *Reden* on the fact that the history of religion has not yet been completed? Does Heidegger share Bergson's conviction that the humanity of this millennium that has just come to a close must give a supplementary effort "in order to accomplish just on our planet the essential function of the universe, which is a machine to make Gods"?¹¹ Heidegger's response is clearly negative: the space of encounter that he sees transcends the limits of religious consciousness: the "last god" (GA 66, 243) is not destined for *homo religiosus*, and he does not need "founders of a religion" in order to be revealed to men. This means also that the thinking of the "last God" is not a more or less esoteric crypto-religion.

Nevertheless, Heidegger borrows the schema of the precursor from the history of religion in order to explain that the "last God" does not emerge in a completely unexpected way, but that its event is the accomplishment of a long preparatory history, although that prehistory is not to be confused with the "history of religion" (GA 66, 244). Faced with such a paradoxical claim, one cannot but wonder if there is not some complicity here with Judeo-Christian eschatology. When Heidegger affirms that what is at stake is something completely different than an "eschatological attitude" (GA 66, 245), this may well be a denial on his part. It leads him to propose a caricature of an eschatology that is in flagrant contradiction with his earlier analyses in the course on the phenomenology of religion. Does it suffice to say that "any 'eschatology' lives in the faith of the certainty of the new state?" (*ibid.*). To this so-called certainty, Heidegger opposes the essential uncertainty that marks the onset and shock of the destinal history of being.

The end of the section that I just pondered upon confirms that a "waiting"—which is actually not a waiting—of the last God does not pertain to a religious faith, that its coming is not a novel genre of a "theophany" (GA 66, 252) that would respond to a so-called religious need and has nothing to do with what we usually understand by "eternity."¹²

Looking back on the text that I have analyzed, I would say that its goal was to make us aware of the enormous difficulty of making one's way toward the space of an encounter in which the "last God" could appear. The fact that

nothing guarantees that man capable of such an encounter already exist, apart from some rare exceptions, throws a new light on the meaning of the adjective *last*. It is the ultimate because it is the furthest: "The furthest in the barely unveiled space time of the truth of be-ing is the "*last* God" (GA 66, 256).

"*Verarmung*": A "Poor" God

Do the texts regrouped under the title the *History of Being*, written at the end of the 1930s, with the Second World War imminent, indicate an advance in relation to everything we have seen up to now? I will begin from a simple lexical observation: the principal semantic innovation of this textual corpus is that the idea of the "last God" is now strongly associated with the theme of poverty. In the first appearance of the "last God" in this corpus there is a simple juxtaposition: "The last God. The gift of impoverishment" (*Die Schenkung der Verarmung*) (GA 69, 28). But the examination of other occurrences shows that there is more than an association of meaning; in reality these two themes are inseparable and shed light on each other (GA 69, 87).

What meaning does this term take on in this context, and how does it help us to understand better the status of the "last God"? It is not easy to respond to these questions. It seems to me that the best approach is an indirect one that follows several paths at the same time, as is required by destinal thinking, which Heidegger characterizes as *vielspurig*, following several tracks at the same time.

A first approach goes by way of a rereading of the history of metaphysics that carries itself out against the backdrop of the destinal history of being. The forgetting of being appears there as a simple effect of the abandonment of being (*Seinsvelassenheit*). Now this abandonment "is unleashed" in the form of the will to power. The key word of the history of metaphysics is *power* (*Macht*) and *unleashing of power* (*Machenschaft*) (GA 69, 24). This *Machenschaft* has already been in question in the *Beiträge* where Heidegger had indicated clearly that what Nietzsche called "nihilism" must be thought as "the abandonment of being." One also finds in *Besinnung* a discrete allusion to the fact that the strangeness of being appears as well in the fact that it is "essentially that which has no power" (*das wesenschaft Machtlose*) (GA 66, 130). On the eve of the Second World War, this theme occupies almost the entire space of Heidegger's destinal interpretation of modernity. The world war is itself an event whose metaphysical essence is radically distinct from previous wars (GA 69, 44). For the same reason, the ravages that it caused are incommensurable with the damages of previous wars. What it produces is a "devastation" (*Verwüstung*) such that it ravages truth itself.

Heidegger gives considerable thought to the essence of *Machenschaft* in the context of the destinal history of being, which leads him to distinguish *Machbarkeit*, *Machsamkeit*, *Mache* (GA 69, 47), and *Übermächtigung*. He refuses to confuse the concepts of force, of violence, or of domination while applying himself to think the metaphysical essence of power that he calls the *Machten der Macht*, the "powering of power" (GA 69, 65). Hence the necessity of developing a symptomology of the manifestations of power: gigantism, massification, globalization, totalizing, leveling, and finally the appearance of great planetary criminals, who, according to Heidegger, can be counted on the fingers of one hand (GA 69, 78). Devastation, in its turn, takes on several faces. Taking up the word *Grimm* that appears in this context, we could rather say that it expresses itself through several "grimaces."

The more that the essence of power is unmasked, the more it manifests its functional indigence (*Dürftigkeit*) which for that very reason needs all the apparatus and extravagances of power (GA 69, 81). Two contrasting faces of poverty begin to emerge: on the one hand, the indigence of power, and on the other hand, the authentic poverty of the truth of being. Like *Ereignis* itself this latter presents many faces. This is what the schema given at §92 portrays as an attempt to speak about being. Poverty is associated there with the notions of abyss, nothingness, and silence (GA 69, 106). The *Vielspurigkeit* that characterizes the thinking of being is refracted in the very idea of poverty. If we want to know why the "last God" is "poor," in a sense of poverty that has nothing to do with a *kenosis*, we must follow several paths at the same time already prefigured in the *Beiträge* even if the word *Armut*/poverty does not appear there.

Let us try to trace some striking aspects of this essential poverty of the truth of being: "Poverty: the essence of be-ing as *Ereignis*" (GA 69, 110). The "other beginning of thinking" can be understood neither as an overcoming that would raise us to inaccessible heights of thought nor as a production of an enriched concept of being. It is the exact contrary that is the case. If there is a gift (*donation*), it has nothing to do with an endowment (*dotation*), since the gift is that of an "impoverishment of thought" (GA 69, 116). Gradually, as the faces of poverty are revealed, the reader of Heidegger, familiar with the theological and mystical tradition, will be tempted to approach the notion either from the Paulian theme of *kenosis* or from what Meister Eckhart said of the nobility of the soul. Are these misleading analogies that one must avoid in order to confront the challenge that Heidegger throws us by requiring that "we" (in this case it is the German people) "are strong enough to prepare and spread the impoverishment in the poverty as the richness of be-ing" (GA 69, 119), or do these analogies help us better understand the paradoxical nature of

this poverty allied to a richness with no equal? I will leave the question in suspense and just examine how the figure of the last God appears in the light of the theme of poverty.

1. Since it has its origin in *Ereignis*, the poverty of the last God will first have a temporal aspect. In order to give thought to the last God, one must renounce the metaphysical conception of eternity as *sempiternitas* which involves gigantism. The “last God” has no other presence than that of a passing (*Vorbeigang*) as a flash of lightning. The instant of its manifestation relates to the “flashing of being” (*Erblitzen des Seyns*) (GA 65, 409).
2. In contrast with metaphysical conceptions that identify God with Being by making it, for example, *Ipsium esse subsistens*, the poverty of the “last God” consists in the fact that it is not confused with *Ereignis* itself. “The last God is not *Ereignis* itself, rather it needs *Ereignis* as that to which the founder of the there belongs” (GA 65, 409). Inversely, being has no claim to being the “highest” it is not itself God (GA 69, 61).
3. The intimate bond between the “last God” and *Ereignis* clearly has consequences for the determination of the relation between humans (that is to say, Dasein as the “guardian of being”) and God. At the same time that God has a need for being, it recognizes that humans belong to being, “an admission that does not relinquish God or its greatness” (GA 65, 413/291). The question of knowing whether its relation to man is heteronomous or not is undecidable. Paradoxically, certain formulations suggest that we are dealing with two interwoven heteronomies, since God “overpowers [*übermächtigt*] man and man surpasses [*übertrifft*] God” (GA 65, 415/292).
4. The “last God” is not an object of knowledge. It is therefore impossible to apply the traditional inquiry into the possibility of knowing God to it. Does this mean that the “last God” is only accessible to a blind faith, a *credo quia absurdum*? Those who are convinced that the very idea of a destinal history of being is profoundly absurd could only come to this conclusion. If, on the contrary, one considers Heidegger’s position, as he himself states it, poverty is only another name to designate the essential finitude of being. The decisive question is therefore that of knowing under what conditions it becomes possible to penetrate into the domain where the “essential finitude of being” is decided, a domain in which one enters “only by virtue of preparing for a long “intimating” (*Ahnung*) of the last God” (GA 65 410/289).
5. The “last God” is (almost) unlocatable, as indicated in what follows: “You could look everywhere in being but nowhere will the trace of the God be seen” (GA 69, 59, 105). Why can it not be found? Because in a world that

- is metaphysically devastated, which means also "ethically" uninhabitable, one can certainly reorganize or rearrange beings differently, but "one can never find the free place where God abides" (GA 69, 59).
6. The destinal history of being is "in-human" in the double sense of the word: it is neither the product of the free will of humans nor even related to humans directly. The events of which it is composed resemble those that structure "the superior history" of which Schelling speaks. In this history the coming or the advent of the last God resembles a *Parousia*: "The most adventful of that which comes is the coming of the last God" (GA 69, 97). The paradox is that this advent of the one who comes has no need to be awaited. The "last god" is poorer than the god of hope that, as Bloch often recalled in his work, is first the god of the poor. But as the term *Überwartung* indicates, this poverty is at the same time richer than any hope related to human desire. The intermediary time that we live is that of the flight, and the abandonment of the Gods has nothing to do with an advent. On the contrary, the space-time of *Ereignis* which delimits the "scene" of its advent is designated as the "space time of poverty" (GA 69, 105).
 7. The poverty of *Ereignis* leaves traces in language itself. Even if it is a silent event, nothing allows us to conclude that it is the ineffable of negative radical theologies. Certainly, speaking and being silent are almost inseparable here, in particular when it is a matter of speaking of the passing of the last God. There is no better way to come near to the last God than the *Verschweigung* which can only be "set into work and word in the style of reservedness" (GA 65, 12/9). On the contrary there are only unique conditions under which *Ereignis* can be spoken. This is why one seeks in vain in the Heideggerian discourse on the last God an equivalent of the traditional treatise: *De nominibus divinis*. It is not that the last God cannot be named. But it is only the last in the sense of the extreme or ultimate because it appeals to the ultimate and extreme possibilities of language itself. It only speaks to those who have become the guardians of the truth of be-ing. Perhaps it is even preferable to say that its speech is only a "hinting hint" of the utmost discretion (GA 65 408/287). It is in this way that it accomplishes what Heraclitus said of the god of the oracle of Delphi: "He does not speak, he does not hide, he makes signs" (Fragment B93).

