

Heidegger on Wonder, Restraint, and the Beginnings of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to contribute to the study of the history of 20th century continental philosophy, centering in particular on Heidegger's "being-historical" writings of the 1930s and the 1940s, with a special emphasis on his *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*. In particular, this thesis takes up the question of the transition from the first beginning of thinking, the original Greek inception of philosophy, to the other beginning of thinking that is yet to come. To this end, this thesis focuses on the relation of "wonder" (*Wunder, Er-staunen*) as the basic disposition of the first beginning—as that which inaugurates philosophy and gives Western thinking its basic orientation since the ancient Greeks—and the disposition of the other beginning, which is variously termed by Heidegger as "shock" (*Erschrecken*), "diffidence" (*Scheu*), "presentiment" (*Ahnung*), "foreboding" (*Er-ahnen*), and especially "restraint" (*Verhaltenheit*). The central argument of the present thesis is that that the still unknown and unexperienced disposition of the other beginning cannot be understood on the basis of wonder, but must instead be understood as its dispositional "counter-thrust." Thus, although the disposition of the other beginning indeed presupposes wonder, and stands in a definite relation to it, it disposes human beings to initiate a "leap" into a more originary grounding wherein beings can be retrieved from out of the truth of beyng and, conversely, the truth of beyng can be once again sheltered in beings.

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INTRODUCTION

Emergency of Being

In the period between 1936 and 1944, Heidegger's philosophical writings bear witness to an increased urgency with which "the question of being" (*die Seinsfrage*) must be raised anew. In particular, beginning with *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, composed between 1936 and 1938, and continuing through a series of private treatises that were never published during his lifetime,¹ Heidegger's writings acquire a desperate, almost apocalyptic tone, motivated by what Richard Polt terms, "the emergency of being."² During this period, Heidegger increasingly writes of "shock" (*Erschrecken*) "pain" (*Schmerz*), and "suffering" (*Leiden*). At the same time, Heidegger's writings bear witness to an increasing preoccupation with the planetary domination of what he calls "machination" (*Machenschaft*), and later "technicity" (*Technik*) and "enframing" (*Gestell*), as well as the accompanying reduction of all beings to mere "standing reserve" (*Bestand*) for our calculation, manipulation, and consumption. According to Heidegger, this domination gives rise to an ethical, political, cultural, and even ecological emergency, leading him to eventually proclaim in 1966 that "only a god can save us now."³

¹ These "being-historical" (*seinsgeschichtlichen*) works, as they came to be known, largely consist of private writings that were published as part of the third division of the *Gesamtausgabe* ("Complete Edition") under the heading, "Unpublished Treatises: addresses—ponderings." Included among these are *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* [*Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Bd. 65, 1936–8], *Mindfulness* [*Besinnung*, Bd. 66, 1938/39], and *The Event* [*Das Ereignis*, Bd. 71, 1941/42]. Included also are the hitherto untranslated *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik* [Bd. 67, 1938/38], *Die Geschichte des Seyns* [Bd. 69, 1938/40], *Über den Anfang* [Bd. 70, 1941], *Die Stege des Anfangs* [Bd. 72, 1944], *Zum Ereignis-Denken* [Bd. 73], and *Zum Wesen der Sprache* [Bd. 74].

² Polt, *Emergency of Being* 5.

³ Interview with *Der Spiegel* conducted on September 23, 1966 and published on May 31, 1976. When Heidegger speaks of "a god" here, this is precisely not to be taken as an Abrahamic God that would transcend the world. For a discussion of "the last god" in Heidegger, see Wrathall and Lambeth, "Heidegger's Last God." See also Musa, "Questioning and the Divine."

It may strike one as odd that Heidegger gives thought to such ‘concrete’ concerns of our contemporary society as the problems of technology and industrialization given the common (but mistaken) impression of Heidegger as a thinker of such seemingly ‘abstract’ subjects, including being, the ontological difference, temporality, and the like. For Heidegger, however, such concrete environmental issues as loss of biodiversity and natural habitat, intensive farming, hydrology, and climate change are not simply discrete problems that happen to arise in our post-industrial society and that could be adequately addressed by a more rigorous application of technological and scientific methodology and know-how. Indeed, even if these particular problems were entirely solved through the application of science and technology (and, in fact, this is the only manner in which these problems could be solved), their true source could not be adequately addressed except by way of a thoroughgoing questioning of our fundamental relation to beings as such as a whole as well as through a more radical rethinking of the history of being itself.

According to Heidegger, the concrete problems that characterize our present situatedness are grounded in the “abandonment of being,” or “abandonment by being” (*Seinsverlassenheit*).⁴ That being has abandoned beings does not mean that being or beings have simply disappeared or ceased to be. Rather, what Heidegger means is that beings have lost their essential grounding in the truth of being. Accordingly, beings—rivers, forests, mountains, and even human beings—have ceased to speak to us and have instead been consigned to (almost complete) meaninglessness. None of this is to suggest, of course, that we cannot any longer speak of rivers, forests, or mountains at all. What it does mean, however, is that increasingly we can *only* speak of them in

⁴ Here to translate *Seinsverlassenheit* as “abandonment *by being*” has the danger of giving the false impression that being is endowed with agency. Nevertheless, this translation emphasizes that this abandonment is not simply due to human activity, but has its source in the way the truth of being occurs (as the twofold oscillation of revealing and concealing).

terms of mere objects for our control, calculation, manipulation, implementation, production, and consumption. Beings that previously spoke to us in thought and poetry can be scarcely conceived in this way any longer: Heidegger reflects on Hölderlin's hymn, "*Der Rhein*," where the poet speaks of a river that has since become nothing more than a natural "resource" to be exploited, reduced to what Heidegger terms, "standing reserve" (*Bestand*), and placed under our command.⁵ However, this is also why the abandonment by being is not an abstraction, of concern only to philosophy: it is not simply the case that thinking loses something of its 'profundity' in this process. The crises of ecological devastation, the objectification of human and animal life, and the reification of human relations all trace their source to this abandonment, which strips beings of their essential meaning.

In order to better understand what Heidegger means by the abandonment by being, however, it is first necessary to get a better sense of what he sometimes calls the "forgottenness," or "the oblivion of being" (*Seinsvergessenheit*). This forgottenness (of the question of being) provides the impetus for Heidegger's 1927 work, *Being and Time*, where it is addressed for the very first time. According to Heidegger, the forgottenness of being involves a twofold oblivion. On the one hand, this forgottenness involves the forgetting of the *question* of being—that is, the forgetting of being *as a question* and the forgetting of all essential questioning. According to Heidegger, by striving to immediately answer the question of being, the Western philosophical tradition has increasingly privileged the response to this question, failing to take stock of the questioning itself. This tradition, which Heidegger later identifies with "metaphysics," ultimately tries to do away with all genuine questioning altogether by settling it 'once and for all' without acknowledging that it is the openness of questioning that renders any response meaningful in the

⁵ Heidegger, GA7 12–17/ QCT 17.

first place. On the other hand, the forgottenness of being involves the oblivion of the “distinction” (*Unterscheidung*) between being and beings, what Heidegger sometimes calls “the ontological difference” (*die ontologische Differenz*). Since the earliest times, Heidegger notes, whenever metaphysics asks about being (*Sein*), it responds with reference to beings (*Seienden*). Such is the case, for instance, when Thales asks, “what is that which is?” only to answer by reference to “water.” On Heidegger’s reading, Thales understands “something like being” in the question, only to posit “a being” in the answer.⁶ This state of affairs does not change in the centuries that follow: from Anaximander to Nietzsche, every time metaphysics attempts to think being, it ends up thinking being in terms of beings, annihilating this very distinction. Even when explicitly addressing being in its various historical manifestations, metaphysics progressively determines being in terms of “beingness” (*Seiendheit*). In other words, it progressively comes to represent being as the most general, highest, or most eminent determinate being (*ιδέα*, God, or the Absolute).⁷ This is why, in addition to stressing the importance of questioning, Heidegger’s starting point in *Being and Time* is precisely that being is *not* a being.⁸

Although this twofold forgottenness plays an important role in *Being and Time* and related texts of the same period, the stated reasons for its neglect—that being has been misunderstood as “the most general,” “emptiest,” and “the most self-evident” notion—leave one with the impression that the forgetting of being is simply due to a philosophical error, or a series of philosophical errors, but could have been otherwise.⁹ At the same time, this way of framing the forgottenness of being gives the impression that the reason for the overcoming of this forgottenness is primarily

⁶ Heidegger, GA58 354/ BPP 319.

⁷ Heidegger, “Introduction to ‘What is Metaphysics?’” in GA9 / PTH 280.

⁸ Heidegger, GA2 3/ BT 3.

⁹ Heidegger, GA2 3/ BT 2–3.

philosophical and of interest mainly to philosophers or similarly inclined laypeople. What emerges in the 1930s, on the other hand, is a realization that the forgottenness of being belongs to the entire history of being itself, a history that determines human beings, even in their everyday material conditions. In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger traces the source of the forgottenness of being to the abandonment by being, writing that “the abandonment by being is the ground of the forgottenness of being.”¹⁰ Specifically, this abandonment is a direct consequence of the way in which being is given to thought within the purview of the first beginning (that is, metaphysics) and is “the most original destiny of the first beginning.”¹¹ This is because, from the perspective of metaphysics, the truth of being manifests itself and comes to presence by expressing itself in terms of beings. Accordingly, whenever being ‘lights up’ beings—whenever beings become thinkable, whether through philosophical speculation or techno-scientific calculation—being itself becomes covered over and can be experienced only as its withdrawal. This is why Heidegger writes: “that being abandons beings means that being *conceals itself* [*verbirgt sich*] in the manifestness of beings. And being itself is essentially determined as this self-withdrawing concealment.”¹²

For this reason, neither the forgottenness of being nor its abandonment are simply a result of a mistaken way of approaching the question of being; neither is it merely the case that philosophers have failed to adequately *respond* to this question. Instead, the very questioning of being that inaugurates the Western philosophical tradition allows itself to be answered with respect to beings and beingness, and the inceptual being-question already contains the seeds of its own oblivion. Indeed, insofar as the being-question allows its explicit formulation in terms of what Heidegger calls, “the guiding question” (*Leitfrage*)—the question, “what are beings?”—this

¹⁰ Heidegger, GA65 115/ CP 91.

¹¹ Heidegger, GA65 115/ CP 91.

¹² Heidegger, GA65 111/ CP 88.

question already ‘betrays’ (in the twofold sense of making manifest and infidelity) the first beginning of thinking. Thus, although both the forgottenness of being and the eventual abandonment by being reach their zenith with technological and scientific modes of thinking that characterize machination (calculation, acceleration, the burgeoning of the massive and the miniscule), neither one of them is, strictly speaking, a contemporary phenomenon. That is to say, neither one of them is merely the result of contemporary culture, which devalues thinking and an authentic comportment towards being. Instead, both the forgottenness of being and its abandonment are now understood a result of the way “beyng” (*Seyn*)¹³ essentially occurs. In this way it is possible to understand this refusal as an abandonment *by being*. By emphasizing that this abandonment has its source in beyng itself is not to suggest that beyng possesses any features of subjectivity; rather, is merely to emphasize that this abandonment is not due to a human omission or “forgetfulness,” but due to the “oscillation” or “trembling” between withdrawal or presencing, concealment and unconcealment, that is the essential occurrence of beyng.

It is only in the present epoch, however, where metaphysics culminates with technological and “scientific” modes of thinking that give rise to “calculation,” “acceleration,” and the “burgeoning of the massive,” that the abandonment of being becomes complete, giving rise to a

¹³ It is important to note that when Heidegger writes the word “being” (*Sein*) as “beyng” (*Seyn*), he does so not in order to introduce a new ‘concept’ into his thought. He adopts the archaic spelling because that word has become overdetermined and worn-out in the history of philosophy as metaphysics where it comes to signify beings as “beingness.” As a consequence, this word has increasingly become ambiguous and vague, and at the same time the most obvious and thereby “forgotten.” And although the need for rethinking the way being is understood already motivates much of his earlier writing, it becomes especially pertinent in Heidegger’s works of the 1930s, which are primarily concerned with a more originary grasping of the history of metaphysics as a history of being, as well as its forgottenness and ultimate abandonment. To be clear, in Heidegger’s own usage, “beyng” and “being” do not ‘signify’ different ‘subject matter’ and neither are they different according to what either would mean ‘in itself’ as though either could grasped as such. Rather, “being” and “beyng” are the same, with the important caveat that the latter indicates a different approach to the former, achieved through an originary insertion into the history of metaphysics as the history of being. This subtle difference is indicated by the change in the way this very same word is spelled.

genuine emergency. According to Heidegger, insofar being withdraws from beings, the latter become detached from their truth and essential origin. As such, beings (including human beings) become increasingly grasped as things objectively present for technological and scientific consumption, manipulation, and exploitation. However, before beings—rivers, mountains, human and animal life—can be reduced to things and resources, they must be first interpreted in such a way that their “makeability comes to the fore.”¹⁴ Heidegger uses “machination” (*Machenschaft*) to refer to this mode of being that allows for the understanding of beings as (exhaustively) representable and represented, that is, “accessible in opinion and calculation and, on the other hand, providable in production and implementation.”¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that machination is not merely a ‘bad’ way of being—which gives way to a mistaken way of thinking—that should be dismissed in favour of a utopian ‘return to nature.’ Instead, as one way in which being occurs, machination is implicitly there from the ancient times. In the first instance, machination takes a definite shape in the ancient Greek interpretation of φύσις (*physis*, “nature”) as a relation of ποίησις (*poiesis*, from ποιέω, “to make”) and τέχνη (*technē*, “craft,” “art”), that is, in an interpretation of “nature” as “the making itself by itself.”¹⁶ However, it is only with the medieval understanding of nature as “creation,” and of beings as *ens creatum*, that machination becomes the predominant way in which being gives itself. Modernity is, in this sense, less of a break with the medieval worldview than its crowning culmination: it achieves the reduction of all of nature to made and makeable things, albeit at human hands instead of God’s. Nevertheless, machination as machination (that is, as a genuine way beyng essentially occurs), is itself still poorly understood in all this, remaining hidden from precisely those modes of thinking—science, technology—that depend on it most.

¹⁴ Heidegger, GA65 126/ CP 100.

¹⁵ Heidegger, GA65 108–09/ CP 86.

¹⁶ Heidegger, GA65 126/ CP 100.

Indeed, this is precisely what makes the dominion of machination and the abandonment by being so profound and so disastrous for thinking: being gives beings as ‘the true’ and ‘the actual’ in the twofold gesture of manifestation and self-withdrawal. Accordingly, a thinking that remains focused on beings is never simply mistaken: it is not merely the case that technological and scientific calculation produces false knowledge that could be refuted by providing new evidence. Even thinking that aims to exploit beings is not to be dismissed as mistaken: after all, Heidegger never denies that a river is a resource, but it is never just a resource. For Heidegger, it is precisely because scientific and technological modes of thinking produce true and useful knowledge (which is expressed in correct propositions), and because thinking remains fixated on this kind of knowledge, that it becomes ever harder to press into the origin of that knowledge, and to inquire into the way it is itself given.

