MARTIN HEIDEGGER
Being, Beings, and Truth

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Martin Heidegger had two main philosophical obsessions: the distinction between Being and beings, and the nature of Truth. One theme which persists in both early and later works of Heidegger is the failure of western philosophy to "think" the ontological difference, the difference between beings (*das Seinde*) and being (*Sein*), between "what is" (things and thoughts, objects and subjects, properties and relations), and "the is of what is", that which makes them present as beings and present as the beings that they are. Now this might seem to suggest that Heidegger is chiding western philosophy for never having discovered metaphysics, whose stock-in-trade is precisely to articulate the distinction between particulars and the structure-of-being-as-such which accounts for them (Plato's distinction between Forms and particulars, Aristotle's distinction between substance and accident, Spinoza's distinction between God and his attributes and modes, Hegel's distinction between Absolute Spirit and its historical manifestations, etc.). If that's what Heidegger's driving at, he's absurdly wrong. But that's clearly not Heidegger's contention: what Heidegger is claiming is that the traditional, metaphysical distinctions between Being and beings always somehow wind up construing Being as a being—as a determinate, determinable thus-and-such—and that this makes a genuine understanding of Being, as that which lets beings become "manifest", or "show up", or "come into the clearing" for us (Heidegger was fond of colorful metaphors) impossible. Since metaphysical philosophy is aware of the "ontological difference" but habitually misconstrues it, and proceeds on the mistaken assumption that Being can be fully grasped by way of a "general theory of Being", we lose a sense of the presence of Being in our lives, and that is an inestimable loss (Heidegger is catching the same worries as the early Wittgenstein, in the latter's musings about regaining the "mystical" sense of "wonder" that anything at all exists).

Likewise, Heidegger is obsessed with the idea of truth, and how it too became hostage to metaphysics. Metaphysics aims to articulate "the truth relationship" from a vantage outside the processes and events whereby the truth becomes "evident" to us, to use Husserlian language. Metaphysical realists are thus bent on establishing the "truth" of the "Correspondence Theory of Truth", and are immediately confronted with the difficulty of specifying what "the correspondence theory", if true, corresponds to, and in more general terms, with the difficulty of explaining the sense in which thoughts could "correspond" with non-thoughts. Idealists are fond of "coherence theories of truth", which finesse truth as "the coherence of ideas with other ideas, or of meanings with other meanings". Yet this too is "metaphysical" with a vengeance—the world is an Hegelian Concept or Bradleyan Absolute, rational and structured in infinite detail—and, by making being the embodiment

of a theory, obscures the way in which truths "happen" in history to existing, finite human beings. Yet for Heidegger the phenomenologist—and here, I think, he closely follows Husserl's lead—truth is fundamentally experienced as disclosure, as a coming-into-presence of that which was hidden. Both metaphysical realism and idealism miss this, the former making of truth a relation entirely external to the beings to whom truths are made manifest, the latter viewing truth not as something which happens, which is dis-covered, but as the construction of an individual or cosmic mind aiming at making a theoretically-complete and tidy product. Not only do these metaphysical approaches to truth support our "forgetfulness of Being", they're philosophical traps in their own right. So Heidegger's attempts to "overcome metaphysics" by "thinking" the ontological difference between Being and beings is of a piece with his attempts to re-think truth as the disclosure or un-concealment of beings in and through our ways of being-in-the-world—our practices.

Heidegger's Basic Orientation: Practical Holism

Throughout Heidegger's works, early and late, there is an emphasis on the primarily practical way in which we grasp or understand beings, even beings such as ourselves. Things become present to us as beings to be used in our personal and common projects; any one item-for-use gets its usefulness by being one node in a network of instruments, tools, procedures, traditions, and skills. This "referential totality of assignments" constitutes our specific, cultural "fix" on reality: this complex of skilled practices—and it is very important to note that at the bottom of these practices lies not a theory, but flexible skills which cannot be captured in any theory (a significant point of contact with the later Wittgenstein)—embodies the "meaning of being" for us, and lets beings "show up" for us in their being. (Consider how one might have an Husserlian "eidetic intuition" of an artifact from an alien, lost culture: to understand it, according to Heidegger, we would have to recover the traditions and practices which provided it with its proper context.) Heidegger is a holist insofar as "meanings" only emerge in the "referential totality" of our being-in-the-world, and a practical holist insofar as our primordial way of being in the world is not as a Deweyan "spectator" but as a "thrown project".

Heidegger Contrasted with Husserl

Heidegger rightly claimed to be refining Husserl's descriptive, phenomenological method and to be extending it to the study of "human existence" or "the human condition", expressed in and by the German noun Dasein. Yet Heidegger departs from Husserl insofar as his phenomenology of Dasein is not held to be presuppositionless—indeed, it cannot be presuppositionless, given the kind of being Dasein is, and given the ways in which being "shows up" for it in its practices. Dasein is the being for whom its own being is an issue: it is only as a "project" (i.e. as "thrown" into its situation and presented with manifold possibilities for becoming) that Dasein is intelligible, and each "project" of a human being presupposes a network of projects, and a totality of practices which gives Dasein its contextual "fix" on being and orients it as a being in the world. Without such "presuppositions"—or better yet, such "fore-structures" of practical understanding—we would not be able to understand or explain anything. Heidegger, by radicalizing Husserl's methodology and bringing it down-to-earth ("existentializing" it), manages to explode it as well.