Interrogations

I will conclude this analysis with some critical questions that show that my treatment of the Heideggerian texts has not put an end to my trepidation.

These questions, deliberately abrupt and trepidatious, stem from the context of the interrogation and thinking opened by the biblical nomination of God. The reader of this essay must decide if these questions express simply the irritation of a believer's thinking who can only be deeply disturbed by the Heideggerian reframing of the discourse about God, or if they put the finger on the *aporia* that anyone who genuinely seeks to join Heidegger on the path of *Ereignis* must face.

These critical reflections begin with the rhetorical question that Heidegger raises in the *Beiträge*: Will the "last God" be our last idol? "But is the 'last God' not the destitution of God, the greatest blasphemy par excellence?" (GA 65 406/286). In Heidegger's eyes the blasphemy consists in the reversal of a hierarchy: the highest becomes the lowest. Now the "last God" is not the "Highest" or the "Lowest"; it is the "last." The possibility of encountering it presupposes a decision which is itself extreme, and which is the ultimate and the most radical expression of what Heidegger refers to elsewhere as the "hermeneutic circle" (GA 65, 407). Here the circle does not designate, as in Gadamer's work, the circularity of understanding in which we already belong to the tradition that we seek to understand, such that instead of us interrogating it, it puts us into question. It is instead a question here of the belonging that relates Dasein to *Ereignis* and whose address (*Zuruf*) confronts us with the passing of the last God. There is a circle because address and belonging-hearing (*Zugehör*) are inseparable. This is the circle that constitutes the primordial space of the encounter between the divine and human beings.

To this circle, into which I have not yet succeeded in entering, I would address three questions that seem to me decisive.

1. Can the "Last God" Save Us?

This first question is related to two equally well-known citations.

- a) In a text that has been the object of numerous commentaries but which, as Didier Frank has shown, has perhaps still not revealed all of its secrets,¹³ Heidegger characterizes the *causa sui* God of metaphysics, assimilated to onto-theology in the following terms: "humans can neither pray nor sacrifice to this God. Before the *Causa sui* humans can neither fall to their knees in awe nor play music and dance before this god."¹⁴ Is the "last God" a God to whom humans can pray or to whom they can offer sacrifices? Can we kneel without renouncing ourselves or can we celebrate the "last God" in any sense of the term? In the view of the texts that we have just examined a negative response would seem to go without saying.

- b) No less well known is Heidegger's statement in 1968 in the interview with *Der Spiegel*: "Only a God can save us." Is this a veiled reference to the last God?

If one seeks a response to these two questions in the texts that we have just considered, one comes up against a fundamental difficulty reflected in contradictory statements that seem to indicate an insurmountable *aporia*. What is striking at first is the extreme reticence with which Heidegger uses categories of religious soteriology, salvation, redemption, eternal life, happiness, and so on, which seem to condemn us to a heteronomy. This is presumably why Heidegger says: "Here no re-demption [*Er-lösung*] takes place" (GA 65, 413/290).

One of his most explicit declarations, but also the most violent, evokes the "magnanimity" and the "extreme length" required by the welcome of the "Most Coming," that is to say, of the last God (GA 69, 31). It represents the refusal of the alternatives: Christianity or paganism. The beginning of another history that the arrival of the last God announces transcends this alternative because it is not a matter of an event that has a religious meaning. This means in particular that this eschatology does not have the sense of eschatological hope, that Heidegger suspects of only being a "calculated expectation" of a salvation that would correspond to human interests. Now such "interests" that correspond to a desire for salvation or redemption are only, in Heidegger's view, a waste of time. In a pre-emptory manner he rejects both humanist discourse which appeals to the vital interests of humanity and religious discourse which speaks of "eternal beatitude" (*ibid.*). Under this respect, an incommensurable abyss separates his thinking from a text like Fichte's *The Way Toward a Blessed Life*.¹⁵

2. Beyond Faith and Knowledge

The paradoxical relation that the notion of the "last God" maintains with eschatological discourse, such as Rosenzweig has tried to thematize in the third book of *The Star of Redemption*,¹⁶ appears to us as well if we raise the question of its credibility. This can take several forms: can one "believe," must one believe in the last God? In other words, is it a "credible" God and must we believe in it?

Once more I reject the facile objection that I am raising the wrong question here. I am well aware that the last god is not and cannot be the object of a properly religious faith. But let us not forget that Karl Jaspers spoke of a philosophical faith. Now as we have seen, in the *Beiträge*, Heidegger himself speaks of a primordial believing. Certainly the word *faith* is never used directly in relation to the last God. On the other hand, everything happens as if *Ereignis*, that is to say, the truth of be-ing, requires some kind of "faith." No doubt that it will not be "dogmatic," since it is the same as the questioning about the

very truth of being. It is in this sense that Heidegger declares at the beginning of the *Beiträge* that “It is only through the ones who question that the truth of be-ing becomes a distress. They are the genuine *believers* because in opening themselves up to what is ownmost to truth they maintain their bearing to the ground” (GA 65, 12/10). Only one who believes in the truth of being will have any intimation (*Ahnung*) of the last God.

Clearly, philosophical faith, insofar as one can still use the term *philosophical* in this context, has nothing to do with any confessional membership, and even less with holding a doctrine to be true. Why then should we speak of faith? Because we have to deal with a knowing that exceeds any type of explicative knowledge, and no doubt even the knowledge that results from the principle of sufficient reason. The “knowledge” of the truth of being (that is to say, the knowledge of *Ereignis*) is a “belief” and the enunciation of this knowing-believing is an attestation (*Zeugenschaft*).

What does attestation mean in this context? It is only another name for questioning: “*Those who question* in this manner are the originary and actual believers, i.e., those who take truth itself—and not only what is true—seriously and from the ground up, who put to decision whether what is ownmost to truth holds sway and whether this essential swaying itself carries and guides us, the knowing ones the believing ones the acting ones the creating ones—in short the historical ones” (GA 65, 369/258).

3. The “Last God” and the “Piety of Thought”

I will conclude my reflections with the citation of one of Heidegger’s last speeches which also has been transformed in the course of the history of the reception of his thought into a quasi-gnomic statement: “For questioning is the piety of thought” (*Denn das Fragen ist die Frömmigkeit des Denkens*).¹⁷ This is how his long inquiry on the essence of technology (from 1953) ends. As in the case of all the other texts published while Heidegger was alive, this article carries no mention of the “last God.” However, Heidegger states that the supreme peril that technology represents is in no way limited to the domain of technological activity. The concept of God that depends on the idea of causality involves a peril that is only a peril from the point of view of the withdrawal of being and of the suppression of the questioning.

Insofar as the “last God” is inseparable from the truth of being, does it not become the object of a “piety”? This “piety” ought to be clarified in a more detailed analysis of Heideggerian vocabulary. Without starting this analysis here, I will conclude my remarks with a citation from Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* (para 344 book 5), addressed to “We Fearless Ones,” entitled, “To what extent are we

still pious" (*Inwiefern auch wir noch fromm sind*).¹⁸ In this text Nietzsche directs his skepticism upon the scientific attitude that wants everything to pass through the screen of an implacable critique, except for its own belief in the truth and its bond with the will of power. The true question that settles the trust and the skepticism is that of knowing which interpretation allows us to decide if the advantage is on the side of unconditional skepticism or unconditional trust. For Nietzsche there is no doubt that the atheists and the antimetaphysicians of today, who so willingly brandish the torch of a scientific truth that is free of prejudice, fan the flame of their convictions on the hearth of the Christian and Platonic belief that God is Truth or that the Truth is divine. Nietzsche ends his reflection on a profoundly impious question: would this belief be "our longest lie"?

How does Heidegger's "last God" appear to us in the light of this Nietzschean interrogation? As the "shortest lie" of a thought incapable of keeping its promises or as the object of a piety of a new kind that tries to warm itself by the fire of the most originary truth of being?

Translated by David Pettigrew and François Raffoul

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper appeared in a collection of celebratory essays offered to Professor HJ Adriaanse, entitled *Post-Theism: Reframing the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Hent de Vries et al. (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2000).

2. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 65, Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis) (1936–1938)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989). English translation as Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999). Henceforth the *Beiträge* will be cited as GA 65 with the German page number followed by the English page number.

3. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 66, Besinnung (1938–1939)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997). Henceforth cited as GA 66 followed by the page number. English translation as Martin Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2006).

4. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 69, Die Geschichte des Seyns—Die Geschichte des Seyns (1938–1940)—Koinon. Aus der Geschichte des Seyns (1939)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998). Henceforth cited as GA 69 followed by the page number.

5. "Das Große Spiel des Lebens und das Übermachtige," in Paola Ludovica-Coriando, ed., *Herkunft aber bleibt stets Sukunft. Martin Heidegger und die Gottesfrage* (Frankfurt: 1998), pp. 45–46.

6. HJ Adriaanse, *Vom Christentum aus*, *Studies Philosophical Theology* 13 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1995).
7. Francis Wolff, *Dire le Monde* (Paris 1997), pp. 22–27.
8. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 27, *Einleitung in die Philosophie (WS 1928–1929)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), pp. 357–390. Henceforth cited as GA 27 followed by the page number.
9. On the meaning of this expression, see Paul Ricœur and André LaCocque, *Penser la Bible* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 223–245.
10. See Jean Nabert, *Le désir de Dieu* (Paris 1996), pp. 121–262.
11. Henri Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: Puf, 1982), p. 338.
12. GA 66, 253. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect see my study, “The Eschatology of Being and the God of Time in Heidegger,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 4 (1996) 17–42.
13. Didier Franck, *Nietzsche et l'ombre de Dieu* (Paris: PUF, 1998) pp. 139–168.
14. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 72. Translation slightly modified.
15. J.G. Fichte, “The Way Toward the Blessed Life or the Doctrine of Religion,” in *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, 2 vols., trans. William Smith (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999). Reprinted, with a new introduction by Daniel Breazeale, from the 4th edition (London: Trübner & Co., 1889).
16. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).
17. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 35.
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 280.

Fourteen

THE RECEPTION AND NONRECEPTION OF HEIDEGGER IN FRANCE

Françoise Dastur

The great philosophies are towering mountains, unclimbed and unclimbable. But they endow the land with what is highest and show its primeval bedrock. They stand as the aiming point and forever form the sphere of sight; they bear transparency and concealment. When are such mountains really what they are? Certainly not when we have supposedly climbed and conquered them. Rather, only when they truly persevere for us and for the land. But how few are capable of this, of letting the most lively soaring emerge in the stillness of the mountain range and of remaining in the sphere of this soaring-over? This alone is what thinking's genuine setting-into-perspective must strive for.