This is also why, for Heidegger, the emergency of being is always at the same time an emergency of thought. Going beyond merely exploiting beings, technological and scientific modes of thinking, which are grounded in machination, exploit being itself by reducing it to something like a resource. Indeed, as early as his 1929 address, “What is Metaphysics?” Heidegger notes that “science” calls upon being for help while simultaneously denying it as something worthy of question.¹⁷ To be sure, science does not need propositions about being in order to formulate its notions—it does not require an explicitly formulated and developed ontology. What it does need, however, is a questioning relation with the world—the prior openness that makes all subsequent propositions meaningful and (potentially) true. Yet, just as natural resources are used up in the service of a technologically driven society, the principal danger of our “post-metaphysical” age consists in the possibility that machinational modes of thinking will “deplete,” as it were, all

¹⁷ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics” in GA9 103/ PTH 82.

potential for thought—including that which grounds science itself—and render genuine thinking impossible.

It might strike one as rather odd to speak of something given to thought becoming depleted in this way, as though it were a physical resource. And, strictly speaking, being itself is not what is depleted; instead, depleted are the essential possibilities of thought and of language, which shelter being and give it expression. At the risk of oversimplification, we might say that insofar “thought” proceeds by established rules and methods, it gets stuck in certain patterns—all the more so if the knowledge produced by way of that fixed methodology is useful and true. This kind of thinking becomes “addicted,” as it were, to the products of its labour and, consequently, it becomes ever more difficult to invent new ways of thinking. This is also why when Heidegger notes that “words have lost all meaning,” this loss is not the result of a mere misunderstanding that could be corrected by rigorous linguistic analysis. Words have become detached from their essential meaning not in spite of their original truth, but precisely because of it: just as true sentiments become cliché through overuse, essential language loses its connection with the openness that gives it meaning and must be reinvented. This is the historical irony that underlies the tragic condition of being: the very condition of “questionlessness” and “unthinking” is due to the richness of being, to the way that it continually gives itself to technological and scientific appropriation that defines our post-metaphysical epoch.

Yet, despite this moment of crisis—or precisely because of it—our historical situation also presents an opportunity for thinking. As Polt notes, it is in this moment of emergency that being may “emerge” once again.¹⁸ In this total abandonment by being, where nothing appears as worthy of questioning any longer, being may once again become experienced precisely as its withdrawal,

¹⁸ Polt, *Emergency*, 5–6.

and this is the sentiment behind Heidegger's famous saying that "what is most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking."¹⁹ In particular, the emergency of being gives rise to a twofold imperative. The first task involves what Heidegger terms, "the retrieval [*Wiederbringung*] of beings from out of the truth of being."²⁰ However, we should not see in this call for a retrieval a romanticist hearkening back to a long-outmoded way of being—for instance, a rejection of technology in favour of a more agrarian kind of existence. Indeed, what Heidegger finds in our post-metaphysical epoch is neither the age of invention nor that of creative expression, but an age that lacks the ability to invent or create anything. For this reason, the second task involves the attempt to "inventively think" (*erdenken*) being from out of itself and, in so doing, prepare the ground for the other beginning of thinking. However, in order to achieve both aims, it is first necessary "to ground" that being for whom being is a question, which now becomes Heidegger's central concern. As he notes in *Contributions*: "Whatever in the future can truly be called philosophy must primarily and exclusively accomplish this: to first find the place of the thoughtful asking of the newly inceptual question or, in other words, to ground Da-sein."²¹ That is to say, it is first necessary to prepare Da-sein itself as the site of questioning wherein being may again take hold and become sheltered in art, poetry, and thought.

To this end, Heidegger's historical-inceptual hermeneutic will seek guidance by going back to the very beginning of Western thinking—its original Greek inception—in order to open the 'space' for the other beginning. To be sure, we can never again begin as the Greeks did—their questioning belongs to the trajectory of metaphysical and scientific thought that defines our

¹⁹ Heidegger, GA8 7/ QCT 5–6.

²⁰ Heidegger, GA65 11/ CP 11.

²¹ Heidegger, GA65 20/ CP 18.

historical epoch. Therefore, in order to repeat this beginning as a true beginning,²² it is necessary to repeat it with a difference. Indeed, what makes Heidegger's being-historical texts so interesting is that the attempt to "inventively think" (*erdenken*) being also involves an attempt to invent a new kind of thinking. Thus, we might view Heidegger's efforts in this period as "experiments" with thought (not to be confused with "thought experiments"), where thinking continually runs up against the limits of language, reason, and intelligibility. To be sure, there is no guarantee that any such experiment will be successful; the very logic of the event, which involves a radical rupture with the present state, renders it immune from any and all calculation and future projection. And, in any case, whether Heidegger's attempts in these texts are ultimately successful is less important; instead, these attempts may allow us to better understand the nature and limits of thought and its relation to that which gives us thought.

Thesis Objectives and Structure

This thesis aims to contribute to the study of the history of 20th century continental philosophy, centering in particular on Heidegger's being-historical writings of the 1930s, with a special emphasis on his *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*. In particular, this thesis takes up the question of the transition from the first beginning of thinking, the original Greek inception of

²² It is important to note, however, that a "beginning," or "inception" (*Anfang*) is not a mere commencement. Beginning is not something that happens once, in time, and is immediately left behind. Rather, beginning is always preserved in the subsequent journey—it continually projects and opens a possible path. This is because, for Heidegger, a beginning is above all a questioning and a decision—as such, it comes to shape and is taken up in every subsequent decision and act of questioning. With respect to the first beginning of thinking, for instance, Heidegger notes that what remains decisive about this beginning is not the particular point of view or a position held by any individual Greek thinker; the Greek beginning does not consist in a set of axioms or theses that are then taken up by subsequent thinkers. Instead, what is decisive about the Greek beginning is the questioning that drives it. In this light, the particularly decisive aspect of Greek thinking is that thought for the first time takes the guidance from the question of being, expressed in terms of what Heidegger calls the "guiding question," or "leading question" (*Leitfrage*), the question "what are beings?" See Heidegger, GA71 228/ E 196. See also Vallega, "Being-Historical Thinking," 55.

philosophy, and the other beginning of thinking that is yet to come. To this end, this thesis focuses on the relation of “wonder” (*Wunder, Er-staunen*) as the basic disposition of the first beginning, as that which inaugurates philosophy and gives Western thinking its essential orientation since the earliest Greeks, and the disposition of the other beginning, which is variously termed by Heidegger as “shock” (*Erschrecken*), “diffidence” (*Scheu*), “presentiment” (*Ahnung*), and “foreboding” (*Er-ahnen*), and especially “restraint” (*Verhaltenheit*). In particular, the central argument of this thesis is that the still unknown and unexperienced disposition of the other beginning cannot be understood on the basis of wonder, but must instead be understood as its dispositional counter-thrust. Thus, although the disposition of the other beginning indeed presupposes wonder, and stands in a definite relation to it, it disposes human beings to initiate a “leap” into a more originary grounding wherein beings can be retrieved from out of the truth of being and, conversely, the truth of being can be once again sheltered in beings through poetry, art, and thought.

The first chapter of this thesis shows the way in which Heidegger takes up the traditional conception of the origin of philosophy in wonder. Contrary to popular opinion, philosophy arises neither out of idle curiosity or the mere pleasure of knowing. Instead, according to Heidegger, philosophy is compelled by a profound need and necessity for thinking. In the first beginning, this need, or plight, occurs out of a fundamental encounter with the unknown and the unthought that occurs as a basic encounter with beings as beings. In other words, wonder is not simply an emotional response of particular Greek thinkers; instead, it is a basic disposition that provided thinking with its fundamental orientation and imparted upon the earliest thinkers the destiny to question beings by formulating and pursuing the question, “what are beings?”

The second chapter turns to the way in which wonder, as the basic disposition of the first beginning continues the entire history of metaphysics, which leads to its eventual decline. However,

it is argued that the move away from wonder is not due to any shortcoming of that disposition, something that ought to be rectified by a more intense focus. Instead, this move away from wonder precisely testifies to its greatness, to its power to dispose and attune human beings to the overwhelming strangeness of beings that imparts upon metaphysical and scientific thinking its historical orientation. In this light, it is argued, the decline of wonder is a result not of its powerlessness, but due to its ability to dispose humans to pursue beings to such an extent that human questioning has exhausted beings as such as a whole—it has exhausted nature itself—to where nothing can any longer escape human grasp.

The final chapter of the present thesis turns to the basic disposition of the other beginning, which becomes understood as arising out of the very condition of questionlessness and unthinking that gives rise to what Heidegger calls “the plight of a lack of plight.” Specifically, the basic disposition of the other beginning is now understood in terms of “restraint” as the dispositional center of the guiding dispositions of “shock” and “diffidence.” On the one hand, shock alienates us from what is now most familiar, the abandonment by being and the complete domination of machination, and exposes us to the necessity of the decision to begin again. On the other hand, diffidence disposes us to attempt to prepare the leap into a perspective that would attain a more originary insertion into the history of the first beginning and grasp it as the end. In both ways, restraint (as the dispositional center of shock and diffidence) attunes humans—the few and the rare—to prepare for the asking of the basic question, the question of the truth of being.

CHAPTER I: WONDER AND THE FIRST BEGINNING

The Plight and the Necessity of Thinking

Before thinking may begin again, Heidegger demands that we return to the original Greek beginning of thinking and understand the manner in which philosophical questioning first arose. Contrary to prevailing opinion, Heidegger aims to show that philosophical questioning arose *not* because of an excess of spare time enjoyed by the free citizens of the polis that could then be spent in the pursuit of fanciful speculation (this is not an arbitrary opinion, as we will see, and is itself indicative of a conception of philosophy as a mere curiosity). In general, for Heidegger, human beings do not think solely for the pleasure of thoughtful meditation. Instead, thinking arises—then and always—only on the basis of a genuine “plight,” “distress,” or “need” (*Not*) that gives rise to the most pressing “necessity” (*Notwendigkeit*) for thinking. This necessity is not to be understood as an empty formalism that might be contrasted with the traditional metaphysical notions of contingency or possibility; instead, necessity is thought out of this plight or need, as something that is most needful and urgent, something that must be done. For this reason, Heidegger insists that this plight is not to be taken superficially as something lamentable, deficient, or miserable.¹ And although this plight is a certain kind of negativity, it is not simply an instance of lack, a privation of some particular thing or another. Properly understood, this plight is an overflowing gift, and a way in which being is given to human beings since the earliest times.² Heidegger writes that this plight “brings humans to themselves and thereby lets history begin or perish,” proceeding to ask, “this plight... what if it were the truth of being itself?”³

¹ Heidegger, GA45 159–60/ BQP 138–39. See also GA65 46/ CP 37.

² Heidegger, GA45 151–53, 160/ BQP 131–33, 139. See also GA39 139–41/ HGR 123–24.

³ Heidegger, GA65 45–46/ CP 37–38.

What is meant by plight here, and how does it usher in the necessity for thinking? Heidegger says that this plight compels in the mode of a “basic disposition,” or “fundamental attunement” (*Grundstimmung*). Thus, in order to properly understand what is meant by this plight, and the way it compels us to think, it is useful to revisit what Heidegger means by “disposition,” “attunement,” or “mood” (*Stimmung*). This word occupied a prominent place in *Being and Time*, to refer to Dasein’s “moods,” which were grasped in terms of Dasein’s “situatedness,” “disposedness,” or “finding oneself disposed” (*Befindlichkeit*).⁴ In that text, moods are not to be understood as emotions or passions of particular human beings; to the contrary, ordinary everyday emotions—for instance, depression, lethargy, anger, joy—are themselves grounded in such moods. For Heidegger, moods are thus the basic determinate ways the world is disclosed to Dasein, that is, ways of “being-in-the-world” (*In-der-Welt-sein*).⁵ More precisely, by attuning Dasein—the distinctive “how” of being to which human beings belong—to particular ways of being-in-the-world, moods disclose the world under a particular aspect. This is not to say, however, that moods simply ‘colour’ what may be disclosed to Dasein, thereby disclosing the world otherwise than it ‘really’ is.⁶ On the contrary, as constitutive of Dasein’s disposedness, moods make possible any experience and all disclosure. In other words, moods disclose being-in-the-world itself, they

⁴ It should be noted that both “mood” and “disposition” are historically used to translate the German word “*Stimmung*.” Nevertheless, I choose to translate the latter as “mood” when used to refer to Dasein’s being-in-the-world in *Being and Time* and related texts and “disposition,” or “attunement,” when it is understood being-historically in Heidegger’s writings from the 1930s onwards. Even though, as I will proceed to make clear, *Stimmung* is never to be understood as a subjective state of a particular human being, there is nevertheless a change of emphasis that comes to prominence in the way this term is used in the course of Heidegger’s shift away from his existential analytic of Dasein to the later being-historical approach. Specifically, in the later works, *Stimmung* acquires more strongly the connotations of displacing and orienting that can be heard in “disposition,” as well as tonality and resonance that become decisive in *Contributions*, and which can be heard in the word “attunement.”

⁵ Heidegger, GA2 178–86/ BT 126–31.

⁶ Heidegger, GA2 183–84/ BT 130.

disclose that Dasein *is*, or *ek-sists*. Heidegger writes: “Mood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something.”⁷ Moods are thus “pre-subjective” (and therefore “pre-objective”) conditions for any distinction between subject and object, human beings and the world, interiority and exteriority. The world is never pre-given, as an object that could be then opposed to the thinking subject; the very determination of the world as an ‘object’ of Dasein’s concern is only possible from within a disposition as a particular way of being-in-the-world—that is, is only possible under the aspect of grasping the world as something objective or present at hand. Accordingly, for Heidegger, it is only because moods are constitutive of Dasein’s being-in-the-world that we can speak of a world to begin with.

As with his discussion of moods in *Being and Time*, Heidegger continues to emphasize in his later writings that dispositions are not to be understood psychologically or anthropologically as aspects of subjective “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*) that would belong to Dasein, or to humans in general, as something human beings possess.⁸ For Heidegger, a disposition is never a fixed state (or “state of mind” as it is sometimes translated); instead, it is a movement, a ‘process’ of attuning or ‘dis-positioning’—in other words, a “happening” (*Geschehnis*). In fact, properly understood, an attunement is nothing more than a movement of dis-position or “displacement” (*Versetzung*) that “displaces us into this or that basic relation to beings as such.”⁹ Nevertheless, this process of attunement and displacement is not to be understood as a mere change of position within an already ordered space or time whereby human beings proceed unchanged from one point to another. Instead, in displacing Dasein, a disposition institutes its own regime of time and space: “disposition

⁷ Heidegger, GA2 182/ BT 129.

⁸ Heidegger, GA45 154/ BQP 133: “a misunderstanding immediately insinuates itself, to the effect that the dispositions would be something man ‘has’... whereas in truth... the dispositions have man and consequently determine him in various ways, even if his corporeality.” See also GA39 139/ HGR 123.

