

# Heidegger's Later Philosophy

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# 1      Being, truth and metaphysics

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1. Heidegger's philosophy has a great deal to say about the first and last things that confront each of us as we attempt to live our lives as best we may. His discussions of, *inter alia*, art, death, alienation, technology, community and ecology are, as the Germans say *actuell*, of evident 'relevance' to our existential concerns, the kinds of discussions non-philosophers look to philosophers to provide (but are, these days, often disappointed). For all of this manifest 'relevance', however, the centre of Heidegger's philosophy lies in none of the above topics but in, rather, his *Seinsphilosophie*, his 'philosophy of Being'. The concern with Being – *the* 'matter of thinking', for Heidegger – is so fundamental to all of his work, both early and late, that unless one attains a solid comprehension of what he has to say about it one's grasp of his discussions of the other, initially more accessible, topics is bound to remain superficial and insecure. So it is that in this first chapter we need to begin with the seemingly dry constellation of topics itemized in its somewhat forbidding title. (*Seemingly* but not really dry: the excitement of Heidegger's philosophy is the discovery that the first and last things in the philosophy of Being, properly understood, are also the first and last things in life.)

## Truth

2. First and foremost, then, the '*Seinsfrage*', the 'question of Being': what is it? One of Heidegger's statements about Being is that it constitutes 'the hidden essence [*Wesen*] of truth' (DT p. 83), a linking of topics which suggests that truth might be a fruitful point of entry into the topic of Being.

What, then, is truth? Unlike the impatient Pilate, Heidegger devoted a lifetime to providing, in full, an answer to this question. The first major formulation of his account of truth occurred in 1925, in *Plato's Sophist*<sup>1</sup>, and

<sup>1</sup> Trans. R. Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

received a major restatement in section 44 of *Being and Time* (1927). Its implications were not, however, properly understood in that work which is the reason why later Heidegger views his early masterpiece as, for all its insights, fundamentally flawed.<sup>2</sup> A useful 'take', indeed, on his life's work, it seems to me, is to describe it as the endeavour fully to understand and appropriate all of the ramifications of *Being and Time*'s theory of truth. An improved restatement of the theory occurs in the 1930 'On the Essence of Truth' (ET) an essay he identifies as the beginning of the 'turn' (away from 'metaphysics') that separates later from early Heidegger (LH p. 250). A further restatement occurs in 1936 in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (OWA pp. 50ff.) and thereafter in many later works.

What then, to repeat, is truth? According to the Western philosophical tradition it is 'correspondence' or, as Heidegger, following the Medievals, calls it, 'adequacy'. Truth is a property of 'propositions' or 'statements', a property they possess when they correspond – are 'adequate to' – the facts. What, however, asks Heidegger, tells us what the facts are to which propositions are to be compared for correspondence (OWA p. 51)?

One answer – the answer, he suggests, provided by the Western tradition in general – is that you just look and see. So, for example, if someone says 'Betty is very thin' you look at what 'Betty' stands for – if there is any doubt about what that is the speaker will simply point – and see whether it is thin or not.

Let us, then, try to apply this simple procedure. I say, pointing, 'Betty is very thin.' You, seeing that what I am pointing at is a rather portly little horse, decide I have said something false. In fact, however, that to which I intended

<sup>2</sup> In *Being and Time*, he says, 'metaphysics . . . is still dominant' (LH p. 256). Since, as we will shortly see, later Heidegger takes his central task to be the overcoming of 'metaphysics', this judgment is the basis of his description of *Being and Time* as constituting (along with all his work from 1927 to 1936) a 'false turning [*Holzweg*] albeit a necessary [i.e. productive] one' (GA 15 p. 366).

'*Holzweg*' I take to be intended to describe the *dominant* character of the period and to be, therefore, consistent with particular works – conspicuously the 1930 'On the Essence of Truth' which (as the main text is about to remark) Heidegger describes as the beginning of the 'turn' to his later thinking – being genuinely free of 'metaphysics'. One may perhaps think of 1927–36 as analogous to late winter with isolated works, the 'Essence of Truth' and parts of 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in particular, representing the first buds of spring. This mixed or transitional character of the period is the reason scholars interested in a finer-grained periodization of Heidegger's career than I, at present, am, have identified it as a 'middle' period. On the periodization of Heidegger's 'path of thinking' see, further, HPA p. 3.

to refer was (for my own arcane reasons) not the horse but rather its skin, a skin which is indeed very thin. Or, to change the example, perhaps I say, pointing at the horse, 'That's very old.' You, knowing the horse to be but a foal, decide that I have said something false. In fact, however, that to which I intended to refer (for, again, my own arcane reasons) was not the horse but rather the region of space it exactly occupies.

These examples are, of course, extraordinarily far-fetched. They are, nonetheless, revealing, for they show that the mere correlation of words with bits of reality – merely saying "‘Betty’" stands for *that*' and pointing – is insufficient to determine reference. Normally, of course, communication flows smoothly and we do not suffer from the kinds of misunderstandings illustrated by these examples. Communication is usually unproblematic. But that is only because we share a – usually unnoticed – background understanding as to the kinds of entities that are being talked about. Generally, for example, we share the assumption that the things named and pointed to are whole natural objects rather than their surfaces or the spaces they occupy. What the far-fetched examples reveal, however, is that it is only because of such a background assumption that we know what kinds of things, and hence what kinds of facts, are under discussion. Heidegger calls such a background understanding a 'horizon' (DT p. 63), a horizon of 'disclosure' ('revealing', 'unconcealment'). Sometimes, echoing Nietzsche, he calls it a 'perspective' (QB *passim*).

Heidegger does not deny that truth is correspondence. His point is rather that since the possibility of propositions being true or false (the possibility, as I shall put it, of reality's becoming 'intelligible' to us) depends on there being things to which they refer and facts about those things to which they may or may not correspond, and since the identification of such a realm of facts depends on a horizon of disclosure which alone makes it possible, truth as correspondence is dependent on a something more 'primordial'. This condition of the possibility of propositional truth Heidegger calls 'truth as disclosure' or often, using the Greek word, '*aletheia*' (OWA p. 51) – *a-letheia*, bringing out of 'oblivion' or concealment.