—Beiträge zur Philosophie, §93

No one who considers the extraordinary interweaving of the different traditions from which the history of the West is woven—to consider the history of the West alone—will doubt that the history of thought amounts to its possible transmissions and translations. But how does such a transmission take place between such different ways of thinking? Heidegger was the first, it seems, who seriously questioned the transmission that is at the very origin of the Western tradition, namely, that well-known translation of Greek into Latin in which he sees, in 1942, “the genuine event of history.”¹ Already in 1936, in the “Origin of the Work of Art,” he emphasizes the particular character of that translation by insisting that it consists in “a translation of Greek experience into a different way of thinking,” because “*Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally authentic experience of what they say, without the Greek word.*”² He adds: “The rootlessness of Western thought begins with this translation.” The Roman philosophical terminology did not in fact issue from the Latin language itself but came, on the contrary, from a transposition of Greek words into Latin

terms. Now, to reconsider the words (*Wörter*) of the Greek language apart from Greek speech (*Wörtes*), which is what is proper to so-called literal translation, implies that the very experience that was at the origin of that speech remains misunderstood. We are thus dealing in that case with a transmission that, as Heidegger says in *Being and Time*, far from rendering what it transmits accessible, contributes on the contrary to covering it, and bars access to the original sources from which the traditional concepts of philosophy are drawn.³ The process of uprooting (*Entwurzelung*), in relation to its origin, of closure and of alienation that constitutes the fundamental movement of the Western tradition, thus begins through the translation of the philosophical terminology from Greek into Latin. Heidegger never wavered on this point; in 1966 in the *Spiegel* interview he responds to the discomfort expressed by his interviewer at the idea of the impossibility of a literal translation: “We would do well to take this discomfort seriously and on a large scale, and to finally consider the grave consequences of the transformation which Greek thought experienced when it was translated into Roman Latin. Indeed this today, even this, blocks the way to an adequate reflection on the fundamental words of Greek thought.”⁴

The genuine “reception” of a foreign thought can thus not be reduced to a mere terminological translation of terms; on the contrary, it is necessary that the source-experience from which it comes be understood, which implies that one not seek straightaway to refute or overcome it. As Heidegger emphasizes, a great philosophy is similar to a lofty summit—it is less a matter of conquering than of “letting be”—so that on that basis one can engage with philosophy in a genuine “debate.” Instead of precipitately seizing a philosophy in order to bend it to ends that are foreign to it, it would rather be a matter of encountering it and letting it be in its specific and irreducible foreignness. To receive indeed requires one to render oneself free for the welcome of the gift that comes to us from the other, which always means to accept being put into question by the other without seeking to submit the gift straightaway to our own interests.

It should therefore be the same with respect to the reception of German thought in general, and Heideggerian thought in particular, in the world of French thought. In a text dating from 1937 entitled *Weg zur Aussprache*, Heidegger envisions precisely the manner in which the French-German philosophical dialogue should be accomplished, that is, in the context of a mutual understanding that requires, he emphasizes from the outset, “the distinctive courage which makes it possible to recognize, on the basis of a necessity that exceeds both of them, what is each time proper to the other.”⁵ In the remainder of the text he explains that if, on the one hand, the fundamental questioning of nature implied a debate—such as Leibniz undertook with the beginning of early modern French philosophy, namely Cartesianism—on the other hand,

a metaphysical knowledge of the essence of history was inaugurated by the thinkers of German idealism that contemporary French philosophers, perceiving the necessity to “free themselves from the context of Cartesian philosophy,” seek to understand. It is a question then, Heidegger continues, of opening the space of a proximity between the two peoples, which requires both “the persevering will of listening to one another and the persisting courage of following one’s own determination.”⁶ To remain oneself while being open to the other: such is therefore what is required for a genuine “reception” to take place and thus to allow for two traditions of thought, however different, to enter into dialogue with each other. We have, on the one hand, a Cartesian tradition that inaugurates the metaphysics of subjectivity that characterized modern thought, allied to a scientism and a positivism that give an exclusive privilege to the ontic, and on the other hand, the speculative summit of German idealism opening the way to both Husserlian transcendentalism and Heideggerian ontologism.

The fact that French thinkers were open not only to German idealism but also to Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology was proven by what was called, at the end of World War II, French “existentialism.” In an interview published in 1946, a time when he already co-edited with Sartre *Les Temps Modernes*, the journal founded in 1944, Merleau-Ponty explained that German philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger provided the thinkers of his generation precisely what they were seeking, namely, “a broader philosophy” and “a presuppositionless analysis of phenomena, that is, of the milieu in which our concrete life takes place.”⁷ Evoking Léon Brunschvicg, the dominant French philosopher at the time and a representative of neo-Kantianism, he emphasized that the latter “did not seek to explore the concrete world of perception that remains outside of science,” while Heidegger and Husserl invite us, on the contrary, “to find again the bond with the world that precedes thought properly speaking” (P, 66). It was indeed a question for Sartre, as well as Merleau-Ponty, of finding in the “philosophy of existence”⁸ that came from Germany, through Husserl and Heidegger, the means of breaking out from a Cartesian-inspired reflexive philosophy, and of thinking the concrete situation of human beings in the world and in history. Merleau-Ponty recognized moreover that in this respect, it was Sartre who, upon returning from Berlin in 1934, played the role of mediator between France and Germany (PE, 257). We know well that Emmanuel Levinas, who was the 1930 translator of a first version of Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*, could be considered the first one to have introduced phenomenology to France, but it was nevertheless Sartre, with the 1943 publication of *Being and Nothingness*, who made the general public aware not only of the work of Husserl but also and most importantly of Heidegger. It is thus necessary to address Sartre first, when one speaks of the French “reception” of Heidegger’s thought.

Did Sartre manage to truly open himself to the Heideggerian problematic and thus to “free himself from the context of Cartesian philosophy” within which he had been trained? That is the question. We know that modern philosophy since Descartes understood the being of the human as “consciousness” or as “subject.” Sartre situated himself in this same perspective, whereas Heidegger decisively broke with it. What thus constitutes the fundamental stakes of this first “reception” of Heidegger’s thought is the confrontation of the Heideggerian analytic of Dasein with Sartre’s philosophy of consciousness. Indeed, Sartre developed in *Being and Nothingness*, a philosophy of consciousness even though he was not unaware that Heidegger had precisely introduced the task of abandoning the notion of consciousness in favor of that of existence. *Being and Nothingness* is nonetheless profoundly marked by Heidegger’s influence, including the choice of terms, to such an extent that one could consider it to be a discussion of *Being and Time*.

It is then the internal structure of consciousness that Sartre names the “for-itself,” in distinction from the “in-itself,” which designates the being of the thing. Similarly, with the term *Dasein* Heidegger sought to designate that which constitutes the specificity of the human being. For Heidegger this is not a matter of a simple terminological change but of the necessity to think anew the being of humans, of avoiding the use of older appellations (BT, §10, 72). What is important for Heidegger is to free his purely ontological problematic from any reference to the specific research domains of anthropology, psychology, or biology. Sartre seems to undertake a similar ontological research in *Being and Nothingness*, as indicated by the subtitle, “An Essay of Phenomenological Ontology.” It seems nevertheless that his true objective was the elucidation of the being of humans, while for Heidegger it is clear that the elucidation of the being of humans is only a way of clarifying Being as such (*Sein überhaupt*) (BT, §2, 26–27). It is because any questioning about Being is based on the explication of Dasein that the existential analytic of Dasein is called “fundamental ontology.” Dasein is indeed essentially defined in its difference from other beings by the fact that it is able to understand Being: “*Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being*,” declares Heidegger (BT, §4, 32). It is thus in its very being that Dasein has a relation to that being, and it is that intrinsic relation to its own being that Heidegger names “*Existenz*,” breaking decisively in this way with the ordinary meaning of this term which, contrasted with essence, names the being-there of a thing, the fact of its existence, or its factuality. That which characterizes on the contrary the existence of Dasein is precisely that it is not present like a thing but has a relation to its Being.

Now for Sartre, a being capable of relating to its own being can only be consciousness itself. To describe it, he borrows, while transforming it, one of the

definitions that Heidegger has given for Dasein: “consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself.”⁹ In the first part of this definition, one finds an echo of Heidegger’s affirmation according to which for Dasein “in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it” (BT, §4, 32). In the second part, one finds the indication of the intentional structure that Sartre takes from Husserl, which implies the relation of consciousness to a world outside of consciousness. The being in-itself of things thus has a mode of being that is radically different from that of consciousness. Consciousness only exists in relation to a thing external to it, and it can therefore not exist as a simple coincidence with itself, it is not what it is and it is what it is not, a formulation that designates the mode of being of the for-itself. This noncoincidence to itself of consciousness allows us to understand how it can be both consciousness of an object and self-consciousness. The notion of “self” is, for Sartre, the symbol of this manner of being its own noncoincidence, of this “presence to self” which consciousness is: “The presence of being to itself implies a detachment on the part of being in relation to itself,” he specifies (BN, 124). What separates consciousness from itself is nevertheless nothing: “The being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist *at a distance from itself* as a presence to itself, and this empty distance which being carries in its being is Nothingness” (BN, 125). It is that Nothingness which is the foundation of any consciousness. For Sartre, there is therefore no other explanation of consciousness than that which consists in saying that it is an absolute fact that comes into being. The for-itself negates its own being by separating itself from itself through a nothingness, and without that negating power, it would only be in-itself. The for-itself is then to itself its own foundation: “The in-itself cannot provide the foundation for anything; if it founds itself, it does so by giving itself the modification of the for-itself. It is the foundation of itself in so far as it is *already no longer* in-itself, and we encounter here again the origin of every foundation” (BN, 130). The emergence of the for-itself within the in-itself is an “absolute event,” because there is nothing that can be the cause of the for-itself except the for-itself itself: “consciousness is its own foundation, but it remains contingent *in order that there may be* a consciousness rather than an infinity of pure and simple in-itself” (*ibid.*). This contingency is the “facticity” of the for-itself.