So, for Heidegger, phenomenological "description" becomes interpretive, or hermeneutic. One grasps being-as-a-whole only by zeroing-in on its integral parts (such as Dasein), which provide a foothold for an interpretive, rather than a pure and presuppositionless understanding of being. To complicate matters, we can only understand a "part" of the whole by placing it in the context of the whole—this is the (in)famous "hermeneutic circle" made much of by phenomenologists and deconstructionists nowadays. Yet this interpretive circle is not a logically vicious circle, since Dasein always already has a tacit, skilled, non-theoretical understanding of being by way of its being immersed in shared practices. These practices constitute our "fore-having" (*Vorhabe*) of being, silently shaping the meaning of being for us, and providing the ultimate context in which beings are present or "show up" for us. This explains Heidegger's curious method in Being and Time, and might serve as an answer of sorts to his critics who complain of a "lack of argument" in this work. Heidegger is, in a way, offering his readers a rival interpretation of Being and its relationship to beings than that of "the metaphysical tradition" and especially that of Cartesian and Post-Cartesian philosophy. He is, in a way, making a wager with his readers, saying, in effect, something like this: I am going to describe, Husserl-style, the range of human experience in such a way that I avoid the rhetoric and the pitfalls of "traditional philosophy". Now if I am right about "the hermeneutic circle"—that the mutual understanding of parts-in-terms-of-the-whole and the-whole-in-terms-of-its-parts is a matter of making explicit our implicit, practical awareness of whole/part and being/beings—then my interpretation will "fit" our lived experience better than the tradition's, since it will articulate the tacit understanding of Being already there in our practices, our historical ways of being-in-the-world. And I will have redescribed "the ontological" realm in such a way that I manage to leave behind all the paradoxes and perplexities of what has become the "natural", explicit, and accepted way of thinking about us and the world (Cartesian dualism, skepticism, realism vs. idealism, etc.). So Being and Time actually is simply one extended argument: does my alternative "reading" of understanding, human existence, etc., resonate (or fail to resonate) with our shared, tacit pre-understanding of being and being-a-human that I have presupposed from the start, and does it do so better than alternative, rival (i.e., "traditional" metaphysical) descriptions? (Thus insofar as Heidegger stakes his philosophical success on an appropriate, truthful, disclosive description, he is a disciple of Husserl; insofar as he sees this description not as "transcendental" but as an interpretation of tacit, practical "presuppositions", he is far from an Husserlian.)

Being Ready-to-hand and Being Present-at-Hand

Part of the problem with the Husserlian phenomenological standpoint is that it attempts to "view" objects in their pure givenness-to-consciousness, assuming that intentionality is, first and foremost, a property of consciousness and theoretical consciousness at that. Like Dewey, Heidegger was suspicious of those who took "experience" exclusively as "conscious experience", when the latter is only a small, shifting region of "experience". Moreover, for Heidegger, this sort of "intellectualism" can't even make sense, untimately, of intentionality. Can one pull off Husserl's neat trick, of articulating the "essence" of an intentional object as an "identity-pole" of an indefinite set of noema, without having some sort of prior interpretive "fix" on it? And must that fix be theoretical—explicit, rule-governed, and dedicated to a detached "contemplation" of the object-as-object?

Heidegger believes that consciousness of decontextualized objects ("de-worlded" objects) can only make sense against a background of a very different, more "primordial" kind of understanding—what the analytic philosopher Gilbert Ryle called "knowing-how" rather than "knowing-that". Actually, Dasein first and for the most part encounters not context-free "things" but implements or tools-ready-for-use. I primarily grasp my word-processor not as one object among many in my study, but as an implement for writing: I grasp it in terms of its "in-order-to"—I don't need a "theory of word-processors" to identify and reidentify it, or identify it as a member of the class of word-processors (any more than I need a theory of books to find and read books, or a theory of driving to drive a car, etc.). I can identify it, in the sense of using and re-using it, because it fits in with my goals (writing these notes, writing a letter, writing an article, etc. . .). Moreover, I cannot understand this instrument aside from its context among related instruments (printers, printer-paper, ribbons, floppy-disks, etc.), a context which easily expands into an even wider context of instruments (books, bookcases, classrooms, etc.; even automobiles for getting to class and the highway to lead one there...). Furthermore, my goals also fan-out into wider and wider contexts (I write notes in-order-to teach classes; I teach classes in-order-to train others in philosophical thinking and to put my own ideas to the test, which I do in-order-to . . .), and my goals are in turn unintelligible apart from wider, shared goals and social practices. What results is a field of implements-internally-related-to-goals, all of which culminate in the widest practical context, which Heidegger calls the world. A "world" (as in "the world of sports" or "the world of particle physics") is a meaningful totality, and is meaningful precisely insofar as it embodies a point, a practical orientation toward Being, which defines us as humans and the sorts of humans we are—as beings-in-the-world.