⁹ Heidegger, GA45 154/ BQP 134.

is what transports us in such a way that it co-founds the time-space of the displacing itself.”¹⁰

We will return to this point in the subsequent sections. For the moment, let us note that since Dasein is always disposed in one way or another any disposition can only be replaced by another disposition of a different kind.¹¹ A basic disposition, then, is one that “is capable of bringing about a change of disposition from the ground up.”¹² Unlike moods, which disclose the world under a particular aspect, or dispositions that displace us into a basic relation to beings as such, a basic disposition has the power to clear the room for any and all disclosure. Even “before” beings are given as such, and even before we relate to them in one way or another, the basic disposition institutes a regime of openness. Heidegger notes:

The opening up of world occurs in basic disposition. The power of a basic disposition that transports, inserts us into and thereby opens up, is thus at the same time *grounding*. That is, it places Dasein into its grounds and before its ab-grounds. The basic disposition [*Grundstimmung*] determines [*bestimmt*] for our Dasein the locale and time of its being, and locale and time that are manifest to Dasein itself.¹³

Again, to say that a basic disposition “places Dasein into its grounds” does not mean that Dasein is transported from one place to another. Instead, as we will see, the basic disposition dis-poses and thereby institutes Da-sein itself as the ground, this openness, whereby beings *as beings* can

¹⁰ Heidegger, GA45 154/ BQP 134. Even though moods are not to be understood on the basis of emotions, we can get a clearer sense of what is meant here by relating this to our ordinary everyday experience: for instance, boredom or lethargy make us perceive time and space in a determinate way—for instance, they might determine that time passes more slowly. Unlike these everyday experiences, however, dispositions do not simply colour our experience of time and space; instead, the movement of displacing of a disposition make possible any spatio-temporal determination.

¹¹ For Dasein to be, for Dasein to ek-sist, it must already be disposed. In other words, there is no non-dispositional ‘default’ state for Dasein.

¹² Heidegger, GA39 142/ HGR 125.

¹³ Heidegger, GA39 141/ HGR 124.

become manifest. Moreover, such a disposition grounds also in the sense that it serves as a foundation upon which one can build: “We call it the *basic* disposition because in disposing man it displaces him into that on which and in which word, work, and deed, as historical, can be *based* and history can begin.”¹⁴ As such, it belongs neither to human beings, nor to any other being, but will be that out which human beings can be determined as such.¹⁵ Within the purview of the first beginning of thinking, the basic disposition is one of “wonder” (*Wunder, Er-staunen*), what the Greeks understood by the word “θαυμάζειν.”¹⁶

Wonder (*Wunder*) and Curiosity

Heidegger discusses wonder as early as *Being and Time* (at this time, he uses the ordinary German word, “*Wunder*”) where he emphasizes that we misunderstand the sense of “θαυμάζειν” when we reduce it to mere “curiosity” (*Neugier*). In contrast to wonder, which compels questioning and whereby one is disposed authentically towards being, curiosity involves a preoccupation with novelty. German language reveals something of this fact: the word “*Neugier*” is a compound of “*Neu*” (“new”) and “*Gier*” (“desire,” or even “greed”). Heidegger notes, for instance, that this greed for the new “has nothing to do with the contemplation that wonders at beings, θαυμάζειν”; instead of seeking understanding, curiosity “seeks only in order to see and have seen.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Heidegger, GA45 170/ BQP 147.

¹⁵ Heidegger, GA65 46/ CP 38.

¹⁶ Heidegger, GA45 155/ BQP 135.

¹⁷ Heidegger, GA2 459/ BT 318. And, to be sure, this distinction between wonder and curiosity is not without precedent: medieval thinkers continued to insist upon this distinction and Heidegger’s explicit connection of curiosity and sight is a clear reference to Augustine, for whom curiosity was a sin. For instance, in book X of the *Confessions*, Augustine discusses curiosity as “the desire of the eyes” (*concupiscentia oculorum*), which is the second form of temptation. Heidegger discusses Augustine’s conception of curiosity in a lecture-course from 1920–21, which was published as *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. See GA60 221–24/ PRL 165–69.

In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger distinguishes between wonder and curiosity on the basis of two conceptions of time. In that work, he understands Dasein's temporality in terms of three temporal horizons, or "ecstases": the "having been" (*Gewesen*), the "to come" (*Zukunft*), and the "making present" (*Gegenwart*). To the extent that Dasein authentically *is*, or "ek-sists," it must on the one hand "own up to the past" by resolutely appropriating its "guilt," or "indebtedness" (*Schuld*); on the other hand, Dasein must anticipate the future by opening possibilities for itself, which also means being open to the possibility of its being otherwise. This involves especially Dasein's most extreme possibility of not being at all—Dasein's own-most possibility of dying—and Heidegger emphasizes that it is the finite character of Dasein, which is revealed as "being-towards-death" (*Sein zum Tode*), that is the condition for any spatial and temporal determination. This authentic comportment whereby Dasein at once "owns up" to the past and "faces up" to the future as its own-most possibility Heidegger terms "anticipatory resoluteness."¹⁸ Thus understood, anticipatory resoluteness is itself the condition for the vulgar, public conception of time as an empty container of happenings, which is usually thought as composed of a series of discrete present instances (what we sometimes call 'clock time').

According to Heidegger, curiosity belongs to a way of being in the world that privileges the making present of the present instant. In curiosity, neither the future nor the past are apprehended authentically as the "to come" and "having been"; instead, they are grasped as modalities of the present, as "future present" and "past present," respectively. For instance, while we normally think of curiosity as oriented towards the future, Heidegger shows that not to be the case. For instance, he notes that

¹⁸ Heidegger, GA2 402/ BT 281.

Greed for the new indeed penetrates to something not yet seen, but in such a way that making present attempts to withdraw from awaiting. Curiosity is altogether inauthentically futural, in such a way that it does not await a possibility but in its greed only desires possibility as something actual.¹⁹

This “not waiting” for possibilities is characteristic of the dominance of the making present as the preeminent temporal horizon. In German, “*Gegenwart*” is a compound of “toward” or “against” (*Gegen*) and “wait” (*Wart*), and is usually interpreted by Heidegger as “waiting towards.” However, the making present of curiosity “comes to itself” in such a way that it precisely withdraws from waiting and we may interpret it literally as “against wait.”²⁰ Interestingly, both “waiting” and “not-waiting” are inauthentic according to Heidegger: while the former is a comportment towards the future that passively accepts whatever comes, the latter attempts to actively grasp the future, but it does so in a way that strips the future of its “futural” character. For these reasons, whether interpreted as waiting or not-waiting, the making present that arises in curiosity should be distinguished from an authentic “anticipation” of possibilities. By anticipating possibilities, Dasein opens possibilities *for itself*, and gasps them precisely *as* possibilities—that is, as something that is never, and never will be, actually present.

In contrast to the authentic anticipation of possibilities, the making present of curiosity attempts to determine possibilities in advance as something definite—that is, as future present moments that will come to pass. Accordingly, curiosity never opens genuine possibilities for thinking or being; instead, by attempting to determine the future in advance and thereby bring it to the present, it closes them off. This especially applies to Dasein’s possibilities of being otherwise, including its own-most possibility of dying. Although we might indulge our curiosity by imagining

¹⁹ Heidegger, GA2 459–60/ BT 318.

²⁰ Heidegger, GA2 460/ BT 319.

possessing things in the future, and possessing the knowledge of future things, we simultaneously imagine ourselves as the same ‘in’ that future (here, we might recall old works of science fiction that imagine fantastic spaceships and colonies on the moon while at the same time maintaining traditional social norms, including racial and gender inequalities). This becomes obvious when we consider Dasein’s own-most possibility of dying since, for the most part, human beings are *not* curious about their own deaths by attempting to “make present” the moment of death itself (for instance, by attaining precise knowledge of how and when we will die). According to Heidegger, and contrary to the usual opinion, curiosity is not characterized by an intense interest in the future—it rather consists in complete *disinterestedness*. “Disinterestedness” here means, “not having a stake in the matter,” that is, being personally divested from it. We are curious about the future only to the extent that we are maintained as immune from the radical possibility of being otherwise.

Curiosity is not only inauthentically futural, however: to the extent that making present dominates as the primary temporal ecstasy, curiosity also involves a forgetting of the past.²¹ To be sure, this forgetting does not consist in a neglect of certain determinate ‘facts’ about past presents. Rather, the precise opposite is the case: by grasping the past as a mere curiosity, Dasein busies itself with historical facts, all the while maintaining itself as separate and immune from its history (*Geschichte*). For instance, we may be curious about ‘History’ (*Historie*), that is, the subject matter of historical research, when contemplating such past injustices as the practice of slavery, but any such approach results from failing to ‘own up’ to this past by ignoring the way it continues to constitute our present historical situation, which can be done on the basis of guilt or indebtedness.²²

²¹ Heidegger, GA2 460/ BT 319.

²² To be sure, this notion of guilt as what is own-most to Dasein has nothing to do with ‘collective guilt,’ which is an inauthentic, public notion (to say that ‘we are all guilty’ means precisely that guilt belongs to

Moreover, this forgetting of the past only re-enforces the not waiting that belongs to curiosity: the more Dasein forgets, the more it busies itself with ever new things to satisfy its curiosity.

For these reasons, Heidegger identifies curiosity, along with “idle talk” and “ambiguity,” as one common inauthentic way in which Dasein is “there” proximally and for the most part. He writes, “in [these characteristics] and in the connectedness of their being, a basic kind of the being of everydayness reveals itself, which we call entanglement [*Verfallen*] of Dasein.”²³ Thus entangled in the world, Dasein does not “dwell” on any question, but instead flees from one thing to another. This is why Heidegger writes that “the making present of curiosity that ‘arises’ is so little interested in the ‘matter in question’ that, as soon as it catches sight of it, it already is looking for the next thing.”²⁴ Moreover, by thus fleeing from one matter to another, Dasein is “tranquilized” into complacency.²⁵ As Heidegger points out, however, this tranquilization is not to be understood as “stagnation and inactivity” but is something that drives one to “uninhibited ‘busyness’”²⁶ For Heidegger, the main feature of curiosity is that, in keeping Dasein busy with the everyday, curiosity distracts from the essential: an understanding of being that results from a questioning of beings.²⁷ This is not to say, that curiosity produces or gives rise to inauthenticity. It is rather the opposite:

no one in particular). Nevertheless, to truly understand something like the practice of slavery, for instance, it is necessary to place into question the way it carries over into our present, and one way to do that would be to question the ways in which we (and not some past individuals) might be benefiting from it today.

²³ Heidegger, GA2 233/ BT 164.

²⁴ Heidegger, GA2 459/ BT 318.

²⁵ Heidegger, GA2 459/ BT 319.

²⁶ Heidegger, GA2 236/ BT 166.

²⁷ We might note that this notion of curiosity as the preoccupation with the inessential bears striking resemblance to way Thomas Aquinas understands that notion. Like Augustine, Aquinas is careful to balance wonder and curiosity in *Summa Theologiae*, noting that one way curiosity occurs is “when a man desires to know the truth about creatures, without referring his knowledge to its due end, namely, the knowledge of God.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Qu. 157, Art. 1, #3. For Aquinas, as for Augustine before him, curiosity distracts us from the essential, that is, the knowledge of God. On this point, Aquinas quotes Augustine, who writes: “in studying creatures, we must not be moved by empty and perishable curiosity; but we should ever mount towards immortal and abiding things.” Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, 29.

insofar as Dasein flees its guilt and avoids its own-most possibilities by seeking refuge in the publicness of the they, it busies itself with idle chatter, ambiguity, and curiosity. In this sense, curiosity is best understood as a symptom, rather than the reason of an inauthentic comportment toward being that is characterized by Dasein's entanglement.²⁸

How, then, does Heidegger understand wonder at this stage of his writing? Although he emphasizes that Dasein proximally and for the most part busies itself with curiosity, idle chatter, and ambiguity, there are nevertheless times when Dasein pulls itself out from entanglement and comports itself authentically toward being. Heidegger calls this authentic present, the “moment of vision” (*Augenblick*). This notion, which will later become intimately related to that of “the appropriating event” (*Ereignis*), involves a sudden realization of Dasein's finitude, which is itself possible on the basis of “anxiety,” or “existential angst” (*Angst*). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger calls anxiety the “fundamental disposedness” (*Grundbefindlichkeit*) that discloses “the nothingness of the world” whereby “Dasein is thrown into uncanniness”²⁹ In contrast to something like fear, which is always directed at some determinate being, anxiety is occasioned by no particular thing—that is, it is occasioned, in particular, by nothing. This is not to suggest that the world simply “disappears” in anxiety—the nothingness revealed in anxiety is not a simple negation of the totality of beings—instead, the world appears precisely in terms of its ‘insignificance’ or utter meaninglessness. It is in precisely such moments, however, that Dasein is freed to own up to the fact of its finitude and come to itself by grasping its own-most possibilities.³⁰ This consists neither in the idealistic overcoming of experience, nor of the attempt to gain mastery over death,

²⁸ Heidegger, GA2 460/ BT 319.

²⁹ Heidegger, GA2 453–54/ BT 315.

³⁰ Heidegger, GA2 250/ BT 176: “Anxiety reveals in Dasein its *being toward* its ownmost potentiality of being, that is, *being free for* the freedom of choosing and grasping itself. Anxiety brings Dasein *before its being free for*... the authenticity of its being as possibility which it always already is.”

but in the sobering realization of the possibilities inherent in Dasein's finitude. "Together with the sober anxiety that brings us before our individualized potentiality-of-being," Heidegger writes, "goes the unshakable joy in this possibility. In it Dasein becomes free of the entertaining 'incidentals' that busy curiosity provides for itself, primarily in terms of the events of the world."³¹

In addition to attuning Dasein to its finite existential constitution, the meaninglessness revealed in anxiety also allows humans to grasp beings themselves as something meaningful in the first place—that is, to grasp them precisely as beings.³² Heidegger first elaborates on this theme in the address, "What is Metaphysics?" where he shows how any understanding of beings is made possible with regard to "the nothing" (*Das Nichts*): "In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises."³³ He goes on to write: "Only on the ground of the original manifestness of the nothing can human Dasein approach and penetrate beings."³⁴ More interestingly for our purposes, Heidegger also makes the explicit connection between wonder and this uncanniness of anxiety. Specifically, "wonder" (*Verwunderung*) now becomes understood as grounded in the nothing. Heidegger notes, for instance:

Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the utter strangeness of entities overwhelm us. Only when the strangeness of entities oppresses us does it awaken and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder—the manifestness of the nothing [*i.e.*, anxiety]—does the "why?" loom before us.³⁵

³¹ Heidegger, GA2 410–11/ BT 286.

³² There are subtle shifts of emphasis in the way Heidegger understands anxiety between *Being and Time* and the address, "What is Metaphysics?" As Richard Capobianco points out, for instance, Heidegger places greater emphasis on the "quiet and calm" element of anxiety in the later text. He also begins to think of Dasein as the finite "between" beings and being (understood as the nothing). See Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger*, 76.