One can understand how for Sartre consciousness is a central and unsurpassable notion: to conceive of human reality in terms of the for-itself is the only way not to identify it with a simple thing. This is why Sartre reproached Heidegger for avoiding reference to the notion of consciousness. At the beginning of the second part of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains that the fact that Heidegger does not refer to the cogito in his existential analytic means that Dasein “can never regain this dimension,” which implies that the self-understanding

that Heidegger attributes to Dasein remains incomprehensible: “But how could there be an understanding which would not in itself be the consciousness (of) being understanding? This ekstastic character of human reality will relapse into an in-itself that is thinglike and blind unless it arises from the consciousness of ekstasis” (BN, p. 120, translation slightly modified). A few pages further, he returns to the charge:

We cannot *first* suppress the dimension “consciousness,” not even if it is in order to re-establish it subsequently. Understanding has meaning only if it is consciousness of understanding. My possibility can exist as *my* possibility only if it is my consciousness which escapes itself toward my possibility. Otherwise the whole system of being and its possibilities will fall into the unconscious—that is into the in-itself. (BN, 134)

There seems to have been a misunderstanding. Heidegger was guided, like Sartre, by a concern to radically distinguish the being of humans from the being of things, from what he names *Vorhandenheit*, pure given presence. The fact of determining Dasein as the being for which “its being is at issue for it,” far from excluding consciousness, on the contrary implies it. Simply put, Heidegger does not *begin* from consciousness, a traditional notion to avoid, because he did not want to conceive of the human as a separate subject, an autonomous entity. This is the reason why Heidegger determines the being of the human as a being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). This expression does not designate a pure relation of spatial inherence, or the contingent fact of being-in-the-world, but the fundamental mode of being of the human. Now, it seems that one cannot find the same definition of being-in-the-world in Sartre’s work, which he understands from the outset as the synthesis of these two abstract moments that are consciousness and what appears to it: “The concrete is man within the world in that specific union of man with the world that Heidegger, for example, calls ‘being-in-the-world’” (BN, 34). For his part, Heidegger in no way thinks of being-in-the-world as the result of a synthesis, since it is the originary manner of being of Dasein, which can in no way be thought of in an abstract manner as prior to world.

It does not seem that Sartre grasped the true meaning of the Heideggerian *Erschlossenheit*. The emergence of the for-itself is indeed an “activity” of the for-itself that causes being, while for Heidegger such activity can only be thought on the basis of the *Erschlossenheit* of the world and of being. *Erschlossenheit* implies in fact an *Angewiesenheit*, a submission of Dasein (BT §18, 120–121) with respect to the world and to Being that makes Dasein diaphanous of Being and not its creator. No doubt for Sartre there is also a reciprocal dependency

between the world and the for-itself, but one does not encounter in Sartre's work the idea that Being reveals itself through human beings. On the contrary, one finds in his work the idea that the absolute event of the for-itself in the midst of the in-itself is at the same time the emergence of the world. *It is thus through the for-itself that there is a world.* For Sartre, consciousness is essentially linked to that which appears; it is in-the-world. This means that the for-itself emerges from the very fact that it negates being-in-itself. There is consequently a nothingness that *separates* the for-itself from the in-itself of the object. *Sartre has then posited consciousness and the object as separate.* For Heidegger, on the contrary, the being of beings is not closed on itself. Dasein has access to that being precisely because being is "revealed" or "open" (*erschlossen*) to it. The access to the being of beings is made possible by the fact that Dasein, as being-in-the-world, finds itself always already in the disclosure of being, disclosure that constitutes what is prior to any comportment to things.

One understands now why Heidegger insisted so strongly on the fact that to define the being of the human as Dasein constitutes a complete renewal of philosophical thinking. To no longer begin from consciousness, as modern philosophy since Descartes has done, means to understand that consciousness does not constitute the source of any access to being. The very foundation of consciousness is Dasein as the very place of *Erschlossenheit*, of the opening of being.

One might think that the second major interpreter of Heidegger in France, namely, Levinas, would have been more independent with respect to the Cartesian tradition of subjectivity, a tradition in which, coming from abroad, he was not trained, unlike Sartre and Merleau-Ponty who were both students at the Ecole Normale Supérieure of the rue d'Ulm where this tradition had its academic home. But just as in the case of Sartre, we will see how, in the last analysis, it was also a Cartesian motif that Levinas opposed to Heidegger's thought.

In 1947, in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas stated that his reflections, which were largely inspired by Heidegger's philosophy, were "governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy."¹⁰ Not content to see in Heideggerian ontology "the accomplishment of a long tradition of pride, heroism, domination and cruelty,"¹¹ a "philosophy of power" and "of injustice,"¹² he also went as far as to characterize Western philosophy up to Husserl's phenomenology as an "imperialism of the Same" (TI, 87). How can Levinas's hermeneutic violence,¹³ with respect not only to Husserl but also above all to Heidegger, be explained? What is at issue is to show how, after being nourished at the ontological source of phenomenology, Levinas's thought could break so decisively with it and explicitly take up again with the metaphysical tradition that Heidegger and Husserl both opposed.

Incidentally, this “reversal”¹⁴ of position is presented by Levinas himself, in a text on “Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite” that slightly precedes the publication of *Totality and Infinity*, as a return to a tradition at least as ancient as the one he sees culminating in Heidegger’s philosophy, in which the Same dominates the Other. He understands by this the tradition of the Other that is philosophical and not religious, and which he characterizes by referring to the two lone motifs of Western philosophy that he endorses: the definition of the good in Plato and the Cartesian analysis of the idea of the infinite. Although this reduction of the totality of the philosophical field to the abstract opposition of the Same and the Other may seem overly schematic, it nevertheless indicates the limit between metaphysics and phenomenology in Levinas’s work. This dividing line not only separates different periods—that of the great commentaries on Husserl and Heidegger’s phenomenologies (*The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* of 1930, *Existence and Existents* of 1947, and the first edition of *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* in 1949) from the period of the original works such as *Totality and Infinity*, published in 1961, and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* from 1974—but it also introduces a fracture between strictly contemporaneous texts such as *Time and the Other* from 1948, where Heidegger is severely criticized, and the texts from the same period in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, where Heidegger’s thinking is discussed and appreciated.

In one of the texts of this group, entitled “*De la description à l’existence*,” the issue for Levinas was to show that one could already find the premises of a philosophy of existence in Husserl’s thought. He affirms there that the phenomenological description seeks the signification of the finite in the finite itself and is in no way animated by a nostalgia for an absolute knowledge. According to Levinas, this constitutes the paradoxical character of Husserl’s idealism.

What characterizes Cartesian idealism is the radical distinction between the finite being of the subject and its thoughts, through which it is connected to the absolute. This implies that human existence is thus not all thought but only a “thinking thing,” whereas Husserl, by affirming the intentionality of consciousness, does not distinguish between existence and thought and, far from assigning to thought an ontological condition, sees ontology in thought itself. This explains that Husserl’s reservations regarding the passage in Descartes from the cogito to the idea of the thinking thing do not only come from the concern of avoiding the naturalization of consciousness, but more profoundly from contesting that one can ever think the ontological structure of consciousness on the basis of the idea of substance. This results in the modification of the very notion of being, which no longer refers to the sole relation of attribution to its role as copula but to the transitive structure that it acquires by

analogy with that of thought, the act of existing being conceived henceforth as an intention. Now it is precisely in the discovery of the transitive character of the verb to exist that Levinas sees the novelty of the philosophy of existence.

According to Levinas, the existentialist concept of existence originates from the fact that it borrows its transitivity from thought while rejecting its claim to the infinite, and he sees the metaphysical signification of that “revolution in the land of categories” (EDHH, 102) in a new conception of power, understood no longer as the power to place oneself in an infinite horizon but on the contrary as the capacity to end (*pouvoir finir*). In this respect, there is in Levinas an authentic understanding of finitude such as Heidegger defined it, not only in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, but already with Cassirer in the meeting at Davos that Levinas attended and where, just like Rosenzweig, who reported on it in his last published work (aptly entitled “Frontal Exchanges”), he had taken the side of Heidegger against Cassirer.¹⁵ It was indeed at Davos that Heidegger, responding to Cassirer—who claimed that an overcoming of the finitude of knowing being takes place in Kantian ethics—emphasized that this exit from the world of phenomena remains relative to the finite being and thus that the infinite only appears in the constitutive place of finitude, which forbids positing, as theology would have it, the finite and the infinite in a relation of exteriority. He explained that the finite being, precisely because it does not create the entity it intuit, must be *capable* of proposing the conditions that allow it to welcome that entity, and thus that there is a projection of an ontological horizon only if determined by the submission with respect to the preexistence of the entity, “for only a finite being,” he concluded, “is in need of ontology.”¹⁶

In fact, Levinas seems to remember that moment when he claims, “what is proper to the philosophy of existence is not to *think* the finite without referring to the infinite, which would have been impossible, but rather to pose for the human being a relationship with the finite that precisely is not a thought” (EDHH, 102). What is proper to theoretical thought is that it has access to the infinite of the fact that it is detached from its condition and that it is in some way, according to Levinas’s felicitous expression, “behind itself” (EDHH, 101), that is to say, turned toward an absolute that can only appear in its intemporality in the guise of the past. From such a perspective, which remains the primacy of theoretical thought, the entire power of existence consists in situating itself through this movement of a return to an absolute past that thought is, behind itself. But from the moment that thought is no longer identified with a theoretical act and where it merges with the act of existence, the power of existence changes direction: it is no longer the power for existence to precede itself in some way by placing itself in the “already” of the absolute, but the power, on the contrary, of anticipating its end in a movement that carries it toward the

absolute future that death is. Levinas can then legitimately affirm that “The power which is not a thought—is death. The power of the finite being—is the power to die. Without transitivity towards death, the philosophy of existence would fatally fall back toward a philosophy of thought” (EDHH, 103).

Levinas thus explains that Heideggerian being-towards-death is radically opposed to the Platonic conception of death. Plato sees in death the condition of theoretical thought and of the access to the absolute, while Heidegger recognizes on the contrary in death that which makes existence possible, accords its transitivity, and saves it from reification. That death is able to ensure the capacity of man is not the least paradox of a thinking that no longer conceives of finitude as an im-perfection since it no longer contrasts it to an actual infinite, but which can recognize in it not a pure passivity but, following Heidegger’s expression in the “Rectoral Address,” a “creative impotence.”¹⁷ This is what Levinas recognizes; indeed does he not summarize the Heideggerian attempt to think by renouncing any recourse to the eternal with the comment “a kingdom that stems from our poverty and which is without triumph and recompense” (EDHH, 89). This is why he calls the Heideggerian formulation that defines death as the possibility of the impossibility and not as impossibility of possibility¹⁸ “admirably precise” and concludes his analysis with the words, “the power of existence does not consist in overcoming its powerlessness in relation to the origin by returning through an act of reminiscence before such origin, but in being able, in the finite itself, to be able to end” (EDHH, 105).