Now of course we can decontextualize beings and let them "show up" for us merely as pure objects, as beings present-at-hand—and moreover, we don't falsify them if we do so. Any theoretical understanding discloses entities by "deworlding" them, and natural science succeeds spectacularly in doing so. Yet we would do well to remember that theoretical explanation only takes place against that practical, "worlded" background that lets beings like electrons and genes "show up" for us, and that theoretical explanation only kicks in after there is some kind of breakdown in our everyday, inexplicit practical understanding. Heidegger uses the example of a broken hammer: when the hammer breaks, it no longer fits into the "referential totality of assignments" that practically determines it as the implement it is. It is just a thing, an "occurrent" entity that is no longer "available" to me and my projects, or us and our projects. The hammer is an occurrent, present-at-hand object, but it is that for us only because, given the practical breakdown of the available, ready-to-hand hammer-in-use, its context-of-uses and context-of-projects becomes, to a degree, explicit for us.

Practical engagement is essential for any being to "show up" as the being it is. So the "scientific realists" are right to the extent that, when a physicist, say, theorizes about the particles leaving trails in his cloud-chamber, he believes they exist (rather than that they're ideal "constructions" or "fictions"), but they're wrong if they believe that these entities can "show up" as the beings they are independent of our practical engagements with them. That is: electrons, say, exist independently of human observers, but the truth that electrons exist can only be made manifest to a Dasein engaged in practices: it makes no sense to say, as most scientific or metaphysical realists would, that the proposition "Electrons exist" would be true if there would be no Dasein to utter it, since electrons would not, could not "show

up" or be disclosed as electrons. Neither they nor their background-context could be made "explicit".

Note the way in which Heidegger's phenomenology helps him bypass the realist/idealist or realist/antirealist controversy. Dasein is a being in the world, and the world is not first-and-foremost a collection of discrete subjects and self-contained objects; thus the problem of establishing a "connection" between "minds" and "things" is a non-starter, since there is "always already" a skilled, practical, use-oriented connection between Dasein and the world it is in. So it is beside the point both to worry about establishing such connections (realism) or to deny such connections and insist that mind "makes up" its world and its truths (idealism). Since Dasein is always in its world, and is "thrown" into it, and since neither Dasein nor its world can be metaphysically prior to or more fundamental than the other, the realism/idealism dilemma is not so much solved as dissolved in a better philosophical description/interpretation. Note also the striking parallels between this and the approach of Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Facticity, Thrownness, Anxiety, Death

Dasein's existence is factical—meaning its world is historically and culturally specific (the world of Ancient Athenians, the world of 18th century Prussians, the world of Aboriginal Australians, etc.). The "projects" of Dasein therefore are situated, "limited" projects, which does not hamper or limit Dasein's freedom in that, given its facticity, its potentialities are always open-ended (Dasein is not a matter of being-what-it-has-to-be but of becoming what it can be given its factical, historical context. Sartre will deny even this "predelineation" of possibilities as a form of self-deceptive "bad faith").

Dasein's factical, historical world-situation is not chosen: rather, Dasein is thrown into its world. This is, perhaps, the start of Heidegger's "existentialist" effort in *Being and Time*, as apart from the "hermeneutic phenomenology" that dominates the first part of Division 1: it is analogous to the existentialist emphasis on "chance" or "absurd" factors in the human condition. In existentialist literature, the (anti)hero is usually "thrust" into a situation in which he or she has no control, and is measured as an honest, "authentic" individual by the ways in which he or she exploits the possibilities open to him or her (cf. Camus's *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, and *The Fall*, and perhaps also Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, which is at least "existentialist" in its treatment of the absurd situation of World War I).

In anxiety, Heidegger claims, being itself is disclosed to Dasein as the no-thing it is. Ultimately, the being of beings "shows up" for us in our practices, and is made explicit when our practices break down or are suspended by theorizing, which de-worlds things ready-to-hand and lets them appear present-at-hand instead. Yet "the meaning of being" is inscribed in our practices (and thus can never be made completely explicit), and cannot be "supported" by appealing to any metaphysical or transcendental certitudes, which might ground our practices and certify or validate them as "absolutely" correct. Heidegger would agree with Nietzsche to this extent: he throws cold water on all "metaphysical comforts". We generally ignore the fact that nothing (i.e., the no-thing that is being itself) supports our practical (pre)understanding of being, that our practices are the "groundless ground" of our being-in-the-world. But this fact "shows up" in the experience of anxiety, which is not just an ontic, psychological state, but one that has genuine ontological, existential import. Unease in the face of no-thing-in-particular is unease in the face of the non-thing

which being is, and unease in the face of the ultimate "nullity" of our projects and world (i.e., that they can't be metaphysically "secured" and that we can't be thus metaphysically "comforted").