Truth as disclosure, says Heidegger, is always simultaneously 'concealment' (ET p. 148, OWA pp. 53–4). This is how it makes truth as correspondence possible. The horizon of whole natural objects puts out of consideration,

blocks, conceals, 'denies' (OWA p. 54) both the horizon of surfaces and that of spaces. But this means that horizons of disclosure also block access to certain truths. If our talk is confined to whole natural objects then truths about their surfaces or spaces are not allowed to appear. This is why Heidegger says that 'truth is un-truth' (not to be confused with falsehood) since there always 'belongs to it the reservoir<sup>3</sup> of the not-yet-uncovered, the uncovered in the sense of concealment' (OWA p. 60).

Heidegger calls that which truth conceals (from now on when I use 'truth' without qualification I mean truth as disclosure) 'the mystery' (ET p. 148). Because of the hidden 'reservoir', the hidden 'depth' (compare BT 152) to truth, truth is 'uncanny' (OWA p. 54), 'awesome' (OWA p. 68). Initially, this is a puzzling inference. Though the whole natural object horizon may block, for now, the spaces and surfaces horizons, the blockage is merely temporary. We can, if we want, choose at a later date to inhabit those other horizons, to discuss reality from a spaces or surfaces 'perspective'.

Heidegger, however, when he speaks of horizons of disclosure means *ultimate* horizons. The horizons discussed so far are, as one might put it, optional. I may adopt and abandon them as, more or less, the mood takes me. My Heideggerian horizon, however, is non-optional. It is, he says, 'transcendental' (DT p. 63), that is (to stay with Kant's language), an '*a priori*' feature of my existence, something which, as a member of the current epoch of the historical culture to which I belong, I inhabit as a matter of necessity. Embodied in the language I speak – language understood broadly as social practice (HE p. 301) or, as Wittgenstein puts it, 'form of life' – it constitutes for me and my fellows, the limit of what, to us, is intelligible. It is, as it were, the horizon of all our horizons. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger calls it a 'world' – 'world' in the 'ontological' sense which is not to be confused with 'world' in the 'ontic' sense of the totality of beings that are disclosed by world in the first sense (AWP p. 129, DT p. 76). In *Being and Time* he calls it the 'thrownness' in which one finds oneself 'already' as one becomes an adult human being and which constitutes one as the kind of human being one is. Language, as Heidegger puts it in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, is not something man has as an attribute. Rather, language is 'the happening that has man', the 'process through

<sup>3</sup> *Herkunftsbereich*. Literally, 'originating region'.



which man first enters history as a being (IM p. 141; compare GA 39 section 7 (h)).<sup>4</sup>

To suppose the limits of intelligibility for my historical-cultural epoch to be also the limits of intelligibility *per se* would be the height of irrational epistemological chauvinism. Once one understands the notion of a transcendental horizon and sees its historically and culturally relative character,<sup>5</sup> the conclusion presents itself that in addition to what is intelligible to us, reality possesses an indefinitely large number of aspects, a 'plenitude' (*Vollzähligkeit*) of 'sides' or 'facets' (*Seiten*) (WPF p. 124, DT p. 64) which would be disclosed to us were we to inhabit transcendental horizons other than the one we do, horizons which, however, we can neither inhabit nor even conceive. Truth, then, is concealment, ultimate truth concealment of the, to us, *ineluctably* mysterious. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art' Heidegger calls this 'region' (see footnote 3 above) 'earth' (*Erde*). 'World' (in the ontic sense) is the intelligible in truth, that which is 'lit up'; as Heidegger calls it, 'the clearing' (*Lichtung*).<sup>6</sup> 'Earth', on the other hand, is 'the not ['linguistically'] mastered [the] ... concealed, the disconcerting [*Beirrendes*]' (OWA p. 55), the dark penumbra of unintelligibility that surrounds (and in an important sense, as we will see in later chapters, grounds) our human existence.

<sup>4</sup> Kant views the horizon of human world-disclosure – 'the categories' – (though he would not, of course, put it this way) as a kind of 'software programme' that is 'hardwired' into the human being as such, hardwired at all times and places. For Heidegger, however, world-disclosure is embodied in the much more malleable phenomenon of 'language', language considered as social practice. This yields a more fluid picture of horizons of intelligibility than is allowed by Kant, a fact which might lead one to question the appropriateness of Heidegger's describing one's ultimate horizon as 'transcendental'. I think that Heidegger would reply that though world-disclosure is indeed a malleable phenomenon, to the extent that it changes so does the human being. A radical transformation in my ultimate horizon of disclosure (I emigrate to Japan and acquire a native competence in Japanese while gradually losing my competence in English) makes me a new person. Hence the world-disclosure into which I am 'thrown' remains 'transcendental' for me and my 'generation' (BT 385), a necessary and defining feature of *our* existence.

<sup>5</sup> Notice that while horizons of disclosure are dependent on social practices and are hence relative to particular cultures, it does not follow that truth (as correspondence) is. That the *medium* of discovery is (for short) 'subjective' does not entail that *what* is discovered is dependent on us. And the latter proposition Heidegger denies. Though Newton's Laws were not true (or false) before Newton formulated them (BT 226–7), 'for nature [reality, Being] to be as it is does not need ... unveiledness' (BP p. 220). Newton discovered (at least approximately) a human-being independent feature of reality itself.

<sup>6</sup> Notice that world in the ontological sense is not the clearing. It is rather that which 'clears' (creates) the clearing. More accurately, 'the clearing' can only refer to world in the ontological sense if 'clearing' is understood as a *verbal* noun, as referring to the activity which, as it were, releases the totality of beings in the midst of which we find ourselves.

Notice that in contrast to the simplicity of the correspondence theory, truth, on Heidegger's account, is *complex*. It is a complex of four elements; the undisclosed (earth), the disclosed (world in the ontic sense), the horizon of disclosure (world in the ontological sense), and man, the discloser. Heidegger records this complexity by calling truth a 'constellation'. To achieve 'insight into that which is' (TT p. 47) (and everything which we will discover that to entail) we must, he says, 'look into the constellation of truth' (QCT p. 33).