This opposition between Heideggerian thought and Platonism is also emphasized in another text from the same collection, “Ontology in the temporal,” which dates from 1940. In this text, Levinas insists on the difference between the Platonic conception of the exile of spirit in the world and that of the intimacy that Heidegger established between the human being and the real through his notion of understanding, “the crux of his entire philosophy” (EDHH, 78). For it is through the importance given to that notion that Heidegger overcomes the idealism of representation by subjecting ontic knowledge and access to the object to the condition of an ontological knowledge, understanding properly speaking, which is a projection of a horizon within which the thing can appear. This is essential: this understanding is not a mere assertion concerning the potentiality of being of a subject but a relation of exposition to the adventure of being that one must take on. Thus, the intimacy that was at issue between humans and the real takes on a precise meaning: it refers to the very dynamism of the existence, which is the same as the capacity of understanding. Levinas emphasizes that it is by existing that we understand being and that ontology is our very existence. Levinas refers then implicitly to what Heidegger himself says of the ontological difference, namely, that it is the mode of

being of Dasein and that existing is, as it were, synonymous with the capacity to perform the distinction between Being and beings.¹⁹ It is thus the same transitivity that Levinas discovered in Husserlian intentionality that he sees also at work in existence such as Heidegger understands it. "One could say," he concludes, "that Heidegger's entire philosophy consists in considering the verb *to exist* as a transitive verb. And in sum his entire oeuvre is devoted to the description of this transition—of this transcendence" (EDHH, 80).

Compared to these admirable commentaries that Levinas devoted to the thinking of Husserl and Heidegger, the thinking that he would introduce in 1961 in *Totality and Infinity*, subtitled "Essay on Exteriority," represents a total break. It is as if, to that thought of transcendence, a more classical metaphysics, a metaphysics of the transcending was preferred; as if to the thought of transitivity he had to oppose a thought of exteriority. There is then a rupture with Heidegger's thinking with respect to an internal finitude in favor of the return to an external finitude that presupposes the primacy of the infinite. This is what Levinas had already long ago discovered in Descartes's Third Meditation, where the finitude of the cogito is conceived on the basis of divine existence and not on the basis of mortality, of the "subject's" capacity to die. Thus Levinas notes in the 1961 book, "The Cartesian subject is given a point of view exterior to itself from which it can apprehend itself" (TI, 210). Without this presence of the infinite within it, finite thought would ignore its own finitude. But the idea of the infinite does not have the status of an object and even less that of a concept. Nor is it a reminiscence; it has been "*put* in us," and it characterizes experience in the radical sense of the term: a relation with exteriority, with the Other, which cannot merge itself with the Same (EDHH, 172). The Cartesian analysis of the idea of the infinite thus gives us the scheme of a protoexperience, the very one Levinas names "separation": "Descartes," he concludes, "better than an idealist or a realist, discovers a relation with a total alterity irreducible to interiority, which nevertheless does not do violence to interiority" (TI, 211).

Derrida's thought, which belongs to the subsequent generation, is to a great extent inseparable from that of the founders of phenomenology, which often makes the understanding of his texts difficult for all those who call themselves "Derrideans" and who only know phenomenology secondhand. Also a student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure of rue d'Ulm starting in 1952, he was trained in an atmosphere permeated by existentialism and dominated by the diffusion of Heidegger's thought,²⁰ in particular through the courses given by Jean Beaufret from 1946 to 1962. Ever since the beginning of his philosophical itinerary, Derrida engaged in a debate with Husserl and Heidegger's thought, and with phenomenology in general. He is also the one who most powerfully contributed to making the work of Levinas known, whose recognition was late in

coming, through the fundamental 1964 article that he devoted to him entitled "Violence and Metaphysics." With respect to Heidegger, Derrida showed a certain ambivalence from the beginning. On the one hand, he situated himself in an explicit manner in the wake of his questions. "What I have attempted to do would not have been possible without the opening of Heidegger's questions," he declared in an interview in 1967.²¹ On the other hand, he suspected Heidegger of not being totally freed from the metaphysics of presence that Heidegger had himself been the first to critique: "I sometimes have the feeling that the Heideggerian problematic is the most 'profound' and 'powerful' defense of what I attempt to put into question under the rubric of the *thought of presence*," he stated in another interview in 1971 (*Positions*, p. 55). Derrida indeed detected in Heidegger two contrary gestures: one by which he remains within metaphysics and the other by which he places the determination of being as presence in question, thus opening the possibility of thinking being as a withdrawal or absence.

The critiques that Derrida addresses to him bear on the question of difference. According to Heidegger, the ontological difference remains unthought in metaphysics, which confuses Being and beings, condemning it to giving an account of beings by recourse to a supreme Being, and thus assuming the form that Heidegger names ontotheology. For Heidegger there can only be a being present for us because we understand Being, and it is this understanding of Being that makes possible the encounter with beings in the sense that we project a horizon of comprehensibility on the basis of which that which appears in experience can be apprehended as this or that being. The ontological difference is thus the very root of human existence insofar as it is both an understanding of Being and a comportment toward beings. Now, what Derrida takes issue with in such a conception of difference is that it seems to reinforce the value of the *presence* of being. This is why he invokes "a gesture more Nietzschean than Heideggerian" (*Positions*, 10) in order to think a difference that would no longer be an ontological difference. Nietzsche appears to him in fact as a better thinker of difference than Heidegger, because he saw in the play of forces the sole reality. For Nietzsche, consciousness is only the effect and not the cause of vital forces and those are not present realities, but only pure differences. Derrida relies here on the interpretation that Deleuze gives of the Nietzschean concept of force in his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, published in 1962, a decisive text for what was later called the French Nietzscheism (Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida). Nietzsche sees indeed in being the result of the difference in forces and their effect. He is thus in the eyes of Derrida a thinker of active differentiation and becoming, as opposed to Heidegger, who sees in difference an effect of being, and who thus remains more a thinker of being than of difference. This is why he appeals, against Heidegger and with Nietzsche, to

a thought of a difference “older” than the ontological difference, and it is this difference that he chooses to write as *différance*.²² In *Of Grammatology* Derrida insists nevertheless on the necessity of going through the question of being, as Heidegger was the first and only one to have raised, so as to have access to the thinking of *différance*.²³ He gives great importance in this respect to *Contribution to the Question of Being*, a text in which Heidegger crosses out the word *being* in order to signify that being can no longer be thought of as an object facing us. Derrida sees in this crossing out of Being the admission that Being cannot be posited as a “transcendental signified,” that is to say, as an absolute signification that would command from the outside the entirety of the play of signs (G, 23). For Derrida indeed the difference between the signifier and the signified that one finds in the Saussurian theory of language is a merely relative difference, for the signified does not represent the thing itself and does not refer to the positivity of a referent. Derrida uses the concept of “trace,” which he borrows from Levinas, rather than that of the sign. Traces are differences without any positivity, which do not signify in themselves but only in the play that opposes them to one another, as is already the case in the Saussurian model of language insofar as it is form and not substance and as it supposes placing the referent in brackets. The Derridean concept of trace presupposes also an indefinite *différance*, namely, *différance* in the sense of to defer, to postpone. For Derrida, the process of signification has no beginning or end, and it takes place only because, as he states at the end of *Speech and Phenomena*, “the thing itself always evades.”²⁴ We have always been and always will be in the Dresden Gallery of which Husserl speaks in *Ideas*,²⁵ where there are only portraits of portraits in a labyrinthine world where we only find images that are not images of real things but only images of images unto infinity.

According to Derrida, Husserlian phenomenology is governed by the principle of living presence, of presence in flesh and bone, which must be given through intuition or originary perception. Phenomenology is thus subjected, like the entire Western tradition, to the thought of presence. In *Of Grammatology*, he declares nevertheless that “a thought of the trace can no more break with a transcendental phenomenology than be reduced to it” (G, p. 62). The passage through transcendental phenomenology, that is to say, through the “dream” of a full presence, thus proved inevitable, not in order to remain there but in order to distance itself from it or even “to deconstruct” it, a term that appears in Derrida’s work in the second half of the 1970s. He borrowed the term *deconstruction* from Heidegger,²⁶ while giving it a quite different meaning,²⁷ and the term was used by American admirers to designate his mode of thought: deconstructionism. Now, Derrida discovers this necessary “deconstruction” of phenomenology (as a thinking of full presence) already in the work of Heidegger himself when

the German thinker crossed out the word *being*. Derrida sees in this crossing out the process of a simultaneous tracing and an effacing that constitutes what he calls the trace in an active sense and which should not be confused with what the word normally means in French, that is, the imprint or the mark left by someone. The crossing out of the word *being*, insofar as it implies the effacement of the transcendental signified, is for Derrida the advent of what he names “writing,” which has nothing in common with what we usually call writing. In order to mark this difference, Derrida speaks at times of the architrace or archiwriting,²⁸ by stressing the fact that there is nothing before the trace, which represents nothing and which is an image of nothing, and that there is nothing before writing. For him, in fact, there is not first speech and then writing, and the latter does not refer to a meaning that would be external to it.

It is clear that Derrida found in Husserlian phenomenology the best paradigm of what he himself called “metaphysics of presence.” In fact, with his concept of “categorical intuition,” Husserl brings the Western tradition, which always saw in sight and intuition the mode of knowledge par excellence to its culmination, to such an extent that only vision presents things “in flesh and bone” (*Leibhafti*), as he often says. But must questioning the principle that founds Husserlian phenomenology, the principle of giving intuition,²⁹ necessarily lead to affirming that there is nothing that appears and can be perceived, and thus break with that thought of appearing that is phenomenology? And must we here also return to Cartesianism and to the idea that “being does not affect us,” as Descartes states in the *Principles of Philosophy*?³⁰ Doesn’t Derrida’s gesture consist here in the inversion of the metaphysical dream of presence, in the image of the Nietzschean reversal of Platonism, and even more of the Sartrean reversal of essentialism into existentialism, of which Heidegger says, quite accurately in the “Letter on Humanism,” that it remains a “metaphysical proposition.”³¹ Is it not necessary to inquire about Derrida’s proximity to Sartre and the dualistic style of his thought? Is it a coincidence if in a 1983 interview³² Derrida admitted having read Sartre in his youth and having seen in him a model that he still admired? Sartre indeed played a significant role in his philosophical formation, unlike Merleau-Ponty, whose interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology he did not share, as certain passages in his introduction to the *Origin of Geometry*³³ show, and with whom he did not have a real relationship. Heidegger, for his part, had always considered that the principle of phenomenology is less that of a giving intuition than that of a return to the things themselves,³⁴ which permitted him, in spite of his critique in *Being and Time* of the Husserlian notion of intuition, (BT, note xxiii, 498) to continue to define to the end his thinking as pertaining to phenomenology, of what he himself identified as “a phenomenology of the inapparent.”³⁵ Heidegger always insisted on

the fact that it is because phenomena are “proximally and for the most part *not* given that there is a need for a phenomenology” (BT, 60). Being can thus not be identified with full presence. This is why Heidegger defines it at the end of the introduction of *Being and Time* as “*das transcendens schlechthin*,” which in no way means that being is a “transcendental signified,” that is, a presence in which all other significations are anchored, but on the contrary that it is never and can never be a full and immediate presence, which would mean the abolition pure and simple of the difference between being and beings. It is thus on the subject of the notion of presence that the misunderstanding between Derrida and Heidegger culminates. It is in a certain way in order to even more clearly affirm the “transcendence” of being that Heidegger, after the *Kehre*, emphasized the withdrawal of being and the necessity of thinking being as the event (*Ereignis*) by which there is *simultaneously* clearing, coming to presence of the entity, and the concealment and withdrawal of Being. Metaphysical thinking is, on the contrary, based on the forgetting of Being in the sense that it is incapable of thinking the withdrawal of Being, that is to say, the concealment that occurs with the clearing itself; it is thus metaphysics that only thinks entities and not Being itself, precisely because for it Being means full presence and not a coming to presence, the event of presence, which is simultaneously presence and absence, the withdrawal of Being happening for the benefit of the appearance of the entity. It is this aletheic dimension of Being that Derrida seems to have missed, and with it everything that in Heidegger’s thought escapes radically from what Merleau-Ponty so rightly called “the ontology of the in itself,”³⁶ that naïve ontology which Western metaphysics has been since Descartes, and for which Being is nothing other than the sublimation of the entity (VI, 187).