³³ Heidegger, GA9 114/ PTH 90.

³⁴ Heidegger, GA9 114–15/ PTH 91.

³⁵ Heidegger, GA9 121/ PTH 95.

We will return to the import of this why-question. For the moment, it is enough to note that grounded in anxiety, wonder is occasioned by the withdrawing of beings as such as a whole that strips away their usual context of meaning and reveals them precisely in their meaninglessness. It is precisely by being held out into this meaninglessness—into beings' own-most possibility of not-being—that Dasein becomes attuned to the “wonder of all wonders: *that beings are.*”³⁶

Wonder (*Er-staunen*) and the First Beginning

Heidegger offers the most sustained analysis of the basic disposition of wonder in a lecture-course from the winter semester of 1937–38 at the University of Heidelberg, the transcript of which was published under the title *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic.”* In this lecture-course, which was delivered at roughly the same time *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* was under development, Heidegger once again makes the crucial distinction between “wonder” (now written as “*Er-staunen*”) and curiosity. However, this time the investigation does not take the form of a phenomenological-horizonal consideration of the temporality of Dasein, nor does it take the guidance from an investigation into anxiety as the manifestness of the nothing. Instead, at this point in Heidegger’s writing, the investigation takes the form of a being-historical analysis that attempts to elucidate the first, Greek beginning of thinking.

Heidegger begins the lecture by turning not to wonder, but to the wondrous itself, what the Greeks understood by “θαυμαστόν.” Here, recalling the discussion of curiosity from *Being and Time*, Heidegger states:

The wondrous [*Erstaunlichen*] is for us in the first place [is commonly understood as] something that stands out and therefore is remarkable... A better name for this would be the curious [*Wunderliche*] or the marvelous [*Verwunderliche*], something that arouses the desire for amazement,

³⁶ Heidegger, “Postscript to ‘What is Metaphysics?’” GA9 307/ PTH 234.

engages it, sustains it, specifically in such a way that it makes the search for ever new things of this kind more ardent.³⁷

Building upon this insight, Heidegger then proceeds to distinguish between several usual senses of wondering, including “amazement” (*Sichwundern*) “marveling” (*Verwundern*), “admiration” (*Bewundern*), as well as “astonishment” (*Staunen*) and “awe” (*Bestaunen*). In particular, the first three notions, which share the German root “*Wunder*,” all have in common that they single out one determinate being—the amazing or the marvelous—and set it off against the usual and the everyday.³⁸ More precisely, amazement and marvelling have in common that they are directed at something that we are unable to explain, which is then contrasted to the known, the understandable, and the explicable. Heidegger emphasizes, however, that this inability to explain is not due to the inexplicable nature of the object under consideration, but consists in the “ignorance of reason” that results from “being caught up in the inexplicable.”³⁹ Clearly recalling themes from the discussion of Dasein’s entanglement, Heidegger notes that the result of being thus caught up is that “the more arbitrary, changeable, and even unessential, though indeed striking, the marvelous happens to be, the more does it satisfy amazement.”⁴⁰ And although he distinguishes admiration from amazement and marvelling insofar as it is not caused by fickle curiosity and surprise, it too concerns itself with some definite unusual thing that becomes maintained precisely as the unusual and is set off against the usual.⁴¹

³⁷ Heidegger, GA45 157/ BQP 136.

³⁸ Heidegger, GA45 173/ BQP 149. Let us also note that this is precisely the definition of wonder we find in Descartes: “When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new, or different from what we knew in the past or what we supposed that it was going to be, this makes us wonder and be astonished at it.” Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, art. 53.

³⁹ Heidegger, GA45 157–58/ BQP 137.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, GA45 158/ BQP 137.

⁴¹ Heidegger, GA45 164/ BQP 142.

Unlike amazement, marvelling, and admiration, however, the notions of astonishment (*Staunen*) and awe (*Bestaunen*) share the German word “*Staunen*,” which also figures in the word Heidegger now uses for the basic disposition of wonder. Nevertheless, even astonishment and awe must be distinguished from wonder. Specifically, in the former we find a “retreating in the face of the awesome” that recognizes the overwhelming power of the unusual, allowing it to grow “into what overgrows all usual powers and bears in itself a claim to a rank all its own.”⁴² However, even astonishment and awe are occasioned by an encounter with a determinate individual object. And although these notions emphasize the powerlessness that characterizes the disposition of wonder, their object is already pre-determined as astonishing, and consequently they do not fulfill “what we intend with the word wonder and what we are trying to understand as the basic disposition, the one that transports us into the beginning of thoughtful meditation.”⁴³

How, then, are we to understand wonder as the basic disposition of the first beginning? In contrast to all of the above-discussed dispositions of amazement, marveling, admiration, astonishment, and awe, the basic disposition of wonder is not occasioned by some unusual being that could be set off against the background of the usual. In wonder, Heidegger claims, the “most usual” (*das Gewöhnlichste*) itself becomes the “most unusual” (*die Ungewöhnlichsten*).⁴⁴ We should be careful to note, however, that what is *most* usual is never the *merely* usual, but the totality of *beings as a whole*. In other words, unlike this or that ordinary, everyday occurrence, which can be recognized as usual (for instance, when we say, “there is nothing unusual about that...”), beings as a whole are most usual insofar they are never even noticed in their usualness. “Everything”

⁴² Heidegger, GA45 165/ BQP 143.

⁴³ Heidegger, GA45 165/ BQP 143.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, GA45 167/ BQP 144.

becomes the most unusual in wonder,⁴⁵ Heidegger says, “for this exists everywhere, altogether, and in every way”; and, “for the most extreme wonder, anything whatsoever *as such* and everything *as everything* become the most unusual.”⁴⁶

How, then, do beings as a whole become the most unusual? According to Heidegger, wonder displaces us into the realization *that* beings are *what* they are: “everything in what is most usual (beings) becomes in wonder the most unusual in this one respect: that it is what it is”⁴⁷ In the first beginning of thinking, wonder attunes human beings to the remarkable fact that, above and beyond any particular thing, everything simply *is* and demands to be approached *as such*.

What is most unusual, then, turn out to be beings *as beings*, that is, beings *as such*. Everything turns on this distinction between “beings as a whole” and “beings as beings”: whereas the former refers to the totality of beings as the most usual and ordinary, the latter refers to an understanding, however provisional, of beings with respect to “their being,” that is, “being-ness.” Heidegger notes: “What is meant here by the ‘as,’ the *qua*, the $\ddot{\eta}$, is the ‘between’ that wonder separates out, the open... in which beings come into play as such, namely as the beings they are, in the play of *their* being [*Sein*].”⁴⁸ In other words, wonder attunes us not merely to the brute ‘fact’ of some particular thing ‘obtaining’—it attunes us to the understanding that the existing being is given precisely *as a being*, that there is more to it than immediately meets the eye. Heidegger goes on to say:

⁴⁵ Cf. Heidegger, GA9 118/ PTH 93: “originary anxiety... needs no unusual event to rouse it.”

⁴⁶ Heidegger, GA45 167/ BQP 144.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, GA45 167/ BQP 144. Note that at this point, “that” something is and “what” it is are grasped simultaneously. They are not at all two distinct questions (this becomes possible only subsequently with the distinction between existence and essence), but in the first beginning they are grasped together in the guiding question. As I proceed to discuss below, by asking, “what are beings?” the earliest philosophers simultaneously affirmed *that* beings are (what becomes the question of *existence*), and that they are *what* they are (what becomes the question of *essence*).

⁴⁸ Heidegger, GA45 168–69/ BQP 146, emphasis added.

The basic disposition of wonder displaces humans into the realm where the most usual, yet still as such unthought (beings), are established in their most proper unusualness, namely the one of *their being*, and where beings as such then become the most worthy of questioning.⁴⁹

Thus displaced through wondering, humans lose their hold on any thing in particular. As with the fundamental disposedness of anxiety, wonder displaces human beings in such a way that every particular being eludes their grasp. “Wondering humans are the ones moved by wonder,” Heidegger notes, “as disposed in wonder, they can perceive nothing else than beings as beings.”⁵⁰ Unlike anxiety, however, in which beings as a whole recede and appear in their meaninglessness, wondering attunes us to the overflow of meaning or sense—what is experienced in the first beginning is a profound irruption of meaning into the world. More precisely, what is experienced is the very creation of a world as a meaningful whole. Every particular being is meaningful because we must take it *as something given*: there is no longer any being that can be grasped as *just a being*.

Despite the necessarily progressive characterization of the unfolding of wondering presented here, however, it is important to note that the incipient understanding of beings in their being does *not* occur in stages: it is not merely the case that beings as a whole are grasped in their usualness “before” wondering could then transform them into the most unusual. Without the basic disposition of wonder, we cannot grasp the most usual in its totality—beings as a whole—any more than we can grasp the most unusual—beings as beings. Heidegger notes:

The usualness of the most usual first erupts the moment the most usual becomes the most unusual. In this transition the most usual first steps forth

⁴⁹ Heidegger, GA45 170/ BQP 147.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, GA45 169/ BQP 146.

separately in its usualness *and* in its unusualness, such that these then appear precisely as such.⁵¹

The movement of wondering—the happening of the displacement—distinguishes and therefore grants beings as the most usual and *that* they are as the most unusual in a single, twofold gesture. It attunes humans at once to what Heidegger calls the “expanse of beings as a whole” and the beckoning “depths of being.” In the basic disposition of wonder, human beings come face to face for the first time with what will become the fundamental concern of metaphysics, what Heidegger elsewhere calls, “beings as such as a whole.”

The Decision between Beings and Non-Beings

How, and on what basis, are beings grasped as such and as a whole? Before the most usual becomes the most unusual (if one may even speak of a “before” here), the plight of the basic disposition displaces, transports, and inserts the human being into the open “place” (*Raum*) “between” beings and non-beings, “that ‘in the midst of’... in whose space and time beings as a whole can be determined in their beingness.”⁵² That is to say, prior to any disclosure of beings as such or as a whole, before it can be determined what beings are—and before we can grasp that “they are what they are”—human beings are placed into the open “between” through a movement of displacement that institutes a regime of space and time as the “locale” where beings and non-beings can be distinguished and grasped as such, and where meaningful presence of beings becomes possible. There is no stepping outside of this “between” because there is no outside to speak of—together beings and non-beings form the totality of what *is* or *is not* given. For this reason, Heidegger describes the basic disposition of wonder as a primordial spatio-temporal distress or confusion,

⁵¹ Heidegger, GA45 169/ BQP 146.

⁵² Heidegger, GA45 154/ BQP 134.

what he calls the plight of “not knowing the way out or the way in.”⁵³ Indeed, only on the basis of being “lost”—not knowing the whence and the whither—do human beings first become attuned to space and time itself, making it possible to “find” themselves as lost in this between and *as* the between. For Heidegger, it is this spatio-temporal distress or confusion that makes possible all human awareness of space and time itself—including the ecstatic temporality of Dasein as discussed in *Being and Time*. The basic disposition of wonder displaces us into, and thereby opens up, *the spatio-temporal playing field of disclosure itself*.

How do human beings—or, historically put, how did the Greeks in particular—emerge in relation to this this primordial plight or distress? Heidegger writes in *Contributions* that the plight of not knowing the whence and the whither “brings humans to themselves and thereby lets history begin or perish”⁵⁴ History begins when human beings “respond” to this plight, not by “fleeing”—as though there was another place to flee to—but in and through a resolute act of “decision” (*Entscheidung*). More precisely, inserted between beings and non-beings by the basic disposition of wonder, “where it has not yet been determined *what* being is or *what* non-being is,” human beings are forced, for the first time, to decide between beings and non-beings.⁵⁵ This decision, however, does not have an either/or structure that would allow human beings to choose between two fully formed alternatives.⁵⁶ In the first instance, this is because neither beings nor non-beings are yet given or determined with respect to what they are or are not. Indeed, we can speak neither of beings nor of non-beings as something “given” to human beings at all, since what is at stake is precisely how and whether anything can be taken as given at all. Accordingly, any decision

⁵³ Heidegger, GA45 152/ BQP 132.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, GA65 45/ CP 37.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, GA45 152/ BQP 132, emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, GA65 90/ CP 71.

between beings and non-beings must “precede” both terms. In fact, for Heidegger, such a decision is a pre-ontological “distinction” (*Unterscheidung*) between beings and non-beings insofar as it precedes both terms but separates them out, allowing them to be grasped as such.⁵⁷ In the second instance, insofar as it arises out of the plight of the basic disposition of wonder, such a decision is also pre-subjective and even ‘pre-human,’ and Heidegger writes that “man himself first arises out of this plight, which is more essential than he himself, for he is first determined by it.”⁵⁸ For Heidegger, prior to this resolute act of decision that inaugurates history, one cannot even speak of human beings as such.⁵⁹ Instead, as grounded in the plight of the basic disposition of wonder, this decision belongs to being itself. As Vallega-Neu points out, “fundamental decisions are nothing we—as supposed subjects of our actions—make but rather something determining us.”⁶⁰

This raises an obvious difficulty: if the decision between beings and non-beings is pre-ontological and pre-human in this way, then ‘who’ is to decide between them and on what basis? More to the point, how did the Greeks in particular emerge in relation to this decision? It is here that Heidegger’s emphasis on the basic disposition of wonder becomes paramount. What is

⁵⁷ To be clear, the distinction between beings and non-beings is not the “ontological distinction” (*ontologische Unterscheidung*) between beings and being since, at this point, thinking has not yet even inquired into being at all—that will only become possible on the basis of a questioning of beings. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger notes that the ontological distinction between being and beings is pre-ontological in precisely this way, in that it separates and grants the apprehension of both being and beings. Similarly, the distinction between beings and non-beings in the basic disposition of wonder necessarily precedes any understanding of beings as such, but also *a fortiori* any ontological distinction between beings and being itself. See Heidegger, GA24 454/ BPP 319.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, GA45 153/ BQP 133.

⁵⁹ This claim seems more profound than it really is: after all, from our present perspective, from within the purview of metaphysics and philosophy, we clearly speak about ancient human cultures before the Greeks and before philosophy. We can even imagine those human beings acting like us or questioning like us in precisely the same way we do today. Heidegger’s point is merely that to speak of any such beings as human in the same sense is always anachronistic to the extent that it already presupposes that the question of being has been always already posed.

⁶⁰ Vallega-Neu, “Thinking in Decision” 247.

encountered in the plight of the basic disposition—the not knowing whence and the whither—is precisely the unknown, undetermined, and undifferentiated—or, in other words, the veiled “essence” of beings or non-beings. Prior to any interpretation or presence—before it can be determined what beings or non-beings are—being gives the manifold of beings and non-beings as the *unthought* and the *unknown*. This is what makes the plight of the basic disposition of wonder so compelling: because it constitutes an encounter with the unthought—and with what is, in some sense, ‘unthinkable’—it gives rise to the necessity of thinking and questioning in the first place.⁶¹ For Heidegger, it is on the basis of this plight—and only on this basis—that human beings first come to themselves as human beings and encounter beings (though not yet *beyng*) as something questionable, open to question, and “most worthy of questioning.” Indeed, it is the encounter with the unknown and undifferentiated that grounds human beings as the ‘site,’ this place of openness, where thoughtful questioning can arise.