### **being**

3. So much for 'truth'. What now of 'Being'? What, to repeat, is Being?

Readers possessing even a slight acquaintance with the secondary literature on Heidegger will have noticed its indecision as to whether 'Being' is to be written with a large or a small 'b'. (The secondary literature in English; in German, since all nouns are capitalized, and since Heidegger almost always uses *Sein* as a noun, the issue does not arise.) This indecision, I shall suggest, is due to the fact that, without being very helpful or consistently explicit about it, Heidegger in fact uses the term in *two* central senses. (One senses that at times he himself struggled to be totally clear on the matter.) Readers who capitalize respond to one, those who do not, respond to the other of these senses. It is, however, I shall argue, important to respond to both. The one sense I shall mark with the small 'b' the other with the large. (The acute reader, noting that I have capitalized up to now, might reasonably conclude that the capitalized sense is, in my view, the most important, that my fundamental sympathies lie with the capitalizers.) When I wish to remain neutral as to which sense is intended, or when I think that both are, I shall either retreat to the German *Sein* or else write 'B/being'.

In the small 'b' sense, being is, as Heidegger puts it, 'presence' (TB p. 2, ID p. 18, WCT p. 235), or sometimes 'presencing' (QB p. 308). Presence (*Anwesenheit*) is contrasted with 'what presences [*das Anwesende*]' (QB p. 299, D p. 163). Since the essence of a being [*das Seiende*] is that it is something present, noticeable, capable of being of 'concern' (TB p. 23) to us, 'what presences' is just another name for beings. While beings are 'ontic', being, i.e. presence, as, not a being but rather, in a yet-to-be-explored

sense, the underlying ‘ground’ of beings (QB p. 300), is ‘ontological’ (DT p. 76).<sup>7</sup>

Reflecting on the affinities between his own conception of being and Ernst Jünger’s (Hegel-indebted) conception of the world-historical, epoch-determining *Gestalt* (for Jünger, as we will see, the *Gestalt* that defines modernity is that of ‘the worker’), Heidegger says that like Jünger’s *Gestalt*, being is ‘transcendence’, that is, ‘the meta-physical’ (QB pp. 298–9). It transcends beings, is ‘above’ the ‘physical’, in the way in which the visual field transcends ‘the appearance of objects’ (DT p. 63).

Thinking about the ‘presence’ – ‘what presences’ relation in terms of this optical analogy suggests there to be two aspects to the relation between being and beings. First, as the visual field is necessary to there being any objects of sight at all, so, one may assume, presence is necessary to there being anything at all that presences. Only being renders it possible that beings should show up for us at all. Second, as, in Jünger’s language, the ‘optics’ (QB p. 294) of a visual field determine the character of its contents – to someone who has lost the sense of colour only the tonal contrasts between things can show up – so presence limits our ‘representing’ (DT p. 64) of beings, the way in which they can show up for us. Heidegger sums up both these aspects of being’s ‘transcendence’ of beings in the following passage. Presence, he says, is

that which, as ground, already underlies everything present as that presence . . . and thus ‘legitimizes’ the latter *as* beings, . . . in the sense of [being their] authoritative, underlying ground. (QB p. 300)

Presence, says Heidegger, ‘the *transcendens* pure and simple (*Being and Time* section 7)’, is that which ‘prevails . . . in an authoritative manner’ (QB p. 312).

It is obvious from the preceding remarks that ‘being’ in the small ‘b’ sense is just a synonym for that which, in discussing truth, Heidegger refers to as a (fundamental) horizon of disclosure and as ‘world’ in the ontological sense. The three phrases are alternative descriptions of that which, both when talking about B/being and when talking about truth, he calls ‘the transcendental’: that which transcends beings and, in the two ways just discussed, determines the

<sup>7</sup> In *Being and Time* Heidegger explains that an ‘ontic’ investigation is an investigation of some range of beings – biology, for example, investigates living beings – while an ‘ontological’ investigation investigates the conditions of there being beings as such. The Kantian investigation that discovers the ‘categories of the understanding’ is an example of the latter.

way in which they show up for ('presence' to) us. In this sense, then, being (more accurately, a particular understanding, 'clearing',<sup>8</sup> or, in the language of *Being and Time*, 'meaning' of B/being) is that fundamental disclosure which is embodied in the 'linguistic' practices of a given culture in a given epoch of its historical existence. It is for this reason that Heidegger says that being exists only through human (by which he means language-using<sup>9</sup>) being. 'Only man', he says,

open for being, allows this to arrive as presence. Presence needs the open of a clearing<sup>10</sup> and remains as such through this dependence given over [*übereignet*] to human being. (ID p. 19)

This, however, he adds does not mean human beings are *prior* to being since though being is dependent on man, man is equally dependent on the clearing of being (*ibid.*). In, for example, the world defined by Jünger's *Gestalt* of the worker, the world where everything shows up as either ripe for work or the product of work, the human being shows up as, and only as, 'the worker'. In other clearings he shows up in other ways. Man's nature is his clearing. 'I am', as Wittgenstein observed, 'my world'. (Lower case) being and human being are, therefore, to put the point in Heideggerian language, 'equiprimordial'.

## Being

4. So much for being. For many readers, so much, too, for *Sein* as such. For them – for indeed, most of the time at least, the author of *Being and Time* – all there is to say about *Sein* is that it is 'intelligibility' (BT 152).<sup>11</sup>

I oppose this view of things. Though there is indeed a sense of *Sein* in which it is just presence (truth as disclosure, 'world' in the ontological sense, intelligibility), there is another sense in which what is crucial about it is precisely the opposite – *unintelligibility* ('un-truth'). In the language of 'The Origin of

<sup>8</sup> The participle, here, needs to be understood verbally rather than substantively, as referring to that which *produces*, 'clears', the clearing in the sense of the ontic world. See footnote 6 above.

<sup>9</sup> All his life Heidegger opposed biological conceptions of the human essence (see HPN chapter 1 section 16). For him, the human essence is to be a 'language' user, a world discloser. It follows that beings biologically quite other than ourselves would count, for Heidegger, as instances of 'man' provided only that they were 'language' users, bearers of a culture.

<sup>10</sup> Again, the participle is to be understood verbally rather than substantively. See footnote 8 above.