The "no-thing" disclosed in anxiety also figures in Dasein's existential condition as a projective structure of possibilities: onmipresent among Dasein's possibilities is the possibility that its possibilities will cease. Heidegger's doctrine of death is metaphysically and theologically agnostic: he is not denying afterlife or personal resurrection, he is merely noting that as Dasein it is a possibility that death annihilates ourselves as we are, and even the religious (if they're honest) will acknowledge this (although they will deny that that possibility is the case). Note that Heidegger isn't (merely) noting the commonplace that it is an empirical (ontic, existentielle) fact that people die: it is an existential, ontological condition of Dasein that its possibilities possibly run out, and in an utterly unpredictable, contingent way. People die, but Dasein is essentially "being-towards-death".

Death grants the concrete structure of projects of individual Dasein a significance it would not have if death were alien to Dasein: if you literally could do anything given an infinitude of time, nothing would matter. Death makes things matter, and as such, makes intelligible the choice for authentic existence: the "call of conscience" is thus not a voice from the heavens or the "true self", but the existential structure of Dasein manifesting itself as one of Dasein's possibilities, in opposition losing one's resolve and letting oneself "fall" into the banal stupor of merely living day-to-day.

Fallenness, inauthenticity, and "the they"

Heidegger's treatment of anxiety is a good example of the old bromide that it's often not what you say, but how you say it that counts. Dewey, for example, would agree with much of what Heidegger suggests about the "metaphysical groundlessness" of our practices. But in a crusty, Yankee-pragmatist fashion, I think that Dewey would quickly drop Heidegger's claim that this is of timeless, gut-wrenching significance, and interpret Heidegger's existentialist musings as a sign more of "ontic" neurosis than profound "ontological" insight. Heidegger, however, is not out to "solve" problems, be they personal or social, as he is after a secular analogue of salvation. We are not saved until we stare anxiety down, and to claim to "overcome" it by pragmatic, social-democratic "meliorism" is to persist in inauthenticity, the secular-existentialist analogue of "original sin".

"Inauthentic" Dasein—which Heidegger claims is Dasein most of the time, and which he says is not a negative term of appraisal but a "structural" ontological description (don't believe it)—is Dasein which "forgets" or "flees from" the fact that its practices, and the world they disclose, rest on no secure metaphysical foundations, but are themselves a "groundless ground", an ultimate "nullity". Inauthentic Dasein can't face this, and so "falls" into the world, taking it at face value and engaging in all the "idle talk" of "the they" (*Das Man*—better understood as "one" as in "That's not what one does in these circumstances". Who is this "one"? No one in particular, but anyone and everyone in general). This "fallenness" into the world (Husserl's "natural attitude"?) in the face of anxiety, of the brute facticity of human existence and it's ultimate (metaphysical) inexplicability, is transcendable only by the facticity of death, the possibility of no-more-possibilities for Dasein, which prods Dasein into acknowledging it's groundlessness, and into resolutely pursuing its projects "authentically" aware of it's status an ultimately a thrown, factical "nullity".

Dasein often enough exists in an "undifferentiated" mode of existence, neither authentic nor inauthentic, where what "one" does and who "one" is is taken at face value as a means of projectively muddling through life. But inauthenticity is a constant temptation, a tendency to fallenness that lures us away from the necessity to assume our projects as our own as well as to admit their metaphysical groundlessness. The affinities to Kierkegaard are clear: Kierkegaard demanded that his readership see the worthiness of the three forms of conscientious life (the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious) as rationally unsettlable, to be resolved only through sheer, criterionless choice. It is entirely fair to see the doctrine of authenticity in *Being and Time* as a secularized version of Kierkegaard's dialectic in *Either/Or*, including his non-metaphysical brief for "the religious". Heideggerian authenticity is Kierkegaard's religious stage without God—an entirely secular leap of "faith".

I think Heidegger is being inconsistent here—rather, his latent existentialism scrapes against his achievements as a hermeneuical phenomenologist. On the one hand, in Division 1, Heidegger describes "the being of beings"—including, presumably, a being such as Dasein—as that which shows up in our practices, primordially as "available" being-ready-to-hand, and subsequently as "occurent" being-present-at-hand. None of this falsifies the beings that show up: rather, it is only through this sort of inexplicit, practical engagement that things are disclosed in their being. However, since there is nothing beyond and behind our practices to metaphysically or transcendentally ground them, Heidegger accuses "everyday" Dasein of slipping into inauthenticity, insofar as it blithely goes about its business, identifying and reidentifying disclosed beings without the "proximate" awareness that none of this has an ultimate cosmic basis. This suggests that there might have been such a cosmic rationale, but alas, there isn't, so we are "inauthentic" to go about our everyday business in an everyday way.