Accordingly, the decision between beings and non-beings takes the form of a radical *questioning* of beings themselves. And not just any questioning: this decision consists in the interrogation, however provisional, of beings with regard to their being, or being-ness. In other words, the basic disposition of wonder forces or imposes the questioning decision regarding the essence of beings, the question “what are beings?” Heidegger writes:

While man is displaced into it, he himself is transformed into one who, not knowing the way out or the way in, has to hold fast to beings as beings in pure acknowledgment. This is the most simple and is the greatest; it is the all-*decisive* beginning, toward which the basic disposition compels. The acknowledgment of beings as beings, however, is only sustained in

⁶¹ Heidegger, GA45 166/ BQP 143. What is “unthinkable” in the experience of wonder, namely, beings as beings, is such only because the way of thinking that would grasp beings as such—philosophy—demands to be invented in the first place.

questioning what beings as such are... To sustain the basic disposition means to carry out the necessity of such questioning, toward which the not knowing the way out or the way in compels us.⁶²

Once again, we should not take this to mean that beings are already pre-interpreted before they can be interrogated and acknowledged. Instead, beings become what they are—they are grasped *as beings*—only insofar they are placed in question. Here it is useful to recall that for Heidegger, any genuine questioning opens space of possible meaning that allows what is interrogated to appear as what it is. To genuinely question something, for something to be open to questioning at all, it must admit of meaning or sense. At the very least, any question—insofar it is a genuine question and not a didactic or rhetorical one—must admit of a response. This meaning or sense, however, is not at all independent of the act of questioning itself, but only emerges in relation to that very questioning. This is what was meant above by the claim that the basic disposition of wonder first ushers in an overflow of meaning or sense: it is not only that the question determines that beings are, and always were, already meaningful in themselves—beings as such and as a whole become endowed with meaning only in relation to this incipient questioning that affirms them as beings.⁶³

It is important to be clear here about the precise nature of Heidegger's central claim. Heidegger never denies that there is a certain way in which forests, rivers, and mountains 'obtain' before they are grasped as beings through a genuine questioning—there is an obvious sense in which none of these things are 'invented' by the Greeks. Instead, what is in question, and what first becomes questionable with the Greeks, at least according to Heidegger, is the understanding

⁶² Heidegger, GA45 174/ BQP 151.

⁶³ In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger discusses the question "why are there beings at all?" and notes that "beings are not changed by our questioning. They remain what they are and as they are." However, he immediately goes on to add that "Our questioning just *opens up the domain so that beings can break open in such questionworthiness* [emphasis added]." Heidegger, GA40 32/ IM 31–32.

of forests, rivers, and mountains *as beings*. The aforementioned beings first become grasped as beings, their questionableness, openness to question, and question-worthiness emerges only once they are interrogated as to their what-ness. Furthermore, what emerges with the acknowledgment of beings as beings is also an understanding that beings are *all that there is* and that everything is a being. For this reason, it is important to note that beings are not limited to physical things; Heidegger notes that even negativity and nothingness are beings since they too admit of the what-question, that is, since they too stand in being in some way.⁶⁴ The questioning decision in favour of beings cannot leave open the possibility of non-beings at all—it cannot leave open the possibility of senselessness or meaninglessness. The acknowledgment of beings as beings is also an acknowledgment of beings as a whole.

We are now in a position to understand the full sense in which this questioning decision also performs a pre-ontological distinction. In interrogating beings with regard to their being-ness, thinking distinguishes and sets up in relief all those beings that can be so interrogated (and whose meaning can become manifest) against all non-existing non-beings that admit of no such questioning (and which cannot be taken to mean anything). However, this is also why we cannot properly speak of human beings as prior to this decision: in distinguishing between beings and non-beings, human beings come to themselves by being distinguished as precisely the “between.” In “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger writes:

...the ek-sistence of historical human beings begins at that moment when the first thinker takes a questioning stand with regard to the unconcealment of beings by asking: what are beings? In this question unconcealment is experienced for the first time... History begins only when beings themselves are expressly drawn up into their unconcealment and conserved in it, only

⁶⁴ Heidegger, GA65 74 /CP 59.

when this conservation is conceived on the basis of questioning regarding beings as such.⁶⁵

In other words, human beings are distinguished as those beings wherein this distinction can become manifest—as the site, this place of openness, where the manful question can take root in the first place—or, in other words, *Da-sein*.⁶⁶

The Suffering of Questioning

Although the pure acknowledgement of beings as beings is compelled by the encounter with the unknown and the unthought, we misunderstand this ordinary questioning decision when we reduce it to a mere search for *explanation*. “Thoughtful questioning,” Heidegger claims, “is not the intrusive and rash curiosity of the search for explanations; it is the tolerating and sustaining of the unexplainable as such.”⁶⁷ Unlike objects of curiosity, which are inexplicable due to the ignorance of reason, the unusualness of wonder is inexplicable precisely because every explanation is “directed to some being, already unconcealed, from which some explanatory cause can be drawn.”⁶⁸ This also means that, since human beings, and beings as such, first emerge in relation to the basic disposition of wonder, wonder is itself inexplicable. And, as will become clearer in the subsequent chapter, to explain the basic disposition of wonder (which consists in the asking of the “why-question”) is always already to leave it behind.

Because the questioning decision with respect to the essence of beings eludes all possible explanation (every kind of causality), human beings cannot bring about the disposition of wonder:

⁶⁵ Heidegger, GA9 189–90 / PTH 145.

⁶⁶ Cf. Heidegger, GA24 454/ BPP 319: “Existence means, as it were, ‘to be in the performance of this distinction.’ Only a soul that can make this distinction has the aptitude, going beyond the animal’s soul, to become the soul of a human being.” See also Heidegger, GA24 398/ BPP 281.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, GA45 172 / BQP 149.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, GA45 170/ BQP 147.

there is no way into wonder any more than there is a way out. “The basic disposition,” Heidegger says, “can neither be simply brought about by man’s will nor is it the effect of a *cause* issuing from beings and operating on man.”⁶⁹ However, he also insists that “insofar as man can at all by himself bring about a relation to it, he can make himself ready for the unconditional necessity that holds sway in this disposition and admits of no escape.”⁷⁰ Thus, although we cannot bring it about, we can and must “anticipate” the basic disposition by readying ourselves for its plight. On the other hand, we must “resolutely” respond to wondering by “carrying out” the questioning of beings as beings—by interrogating them as to their “whatness.” Heidegger writes that “to sustain the basic disposition means to carry out the necessity of such questioning, toward which the not knowing the way out or the way in compels us.”⁷¹ And although this “anticipation” and “resoluteness” should not be understood in terms of Dasein’s authenticity, the central task for thinking lies in maintaining what might be termed a ‘fidelity to the event.’

For this reason, Heidegger insists that the questioning response into which the basic disposition compels “is essentially suffering [*Leiden*].”⁷² As we will see more clearly in the final chapter, this suffering is “is not a melting into or a vague and empty wallowing in ‘feelings’; on the contrary, it is the carrying out of the necessity of the question of beings as such in their region.”⁷³ This carrying out of the necessity of questioning is better understood as ‘bearing,’ ‘enduring,’ and ‘carrying it through.’ This suffering involves resisting every explanation and tarrying along in the “what?” It is staying with the most difficult and refusing the urge to explain away the difficulty. This is why we must distinguish this originary questioning from the usual

⁶⁹ Heidegger, GA45 170/ BQP 147, emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Heidegger, GA45 170/ BQP 147.

⁷¹ Heidegger, GA45 174/ BQP 151.

⁷² Heidegger, GA45 175/ BQP 151.

⁷³ Heidegger, GA45 172/ BQP 149.

kinds of 'questions' and 'problems' of today that stay on the surface, and which are directed precisely at doing away with the inexplicable. Most importantly, as we will see in the following chapter, this also includes what will become "the basic question of metaphysics," the question "why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" For Heidegger, the originary task of the first beginning is to sustain wonder, 'deepening it,' which will also turn out to mean, 'getting to the bottom' and pressing into 'the depths of beyng.'

CHAPTER II: WONDER AND THE TRANSITION TO THE OTHER BEGINNING

The Renewal of Wonder?

According to Heidegger, the first inception of thinking harkens back to the displacement—the not knowing whence and the whither—that characterizes the basic disposition of wonder. This disposition first compels the questioning decision regarding the essence of beings, what in *Contributions to Philosophy* Heidegger calls the “guiding question,” or “leading question” (*Leitfrage*) of being, the question, “what are beings?” At the same time, Heidegger also insists that the history of wonder—which is also the history of metaphysics itself—is one of its ultimate decline and even demise. For Heidegger, the forgottenness of being and the ultimate abandonment by being are linked intimately with this decline: in an age of complete questionlessness, where technological and scientific calculation only admits of ‘problems’ to be solved and resolved, where everything becomes an object of fickle curiosity and nothing appears as worthy of question, we have become estranged from the basic disposition wonder. This is perhaps why he suggests that, as a precursor to thinking, “the wonder [*Wunder*] of questioning must be experienced... and must be made effective as an awakening and strengthening of the power to question,”¹

Does this mean that we must attempt to experience wonder in the same way as the Greeks—that is to say, precisely *as a basic disposition*? To be sure, one cannot simply will a return to the Greek sense of wonder since, as discussed previously, human beings cannot bring about a change of disposition by willing it, least of all a basic disposition such as wonder. More significantly, the originary sense of wonder belongs to a certain fundamental experience that is no longer our own—most even as we continue to be shaped by it. Specifically, we cannot experience the fundamental

¹ Heidegger, GA65 10/ CP 10.

encounter with the overwhelming strangeness of beings as though we could brush aside the past two millennia of metaphysical and scientific thought. Indeed, we cannot experience this wonder any more than we can marvel at the causes of lightning or the movements of celestial objects and tides of the oceans. For this reason, Heidegger insists that “our *basic position* toward beings is not anymore and never again will be that of the first beginning,” underscoring that “the *basic disposition* can no longer be the one of wonder.”² Instead, Heidegger variously refers to the basic disposition of the other beginning in terms of “shock” (*Erschrecken*), “diffidence” (*Scheu*), “presentiment” (*Ahnung*), and “foreboding” (*Er-ahnen*).³ And although he emphasizes that “the basic disposition of the other beginning can almost never... be designated with a single name” because we still lack the language to articulate the other beginning of thinking in the transition to it,⁴ he most often chooses to consider it in terms of “restraint,” or “reservedness” (*Verhaltenheit*).⁵ According to Heidegger, only once thinking is compelled by the basic disposition of the other beginning can we be in a basic position to experience being once again—this time as its “refusal” (*Versagung*) and even abandonment—and to once again question inceptually.

A basic task of interpreting Heidegger’s way of relating the two beginnings, then, concerns the relation of wonder, as the basic disposition of the first beginning, and the basic disposition of the other beginning. Among recent commentators, one way to approach this relation has been to understand the latter in terms of a “deeper,” “more authentic,” or “more originary kind of

² Heidegger, GA45 184/ BQP 159, emphasis added. Note that this is not to suggest that we cannot experience wonder at all. What is in question is whether wonder can be experienced as a *basic disposition* and whether the basic disposition of the other beginning is a kind of wonder.

³ Heidegger, GA65 21–22/ CP 19.

⁴ Heidegger, GA65 21/ CP 19.

⁵ The basic disposition of the other beginning “oscillates” as these “guiding dispositions” throughout *Contributions*. Heidegger, GA65 14/ CP 14. See also Vallega-Neu, *Introduction to Contributions*, 38–43; and Vallega-Neu, “Heidegger’s Imageless Saying of the Event,” 319.

wonder.”⁶ Such an approach has its appeal because it allows us to come to terms with something that is in our everyday experience rather opaque and cannot be easily named—the basic disposition of the other beginning—by reference to something we are presumably quite familiar with, namely, wonder. However, as I will proceed to argue, any such approach significantly underestimates the extent to which, for Heidegger, wonder is indissolubly bound to the entire history of metaphysical and scientific thought, which will also result in its eventual decline. Indeed, as we will see, this is neither a shortcoming of wonder—a sign of its purported inauthenticity—nor does it testify to its corruption. Rather, this tendency testifies to precisely to the originary character of wonder, its creative power. Furthermore, in addition to simply misunderstanding the role of wonder in the history of being, any approach that would reduce the basic disposition of the other beginning to that of wonder also fails to do justice to the beginning that is yet to come. In order for this other beginning to be a true beginning—and for the repetition of the Greeks to be a genuine repetition—it must possess its own uniqueness and unprecedented character.⁷ To do justice to both beginnings, then, we cannot simply assimilate them to each other; instead, it is necessary to uncover and even amplify the differences between them in such a way as to allow them to “resonate” and achieve a harmony between them.

⁶ For instance, Chad Engelland presents us with a choice between two ways of understanding this relation: “is wonder simply supplanted or is it deepened in the fundamental disposition of the new beginning?” Opting for the latter option, he concludes that “even though Heidegger sees in the original form of wonder a critical shortcoming... the fundamental disposition of the other beginning is also a kind of wonder,” going as far as to call it an “authentic wonder.” Engelland, “Wonder of Questioning,” 185. A similar approach is taken by Rubenstein: “Heidegger gives us two substantial treatments of wonder. The first is *Erstaunen* as the first disposition of philosophy, and the second is *Verhaltenheit* as the disposition that might transport thinking back to its deepest roots, and into a new beginning.” Rubenstein, *Practises of Wonder*, 153.

⁷ Heidegger, GA65 55/ CP 45.

The Answer to the Guiding Question and the Forgivenness of Being

In order to understand better why Heidegger insists that our basic disposition—or, more precisely, the basic disposition of those to come—cannot be one of wonder, it is first necessary to come to terms with the ‘decline’ of wonder (which will turn out to be no decline at all but its ultimate historical trajectory). In particular, it is incumbent upon us to understand the way in which the questioning decision compelled in the first beginning of thinking—and wonder is nothing without this decision—sets the ground for a series of decisions that will come to constitute metaphysics as a whole. From the purview of transitional thinking, once thinking attempts the “leap” out of metaphysics, these decisions will be understood as constituting the forgottenness of being, culminating with the ever encompassing dominion of machination and the abandonment by being.

In order to come to grips with the abandonment by being and its forgottenness, Heidegger demands that we return to the Greek inception of philosophy, the very first instance beings became manifest as such as a whole, that is, precisely *as beings*. According to Heidegger, the earliest Greek philosophers, the Presocratics,⁸ answered the guiding question of being by interpreting beings as such as a whole in terms of “nature” (φύσις).⁹ However, Heidegger insists that by “nature,” the Presocratics did not have in mind something like the realm containing beings that could be subjected to scientific scrutiny, something that could be opposed to the “supernatural.” Instead,

⁸ Although Heidegger sometimes engages with ancient Greek poets, his engagement with the inceptual Greek thinkers, the Presocratics, is largely limited to Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus. “Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus are the only inceptual thinkers [*anfängliche Denker*]. They are this, however not because they open up Western thought and initiate it. Already before them there were thinkers. They are inceptual thinkers because they think the inception... The inception is that which begins something with these thinkers—by laying claim on them in such a way that from them is demanded an extreme retreating before being. Heidegger, GA54 10–11/ P 7–8.