<sup>11</sup> This is the reason that later Heidegger views the work as, for all its insights, fundamentally flawed, a 'dead end [*Holzweg*]' (GA 15 p. 366) irredeemably dominated by 'oblivion of Being', by the 'metaphysics' which it is later Heidegger's prime task to overcome (see footnote 2 above).

the Work of Art', while in one sense *Sein* is just 'world' (in the ontological sense), in a different and, in the end, much more important sense its heart lies in 'earth'. More accurately, *Sein* in this second sense is 'world' (in the ontic sense) and 'earth' taken together, in other words, 'that which really is' (TT p. 44) or simply 'reality' (QCT p. 18)<sup>12</sup> taken in the infinite 'plenitude' of all its 'facets'. It is this second sense I indicate by writing 'Being' with a capital 'B'.

5. Why should we acknowledge Being in addition to being? Why, in other words, should we acknowledge that key Heideggerian phrases – 'house of B/being', 'destiny of B/being', 'truth of B/being', 'O/other of beings', for example – are systematically ambiguous?<sup>13</sup> For a number of reasons, the first of which has to do with Heidegger's terminology.

Though by no means consistently, Heidegger sometimes observes a distinction between '*Sein*' and '*Seyn*' (see, for example, GA 39 *passim* and ET p. 144 footnote a). The use of the antique 'y' suggests something both solemn and forgotten. The (generally excellent) translator of 'On the Essence of Truth' renders the '*Sein*'-'*Seyn*' distinction in English as a distinction between 'being' and 'beyng' (*ibid.*). Though ingenious, this strikes me as an unilluminating rendition. I prefer to use the 'being'-'Being' distinction. Given that the 'y' is intended to suggest something solemn and forgotten, its similarity to the 'god'-'God' distinction is a useful one.

<sup>12</sup> Of course 'world' is often used, and is used by Heidegger, as a synonym for 'reality', 'as a name for that which is, in its entirety' (AWP p. 129). ('The world', Wittgenstein famously said – though not with Heidegger's sense of totality – 'is all that is the case'.) This marks a third sense, distinct from both the 'ontological' and 'ontic' senses, in which the term will figure in this book.

<sup>13</sup> A most infuriating ambiguity which permeates Heidegger's later writings is that between the subjective (or 'active') and objective (or 'passive') genitive. ('Tales of Hoffmann' read as 'tales told by Hoffmann' is a subjective genitive while read as 'tales about Hoffmann' it is an objective genitive.) Depending on which is intended 'house of B/being' (as in the refrain 'language is the house of B/being' (WPF p. 132 *et passim*)) means either 'house "built" by Being' or 'house inhabited by being' and 'truth of B/being' means either 'truth "sent" by Being' or 'truth which is being'. (Notice that Being determines a subjective, being an objective genitive.) Sometimes, but by no means consistently, as the main text is about to remark, Heidegger does distinguish the senses by writing '*Sein*' in the normal way when he means 'being' and '*Seyn*' with the antique 'y' when he means 'Being'. The reason, however, he does not observe this disambiguating convention at all consistently is that, nearly all of the time, the ambiguous utterances express what he takes to be important truths on *both* readings. 'Language is the house of B/being', for example, he takes to be true both in the sense that the 'house' is 'built' ('sent') by Being and in the sense that it is 'inhabited' by being, is where being is to be found. The economy and poetic richness of expression that results from this willful ambiguity, however, in no way makes up for the disastrous loss of clarity that results.

Again, sometimes but by no means consistently, Heidegger observes a distinction between 'Being' *simpliciter* or 'Being as Being' and 'the being [or 'beingness'] of beings' which is treated as synonymous with 'the truth of beings' (see, for example, IWM p. 280, LH p. 246, OWA p. 39 and N III pp. 150–8). 'Being as Being' I take to be Being, 'the being of beings' to be being.

6. The second reason for acknowledging Being in addition to being is that there are a number of passages in which, a little reluctantly, perhaps,<sup>14</sup> Heidegger comes clean and, reasonably explicitly, *says* that *Sein* has two senses.

In 'What are Poets for?', for example, while emphasizing that it should not be taken too literally, Heidegger adopts as his own Rilke's image of Being as a sphere which, like the moon, has a lighted side ('world') and a dark side ('earth'). Referring to this 'globe of Being' he says that we may distinguish two senses of *Sein*: 'being in the sense of lightening-unifying presence' and Being in the sense of 'beings in . . . the plenitude of all their facets' (WPF p. 124). A similar passage occurs in the 'Conversation on a Country Path'. Since our world-disclosure is 'but the side facing us of an openness which surrounds us; an openness which is filled with views'<sup>15</sup> of the appearances of what are to our re-presenting objects'<sup>16</sup> we need, says Heidegger, a special term to designate this 'openness' (DT pp. 64–5). In the 'Conversation' the term chosen is not 'Being', but rather the mysterious 'that which regions'. But it is clear that this must mean 'Being' rather than 'being' since its referent 'can be thought of neither as ontic [a being or totality of beings] nor as ontological

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, it is clear, sometimes deliberately cultivates an air, not merely of mystery, but of mystification. Take, for example, the remarks about the genitive in the previous footnote. Heidegger *knows* perfectly well that his use of the genitive is obscure – in 'Anaximander's Saying' he refers to 'the enigmatically ambiguous genitive' (GA 5 p. 364) – yet never seeks to clarify it. In an imperfect world, it is not uncommon to find genius go hand in hand with a touch of charlatanry (or, more charitably, showmanship).

<sup>15</sup> Notice that 'views' do not entail a viewer: there are undoubtedly many fine views in Antarctica which no one has yet seen. Heidegger's talk of alternative views, or aspects, of things by no means commits him to alternative viewers.

<sup>16</sup> Notice (though Heidegger is not always clear about this) that the predicate 'is a being' is always relative to a particular horizon of disclosure. What is individuated as a being in one disclosure may not be so individuated in another. The individual of one disclosure may appear as a mere part of an individual, or as a congregation of individuals, in another. It follows that that of which there are many 'views', that, in other words which is, in Heideggerian language, persistently 'the same' through many disclosures, is not a being. There is no familiar word to describe this persistent sameness. One might, perhaps, call it a 'ripple' in the real.