This doesn't follow. If metaphysics, in Heidegger's sense of construing being as a determinate thus-an-such, capturable in a theoretical formula, is misguided, then the very fact that it is misguided would also make the lack of a metaphysical ground-of-all-grounds something ontologically insignificant. One can only "miss" something if one could have "had" it in the first place, or if it's worth missing. But the whole thrust of Division 1 (not to mention the bulk of his later thought) is designed to show that we can't have old-time metaphysics, that it rests on a mis-taking of the "ontological difference", and that we shouldn't miss it, since our practices suffice to open up a world to us and make it intelligible, intelligible enough to act and choose within it. Of course, from time to time it might pay to see that all this comes without an airtight metaphysical "guarantee": "existential crises" do happen, and ought to happen. But how does this make ordinary, "everyday Dasein" inauthentic, rather than just different in its being-in-the-world from "authentic" Dasein? Why is "immersion in the world" necessarily fallenness, necessarily a bad thing?

I don't think it is. Again, Heidegger and Heideggerians might bring up the issue of secular "salvation" again, charging that only by "anxious, mooded-understanding" of our groundless finitude can we face up to the sort of beings we are, and that anything less than that is, to use Sartre's term, a form of "bad faith". My Deweyan reply to this is that it's once again not what you say but how you say it: I'd readily acknowledge our "groundless finitude", but the question is whether "facing up to the sort of beings we are" is all important, as opposed to important where and when it is important. Salvation, religious or secular-existentialist is all important, almost by definition. But like Aristotle, Dewey and myself are inclined to be oriented towards virtue rather than salvation: the former is not

an all-or-nothing affair, and while it entails the occasional, appropriate "existential crisis" to shock one into a sense of finitude and get one back on track, it mostly is an attempt to overcome, by critical reflection and forming decent habits, the obstacles to being a better person and to living in a better community. I think this confrontation between Dewey and Heidegger shows, perhaps, that the historical clash between world-views that stress virtue and those that stress salvation persist even between modern and postmodern philosophies that are explicitly "secular" in doctrine and orientation.

Transition to "the later Heidegger"

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger described what he was doing as "fundamental ontology" (articulating the conditions for understanding "the meaning of Being") and "an existential analytic of Dasein" (explicating the always-and-everywhere aspects of human existence or the human condition). After having written *Being and Time*, Heidegger detected a deep tension between his methodological goals and their findings. On the one hand, Heidegger saw himself as continuing and perfecting the "transcendental" projects of Kant and Husserl without endorsing their transcendentalism, i.e., their postulation of a transcendental ego synthesizing or constituting experience or transcendental certitudes (the categories, "essences") that were ahistorically validated by "pure", noninterpretive inquiry. The universal ontological structures of Dasein would be disclosed by time-bound, hermeneutic phenomenology. On the other hand, the Dasein which Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology-as-heir-to-transcendental-inquiry revealed was historically contingent, immersed in equally contingent practices or ways-of-being-in-the-world, which therefore open up "the meaning of being" in such a way as to foreclose any "always and everywhere" theses about it. If, as Heidegger said in closing *Being and Time*, time is the horizon of being, then all "transcendental" philosophy is bankrupt, even Heidegger's interpretive version to it—not just inquiry into Being, but "the meaning of Being" itself is finite, contextualized, historical, and incapable of definitive conceptual articulation in any theory. What *Being and Time* wound up being, contrary to its intentions, was, to steal a quote from Richard Rorty on Donald Davidson, a "transcendental argument to end all transcendental argument".

So while Heidegger does not "disown" his earlier thought, he can no longer use a transcendental-hermeneutic method, and has to adopt different tactics in his subsequent thinking. Here are five major currents in the later Heidegger: a) the further explication of "time as the horizon of being", b) the distinction between philosophy and "the thinking of Being", c) the role of the artwork in disclosing the world, d) the destructive (deconstructive?) reading of the history of philosophy, e) and his meditations on technology.

Time and Being

Reflect on the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*: theoretical articulation of occurrent beings present-at-hand is made possible by our encountering available beings ready-to-hand in the open-ended totality of practices and engagements which defines "the world". These practices establish our "fix" on "the meaning of being" for us, and let beings "show up" for us as beings and as the beings they are. Yet practices change (often as a matter of their internal, dynamic development; often accidentally and indeliberately). So if our access to being is practical, and practices are inherently historical, the question of "the mean-

ing of being" is itself historical. It is a "timely" rather than a "timeless" question (Compare Hegel: philosophy is the spirit of an age as it grasps itself in thought).

Here Heidegger's language turns lyrical (often annoyingly so) in order to convey the way in which "the meaning of being" can be historical or timely, and in order to avoid the snares of philosophical language, which transforms "timely" questions into "timeless" ones. Time is the horizon in which being is "sent" or "sends itself"; we humans stand in "the clearing" or "the open" in which being is "given" to us. Our job is to be receptive to this "message", to "hear the call of being" and respond to it in an historically appropriate way—which may not be the same way as other historical moments with their own historically appropriate "sendings" of being.