⁹ Heidegger, GA65 190, 195/ CP 149, 153. See also Heidegger, GA40 15/ IM 14: “In the age of the first and definitive unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, when the questioning of beings as such as a whole had its true inception, beings were called φύσις.”

Heidegger argues, they understood φύσις more originarily in terms of “prevailing emergence” (*waltende Aufgehen*),¹⁰ “upsurgent presentedness” (*aufgehendes Anwesens*),¹¹ or what Heidegger sometimes simply refers to as “what presences” (*das Anwesende*). At the same time, the earliest Greek philosophers understood being itself primarily in terms of this very “presencing” (*Anwesen, Anwesenung*) of beings¹²—that is, as the coming to presence of beings—what they designated with the name “ἀλήθεια.” Although ἀλήθεια is traditionally translated as “truth,” Heidegger warns that, like nature, it should not be understood in terms most familiar to us today—for instance, in terms of truth as representing a certain factual state of affairs, the correctness of a proposition, and especially not in terms of “correspondence.”¹³ Instead, for the Presocratics, ἀλήθεια was what we may call a ‘process,’ a movement of “unconcealment,” or “unhiddenness” (*Unverborgenheit*)¹⁴ that occurs only on the basis of a genuine questioning of beings as such as a whole.

¹⁰ Heidegger, GA65 195/ CP 153.

¹¹ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” in GA9 189–90 / PTH 145.

¹² Heidegger, GA65 188–89/ CP 148. There is some disagreement among commentators about the extent to which the notion of “presencing” or any other variation of presence, however understood, is an appropriate way to approach Heidegger’s own understanding of being throughout his writings. Most notably, Taylor Carman argues that Heidegger rejects any notion of presence as an adequate way of understanding being. Carman, “Being Social”; see also Carman, “Heidegger’s Concept of Presence.” On the other hand, Frederick Olafson maintains that some notion of presence characterizes being throughout Heidegger’s work. Olafson, “Individualism, Subjectivity, and Presence.” It is clear, however, that Heidegger increasingly came to understand “presencing” (*Anwesen, Anwesenung*) in close connection with the “essencing,” that is, the “essential occurrence” (*Wesen, Wesung*) of being from the 1930s onward. For a broader discussion of this point, see Hernández, “How Presencing (*Anwesen*) Became Heidegger’s Concept of Being.” Even keeping aside the issue of whether Heidegger takes presencing to be an adequate name for being in his own questioning, he most certainly came to understand that the Greek conception of being as presencing is not simply mistaken, but is an originary way in which being manifests itself to them. He writes, for instance: “But for the Greeks ‘being’ means presencing [*Anwesenung*] into the unconcealed.” Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle’s *Physics*, B, I” in GA9 270/ PTH 206.

¹³ Heidegger, GA34 11/ ET 8; GA15 403/ FS 94. See Wrathall, “Heidegger on Truth as Correspondence.”

¹⁴ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” in GA9 188/ PTH 144: “If we translate ἀλήθεια as ‘unconcealment’ rather than ‘truth,’ this translation is not merely ‘more literal’; it contains the directive to rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of statements and to think it back to that still uncomprehended disclosedness and disclosure of beings.”

It is only beginning with Plato that the dominant “determination” (*Bestimmung*) of being becomes one of “beingness” (*Seiendheit*), and being becomes grasped primarily as the “being of beings” (*das Sein des Seienden*).¹⁵ Although Heidegger concedes that this determination remained implicit even with the earliest philosophers (it is not simply ‘invented’ by Plato), it nevertheless remained veiled,¹⁶ coming to prominence only with Plato’s reinterpretation of ἀλήθεια as “ιδέα.” To be sure, ιδέα does not in Plato’s thought refer to something represented or representing; instead, according to Heidegger, it refers to the “shining forth of the look itself, what offers up a view and does for a gaze.”¹⁷ According to Heidegger, then, ιδέα “refers to presencing... as that which in coming to presence provides constancy at the same time.”¹⁸ However, instead of presencing, the dominant character of being becomes increasingly one of “constancy” (*Beständigkeit*), or, more precisely, “constant presence” (*beständigen Anwesenheit*).¹⁹ Moreover, because ἀλήθεια becomes understood in relation to the gaze of the philosopher, the character of truth as unconcealment of beings increasingly comes to acquire the character of “correctness,” and becomes for the first time understood in terms of truth as “correspondence.” This becomes most obvious in the way Plato understands the essence of “untruth”: because beings in their beingness are always offered to human gaze, “untruth” comes to acquire the character of “ψεῦδος” (roughly translated as “falsity,” or even “lie”). In other words, unlike the earliest thinkers who thought of untruth as the

¹⁵ See Richardson, *Heidegger*, 306–08.

¹⁶ Heidegger, GA65 195/ CP 153.

¹⁷ Heidegger, GA65 208–09/ CP 163.

¹⁸ Heidegger, GA65 208–09/ CP 163.

¹⁹ Heidegger, GA65 195/ CP 153.

“concealment” (λήθη) of beings, as beings refusing themselves to human grasp,²⁰ untruth now comes to dominantly refer to something like a mistake or an error on the part of the thinker.²¹

For Heidegger, the transition from ἀλήθεια as unconcealment to truth as correspondence or correctness occurs at a point when “Western philosophy takes off on an esoteric [*abseitigen*] and ill-fated course.”²² Nevertheless, it would be too hasty to understand this transition as an entirely arbitrary and contingent occurrence, a matter of simple confusion or misunderstanding on Plato’s part that happens to persist in the centuries that follow. Instead, according to Heidegger, this understanding of being as beingness and ἀλήθεια as correctness is a direct consequence of the way in which the first decision regarding the essence of beings is taken up and *answered*. That is to say, the kind of understanding of beingness that comes to prominence with Plato presents one response to the guiding question, “what are beings?” Specifically, on Plato’s account, “a being is a being in virtue of constant presence, ἰδέα, the seen in its seen-ness (ἀλήθεια).”²³ In this way, what was experienced at the first beginning in the questioning-decision regarding the essence of beings—the wonder *that* beings are, and that they are *what* they are—has already become eroded. It becomes possible for the first time to grasp beings as “objects,” as something readily offered to human grasp, and being itself as just this “objectivity.”

²⁰ Heidegger points to Heraclitus’s famous fragment DK 22B123, “φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ.” This fragment, traditionally translated as “nature loves to hide,” is interpreted by Heidegger as “the essential occurrence of beings, *i.e.*, beings in their being, loves to conceal itself.” Heidegger, GA34 13–14/ ET 9. See Heidegger, GA34 139–44/ ET 101–03. See also Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, 84.

²¹ To be clear, for Plato, as for the Presocratics before him, truth remains a characteristic of beings themselves and is not limited to our propositions about beings. It is beings themselves that are concealed or unconcealed, and not to our correct or incorrect propositions about them (that will in earnest begin with Aristotle). See Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, 80–81.

²² Heidegger, GA34 17/ ET 21.

²³ Heidegger, GA65 208–09/ CP 163.

It is unsurprising, then, that Heidegger claims that the interpretation of ἀλήθεια as ἰδέα “prepares the later determination of beingness as objectivity and necessarily forecloses to the entire history of Western philosophy *the question of ἀλήθεια as such.*”²⁴ One important reason why this determination forecloses the question of the truth of being—the possibility of any such future questioning—is precisely because it purports to answer it *once and for all*. As Heidegger notes, in answering the question of beings—the guiding question, “what are beings?”—the determination of beingness as ἰδέα, as constant presence, “completely satisfied the questioning of beings and drove out all other questioning from the very outset.”²⁵ In this context, Heidegger writes:

The ἰδέα essentially occurs as constant presence and makes every step beyond that impossible; for here being gives itself in this essential occurrence such that beings completely satisfy everything which is. Essential occurrence as presence and constancy leaves no room for something that would not be satisfied therein and thus presents no motive for questioning the truth of this interpretation... Beingness as ἰδέα thereby is of itself what truly (ἀληθῶς) is, ὄν.²⁶

In other words, because ἰδέα, as constant presence, lays a claim to encompass and dominate all beings (including the changeable, impermanent beings—those that have been or will come to pass) it purports to exhaust every possible sense of what there *is*. Accordingly, in addition to answering the guiding question, the interpretation of truth as ἰδέα also lays a claim to answer any “what question” whatsoever—including any question that would inquire into the truth of being. Of course, were it the case that some particular what-question could not be answered with regard to ἰδέα, all

²⁴ Heidegger, GA65 208/ CP 163, emphasis added.

²⁵ Heidegger, GA65 220/ CP 172.

²⁶ Heidegger, GA65 220/ CP 172, emphasis added.

that would mean on this interpretation is that the question, and not the interpretation itself, was deficient. This is one way in which the interpretation of truth as *ἰδέα* is tautological in character.

There is a second way in which this interpretation of beingness as *ἰδέα* is tautological in character. Specifically, in addition to pretending to answer any “what-question,” this interpretation explicitly sets itself up as above question. It provides its own standard—truth as correspondence and correctness—according to which this interpretation can be interrogated as to its correctness or incorrectness. In other words, the truth of this interpretation is closed to questioning partly because the interpretation itself lays a claim to a determination of the essence of truth and imposes itself as the ground of all truth. On that assumption, there is simply nothing that escapes this purported ground, and it thus ‘makes no sense’ (quite literally, it opens no room for sense) to inquire into the truth of being. This is contrasted to way the inceptual thinkers approached the guiding question: although they already provided an answer to the guiding question by reference to beings understood as *φύσις*, their answer also kept the possibility of questioning their interpretation open, as well as questioning the truth of being.

Needless to say, the answer provided by Pato is neither the first nor the final answer to the guiding question. For instance, Heidegger notes, alluding to Aristotle, that “the *answer* to the guiding question is the *being* of beings, the determination of beingness (*i.e.*, the providing of the ‘categories’ for *οὐσία*).”²⁷ And, indeed, there are a myriad of ways from Anaximander to Nietzsche (right up to our own present moment) that the guiding question has been taken up and answered. Nevertheless, whichever way the guiding question is answered—in terms of the determination of beingness as *ἰδέα*, *οὐσία*, subjectivity, objectivity, the will to power, and the like—it is this very determination of being in terms of beingness that remains decisive for the

²⁷ Heidegger, GA65 76/ CP 61.

possibility of thought. But more than that, every answer to the guiding question carries over the Platonic association, developed in Aristotle, of truth as correctness of a proposition and accepts the answer to the question of beings as the privileged locus of truth. Indeed, whichever way the guiding question is explicitly formulated and answered, the very notion of truth is only thought in relation to the answer to this question—as the property of any such answer—and, in this way, truth becomes estranged from questioning itself. “That the assertion becomes the locus of ‘truth’” Heidegger writes, “is one of the strangest occurrences in the history of truth, although for us it seems perfectly ordinary.”²⁸ Although we are used to associating truth or falsity (correctness or incorrectness) with propositions or answers, for Heidegger, truth as unconcealment refers, above all, to questioning. In other words, for Heidegger, it is above all questions, and not just responses, that are concealing or unconcealing.²⁹

Because metaphysics thinks truth only with regard to the answer to the question of beings, Heidegger notes that the forgottenness of being “becomes more and more prominent precisely in the pursuit of an *answer* to the guiding question.”³⁰ For Heidegger, the forgottenness of being is

²⁸ Heidegger, GA65 358/ CP 283.

²⁹ Wrathall distinguishes four levels of truth in Heidegger, namely: propositional truth, truth of beings, truth of being, and truth as the clearing. As Wrathall points out, the usual conception of propositional truth is in some sense derivative of these other notions of truth, and truth as unconcealment is most properly thought in terms of the clearing that “does not name a thing, or a property or characteristic of things, or a kind of action we perform on things, or even the being of things. It names, instead, a domain or structure that allows there to be things with properties and characteristics, or modes of being. This is not a spatial domain or physical entity, or any sort of entity at all. *It is something like a space of possibilities.*” Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, 14, emphasis added. Note, however, that this structure that projects a space of possibilities, or a domain of sense, is precisely how Heidegger understands the structure of the question throughout his writings. To be sure, this structure is in every way prior to an explicitly formulated question (an interrogative statement): it refers to a fundamental relation of opening and delimiting a horizon of sense. Thus, unconcealment itself has the structure of a question—the opening of a realm and projecting a horizon that endows beings with sense in the first place (for instance, in the guiding question), in the context of which we can judge particular propositions as correct or incorrect.

³⁰ Heidegger, GA65 115/ CP 91.

not a simple forgottenness of the *notion* of being; the very determination of beings as beings—going back to the original decision—already demands that there be a notion of being at work (otherwise, it would make no sense to speak of beings in the first place). Instead, this forgottenness is always the forgottenness of *the question* of being, that is, the forgottenness of being as a question and the oblivion of questioning itself. Heidegger writes:

In its *answers* to the question concerning beings as such, metaphysics operates with a prior representation of being. It speaks of being necessarily and hence continually. But metaphysics does not induce being itself to speak, for metaphysics does not give thought to being in its truth, nor does it think such truth as unconcealment, nor does it think this unconcealment in its essence.³¹

For this reason, Heidegger never claims that any particular answer to the guiding question, that is, any particular determination of beingness, is mistaken or incorrect; it is not simply the case that philosophers throughout history have failed to answer the guiding question correctly, an error that could be rectified by attempting to answer this question once and for all. On the contrary, insofar as thinking takes guidance from the guiding question, this question has been answered again and again, and each answer does in fact add further nuances to our understanding. Yet, it is precisely because whatever the answer, it is always the answer itself, and never the question, that is thought to be the locus of all truth and the terminus of all thought, that it constitutes the forgottenness of being, and this is why the question of truth of being, the question as truth, remains necessarily unasked.

³¹ Heidegger, “Introduction to ‘What is Metaphysics?’” in GA9 369/ PHT 280.

The Abandonment by Being as the Destiny of the First Beginning

Given this cursory overview of the way Heidegger understands the relation between the inceptual questioning of the Presocratics and the way this question is taken up and answered by the metaphysical tradition from Plato onwards, one could be forgiven for the impression that, for Heidegger, the earliest Greek thinkers ‘got it right,’ once and for all, when it comes to the thinking of being. Understood this way, the entire history of philosophy would simply be a “corruption” of that original beginning. The Presocratic beginning could then be taken as a model—that is, precisely as an eternal “ideal”—of the kind of questioning that purports to interrogate the truth of being. Heidegger’s “return” (*Rückgang*) to the Greeks would be understood *not* in terms of a “retrieval,” or “re-petition” (*Wieder-holung*) that would have as its ultimate aim a new kind of thinking; instead, this return would be understood as nostalgic “revival,” or “renewal” (*Erneuerung*) of the thinking of the Greeks in precisely the terms set out by them. Attributing any such view to Heidegger, however, would be mistaken. Writing of the necessity of inquiring into unconcealment, Heidegger notes:

Does this require a revival [*Erneuerung*] of Greek philosophy? Not at all. A revival, even if such an impossibility were possible, would be of no help to us. For the hidden history of Greek philosophy consists from its beginning in this, that it does not measure up to the essence of truth that flashes out in the word ἀλήθεια, and so of necessity has to misdirect its knowing and its speaking about the essence of truth more and more into the discussion of a derivative essence of truth. The essence of truth as ἀλήθεια was not thought out in the thinking of the Greeks, and certainly not in the philosophy that followed after.³²

³² Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in GA5 37–38/ OBT 27.