It is in fact paradoxically to Merleau-Ponty that we must turn if we want to find a true “reception” of Heidegger’s thought. It is true that until the recent appearance, in 1996, of *Notes de cours*,³⁷ it was difficult for those who did not have access to Merleau-Ponty’s manuscripts to have a precise idea of the knowledge that he had of Heidegger’s texts. It is necessary to recall that at the time of his death in 1961, few of them were translated into French, and those that were—the first partial translation of *Being and Time* was not among these, as it was only published in 1963—had for the most part appeared toward the end of the 1950s. If one knows with precision, indeed, which of Husserl’s texts Merleau-Ponty read in the early 1930s, which manuscripts he consulted during his visit to Louvain in 1939, and those that he received and read thereafter, we lack, however, information concerning his relation to Heidegger’s work in the 1930s and 1940s, a period when he was associated more often with Husserl. The difficulty is not only due to his refusal to oppose the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, a refusal that he expressed clearly in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*,

but also and above all to the diffuse influence in this whole period of Heidegger's thought, which bears incontestably on the interpretation that Merleau-Ponty gives of the later philosophy of Husserl, which was itself marked to an extent—very difficult to measure—by the thorough reading that Husserl undertook of *Being and Time* as early as 1929 and by his wish to respond to it through a systematic work that would never see the light of day, the *Krisis* only constituting a new and last “introduction” to phenomenology.

One finds in the working notes that the editor of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Claude Lefort, added a number of remarks to the incomplete manuscript of the text at the time of its publication in 1964, indicating that the proximity between Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's thought had grown considerably. The most famous of these notes, in which Merleau-Ponty recognizes that “The problems posed in *Phenomenology of Perception* are insoluble because I start there from the ‘consciousness’—‘object’ distinction,” (VI, 200) dates from July 1959. This note testifies to the fact that the critique of Husserlian transcendental idealism, which already led Merleau-Ponty to give an existential interpretation of intentionality in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, does not only lead to a new conception of subjectivity but also requires its deconstruction. This allows us to understand the meaning of this other working note of February 1959 in which Merleau-Ponty, sketching the outline of a book he planned to write, defines fundamental thought as having to “say that I must show that what one might consider to be ‘psychology’ (*Phenomenology of Perception*) is in fact ontology” (VI, 176). He left us no doubt that in this ontological turn, which consists essentially in questioning the modern identification of Being and the object, the work of the “later” Heidegger served as a model. What Merleau-Ponty developed in his later philosophy is certainly an ontology of the flesh, a notion that neither the early nor the later Heidegger put at the center of his problematic, but it is nonetheless by the same anti-anthropocentric turn as the one that characterizes Heidegger's thought after the *Kehre*, that it can be understood. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the “flesh” must not be confused with that of the phenomenal body, because it is this “formative medium of the object and the subject” that it is necessary to think “not starting from substances, from body and spirit . . . but . . . as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being” (VI, 147). Merleau-Ponty is able to speak of the “flesh of the world” or of the “flesh of things” because for him there is no *substantial* separation between the sentient body and the world, since the body is born from the world “by segregation,” and it remains, as seeing, open to it (VI, 136). This explains, as Merleau-Ponty himself emphasizes, that by speaking of the flesh of the visible he does not intend to undertake an anthropology but on the contrary proposes to see in carnal being a “. . . prototype of Being, of which our

body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible" (*ibid.*). This paradox, which is none other than the reversibility of the seeing in the visible, does not in fact find its final explication in the ambiguity of the body that is both sentient and sensible, for "... it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here" (*ibid.*), which implies that for thinking it does not suffice to undertake a phenomenology of the body proper, but to undertake a reversal of the perspective which consists in seeing activity as passivity or, as Merleau-Ponty says, feeling "... looked at by the things ..." (VI, 139). Other statements, which express something similar, have a clearly Heideggerian resonance, for example this passage from a note from March 1959 in which Merleau-Ponty compares the *Offenheit* of Husserl's *Umwelt* with Heidegger's *Verborgenheit* of Being: "It is not we who perceive, it is the thing that perceives itself yonder—it is not we who speak, it is truth that speaks itself at the depths of speech";³⁸ or this other passage from a note on Bergson of May 20, 1959, which affirms that what there is to say and that only finds expression in the subject-object language in Bergson's work is "... that the things have us, and that it is not we who have the things. That language has us and that it is not we who have language. That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being" (VI, 194).

There are certainly more direct references to Heidegger in *The Visible and the Invisible*. First, there is an implicit reference to the Heideggerian notion of *Wesen*, where, in more than one passage, Merleau-Ponty writes: "*Wesen* (verbal)," as in a note of February 1959, where he notes that it is there the "... first expression of being that is neither being-object nor being-subject, neither essence nor existence," and he underlines that "What *wes* answers to is the question *was* as well as the question *dass*..."³⁹ There are other implicit references as in the case of the reference to the well-known formulation of the "Letter on Humanism" in the note of October 27, 1959, where, discussing perception and language and thus the opposition between things perceived and significations, Merleau-Ponty opposes natural being, resting in itself, which is the correlate of perception, to "The Being whose home is language" and which "cannot be fixed, looked at," which "it is only from afar" (VI, 214). But the most important references concern the concept of Being itself. In a note from November 1960, which again treats of the chiasm and the identity of activity and passivity, and which describes perception as an "act with two faces" in which "one no longer knows who speaks and who listens," invoking the "universal dimensionality which is Being," Merleau-Ponty adds Heidegger's name in a parentheses (VI, 264–265). In an earlier note dated January 1960, he explains that "Being is dimensionality itself," that is to say, the "inner framework common" to the different views of reality, and it is moreover in the same note

that he sketches out the project of an intraontology and an endoontology (VI, 227). This project supposes not only a vision of the world that functions from outside the world but also what Merleau-Ponty calls the “verticality” of Being, which refers, as he explains in the following note, to a “certain relation between the visible and the invisible” (*ibid.*). That relation is similar to the one Heidegger establishes between the thought and the unthought, where the invisible is that “other dimension” that gives itself negatively in the visible, a dimension that can only be understood as the *Verborgenheit*, that latency of Being, thanks to which there are beings. This is what constitutes Heidegger’s fundamental thinking in the 1930s, a time when he took recourse to the old writing of Seyn to express what Merleau-Ponty himself transcribed by writing the word *Être* (Being) in all his later texts with a capital *Ê*. One understands better why in an earlier note dated January 1959, Merleau-Ponty did not hesitate to declare that “this perceptual world is at bottom Being in Heidegger’s sense . . .” (VI, 170).

All these allusive references to Heidegger in the 1959–60 working notes become clearer in Merleau-Ponty’s last courses at the *Collège de France*, and in particular, the course from 1958–59, bearing on “Philosophy Today.” It is there that one finds the great surprise of this course. While the part devoted to Husserl is relatively short and only addresses in detail Husserl’s last philosophy, and the new meaning of philosophy sketched in the *Krisis* as a reconquest of the lifeworld by a scientificity of a new kind, the part concerning Heidegger involves a detailed analysis of a certain number of texts after *Being and Time*, some of which had only recently been published, such as the *Der Satz vom Grund* (*Principle of Reason*, published in 1957), and *Zur Seinsfrage* (*Contribution to the Question of Being*, published in 1956), to which Merleau-Ponty refers in an essential manner. It is clearly not possible to present here a complete analysis of all the fifty-seven pages of notes devoted to Heidegger, but only to emphasize in a general manner how much they reveal the profound understanding that Merleau-Ponty had acquired of Heidegger’s project, which he exposes most often in this course without critical distance.

The principal idea that stems from this course is that the development of Heidegger’s thought after *Being and Time* must not be understood simply as the passage from an anthropological point of view to a point of view pertaining to a “mysticism” of being, but as a simple change of emphasis⁴⁰ in a thought that remains essentially the same (NC, 120). Thus there has been a change, or passage, one might say, from a Heidegger I to a Heidegger II (to borrow Richardson’s distinction to which Heidegger responded in 1963 in a well-known letter) only in relation to a “popular” interpretation and reception of his work that does not do justice to his recognition of the reasons for the failure of his project of 1927 and of the necessity in which he found himself from the 1930s to