What could this possibly mean? It might be tempting to presuppose that Heidegger is dealing in a sort of "atheistic mysticism" here, imparting personal characteristics to impersonal being ("sending" us messages), supplying us with revelations (of what?) like those of Yahweh to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Heidegger's rhetoric often reinforces this reading—being as a sort of dark and mysterious god to whom we must be subservient—and it unfortunately reinforces all one's well-grounded suspicions about his later politics (i.e., a sort of submissiveness to the "sendings" of history and destiny). I'm not sure that this "mystical" reading of time-as-horizon-of-being is the best one, however. What Heidegger seems to be saying here is: our practices open up being to us, and disclose "the meaning of being". We do not make our practices deliberately (they are not well-defined, arbitary Carnapian conventions, for the most part): in a way, they make us the specific sorts of historically contingent beings we are. Our practices supply us with an understanding of being and an understanding of our being that needs to be made explicit or manifest by our questioning—by inquiry. No one should assume that this process of coming-to-self-understanding, trying to answer the questions "what am I?/what are we?" will yield the same answers for anyone and everyone (Muslims, Christians, Jews, atheists.... 21st Century Americans, 12th Century Germans, Ancient Athenian peasants, etc.). The metaphoric images of "listening to being's call" or of placing oneself in "the clearing" are meant to evoke a) the context-and-practice-bound aspect of self-understanding, and b) the truth that any attempt to articulate "the meaning of being" apart from such contexts is going to escape the nets of our language and concepts. Hence Heidegger's (somewhat chintzy) tactic of writing "Being" crossed-out, as B-e-i-n-g-, to correct the impulse to think of Being as somehow transcending time and historicity, or "the meaning of Being" as something necessary and universal, undergirding all our graspings of it in "the open" or "the clearing".

"Thinking" and Poetry

Heidegger is forced into attempting "a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual", when it comes to "the meaning of being". He distinguishes "philosophy" from "thinking": philosophy tries to think being in itself, in timeless, necessary categories, thus mis-taking the ontological difference by construing being as a being. "Thinking" on the other hand, acknowledges that "language is the house of being"—that articulating "the meaning of being" takes place in words and in time, and thus is indexed to a particular historical and cultural practical setting—and tries not to represent but to evoke being, as that which is disclosed in "the clearing" or "the open" to "mortals" (Heidegger's later preferred term for Dasein).

Compare Heidegger here to Wittgenstein on "the sayable" and "the showable": they are catching the same worries, I think. Wittgenstein was obsessed with "the conditions for representation-in-general": while in the later thought Wittgenstein will reject the idea that there is such a thing as representation-in-general, both early and late Wittgenstein were one in insisting that the conditions for representation cannot themselves be represented. Therefore these conditions can be shown in what is said, yet not themselves said. Heidegger makes much the same claims for poetry in the later thought: the poet, in the act of "naming" things, letting them become manifest as the things they are by "housing" them in speech, "shows" being in its unutterable mystery, and in a way "gives thanks" to being for letting beings become disclosed in speech. In this way, "thinking", as opposed to metaphysical and epistemological philosophy, allows us to recollect and retrieve being from our collective "forgetfulness" or "oblivion" of it.

Art and Truth

In an important essay, "On the Origin of the Work of Art", Heidegger muses "In the work of art, the truth of a being is put to work". By linking truth to art Heidegger not only indicates the ways in which we can begin to "think being" outside of "the conceptual" methods of metaphysics, but places himself outside the "subjectivism" which has dominated aesthetics and art criticism since Kant.

One way to look at an artwork is as an object whose formal features—the properties of its medium, its form, line, color, shading, etc.—cause a pleasant feeling in the viewer. These feelings may be shared by all and any sentient beings (cf. Kant's definition of "the aesthetic" as a "subjective universal"), or may be unique to me; they may be the outcome of a noncognitive "aesthetic sense" (the empiricists) or the result of a kind of judgment (Kant). But the standard view is that the function of art is not to disclose truths about the world, but to key us in to our own inner states. The fact that, say, Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fills us with a sense of awe and fear, or Rothko's chapel-murals impart a sense of blank melancholy, says much about us, our own psychological makeup, but nothing really about "the way the world is".

Heidegger disagrees emphatically. Viewed as an occurent being present-at-hand, an artwork is just a paint-laden canvas or a hunk of marble or metal. Yet the artwork isn't just an occurent object. Nor is it an available being ready-to-hand or an implement either. The artwork—whether representational or nonrepresentational—has the ability to disclose "the world", the meaningful totality that our practices ultimately opens up for us. Heidegger uses as his paradigm case Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes*. The subject matter of the painting and Van Gogh's stylistic technique work to disclose the world of the peasant, the "referential totality of assignments" that define the meaning of being for the wearer. Van Gogh's shoes bring this world into focus—like "the broken hammer", they make it explicit—and display it as a meaningful totality.

Art serves the purpose of focusing our practices, of illuminating "things which bear a world", and "the world which gives rise to things". To the extent that art is subjectivized or "aestheticized" it loses this function of disclosing the truth of beings as part of a meaning-totality which is our world. And becoming keyed-in to this meaning-totality is important, both for understanding beings for what they are, for understanding ourselves, and for understanding the truth of Being.