Even though Heidegger praises the Presocratics for being the first to question beings as such as a whole, and for holding fast to this inceptual questioning, he also maintains that they never truly thought the truth of being, and for them the question of the truth of being remained *unasked*, and ἀλήθεια as unconcealment remained *ungrounded*. Heidegger goes on to say, “Unconcealment is, for thought, the most concealed thing in Greek existence, although from early times it determines the presencing of everything present.”³³

Why did the question of unconcealment remain unasked in the first beginning? Like any question, the questioning decision that inaugurates Western thinking opens a horizon of possible sense, delimiting in advance the field of responses that could be meaningfully provided. This is why, for instance, the very determination of beingness that comes to prominence with Plato, and inaugurates the forgottenness of being that is characteristic of the metaphysical tradition, is itself made possible by this inceptual questioning. But more than that: in addition to delimiting the field of sense, the guiding question is also such that it necessarily misdirects any questioning of being in its truth. To recall, this question arises as a decision “between” beings and non-beings. By asking, “what are beings?” the earliest philosophers simultaneously affirmed *that* beings are (what becomes the question of *existence*), and that they are *what* they are (what becomes the question of *essence*). In so doing, they decided against non-beings, which admit of no such questioning. However, in being framed this way, the guiding question remains firmly focused on beings themselves (and the meaning or truth of beings) and never touches on that which grounds and sustains them in their coming to presence as the beings that they are, ἀλήθεια. In this context, Heidegger writes:

³³ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in GA5 37–38/ OBT 27.

the question of the Greeks, the primordial question about beings as such, is of such a kind that *it precludes an inquiry into ἀλήθεια as such*. For unconcealedness is the determination of beings that in general and in advance constitutes the field of view within which become possible the manifestation of the characters of beings we mentioned and hence the fulfillment of the question of beings. In order to bring in to view what resides in a visual field, the field itself must precisely light up first, so that it might illuminate what resides within it; however, it cannot and may not be seen explicitly. The field of view, ἀλήθεια, must in some sense be overlooked.³⁴

In other words, for the Presocratics, insofar as their thinking takes guidance from the question “what are beings?” ἀλήθεια is only experienced as the horizon of that question, as that which endows them with sense as such. However, insofar as ἀλήθεια is at all explicitly thought, it remains thought on the basis of beings (and not the reverse) and beings remain “privileged” in this relation. Insofar it is seen at all, ἀλήθεια remains a basic character of beings—it is from the outset understood as something that belongs to beings—whereas in truth beings belong to unconcealment itself.³⁵ This is why the question of the truth of being, remains the most concealed with the Greeks: to the extent that beings are grasped as the most worthy of question, truth of being, being itself, withdraws itself from view.

Heidegger writes that “from the Greeks to Nietzsche, the *guiding question* determines the same mode of asking about ‘being.’”³⁶ Crucially, this mode of asking—and not merely the response—is such that it precludes inquiry into the truth of being itself. As something that makes possible the concealment of truth, however, this mode of asking about beings is also that which makes possible the later abandonment by being. Heidegger writes, for example, that “being is

³⁴ Heidegger, GA45 147/ BQP 127–28, emphasis added.

³⁵ The question of truth remained ungrounded and allowed truth to “sink to the level of a proposition.”

³⁶ Heidegger, GA65 76/ CP 61.

already abandoning beings when ἀλήθεια becomes the withdrawing basic character of beings and thereby prepares the determination of beingness as ἰδέα.”³⁷ To be sure, as with the forgottenness of being, the abandonment by being does not entail the complete disappearance of any notion of being. Rather, what this abandonment entails is that, from the perspective of a thinking that remains focused on beings, whenever those beings are brought into focus and being is interpreted in terms of beings, the truth of being—beyng itself—withdraws itself from view. Heidegger writes, “the abandonment of beings by being means that beyng [that is, the truth of being] conceals itself in the manifestness of beings.”³⁸ For this reason, the abandonment by being should be understood as a movement whereby beyng refuses itself and can become experienced only as this movement of self-withdrawing and refusal. Accordingly, in this manifestness, “beyng itself is essentially determined as this self-withdrawing concealment.”³⁹

Yet, if we can understand from the perspective of transitional thinking that the Presocratics never ‘got it right’ regarding the question of the truth of being, does this mean that they ‘got it wrong’? In other words, was their inability to open the question of truth due to some weakness or defect in their inceptual questioning? No, Heidegger is adamant that the task of the Greeks was never to inquire into the truth of being—that task falls upon ‘us.’ Instead, the task meted out to the Greeks was “to apprehend beings as beings, to install the pure recognition of beings as such and nothing more.”⁴⁰ Heidegger writes:

The reason the Greeks did not inquire here is that this question runs counter to their ownmost task [*eigenste Aufgabe*], and therefore it could not at all enter their field of view. Their failure to question was not a consequence of

³⁷ Heidegger, GA65 112/ CP 88.

³⁸ Heidegger, GA65 112/ CP 88.

³⁹ Heidegger, GA65 112/ CP 88.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, GA45 147/ BQP 128.

a lack of power but was due *precisely to their original power to remain steadfast in the destiny meted out to them.*⁴¹

Even if the Greeks could have inquired into the truth of being, the kind of questioning that becomes most necessary for us today, they would have also turned away from their own destiny and the inner necessity of their own-most questioning. For this reason, their inability to inquire into the truth of being is not a lack on the part of their questioning, but it testifies to the greatness of that inception, to the ability of the inceptual thinkers to persevere in their questioning and face up to their destiny.

Heidegger's invocation of "destiny" might strike one as rather odd here, but this is not just poetic language or fanciful expression on his part. For Heidegger, destiny has nothing to do with "providence": "destiny is not a pre-determined and unavoidable end or goal. Instead, it refers to a direction of thought, a fundamental orientation."⁴² More precisely, "destiny" (*Geschick*) and "history" (*Geschichte*) are always thought in relation to "sending" (*schicken*). Heidegger thinks history as a sending by beyng in which what is sent as well as the sending itself holds something back, what Heidegger calls an "epoch" (ἐποχή, "suspension") in the history of beyng. Epoch, then, does not refer to a particular span of time; rather it refers to "the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of being with regard to the grounding of beings."⁴³

But where does this destiny come from? As previously discussed, for Heidegger, history begins when the Greeks first question beings as such as a whole. Before this decision, however, we cannot even speak of the Greeks as such, since they become what they are only in and through

⁴¹ Heidegger, GA45 122/ BQP 107. Emphasis added.

⁴² Heidegger, GA14 13/ OTB 9.

⁴³ Heidegger, GA14 13/ OTB 9.

this very decision. Accordingly, the destiny of the Greeks, the task meted out to them, cannot be of their own making, but that very destiny is what makes them what they are. Heidegger writes:

It is as a consequence of this destiny that the Greeks first became, in the historical sense, the Greeks... As we use the word, “Greek” designates neither an ethnic nor national, neither a cultural nor an anthropological characteristic. What is Greek is that dawn of destiny as which being itself lights itself up in beings and lays claim to an essence of humanity, a humanity which, as destined, *receives its historical path, a path sometimes preserved in, sometimes released from, but never separated from being.*⁴⁴

In other words, it is being itself that gives to the Greeks their historical task. History begins when the Greeks take up this task and own up to their destiny, and remain steadfast in it. For this reason, the orientation of thinking of the first inception, that is, the destiny of the Greeks, is certainly not something determined in advance by any “higher power,” as it were—being is not God. Rather, the Greek thinking gets its fundamental orientation precisely from the basic disposition of wonder. The task meted out to the Greeks is due to the sendings of being itself—that is, it is due to the way in which being *gives itself, or expresses itself*, in terms of beings. It is worth repeating: what alone is wondrous, according to Heidegger, are *beings as beings*.⁴⁵ Wonder attunes and disposes human beings to focus on beings; it sets human beings on a path of questioning that opens the entire history of thought.

To be sure, none of this was known or could have been known to the Greeks themselves. They could not step ‘outside’ of their thought precisely because they remained steadfast in their focus on beings themselves as their ownmost task. Their destiny becomes apparent only from within the purview of transitional thinking, once we have already begun to step out of

⁴⁴ Heidegger, “Anaximander’s Saying” in GA5 336/ OBT 253.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, GA45 168/ BQP 145.

metaphysics—that is to say, in the interplay between the first beginning and the other beginning of thinking. For the Greeks, as well as the metaphysical tradition in general, the guiding question, “what are beings?” indeed takes itself as the basic and the most fundamental question. In this way, it is not only the *answer* to the guiding question that leads to the forgottenness of being by precluding an inquiry into the truth of being. Instead, this forgottenness is itself made possible by a more profound abandonment by being that traces its roots to the way the guiding question is posed, that is, to the way it imposes itself as the basic, most fundamental question in the history of being.

Decline of Wonder and the Move Away from the Inceptual

If the questioning of beings was the original task meted out to the Greeks in the experience of wonder, what accounts for the decline of wonder experienced today? In other words, if the Greeks answered the call of being by questioning beings as such as a whole, how does this first decision lead to ever increasing transformation of all beings into mere objects curiosity?

According to Heidegger, all curiosity is rooted in a search for *explanation* [*Erklärung*].⁴⁶ Since the earliest thinkers, this search takes the form of the “why-question,” that is, in the form of a search for causes, reasons, or grounds. In the metaphysical tradition, this search for explanation reaches its culmination with one question in particular, the question “why are there beings at all and rather than nothing?”⁴⁷ From the within the purview of metaphysics, this question is not just one question among many; rather, this question is “first in rank... as the broadest, as the deepest,

⁴⁶ Heidegger, GA45 172 / BQP 149.

⁴⁷ Heidegger turns to this question for the first time in his 1929 address, “What is Metaphysics?” but develops it further in a lecture-course of 1939, published as *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In that text, Heidegger calls this question the “basic question of metaphysics” (*Die Grundfrage der Metaphysik*). This should not be confused with what from the perspective of transitional thinking will become the “basic question” (*Grundfrage*), the question concerning the truth of being.

and finally as the most originary question.”⁴⁸ According to Heidegger, this question is broadest in scope insofar it encompasses beings in their totality and is not limited by any particular being; it is “limited only by what simply is not and never is: by nothing.”⁴⁹ Moreover, this question is also the “deepest,” because in asking “why?” the question seeks *grounds*, or *reasons*—it attempts to “get to the bottom.”⁵⁰ Finally, the question “why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?” is the most originary because it is implicated in all questioning, “and is necessarily asked, knowingly or not, along with every question.”⁵¹ In all these ways, the metaphysical why-question seeks the ultimate ground of all beings—the ground that would provide an explanatory account of beings as such as a whole as well as any being in particular. From the perspective of metaphysics, then, this question indeed takes itself as the basic question, more originary even than the inceptual, guiding question, “what are beings?”

As Heidegger points out, however, “although in the course of that history the ‘why-question’ has taken on the appearance of the deepest and most extreme question, the ‘why-question’ is not an originary question at all, but rather remains trapped in the domain of explaining beings.”⁵² In other words, this question cannot in its metaphysical formulation reach beyond beings themselves and inquire directly into their grounds. Insofar as this question interrogates beings with respect to their ground, it proceeds by inquiring into beings themselves; in so doing, it only ever attains any ground by *positing*, but not *inquiring into*, the very notion of ground that would ground beings as such as a whole. Thus, for metaphysics, such questioning can only be resolved by once again positing a notion of beingness, this time as the highest being—for instance, as God the

⁴⁸ Heidegger, GA40 4/ IM 2.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, GA40 4/ IM 2.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, GA40 4–5/ IM 3.

⁵¹ Heidegger, GA40 8/ IM 7.

⁵² Heidegger, GA66 273/ M 243.

creator that would purport to explain and ground all beings in their “whatness” as well as “thatness.” Instead of inquiring into truth, this question opens the conception of beings as made, as *ens creatum*, and the God as the ultimate creator. In so doing, beings become completely detached from their essential origin in the truth of being and thus lose connection with that which makes them the beings that they are. Accordingly, if the guiding question first misdirects the questioning of the truth of being, the basic question of metaphysics entirely obliterates any possibility of such questioning from the outset, and this questioning pushes the abandonment of being to its most extreme point. Nevertheless, even if the response to this metaphysical why-question becomes more and more “irrational” according to Heidegger, he never suggests that the question is itself senseless and mistaken. Indeed, even in its metaphysical formulation, the question “why are there beings rather than nothing?” is not a mere accident. Instead, this question is itself a decision and a “happening” (*Geschehnis*) in the history of being,⁵³ and, as such, it arises out of a genuine need and utmost necessity. Specifically, this decision continues to take guidance from the first decision regarding the essence of beings, the guiding question, “what are beings?” It is itself a kind of response—a questioning-response to be exact—to that inceptual question.⁵⁴

If the basic question of metaphysics remains trapped in the wake of the guiding question, why does it appear to get the upper hand now? On the one hand, the explanatory why-question gains its primacy due to the weakening of the basic disposition of wonder, “because subsequent to the initial wonder, beings increasingly lose their strangeness, are pushed into the domain of expertise and draw from this domain the forms of their determinability.”⁵⁵ However, this appears to introduce a difficulty into Heidegger’s account. Namely, how is it possible that wonder has been

⁵³ Heidegger, GA40 25/ IM 24.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, GA66 273/ M 242.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, GA66 273/ M 242.

weakened and ultimately supplanted by curiosity and all those forms of marvelling and amazement that are characteristic of our present epoch? Clearly, curiosity cannot have the power to bring about a change of disposition since, as discussed in the previous chapter, a change of disposition can only come about by another, more basic or fundamental disposition. Indeed, contrary to what is claimed by some commentators, Heidegger never blames curiosity for the ultimate demise of wonder.⁵⁶ Instead, he writes that wonder “*makes way* for this familiarity [of beings] and thus *abandons itself* and coalesces with the mere amazement about what is astonishing. The incipient wonder, fails to retro-ground itself unto its own origin and thus becomes ever more bewildering.”⁵⁷ We have reached at the heart of the complication regarding wonder. On the one hand, every attempt at explanation, every explanatory why-question enervates and even destroys wonder.⁵⁸ At the same time, however, this very impetus to explanation is itself directed by wonder, which since the very beginning always calls for and demands explanation, and, in this way, wonder does indeed contain the seeds of its demise.