use a new language. What is particularly interesting is the manner in which Merleau-Ponty explains the change in language, which shifts from the idea, exposed in 1929 in *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, of a freedom granting the ground and thus groundless, to that of the abyssal character of Being itself in *Der Satz vom Grund* in 1957, and from a definition of the human being as the placeholder of the nothing (*Platzhalter des Nichts*) in 1929 in *What is Metaphysics*, to a definition of man as a shepherd of being in the “Letter on Humanism” in 1947. Merleau-Ponty understands this change in Heidegger’s work as the passage from a direct to an indirect analysis,⁴¹ which is particularly significant if one refers to the critique that he addresses to Heidegger at the end of his course, that of having sought “a direct expression of being which, as he shows, cannot be directly expressed” (NC, 148). One cannot simply oppose the direct ontology of Heidegger to the indirect ontology of Merleau-Ponty, on the basis of the famous working note of February 1959⁴² where Merleau-Ponty affirms, “One cannot make a direct ontology. My ‘indirect’ method (being in the beings) is the only one which befits being—‘negative’ as in ‘negative theology.’” Merleau-Ponty’s “indirect” method and his “negative” philosophy are anticipated in Heidegger himself, about whom Merleau-Ponty recalls in the end of the notes he devoted to Husserl that Heidegger was the first, after Husserl, to give biology an ontological scope by showing that it is founded in a privative manner on the ontology of *Dasein* (NC, 89). In this regard, one understands that the conception of life, which is the goal of the course on nature that Merleau-Ponty undertook, can be considered on its own as a prolongation and reconsideration of the way Heidegger conceived of our relation to living beings, an eminently indirect relation, since, as Merleau-Ponty says, “What binds them to Us is only the fact that we can only reach them through our own existence” (NC, 90). This, in any case, is what transpires at the end of the notes on Heidegger where Merleau-Ponty cites without comment the passage in the “Letter on Humanism” where Heidegger says that the living being is our closest parent and at the same time “separated from us by an abyss”—“a kinship which is stranger to us than the distance that separates man from God, as immense as it is” (NC, 148). This passage from a direct analysis to an indirect analysis, insofar as it is internal to Heidegger’s work, is understood by Merleau-Ponty as the overcoming of a massive opposition between *Dasein* and *Sein*, which opposes them as positive and negative. What is important in this passage is the elimination of the negativism which is also the elimination of the still dogmatic opposition between existence and essence, for which we can substitute, as Heidegger does in his transitional text *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, a meditation on *Wesen* in a verbal sense, which is no longer opposed negatively to existence but indivisible from it. It is a question, then, of arriving at the conception

of a “universal being” that is no longer negatively opposed to Dasein and that no longer refers to two different senses of Being, such as essence and existence, but that on the contrary “envelops the two correlates that are Dasein and world” (NC, 95). Now this overcoming of negativism, through which Being as invisible no longer appears as another possible visible or a possible visible for an other⁴³ but on the contrary as a “domain to which it is essential to remain hidden, and to only present itself as withdrawal,”⁴⁴ supposes this same nonexteriority of Being in relation to beings that Merleau-Ponty recognizes in the invisible in relation to the visible and that he defines so definitely in *The Visible and the Invisible* as “the invisible of this world” (VI, 151).

There is thus here a quite remarkable homology between Heidegger’s motif of *Seyn* and Merleau-Ponty’s problematic of the visible and the invisible, a homology all the more striking since it leads to a critique of Sartrean ontology. Merleau-Ponty only recognizes therein the thinking of a pseudo-transcendence, which implies the opposition of the interiority of the nothing in the for itself with the exteriority of being in the in itself. These are notions that Merleau-Ponty does not hesitate to refer to as “essentially Cartesian” and “pre-phenomenological” (NC 104). What in his view is lacking in Sartre is not only the transcendence of Dasein but the ontological difference itself, the difference between Being and beings, which thus implies the identification of Being and actuality, Being and full presence, while on the contrary, for Heidegger, Being is “what is possibly be-ing,” according to a formulation in *Der Satz vom Grund*. Through this integration of the possible with Being, and not only with consciousness, we see the belonging of Being to Nothingness itself. This unity in the Being of the actual and of the possible refers to the thinking of Being as *wesam*, which alone can account for the being of the world or of the thing. What the “later” Heidegger seeks to think is both the fact that Dasein is addressed (*zugeworfen*) to humans and that there is thus a call or a claim of Being to human beings, and the non-exteriority of Being in relation to us, since Being is not in itself and thus not distinct from its *Zuwendung*, its way of turning towards us and claiming us. This, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes pertinently, is “Heidegger’s essential thought,” that Being that can only give itself as *a-letheia*, as “emerging from latency,” and thus solely in a negative manner. It is in fact only at this moment of the course⁴⁵ that Merleau-Ponty cites the key passage from *Zur Seinsfrage* where Heidegger explains that one can only write Being as crossed out, this crossing out having the virtue of freeing us from the almost inextricable habit leading us to represent it in the form of the in-itself (NC, 232). What is thus conjured is the infinitism of the in itself, and Merleau-Ponty notes here with good reason that “by opening *Dasein* onto Being, by making it *Da-sein*, a *Da* which is thrown to it by Being, Heidegger is much further from

a Being in itself than when he described Dasein as thrownness, *Geworfenheit*, thrown by \times " (NC, 118). Because, he adds, "negativism always conceals thinking of a pure positive." Negativism, one could say, is essentially nostalgic—it is the law of the diametrical inversion that it only sustains itself on the basis of what it inverts and negates; the reversal of a metaphysical proposition remains a metaphysical proposition, Heidegger said of the Sartrean proposition, "existence precedes essence," in the passage already cited from the "Letter on Humanism." To free oneself from metaphysics, from this pure positive that is the *ens realissimum* and from the God defined as *causa sui*, does not signify their negation pure and simple. This is the reason why Merleau-Ponty declares that "by introducing the Divine (a question which for him encompasses that of God, gives the philosophical meaning of God), [Heidegger] is further from God in itself than when he made Dasein the place of the nothing" (*ibid.*). In other words, the methodological atheism of the "early" Heidegger was still *too theological*, and by making of Dasein a being without origin he still took sides with the infinitism and creationism, which can only find in human beings the negative of God. Heidegger's position in *Being and Time* will not only have been influenced by subjectivism but also negatively, by objectivism and theologism. What allows him to overcome these, declares Merleau-Ponty, is the dialectic of *Verborgenheit* and *Unverborgenheit*, or latency and nonlatency, which allow us to understand the statement, "there is nothing behind things," no other world than this one, no beyond of the world where Being would finally be at home and from which it would occasionally come to appear to us. Latent Being is not a secondary property of Being, and any truth is also itself untruth because the very idea of a total unconcealment is illusory. But that implies at the same time that the latency of Being, its withdrawal, can only give itself in the entity itself. Being hides itself as Being by making itself an entity, as Heidegger suggested in *The Principle of Reason*, and he says explicitly in *Identity and Difference*, a text from 1957 that Merleau-Ponty knew and cited further. There is thus an internal *inadequation* to appearing, and it is that thinking with respect to the *inadequation to Being* and thus of the *nonpositivity* of entities which also allows Merleau-Ponty to think both what he names "the sensible" as "that medium in which there can be being without it having to be posited," and "Being's unique way of manifesting itself without being positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent,"⁴⁶ and the invisible as hollow—and not as a hole—in the visible as a virtual center and invagination of it. Merleau-Ponty does not hesitate henceforth to conclude—and nothing prevents us from thinking that he also speaks for himself, which would perhaps prevent one from unduly "Christianizing" his ontology of the flesh⁴⁷—and from opposing it too precipitously as still theological to Sartrean atheism, which should on the contrary appear itself as a

theological remains: “The philosophy of the nonpositive is further from theology than the philosophy of the nothing or nihilism, which is the inevitable counterpart of theology. The philosophy of the death of God is still theology” (NC, 119). To be further from theology, and from the positivism that it implies, than the nihilists of any kind, means *to be phenomenological*. This is why Heidegger’s so-called mystical formulas are nothing other than phenomenological formulas that state the identity of phenomenology and ontology and proclaim that Being deploys itself as appearing and that appearing means being, expressions that Merleau-Ponty finds in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, but which refer to an idea already strongly expressed in §7 of *Being and Time*, where he states: “from the start phenomenology was understood as ontology” (NC, 120). But if Being remains hidden, there can no longer be an onto-logy, a discourse on being, any more than a discourse on God or theo-logy, the relation Being-beings remaining ineluctably moving, and in no way can it be halted; Merleau-Ponty is right in suggesting that it is the faithfulness to this movement that led Heidegger to contrast thinking as the task of the future, to philosophy as a thinking of foundation, and positivism.

Translated by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), §3b, p. 42 (Winter semester course 1942–43). ED. Our appreciation to Troy Mellon, John Castore, and James Ryan, for their assistance with the editorial preparation, as well as to Dr. Cathy Leblanc, teaching and research assistant at the University of Arras (France), for her valuable assistance with the translation of this chapter.

2. Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 23.

3. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), §6 p. 42. Hereafter cited as BT followed by the page number.

4. Martin Heidegger, “‘Only a God Can Save Us’: *Der Spiegel*’s Interview with Martin Heidegger (1966),” *The Heidegger Controversy: a Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 113.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Denkerfahrten* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), p. 16.

6. *Ibid.*, 21.

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7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Parcours 1935–1951* (Paris: Verdier, 1997), p. 67. Hereafter cited as P, followed by page number.

8. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “La philosophie de l’existence,” conférence de 1959, in *Parcours II 1951–1961* (Paris: Verdier, 2000), p. 247. Hereafter cited as PE, followed by page number.

9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), p. 24. Hereafter cited as BN, followed by the page number.

10. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), p. 4.

11. Emmanuel Levinas, *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), p. 170. Hereafter cited as EDHH. Translation ours.

12. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p. 46. Hereafter cited as TI, followed by the page number.

13. On such violence, Derrida’s essay, “Violence and Metaphysics,” already says all that needs to be said in an admirable way. Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 70–153.

14. This word is from Levinas himself, who speaks of “reversing terms,” that is to say, the relation of primacy between the Same and the Other. See EDHH, 171.

15. See François Poirié, *Emmanuel Levinas, Essais et Entretiens* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1996), p. 78, where Levinas narrates that he reproached himself greatly during the Nazi years to have preferred Heidegger in Davos. Also see Franz Rosenzweig, *Vertauschte Fronten, Gesammelte Schriften*, volume III (Nijhoff, The Hague, 1984), pp. 235–237.

16. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 175. Translation slightly modified.

17. Martin Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 31, where Heidegger comments on Aeschylus, saying in *Prometheus Bound* that knowledge (or technē) is far less powerful than necessity.

18. EDHH, 104. See also a note on p. 70 in Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), where Levinas notes that for Heidegger death is not “the impossibility of possibility” but indeed “the possibility of impossibility” and that such an “apparently Byzantine distinction has a fundamental importance.”

19. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), §22, pp. 318–324.

20. On this topic, see Dominique Janicaud who, in *Heidegger en France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), speaks with good reason of the “improved atmosphere of the 1950s” (pp. 135–184).

21. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 9.

22. In particular in his January 1968 lecture “*Différance*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 3, which begins with these words: “I will speak, therefore, of a letter. Of the first letter, if the alphabet, and most of the speculations which have ventured into it, are to be believed. I will speak, therefore, of the letter a, this initial letter which it apparently has been necessary to insinuate, here and there, into the writing of the word *différance*.”

23. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, The John’s Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 23. Hereafter cited as G, followed by page number.

24. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison and Newton Garver (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 104. Translation slightly modified.