[the horizon of presence which determines the way in which beings show up for us]' (DT p. 76).

A second passage occurs in the interview with Richard Wisser broadcast on ZDF television in 1969. To Wisser's observation that the 'question of *Sein* [*Seinsfrage*]' is the 'basic question' of his philosophy Heidegger responds that 'the phrase "question of B/being" is ambiguous'. On the one hand it requests a 'definition' of *Sein*, but on the other 'it can be understood in the following sense: whereon is each answer to the [above] question of being based i.e. wherein, after all is the unconcealment of being grounded?'<sup>17</sup> This passage only makes sense if we take the '*Sein*', here, to be being and that in which it is 'grounded' to be Being.

This distinction between ground and grounded occurs, too, in the distinction between 'being' and 'the essence of being' that runs through 'On the Question of Being'. The 'essence of being' may, Heidegger suggests, be called '*Sein*' (QB p. 309), a suggestion which makes no sense unless we distinguish between the two senses of 'B/being' and take this *Sein* to be Being.

In a 1954 footnote to the 1930 'On The Essence of Truth' Heidegger distinguishes three senses of 'essence': '(1) *quidditas* – the "what" – *khoinon* (2) enabling – condition of possibility; (3) ground of enabling' (ET p. 136 footnote a). In which of these senses could Being be the essence of being? Not, obviously, in the first sense – only beings have a 'whatness' (that which is given by the definition of what it is to be a being of a certain kind). And not in the second sense either. (Lower case) being, clearly, is the 'condition of the possibility' of our apprehension of beings, as the visual field is the 'condition of the possibility' of our apprehension of visual objects, and the idea of a condition of the possibility of a condition of possibility is baroque to the point of senselessness. The relevant sense, therefore, is clearly the third: being is the condition of the possibility of our apprehension of beings and Being is the 'ground' of being, that in virtue of which a given mode or meaning of being obtains, 'that in which *aletheia* is grounded' (QB p. 314). This is the reason Heidegger refers to Being so often as 'the Origin' or 'Source' (see DK p. 214, I pp. 129ff., WCT pp. 350–1, TB p. 12 and footnote 3 above). In some way (a way that has often been thought to be problematic – see footnote 24 below) Heidegger thinks of Being as the *generative* 'ground' of being.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger in *Conversation* ed. R. Wisser, trans. B. Murthy (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1977) pp. 44–5, hereafter HIC.

It seems, then, that we can say this: that while being is the *transcendental* ground of our world of beings, Being, as the generative ground of being, is its *generative* ground.

A final important passage is that in which Heidegger performs the celebrated act of writing *Sein* with a crossing-out through it: *Sein*. This crossing-out has, he says, two functions. The first is an 'initial' and merely 'preventative' one of blocking 'the almost ineradicable habit or representing 'being' as something standing somewhere on its own' in complete 'independence' of 'human being' (QB p. 310). (I shall discuss this passage in detail in section 14 below.) Because the existence of beings<sup>18</sup> is entirely independent of human being, and because there is a powerful tendency built into every Western language to assume a substance wherever there is a substantive, a being wherever there is a noun (ID p. 66), we are powerfully tempted to assume that 'being' designated something that is entirely independent of human being. Hence some radically disruptive device is needed to warn and remind us that 'being' does not function at all like a common or garden noun, that 'being' is not a being, that it is 'nothing' (QB p. 317) (no thing), no more a being than the visual field is an object of sight.<sup>19</sup> The point, then, in other language, is to mark the 'ontological difference' between being and beings (ID pp. 33ff.), to mark the fact that the status of being is 'ontological' rather than 'ontic'. (The question of why it is of such importance to be alive to the ontological difference will be discussed in section 11 below.)

The main point of the crossing-out, however, says Heidegger, is not the 'merely negative' one just outlined. Its primary significance is that the four arms of the crossing 'point . . . toward the four regions of the fourfold and their being gathered in the locale of this crossing through' (QB pp. 310–11).

What 'the fourfold' is will be discussed in detail in chapter 7. Let me here, however, briefly anticipate that discussion. Later Heidegger holds that the fundamental structure of the (ontic) world – any world of human habitation – has four, as it were, dimensions to it, dimensions which he calls 'earth', 'sky', 'gods' and 'mortals'. It only shows up as 'the fourfold', however, in that

<sup>18</sup> More accurately, of those 'ripples' in the real which are individuated in our disclosure as beings. See footnote 16 above.

<sup>19</sup> There is an interesting anticipation of this point in *Being and Time*'s discussion of 'the One' (*das Man*). In expounding the concept Heidegger points out that 'traditional logic' ranging ('quantifying', as logicians say) over beings alone, 'fails' with respect to the One, cannot acknowledge it (BT 128–9).



moment of 'insight' or 'in-flashing' (TT p. 45) in which it shows up as a 'holy' or sublime place: in which, according to Heidegger's analysis of the sublime, it is intuitively grasped as the lighted side of the 'globe of Being', a globe the other side of which is the 'unfathomable' (WPF p. 128) 'mystery'.

If this is right, then the two functions of the crossing-out point to the two senses of '*Sein*'. On the one hand it points to being in its ontological difference from beings. On the other hand it points to the fourfold, to the manifest grasped in conjunction with the hidden side of reality, in short, to Being.

7. One reason, then, for acknowledging Being in addition to being is that on various occasions and in various ways, Heidegger reasonably clearly acknowledges such a distinction himself. Another lies in the fact that he says, as already noted, that '*Sein* is what really is' (TT p. 44), in other words 'the real' (QCT p. 23), reality. Since, however, being is, as we have seen, human-being-dependent, the supposition that 'being' exhausts the meaning of '*Sein*' leads to the absurdly idealist conclusion that nothing 'real' antedated the existence of man. To avoid this conclusion, as Heidegger clearly wishes to do (see footnote 5 above), we must distinguish Being from being and take the former to be 'that which is in its entirety' (AWP p. 129); that is to say, reality as it presents itself to ('presences' for) us, together with all those other 'views' of it which lie beyond the horizon of our intelligibility.