"Truth", for Heidegger, is "unhiddenness" or "disclosure". Our practices allow the world and things to become manifest to us (to come into "the clearing", etc., etc.). This means that truth is not primarily "correspondence", or correctness of representation—i.e., the isomorphism between atomic propositions and states-of-affairs, or judgments and facts. In a secondary sense truth is correspondence, but only because our practices have opened up the Being of beings for us in the first place (e.g., the practice of working and observing cloud-chambers lets electrons show up for us, the practice of writing tragedies lets fear and pity show up for us or become present in "the clearing", etc. Only after these disclosive events have happened can one gauge the match between "the facts" about electrons and tragedy and our judgments about them). Our practices reveal or disclose the being of beings to us, yet every unconcealment of being, given that the horizon of being is time and our appropriation of it is always finitely mediated by language and practice, is also a concealment and untruth. Every truth—every revealing—also harbors untruth—a concealing—which means that every vocabulary we devise which lets the being of beings become manifest to us can never exhaust the being of beings, can never be a complete, definitive, final, and unique vocabulary, and thus in some measure lets distortion and inadequacy slip through. The kind of "fallibilism" which John Dewey and Karl Popper advanced as a methodological doctrine here is given an ontological twist by Heidegger. Because we are finite and "worldly", we can have access to being (a wonderful thing, says Heidegger, which is why true thought is a form of thanksgiving—*Denken ist Danken*). Yet that very finitude guarantees that being "in the truth (of being)" can never become being in the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Unfortunately, metaphysics cons us into thinking that snatches of "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" about Being is available to us if we use the proper methods and perform the right rituals.

Philosophy as "The History of Being"

Because transcendentalism is no longer a live option for Heidegger, his critique of metaphysics—which was there right from the start in *Being and Time*—needs to go historical if he is to make good on his contention that traditional philosophy mis-takes the ontological difference between being and beings. He does this by sketching the downward trajectory of metaphysics from the Greeks through the moderns to the 20th century, when metaphysics was "inverted" by Nietzsche and supplanted by "technological thinking", or what Heidegger calls Gestell or "enframing".

Pre-socratic thinkers, such as Parmenides and Heraclitus, did not construe being as a being, but rather as that by which and through which beings become present as such (Heraclitus' logos and Parmenides "One" or to hen are "the same" for Heidegger, despite the radical surface differences between their thought). Yet Plato, and to a lesser extent Aristotle, understood being as "intelligibility" and changelessness (i.e., the transcendent Forms, or immanent form), and understood truth, in parallel fashion, as "correctness" (conformity with the intelligible order). (Aristotle was, for Heidegger, a more commendably "archaic" figure, insofar as he admitted "several senses of being". But ultimately, he remained a disciple of Plato insofar as he privileged contemplation over action, and defined "primary substance"—the being of beings—as the concrete individual whose identity persists through change due to its essential species-form or morph').

This initial mis-taking of the ontological difference (intelligible Being vs. sub-intelligi-

ble, shifting particular beings) was reinforced in medieval latin philosophy, especially that of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thomas, like Heidegger (and Kant) denied that "being" was a concept (a determinate thus-and-so): rather, it was a "pure actuality" (*actus purus*) grasped not by discursive reason (*ratio*) but by the intuitive intellect (*intellectus*). But this is a dodge, claims Heidegger: if being is understood to be "pure actuality" (as opposed to something else) it is a concept, and it is being understood in ontic categories rather than ontological ones (a being can be an actual block of marble and a potential statue—but if you think of Being as actual rather than potential, as opposed to "beyond actuality and potentiality", aren't you assimilating the ontic and the ontological and misconstruing the ontological difference?). God—as "being itself—is the actuality orders and structures beings and grants them existence, and truth is primarily correspondence with this prior order in the divine intellect and will, and only secondarily correspondence with "objects" or "facts". Hence with scholasticism, metaphysics becomes "the onto-theological tradition".

Modern thought—Descartes, Bacon, Kant, Hegel—disloges metaphysics from its theological moorings. Now, the criteria for knowing beings is set by universal rational methods discoverable in and by individual human minds. Epistemology takes priority over metaphysics, the subjective over the objective. While most modern philosophers explicitly view the knowing subject as a passive spectator on universal, rationally-validated truths, implicitly the knowing subject dominates the known objects by rigorously and ruthlessly applying epistemological methods. This conception of knowledge-as-power is overt in Bacon, at least: for Bacon, human subjects must "put nature to the rack" (of experimentation) to insure that it responds to our demands for truth. Yet now, in contrast to the greeks and medievals, we are the measure of all things, we set up the canonical tests and procedures for determining what does and doesn't count as knowledge and truth.