25. Cf. Emmanuel Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers), §100, p. 246. Hereafter cited *Ideas*, followed by the page number.

26. If in *Being and Time* it is a question of *Destruktion*, the term *abbau*, “deconstruction,” which is also present in Husserl, appears on page 315 in Martin Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), where Derrida probably found it, but also on pages 71 and 73 in Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1958), where it is translated as “*dismantling*,” and also §5 in the course from 1927, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, §5, p. 23.

27. The Derridean deconstruction is the deconstruction of presence, whereas *Destruktion*, as Heidegger recalls in 1969 in his third seminar at the Thor [on page 43 of Martin Heidegger, “Seminar in Le Thor 1969,” in *Four Seminars: Le Thor 1966, 1968, 1969, Zähringen 1973*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003)], aims on the contrary at revealing the originary meaning of Being, which is none other than *Anwesenheit*. See also page 315, in “On the Question of Being,” where Heidegger attacks “the superficial misconstrual of the ‘destruction’ [*Destruktion*] discussed in *Being and Time* (1927), a ‘destruction’ that has no other intent than to reattain the originary experiences of being belonging to metaphysics by deconstructing [*Abbau*] representations that have become commonplace and empty.”

28. On this “new concept” of archi-writing, see in particular Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 57.

29. See Husserl’s *Ideas*, §24.

30. Rene Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I §52, as Gérard Granel, who cites this passage in his commentary on the 1905 lectures, notes that this passage from the Latin text was not exactly translated into French by Abbé Picot (*Le Sens du Temps et de la Perception chez E. Husserl*, Gallimard, 1968, p. 73).

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31. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1977), p. 208.

32. Jacques Derrida, "An Interview with Derrida," September 9, 1983 (from *Le Nouvel Observateur*), *Derrida and Différance*, eds. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, trans. David Wood et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 71–82.

33. Cf. E. Husserl, "Origin of Geometry," in *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, Jacques Derrida, trans. J. P. Leavey, Jr. (Stony Brook: Nicolas Hays, Ltd., 1978), pp. 111–114.

34. See Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 1977), pp. 373–392.

35. "Zähringen Seminar," in *Four Seminars*, p. 80.

36. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 226. Hereafter cited as VI, followed by the page number.

37. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours 1959–1961* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996). Hereafter cited as NC, followed by the page number.

38. VI, 185.

39. VI, 174. Translation slightly modified.

40. NC, 93.

41. NC, 94.

42. VI, 179. Translation modified.

43. VI, 229.

44. NC, 94.

45. NC, 118.

46. VI, 214.

47. A suspicion Derrida expresses in Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 216–262.

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CONTRIBUTORS

FRANÇOISE DASTUR recently retired as Professor of Philosophy at the Université de Nice Sophia-Antipolis. She is the author of numerous books, including *Death: An Essay on Finitude* (1996), *Hölderlin Le Retournement Natal* (1997), *Heidegger and the Question of Time* (1998), *Telling Time: Sketch of a Phenomenological Chrono-Logy* (2001), and *Chair et Langage: Essais sur Merleau-Ponty* (2001). She has published many articles in French, English, and German on Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, and Ricœur.

JONATHAN LAHEY DRONSFIELD is Reader in Theory and Philosophy of Art at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom and serves on the Executive Committee of the Forum for European Philosophy at the London School of Economics. He has published in continental philosophy, in particular on art and on ethics. Currently he is working on two book projects, one concerning responsibility in contemporary French philosophy and the other Heidegger's philosophy of art.

HELEN A. FIELDING is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Women's Studies at The University of Western Ontario, Canada. She has published articles on Irigaray, Heidegger, Nancy and Merleau-Ponty, including: "This Body of Art: The Singular Plural of the Feminine," in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 36.3, "Questioning Nature: Irigaray, Heidegger and the Potentiality of Matter," in *Continental Philosophy Review* 35:1, and "White Logic and the Constancy of Colour," in *Feminist Interpretations of Merleau-Ponty* (2006). She is currently working on a book manuscript on sexual difference that takes up the works of these thinkers.

WAYNE FROMAN teaches philosophy at George Mason University, where he served as department chair for ten years. He is the author of *Merleau-Ponty:*

Language and the Act of Speech (1982) as well as numerous articles, including “Heidegger and the Essence of Technology,” in *Die Metaphysik der Praktischen Welt (Festschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstag Otto Pöggeler)* (2000), “Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenological Philosophy,” in *Les études phénoménologiques* (2001), and “The Strangeness in the Ethical Discourse of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Addressing Levinas* (2005).

JEAN GREISCH is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at l’Institut Catholique de Paris. In Fall 2006 he was Gadamer Distinguished Visiting Professor at Boston College, and in Spring 2007 Visiting Professor at Villanova University. He has written numerous books, including *Ontologie et Temporalité: Esquisse d’une interprétation intégrale de Sein und Zeit* (1994), *L’arbre de vie et l’arbre du savoir: Les racines phénoménologiques de l’herméneutique heideggérienne (1919–1923)* (2000), *Le cogito herméneutique: l’herméneutique philosophique et l’héritage cartésien* (2001), *La Parole Heureuse: Martin Heidegger entre les choses et les mots* (1987), and a three-volume work on the philosophy of religion, *Le Buisson ardent* and *les Lumières de la Raison: L’invention de la philosophie de la religion* (2002–2004).

PIERRE JACERME was for many years *Khâgne* professor of philosophy at the prestigious *Lycée Henri IV* in Paris, where he trained generations of future professors of philosophy. He is the author of *L’éthique à l’ère nucléaire* (2005). He has published numerous articles, most notably “A propos de la traduction française d’Etre et temps,” in *Heidegger Studies*, vol. 34 (1987–1988), “Le silence d’Hiroshima,” in *L’Infini* (2006). He is completing a book on the history of Western philosophy.

DOMINIQUE JANICAUD was professor of Philosophy and Director of the Center for Research in the History of Ideas at the Université de Nice Sophia-Antipolis, where he created the Journal *Noesis*. His magisterial two-volume *Heidegger en France* (2001) chronicles the French reception of Heidegger over the course of seven decades. He addressed Heidegger’s thought in many books, including *Heidegger from Metaphysics to Thought* (1995) and *The Shadow of That Thought* (1996). Other works contributing to philosophies of rationality and power include *Powers of the Rational: Science, Technology, and the Future of Thought* (1994) and *Rationalities, Historicities* (1997). He is also the author of the influential *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate* (2001).

REGINALD LILLY received his Ph.D. from Duquesne University and teaches at Skidmore College, where he is Professor of Philosophy. Lilly has translated books from German and French by and on Heidegger, as well as Reiner Schür-

Contributors

mann's *Broken Hegemonies* (2003). He publishes on Heidegger, Levinas, Hegel, Foucault, and others. Lilly has been *correspondant* of the *Collège International de Philosophie* in Paris where he delivered two series of lectures dealing with Schürmann, Heidegger, Derrida, and psychoanalysis, bearing on "the fissured subject." He plans to publish these as a book, *The Traumatic Subject: An Essay in the Analytic of Ultimates*.

ALAN MILCHMAN teaches in the Political Science Department at Queens College of the City University of New York. His research focus has been on twentieth-century continental philosophy and social theory and on the philosophical study of the Holocaust and man-made mass murder. He has co-edited (with Alan Rosenberg) *Martin Heidegger and the Holocaust, Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, and most recently *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters*. He has authored or co-authored essays on Max Weber, Ernst Bloch, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault, as well as on the philosophical implications of modern genocide.

ANDREW J. MITCHELL is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Emory University. He works in the fields of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German philosophy and the philosophy of literature, with emphases in the philosophy of nature (German Romanticism, American Transcendentalism), critical theory, and the history of philosophy (ancient and modern). His research addresses questions of meaning, mediation, and materiality in philosophy and literature. He is the translator (with François Raffoul) of Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars* (2003). Recent publications include "Heidegger and Terrorism," in *Research in Phenomenology* 35, and "Fassbinder: The Subject of Film," in *Cinematic Thinking*.

JEAN-LUC NANCY is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Strasbourg II and is currently Professor of Political Philosophy and Media Aesthetics at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland. Among his many books are: *The Inoperative Community* (1991), *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan* (1992, with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe), *The Experience of Freedom* (1993), *The Birth to Presence* (1993), *The Muses* (1996), *The Gravity of Thought* (1997), *The Sense of the World* (1998), *Being Singular Plural* (2000), *The Speculative Remark* (2001), *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* (2002), and *A Finite Thinking* (2003).

ALAN ROSENBERG is Professor of Philosophy at Queens College of the City University of New York. His scholarly work has focused on philosophical issues relating to the Holocaust, philosophical issues that arise in connection

Contributors

to psychoanalysis, and key themes in continental philosophy, value theory, and philosophy of the social sciences. Rosenberg is the co-author of more than eighty journal articles and book chapters. He is also the co-editor of numerous books, including *Contemporary Portrayals of Auschwitz: Philosophical Challenges* (2000), *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (2003), *Experiments in Thinking the Holocaust: Auschwitz, Modernity and Philosophy* (2004), and *Reading Nietzsche at the Margins* (2008).

GREGORY SCHUFREIDER is a Professor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University. He was the founding Director of the Program for the Study of the Audiovisual Arts at LSU and is currently Associate Chair for Philosophy. He teaches primarily in areas of the history of philosophy, recent continental philosophy and the philosophy of art. He is the author of *Introduction to Anselm's Argument* (1978) and *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm's Early Writings* (1994), and his articles include "The Metaphysician as Poet-Magician," in *Metaphilosophy* (1979), "Art and the Problem of Truth," in *Man and World* (1981), "Heidegger on Community," in *Man and World* (1981), "The Logic of the Absurd," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1983), and "Overpowering the Center: Three Compositions by Mondrian," in *JAAC* (1985).

ALLEN SCULT teaches philosophy at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. Early in his career, in addition to preparing to enter rabbinical school, he studied Semitic languages and Bible at the University of Pennsylvania. The deeply engaged way of reading he learned during that period carries over to his present interest in the relationship between hermeneutics and the rhetoric of sacred texts. He is the author of *Being Jewish/Reading Heidegger: An Ontological Encounter* (2004), a co-authored book entitled *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (1990), and numerous essays published in rhetoric and philosophy journals.

DENNIS SKOCZ is an independent scholar who received his Ph.D. in philosophy at Duquesne University in 1974. His studies of Heidegger, Husserl, and Habermas influence his thematic work in the media, technology, and the environment. His papers have appeared in *Analecta Husserliana*, *Phenomenological Inquiry*, *Glimpse: Publication of the Society for Phenomenology and Media*, *Outis Environmental Philosophy*, and *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*. Dr. Skocz is President of the Society for Phenomenology and Media.

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