8. A further reason – the most crucial of all – for the acknowledgment of Being consists in the distortion of Heideggerian thinking – oblivion, in my view, to its heart and ultimate concern – which results from the failure to do so.

Being is, says Heidegger, *the* 'matter of thinking' that which, above all, is '*fragwürdig* [thought-provoking or question-worthy]'. Though it 'withdraws' from us it also

draws us along by its very withdrawal, whether we become aware of it immediately, or at all. Once we are drawn into the withdrawal, we are, somewhat like migratory birds, but in an entirely different way, caught in the pull of what draws, attracts us by its withdrawal. And once we, being so attracted, are drawing toward what draws us, our essential being already bears the stamp of that 'pull'. As we are drawing toward what withdraws, we ourselves point toward it. (BW pp. 350–1)

It is in such pointing, that 'man first is man' (*ibid.*). If we reach out to what draws and withdraws we are drawn into the 'enigmatic nearness of its appeal'.

As one who placed his whole life in this 'draft', Socrates is the 'purest thinker of the West'. All thinkers after him, even the greatest, have been 'fugitives from the draft' (BW p. 358).

Not, however, the poets. Summarizing the experience of Being recorded in Rilke's poetry, Heidegger explains that, for the poet, we are the beings who are 'ventured forth' into existence by the '*Urgrund*', yet at the same time held in the 'gravitational pull' of a 'draft [*Bezug* – 'pull' not 'push']' which, whether we admit it or not, draws us back to itself as the self-withdrawing 'centre' (WPF pp. 99–107). The 'destitution' of modernity, according to Heidegger's reading of Rilke, is its oblivion to 'the drawing of the pure draft' (WPF p. 108), the fact that contemporary man 'completely blocks' his path into the draft (WPF p. 116).

As he intimates in his appropriation of Rilke, the need of modernity, according to Heidegger, is the recovery of our nearness to 'the Open', as Rilke calls his '*Urgrund*'. This, above all, is the matter of thinking (which is not at all to say that it is the exclusive preserve of professional thinkers). The salvation of modernity requires we once more attend to that which, above all, is 'worthy' of thought.

9. What kind of thinking (to digress, for a little while, from the main line of discussion) is required to think the *Urgrund*? Heidegger distinguishes two kinds of redemptive thinking: *Dichten* (poetry) and *Denken* (thinking) (S p. 106). It is important to notice here that, contrary to appearances, this is not a contrast *between* poetry and thought since, for Heidegger, 'valid' (WPF p. 96) poetry is always *also* thinking, is always 'thinking poetry' (WPF p. 95). (Heidegger's highest exemplars of such poetry are Sophocles and Hölderlin.) The contrast is rather, therefore, a contrast between different *kinds* of thinking. *Denken* is what Heidegger also calls 'meditative thinking'. It is his own philosophical thinking about, centrally, the essence of truth. Meditative thinking is philosophical thinking which, properly carried out, leads to one's 'openness to the mystery' (DT p. 55). *Dichten*, on the other hand, is what Heidegger calls 'poetic thinking' or, appropriating the title of the Hölderlin poem which concerned him more than any other, 'recollective thinking [*Andenken*]' (QB p. 314). Thinking of this kind is contrasted with 'representational thinking'. Whereas the latter always occurs *within* a horizon of disclosure, the former is, in a certain sense, 'horizonless'. Thinking of this kind 'has the task of attending to [the] . . . concealment in which

unconcealment (*aletheia*) is grounded' (*ibid.*), the task of 'founding the holy' (GA 52 p. 193, I p. 138, GA 4 p. 148). It is thinking which brings 'the mystery' to presence while allowing it to remain the mystery (QB p. 320), allowing it to remain 'nameless' (LH p. 243).<sup>20</sup>

Both meditative and poetic thinking, then, allow 'the holy enigma [*Rätsel*]' to come 'close' to us 'as the enigma' (I pp. 34–5), allow us to 'grasp the ungraspable' and our lives as lived 'in the face of the ungraspable' (I p. 136). '[W]hen poesy is elevated and thinking profound' they think 'the same' (WCT p. 20). It follows that, *contra* Plato, they are, at the most fundamental level, friends and allies. As Heidegger puts it in his poem 'Cézanne' (whom he regards as a 'poet' *par excellence*) they 'belong together' (D p. 163; see, too, I p. 111).

Why, then, does there remain between them an essential difference, one which, Heidegger insists, must never be obscured (I p. 112)? Why is it that though what they say is 'the same', it is 'never identical' (WCT p. 20)? Why, though they both think and say 'the holy', is there a 'clean and decisive cleft' (*ibid.*) between the ways in which they do so?

Heidegger recognizes, I think, five essential differences between meditative and poetic thinking. The first is that the former is discursive, is a process of reasoning – 'brainracking' as he at one point puts it (HIC p. 46) – while the latter is intuitive, 'direct'. 'These days in Cézanne's homeland', Heidegger is recorded to have said on one of his visits to Provence in the 1960s, 'are worth more than a whole library of philosophy books. If only one could think as directly as Cézanne painted' (quoted in HPA p. 151; see chapter 4 sections 19–20 of that work for a detailed discussion of Heidegger's relationship to Cézanne). The former (to borrow from Schopenhauer a metaphor he uses in an entirely different context) slowly circles the fortress of the mystery from without, the latter, as if by a secret, underground passage, places us directly in it.

The second reason for Heidegger's insistence on the essential difference between the two lies, I would suggest, in the fact that, along with that of all the other sciences, philosophical<sup>21</sup> thinking is a species of 'representational', horizon-bound thinking. This means that while great poetry, in its own way,

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion of Heidegger's view of poetry, of what distinguishes it from prose and of why it should have, *qua* poetry, the special task of 'thematizing' the holy, see HPA chapter 3 section 17.

<sup>21</sup> As observed in the Introduction, though Heidegger sometimes represents his 'meditative thinking' as something other than philosophical thinking, in reality, this only means other than *bad* philosophical thinking.

brings the 'holy mystery' to positive presence – 'thematizes' it – meditative thinking can only indicate its presence negatively, by indicating that there is 'something [*etwas*] completely and utterly Other [*Anderes*]' (GA 15 p. 363) than everything that lies within the domain that it is competent to talk about.