Enter Nietzsche: if knowledge is a species of power, then "truth" is utterly unlike what philosophers, from Plato through Thomas to Kant and Hegel, took it to be. Truth is actually a "fiction", or a metaphor, that has come to be believed and taken for granted because it answers to some call of the human will. Hence Nietzsche's entreaties to acknowledge, cultivate, and refine the Will-to-Power which one is, for the idea of a "higher world" beyond and above life and its vicissitudes is an illusion, an illusion shattered by its own historical development (Greek metaphysics and Christian theology, by placing such a high premium on "capital-T Truth" and by relentlessly seeking it and putting it to the test, reveal that there is no such Truth, and that "True Being" is but "a myth and a vapor"). Nietzsche thus "inverts" Platonism: the "higher world" of Forms (Plato), God (Thomas), truths of reason (Descartes), given facts (empiricism, positivism), transcendental categories (Kant), the Absolute (Hegel), etc., are actually creative projections of Will to Power, which is usually portrayed as base and in need of discipline and control by "noble" reason.

Nihilism and Technology

Metaphysics thus "inexorably" digs its own grave in Nietzsche's doctrine of Will-to-Power—it dialectically produces its opposite and disintegrates. Yet what kind of cognition is possible "After Nietzsche"? Nietzsche himself found it difficult to settle what Will-to-Power was actually willing—power for what? To what end? Nietzsche's denial—or rather, fictionalization—of Truth makes it impossible to distinguish "good power" from "bad power", because no standard outside the economy of power can be appealed to do distinguish,

say, power-as-excellence (cf. Aristotle) from power-as-domination. The will to power thus is the will to more power, to enable one to will more effectively, which in turn requires more power, which... The Will-to-Power, secreted in metaphysics from the start, is the will to will. The point of willing is more effective willing. The point of more effective willing is still more effective willing. If that seems rather pointless....well, it is.

Thus the evaporation of metaphysical-epistemological philosophy into "technological thinking", or "enframing". Here Heidegger sounds a great deal like the liberal social theorist Max Weber, for whom reasoning-about-ends (*Wertrationalitat*) has been supplanted, in capitalist and socialist orders alike, by calculative or instrumental reasoning (*Zweckrationalitat*), which seeks effective means (e.g., five-year plans, supply-side monetary and fiscal policies, Keynesian demand control, and so on) to desired ends (higher productivity, higher consumption, happy contented citizen-consumers). And insofar as Heidegger's critique of technological thinking sounds these gloomy Weberian themes, he is in the unusual company of some of his harshest critics, the revisionist Frankfurt School Marxists Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer. Heidegger goes further than Weber, Adorno, et. al. by insinuating that the mainstays of the Western Philosophical tradition were all "power freaks", in Rorty's colorful phrase, although they repressed this aspect of their characters from themselves. That modernity would ultimately spawn a generation of overt, unapologetic "power freaks"—the technocrats, corporate and state bureaucrats and go-getters, and media spin-doctors—who want an impossible, absolute Faustian control over nature, themselves, and other human beings, should not surprise us. What is surprising, says Heidegger, is that the Huxleyan world looming on the horizon—a meaning-dead world of pointless order and control that the masses, stupefied by the opiates of consumerism and cheap pleasures, don't even worry about—is the outcome of 2500 years of philosophy, of an intellectual wrong turn taken by Plato. While this legacy needs in one sense to be preserved as a hedge against the domination of technique (after all, the Plato-to-Nietzsche canon is still philosophy, still acknowledges the need for "the meaning of being / the meaning of it all", and hasn't fallen into the oblivion of this need, as technocratic thinkers have), in another sense it needs to be overcome. We cannot will the overcoming of "enframing", since an overweening reliance on willing got us into this mess in the first place. We need a new paradigm, a new "work of art" which can focus the meaning-of-being still hidden in our practices. When this new paradigm (the appearance of a "new god") happens ...it happens: great. If it doesn't happen...well, too bad for us.

It is hard not to be very ambivalent about the above. On the one hand, Heidegger shows rather nicely how philosophy has reflected, even conspired in, the eclipse of value-rationality in (post)modern, (post)industrial civilization. His "unmasking" of the metaphysical impulse as a somewhat pathological desire for godlike powers of surveillance and control dovetails nicely with some of the themes, and worries, of Dewey and Wittgenstein. But to rack up "technological thinking" and its lock on our collective mindset just to philosophy is, I think, a drastic oversimplification, to put it too kindly. It presupposes that the rest of cultur—scientists, artists, religious leaders, politicians, etc.—always follow the lead of philosophers, and ignores the sound Hegelian advice that philosophers, more often than not, reflect rather than form the "spirit of the age". Furthermore, his conviction about the "primacy of the history of metaphysics" in history-in-general leads him to a sort of quietism about what is to be done. We need to "wait" for a "new god" or a new paradigm, like the greek temple or gothic cathedral, that will focus our practices, disclose the meaning of

being, and free us from our "oblivion of being". Yet this is simply more "contempt for the ontic" in favor of "the ontological"—the idea that caring about being takes precedence, even exclusive precedence, over caring about beings. What happens to politics, then? We can grant the importance of almost everything Heidegger says about technological thinking, yet still affirm, with Dewey, that our most immediate concerns are with countering technocratic domination and the decay of reasoning about goods and values where they strike home—in our actual, concrete social and political communities. If we "wait", as Heidegger suggests, for something to "happen", culturally, we may find ourselves waiting not for a new god but for an old Godot.