Schopenhauer, discussing the relation between mysticism ('illuminism') and philosophy, while insisting that the former can represent genuine knowledge that is of ultimate importance, insists, too, that such knowledge is incapable of literal communication. Philosophy, however,

should be communicable knowledge and must therefore be rationalism. Accordingly, at the end of my philosophy I have indicated the sphere of illuminism as something that exists, but I have guarded against setting even one foot thereon.<sup>22</sup>

This, I think, is Heidegger's position with respect to philosophy. Meditative thinking 'ends' by 'indicating' the sphere of 'the mystery' but remains, itself, outside. Only poetic thinking 'sets foot thereon', brings the mystery to positive presence. This is not, however, to say that the Heideggerian *texts* end where meditative thinking ends. The single most striking difference between early and later texts is that whereas the former remain pure (or nearly pure) philosophy, the latter are a complementary mingling of both meditative and poetic thinking, a happy marriage between the two. (The appearance of the latter, of course, is what leads the staid to dismiss later Heidegger as 'mere poetry' or 'mere mysticism'.) Whereas, that is to say, Wittgenstein's response to the mystical was to demand that one lapse into a Trappist silence – 'Whereof we cannot speak we must remain silent' – Heidegger's response is to become a poet.

The third difference between meditative and poetic thinking I suggest Heidegger to have recognized, is a consequence of the second. Because the latter brings to positive presence what the former can only indicate negatively, it possesses a kind of 'power' (GA 39 p. 214) the former does not. This is one way in which poetic thinking is superior to meditative thinking, why, from, at least, certain points of view, a Cézanne 'is worth a whole library of philosophy books'. So far as power is concerned, a picture is, as we say, worth a thousand words. When it comes to reappropriating 'the mystery' in one's life as well as one's head, the transition from meditative to poetic thinking is essential, since only the latter has the power to engage one's whole being

<sup>22</sup> *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol. II p. 10.

and thereby transform one's life. Only in art can the 'decisive confrontation' with the destitution of our age come about (QCT p. 35).

A fourth difference I think Heidegger recognizes between philosophy and poetry is that the latter is, in a certain sense, more (in Heideggerian language), 'primordial'. Schopenhauer says that though philosophy, *qua* philosophy, can never *be* 'illuminism', nonetheless, when it is great philosophy, it rests on, and is guided by, a 'concealed illuminism' (*Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. II pp. 10–11). This, I think, represents the character of the later (and even, to a degree, the earlier) Heideggerian texts. The ground from which they spring lies, not in any product of ratiocination, but in, rather, poetic vision. *Qua* meditative thinking they attempt, over and over again, with Jamesian obsessiveness, to articulate as much of that vision as can possibly be captured within the limits of the (in Schopenhauer's language) 'rationalism' that is definitive of philosophy. This means that though, as I put it, a 'marriage' between poetry and philosophy occurs in the texts, it is not a marriage between partners who are, in every respect, equals. The generative principle, the principle of fertility, is poetry. This means that, in one respect, the role of philosophy is confined to the traditional one of midwife.

Why, however, it might now be asked, do we need meditative thinking at all? If art is more direct, complete, powerful and fertile than philosophy, why not throw all our philosophy books away, including those by Heidegger, and just make do with art? The answer, it seems to me – and here we come to the fifth difference I take Heidegger to recognize between philosophy and poetry – is that though poetry is prior to philosophy in the *order of generation*, philosophy is prior to poetry in the *order of verification*. What, that is to say, philosophy can do which art cannot is to *validate*. It is the careful 'brainracking' of the Heideggerian meditation on B/being and truth which assures us that the fertile and powerful words of the poets yield insight rather than wishful fancy, truth rather than illusion, that the highest poets ('demigods' (GA 39 *passim*) or 'angels' (WPF pp. 136–7)) are beings we can *trust*. Along with the articulation of vision which it presupposes, this is philosophy's contribution to the happiness of the marriage between it and poetry in the later texts. While poetry 'founds the holy', thinking establishes that there really is a 'holy' to be founded.

10. Heidegger's most common name for the defining affliction ('destitution' (WPF p. 91)) of modernity (to return now from the digression of the previous

section) is 'oblivion (literally 'forgetfulness') of Being [*Seinsvergessenheit*]. Locked as we are into merely 'calculative thinking' (DT p. 53) (the planning of means to practical ends) Being – reality in the 'plenitude of *all* its "sides" – is what we have become oblivious to. The task of thinking, of both meditative and poetic thinking, is to overcome this oblivion, to raise ourselves to the kind of thinking which, in grasping the ground of our being, 'recollects' Being.

11. The above exposition of Heidegger's thinking towards Being will have been, to those who know no Heidegger, only dimly comprehensible. But only, I think, a dim comprehensibility is necessary to make it clear that Being – 'the Origin', 'the Source', 'the *Ur-etwas* [ur-something]' (GA 6 p. 60), 'the Other [as opposed to 'other'] of beings' (GA 15 p. 363), '*ku*' as it is called in Japanese Zen Buddhism (DL p. 14), '*Tao*' as it is called in Taoism (ID p. 45) – is, first, *the* topic of Heideggerian thinking, and second, as something 'mystical' (QB p. 310), 'awesome' (OWA p. 68), 'holy' (WPF p. 94), is an object of something close to, or identical with, religious veneration. This is why those sensitive to the 'theological' heart of Heidegger's thinking wish to capitalize the 'B' of 'Being' – to exhibit the same kind of veneration towards it as is exhibited by the 'G' of 'God' and the 'y' of Heidegger's '*Seyn*'. Heidegger denies many times that Being is God, but the denials are always made with reference to the god of Christian theology and metaphysics. If however, we think of Being as the god of an authentic (or 'originary') theology – in Greece, says Heidegger, 'theology' was not 'representational thinking' about God but rather 'the mytho-poetic saying of the gods without any relationship to articles of faith or church doctrine' (ID p. 44) – if we think of it as, not the God of Christian dogma, but as, rather, 'the god of the poet',<sup>23</sup> the 'unknown God' who, in Hölderlin's poetry, approaches us in the sight of 'familiar' things (PMD p. 225), then Being, to be brief and blunt, is God. 'Only a God', after all, as the multi-layered title of Heidegger's 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel* puts it, 'can save us' (S p. 91).

Lower case 'being' is incapable of bearing the religious weight of Heidegger's language and concern. By denying Being, by taking the discussion of being to be the totality of his *Seinsphilosophie*, one can undoubtedly produce an interesting figure, one very much in tune with the secular tenor of

<sup>23</sup> *The Piety of Thinking* trans. J. Hart and J. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) p. 58.

modern Western philosophy. One may even succeed in convincing a few of the ‘flakier’ members of the ‘analytic’ hegemony within modern anglophone philosophy that Heidegger is, in their own terms, a respectable figure, a genuine philosopher. What one will miss, however, is everything that, to him, is of ultimate concern. One will bypass the – essentially ‘theological’ – core of his ‘matter of thinking’. And to the extent that one identifies one’s own thinking with that of this diminished Heidegger one will lapse, oneself, into *Seinsvergessenheit*.

12. A final reason for acknowledging Being in addition to being is to be discovered by attending to the course actually followed by Heidegger’s ‘path of thinking’ towards Being. This course runs somewhat as follows.

*Sein*, as Western thinking has always understood it, is, we know, presence. But what is presence and where, asks Heidegger, does it come from? Presence, we know, is given – something we find ourselves ‘already’ encircled by. But what, he asks, does the ‘giving’ (QB p. 317)? ‘Wherein’, to repeat Heidegger’s question posed in the *Wisser* interview, ‘is the unconcealment of being grounded’ (see p. 15 above)?

An answer to be rejected is the notion that presence is the product of human intention. This is evidently false. No ‘committee’ (QCT p. 23) decides on our ultimate horizon of disclosure. Though it happens through human language, disclosure is never human ‘handiwork’, ‘will never let itself be mastered either positively or negatively by a human doing’ (TT p. 38). Human beings never make their own ultimate horizons of disclosure; conspiracy theories are always false. This, I think, is a matter not of observation but of logic. Since conspiring or planning is an instance of what Heidegger calls ‘calculative thinking’, and since thinking of this type always presupposes and happens within a horizon of disclosure, conspiring to create one’s ultimate horizon of disclosure would require one to ‘calculate’ before one could ‘calculate’.

Human beings and human cultures are, therefore, receptive rather than creative with respect to the modes of presence they inhabit. (The ‘languages’ that provide them are, as we say, ‘*natural* languages’.) Heidegger puts this by saying modes of presence are ‘granted’, ‘sent’ or ‘destined’ to them. But what, to repeat, does the ‘destining’? Western philosophical thinking has never asked this question, regarding presence as something ‘ultimate and primordial’. We, however, says Heidegger, need to ponder the ‘provenance’ of

presence (QB p. 303), to ponder, not just being but, additionally, its 'essence', that is, its originating 'ground' (ET p. 136).

Heidegger calls this 'Source' or 'Origin' the 'It' (his own capitalization); the 'It' that occurs in 'It gives [*Es gibt*] presence'. (The German '*Es gibt*', though generally used to mean 'It is', as in 'It is raining', literally means 'It gives'. What Heidegger intends to suggest is that 'There is presence' is more perspicuously construed as 'It gives presence'.) The 'It', then, 'gives being i.e. presence', 'sends' or 'destines' presence in each of its 'epochal transmutations' (TB p. 17). Yet what is the 'It'?

Perhaps, muses Heidegger, this question has a false presupposition, perhaps it is the product of grammatical illusion. Can it be assumed that anything at all corresponds to the 'It', bearing in mind that neither Latin nor Greek possesses the 'It is . . .' construction? (In Latin, he observes, '*Pluit*' means 'It is raining', in Greek '*chre*' 'It is needful'.) But that, he points out acutely, 'does not mean that which is meant by the "It" is not also in their thought' (TB p. 18).

It would, then, be superficial to dismiss the 'It' as a grammatical chimera. There is an 'It' and this 'It' is Being: 'the "It" that here [in "*Es gibt*"] "gives" is Being itself' (LH pp. 254–5, cf. p. 252). Being, then, 'gives' – 'sends', 'destines' – being.<sup>24</sup> Through the medium of human practice it, as it were,

<sup>24</sup> It may be objected that if Being, as well as being the object of disclosure, is its 'Source' then it is, surely, a *cause*. Yet Heidegger insists that anything which preserves the 'mysteriousness of . . . distance' must lie beyond the 'cause-effect coherence' (QCT p. 26). To present Being as a cause is to lapse, it may be claimed, into *Seinsvergessenheit*, into, in Heidegger's pejorative sense of the word that we are about to investigate, 'metaphysics'. More specifically, it is to lapse into that species of metaphysics Heidegger calls 'onto-theology': the metaphysical view which divides reality up into (a) ordinary beings and (b) their cause and creator, a more or less overt 'God' (ID pp. 31ff.). Hence, since the 'Source' and 'Origin' talk is unmistakable in Heidegger his philosophy is fundamentally self-contradictory.

Clearly if Being 'sends' being then it is *responsible for being* and is, in *that* sense (see QCT p. 8), a cause. Actually, however, all that Heidegger insists on is that, as the 'mystery', Being must not be understood as an *efficient* cause, a '*causa efficiens*' (QCT p. 26). What he means, here, by 'efficient' cause is, I suggest, *explanation*. (This is also, I believe, what he means by 'cosmic ground' when he denies (L p. 252) that Being is a cosmic ground.) What deprives Being of its mystery – and is, as such, 'metaphysics' – is the attribution to it (in, for example, mainstream Christian theology) of a *known nature* which is taken to explain the character of the world it discloses. (A close look at what Heidegger means by 'onto-theology' reveals that it is the double movement of the inference from the character of the world to the character of its origin and back again from the character of the origin to the character of the world that in fact defines the position (QB p. 309).) So long as (with Heidegger's heroes, Hölderlin and the Medieval mystic Meister Eckhart) we remember that God or Being is unknown and unknowable – apart from the that and how of its partial self-revelation as world – its mystery is preserved and 'metaphysics' avoided.