We will return to the demise of wonder in what follows. At this point, it might be asked: if explanation in general, and the explanatory why-question in particular, destroys wonder, must we attempt to forget all explanation and pretend as though the entire history of philosophy is merely a mistake? No, according to Heidegger, we must work through these responses because it is only that way that we can reach the point at which metaphysics reaches its end and another beginning becomes possible. In fact, there is a way in which even the explanatory metaphysical why-question opens a path for thinking. Heidegger suggests that this question may prepare us for the necessity of the “leap” (*der Sprung*) out of metaphysics itself, and, when taken up properly, first attempts

⁵⁶ For instance, see Stone, “Curiosity as the Thief of Wonder.”

⁵⁷ Heidegger, GA66 273/ M 242.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, GA45 168/ BQP 145.

such a leap. According to Heidegger, in being posed, the question “why are there beings at all rather than nothing?” recoils back upon itself by imposing the question, “why the why?”⁵⁹ To be sure, from the perspective of metaphysical thinking, the question “why the why” appears merely as mechanical repetition of the same. According to Heidegger, we can begin to respond to “why the why?” by noting that it is “for the sake of beyng” that such a question poses itself to itself. However, we have reached a point beyond which metaphysics cannot proceed without ceasing to be what it is. To be clear, metaphysics may indeed claim that beings occur “for the sake of beyng.”⁶⁰ Yet, even in providing this answer, metaphysics misunderstands itself. On the one hand, whenever metaphysics speaks “of beyng,” this can only mean “pertaining to beyng”; on the other hand, metaphysics understands “for the sake” in teleological terms, and it is thereby inclined to grasp beyng as a goal or objective. In general, Heidegger claims that the only way metaphysics can grasp beyng is by understanding it as a response, that is, only by determining it in terms of beingness, stripping it from its uniqueness, and dragging it down to the explanatory level.

From the perspective of transitional thinking, however, “beyng [the truth of being] is the refusal of all ‘goals’ and the denial of every possibility of explanation.”⁶¹ To be clear, beyng is inexplicable not because we lack the power to explain it, but precisely because an explanatory account is antithetical to any genuine inquiry, only apprehending its object by stripping it away of precisely what is strange and unique. Instead of a goal or a teleology, then, transitional thinking understands this “for the sake of beyng,” in terms of the “honouring” of beyng. “Of beyng” then refers to the way in which beings belong to beyng, that is, to the way in which they are originally appropriated by beyng.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, GA40 4/ IM 6.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, GA66 269/ M 239.

⁶¹ Heidegger, GA65 477/ CP 375.

What, then, is the appropriate way to honour being, and move beyond the metaphysical why-question? According to Heidegger, “the proper response to this question [“why the why?”], that is, to what is fundamental to all questioning, can only be an *inquiry into the most question-worthy*.”⁶² He writes:

If the “why-question” is still raised in the domain of inventively thinking being, then it can only be enacted as the transitional question. Answering it no longer leads to a highest cause that, with the peculiarity of a primary technician, anticipates everything, holds everything together, and takes care of everything. Rather, the answer points to being in such a way that now the responding one directly unveils itself as the most question-worthy, but question-worthy for an inquiry in which every “why” either falls too short, or does not hold at all.⁶³

This is why in *Contributions to Philosophy* Heidegger calls the question “why are there beings rather than nothing?” the “transitional question” (*Übergangsfrage*) when approached from the perspective of transitional thinking.⁶⁴ Indeed, this question will prove to be a necessary step in the destiny of the first beginning, if only to allow us to experience the complete abandonment and refusal of being, thereby enabling us precisely to move beyond all metaphysics, provided we can adequately take up its challenge.

Wonder and the Questions of Authenticity and Origin

Let us return to the relation of wonder as the basic disposition of the first beginning and the disposition of the other beginning. Even though it is not yet possible to understand more precisely what Heidegger means by the other disposition, the basic disposition of the other beginning, we

⁶² Heidegger, GA66 269/ M 239.

⁶³ Heidegger, GA66 274–75/ M 244–43.

⁶⁴ Heidegger, GA65 509/ CP 400. See also Heidegger, GA66 274/ M 243.

can at least begin to understand why that disposition cannot be one of wonder, even as it stands in an important relation to it.

In the first instance, contrary to what is sometimes claimed,⁶⁵ the basic disposition of the other beginning cannot be a more originary or more authentic kind of wonder. To be sure, wonder has within it the seeds of its own demise, and the Greeks have failed to inquire into that origin, the truth of being and the sending of being that attune them to their historical task and their destiny. None of this is to suggest, however, that wonder lacks a certain ‘originary status’; indeed, if wonder lacked any such thing it would have never heralded a genuine inception of thought. It is precisely because it is originary—because from within the purview of transitional thinking to the other beginning there could have been no other first beginning—that it ushers in more than two millennia of metaphysical and scientific explanation. At the same time, if it were possible to replicate that beginning, or to somehow make it more originary, all that would mean is that it was never unique in the first place—it would not have been a true beginning and the original inception of thinking.

Moreover, the move away from wonder is not due to any “shortcoming” of that disposition, something that ought to be rectified by a more intense focus. Instead, this move away from wonder precisely testifies to its greatness, to its power to dispose and attune human beings to the overwhelming strangeness of beings as beings that first makes possible and prepares Da-sein as the site of the decisions of history. Accordingly, wonder exhausts itself not because it is powerless, but because it disposes human beings to grasp beings to such an extent that human questioning has exhausted those beings as such as a whole—it has exhausted nature itself—to such an extent that nothing escapes human grasp. None of this is to suggest, of course, that human beings have learned

⁶⁵ Engelland, “Wonder of Questioning” 185.

everything about every being in particular; what it does suggest, at least according to Heidegger, is that in the age of complete questionlessness and abandonment by being, every possible *sense* of beings has been exhausted. The history of metaphysical and scientific thought has reached its end, according to Heidegger, not because it has failed, but precisely because it has succeeded. The end and ultimate decline of wonder is not merely its *demise*, but its ultimate *completion*.

If, on the other hand, it is claimed that the basic disposition of the other beginning is a “more authentic” kind of wonder, it is necessary to briefly recall what Heidegger means by “authenticity” in the first place. For Heidegger, “authenticity” (*Eigentlichkeit*) does not refer to an abstract value—it is not simply another way of saying that something is good or better than something else. Instead, “authentic” refers to what is “own-most,” to what most properly belongs to something. As such, it is only such beings as human beings can be authentic or inauthentic in relation to what is their own-most or most proper to them.⁶⁶ For this reason, a basic disposition such as wonder can by itself neither be authentic nor inauthentic. Indeed, even when we say that something like “curiosity” is inauthentic, what is really meant is that it curiosity is a mode of being for human beings—or more precisely, *Dasein*—that is not their own-most or most proper to them.

With that in mind, it is necessary to recall that the Greeks have indeed persisted in their historical task. Their inability to question the truth of being was not due to a lack of authenticity; rather, they remained true to their own-most task and their destiny. It is for this reason that wonder, in any guise, cannot be a basic disposition of the other beginning. Even though we stand in a definite relation to it, wonder is no longer *our* basic disposition, nor can it be the basic disposition for the ones to come. Indeed, to attempt to grasp wonder more authentically than the Greeks, to attempt to be more Greek than the Greeks themselves, would be the height of inauthenticity: in so

⁶⁶ Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 265.

doing, we would neglect our own historical task, our destiny and the demands placed on us by our position in the history of being. Accordingly, any such approach to the basic disposition of the other beginning would fail to open possibilities for a radical transformation of thinking. Instead of grounding the place where inceptual questioning can once again take root—that is, Da-sein—we would attempt to replicate something that is unique and can never be replicated, while also failing to own up to our destiny.

CHAPTER III: RESTRAINT AND THE TRANSITION TO THE OTHER BEGINNING

The Plight and the Necessity of Beginning Again

The necessity of the questioning of beings that inaugurated Western philosophy has its origins in the primordial plight of the first encounter with beings as such as a whole. However, given ‘our’ position in the history of being, that is to say, in our questionless epoch, we can never again experience the plight of that basic encounter. After all, we already have beings laid bare before us: it is acknowledged—and, indeed, beyond question—that beings are, that they are *what* they are, and we have recourse to over two millennia of metaphysical and scientific explanation to explain and explicate *why* they are what they are. For us, it would seem, there simply is no need to wonder. But more than that, it would appear that there is no need to think at all, if by ‘thinking’ we understand not merely calculation, but a questioning that would interrogate being in its truth.

It may surprise one to read that Heidegger maintains precisely that: in a very real sense, there is no need to think at all; for us, all genuine thinking is unnecessary. Why, then, does Heidegger insist that we begin anew? Why should—and indeed must—we question being in its truth? Needless to say, if by ‘why?’ what is being asked is, ‘towards what end?’ or, ‘for what purpose?’ then our questioning already leads us astray, since, as pointed out previously, the truth of being resists every ‘why’ and is immune to all calculation and future projection. Nevertheless, according to Heidegger, precisely due to this lack of plight, there emerges a kind of need, or plight that compels us to think. Indeed, for Heidegger, our age of a lack of plight is also that of “the highest plight,” namely, what he calls, “the plight of a lack of plight” (*die Not der Notlosigkeit*)¹

¹ Heidegger, GA65 235 /CP 185.

We can understand better this plight of the other beginning in its resonance with the primordial plight—the not knowing of the whence and the whither—of the first beginning of thinking. In particular, much like the initial encounter with beings as beings, the current plight does not draw its force, its compelling power, from a future point in time, a goal or a predetermined end. To recall, it was not the case for the earliest thinkers that they were compelled to question beings as such as a whole *in order to* usher in an entire tradition of metaphysical and scientific thought. Instead, they merely allowed themselves to be overpowered by the overwhelming strangeness of beings. Likewise, it is not the case that the plight of a lack of sense of plight compels us to think according to some predetermined end or goal that can be calculated in advance. For instance, it is not merely the case that we have must question the truth of being in order to solve the most pressing ‘problems’ of today—say, the varied social, political, environmental, and other crises of our day and their future repercussions.² This is why Heidegger emphasizes that what compels “is itself what is genuinely to come.”³ Recalling the discussion of temporality from *Being and Time*, this ‘to come’ is not the future present that will come to pass. Rather, what compels, the plight of a lack of plight, stands outside of the very temporal order of calculation and future projection that could be accounted for.

Nevertheless, even though it compels from a different and unprecedented measure, this plight of a lack of sense of plight is not at all indifferent to the now—our present, this very moment—and neither is it indifferent to the history of being itself. On the contrary, as we will see, this plight arises from the very condition of questionlessness that characterizes our current position

² This is not to say, of course, that if such a questioning did come to pass, it would not allow us to come to terms with those problems as well; it is just that any such goal cannot precede what is by its nature unprecedented, and the use of any such thinking, if there is any use in it at all, cannot be predetermined.

³ Heidegger, GA65 113/ CP 89.

in the history of being. Heidegger writes: “The lack of a sense of plight is greatest where self-certainty has become unsurpassable, where everything is held to be calculable, and especially where it has been decided, with no previous questioning, who we are and what we are supposed to do.”⁴ In other words, this plight of a lack of plight finds its greatest expression in the overwhelming domination of machination. “Within machination,” says Heidegger, “there is nothing question-worthy, nothing that could be deemed worthy through questioning as such, alone deemed worthy and thereby illuminated and raised into truth.”⁵ However, as previously pointed out, machination is itself a way *beyng* gives itself in the hidden mode of the abandonment by being that stretches to the very inception of thinking. In other words, machination remains one way in which *beyng* essentially occurs, however distorted its essential occurrence. Accordingly, coming to terms with machination, grasping it *as such*,⁶ will at once allow us to grasp something of *beyng* itself as the most worthy of questioning.

Like the initial plight of the first beginning, then, the plight of a lack of sense of plight is nothing deficient or lamentable. Indeed, just like that initial encounter with beings, which first arouses wonder and imparts upon thinking its orientation and historical direction, the plight of a lack of plight compels thinking, and without it, thinking is impossible. This is not to say, however, that this plight is of itself something ‘good’ either. Heidegger writes: “That which compels, and is retained without being grasped, essentially surpasses all progress, for that which compels is itself what is genuinely to come and thus *resides completely outside of the distinction between good and evil and withdraws itself from all calculation.*”⁷ In other words, because this plight compels from

⁴ Heidegger, GA65 125/ CP 99.

⁵ Heidegger, GA65 109/ CP 86.

⁶ In other words, not simply as a contingent human-historical happening that characterizes contemporary culture, but as the essential occurrence of *beyng* that stretches back to the very inception of history.

⁷ Heidegger, GA65 113/ CP 89, emphasis added.

the appropriating event, which remains prior to, and above, any such valuation and future projection, it will itself prove to be that which allows us to re-evaluate the very notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ This is also why the crisis of thinking brought about by machination also presents an opportunity, provided thinking is appropriate to it. What is most needed now, according to Heidegger, is “not a *proclamation* of new doctrines to the bemired bustling about of humans; instead, a *dislodging* of humans out of the lack of a sense of plight and into the most extreme plight, namely, the plight of lacking a sense of plight.”⁸

The Guiding Disposition of the Other Beginning: Shock (*Erschrecken*)

In order to understand the manner in which this lack of plight is recognized as the highest plight, we must first get a better sense of what Heidegger means by the basic disposition of the other beginning. As discussed, Heidegger assigns various names to this disposition, including “shock” (*Erschrecken*), “diffidence” (*Scheu*), “presentiment” (*Ahnung*), “foreboding” (*Er-ahnen*) and especially “restraint” (*Verhaltenheit*). These names indicate what Heidegger sometimes calls “guiding dispositions,” and they all “oscillate” differently within the basic disposition of the other beginning. These dispositions are “guiding” *not* in the sense that they each occur at a different time (for instance, by occurring in succession), but merely because they each attune us in a slightly different way to the basic disposition of the other beginning. Thus, even though each guiding disposition is distinct, each one adds richness and tonality to the basic disposition.⁹

⁸ Heidegger, GA65 235 /CP 185.

⁹ Heidegger, GA65 22/ CP 20: “Every naming of the basic disposition in a single word fixes on an erroneous view... That the basic disposition of the other beginning must bear multiple names does not militate against its unity but, rather, confirms its richness and strangeness.” For this reason, Heidegger insists that even though that basic disposition “can almost never” be designated with a single name, “the multiplicity of names, however, does not negate the simplicity of this basic disposition; it merely points to the ungraspableness of everything simple.” Heidegger, GA65 21–22/ CP 19.

One way to characterize the basic disposition of the other beginning, then, is to say that it is *implicitly* simple, but *explicitly* complex, that is to say, this disposition is heard and experienced differently depending upon the specific context.¹⁰ Within the ‘structure’ of the *Contributions*, in particular, shock and diffidence make an appearance in the first “jointure” (*Fuge*) of the text, “The Resonating” (*Der Anklang*), and diffidence becomes crucially important in the jointure, “The Leap” (*Der Sprung*). Most importantly, restraint is taken as the dispositional center of shock and diffidence and appears throughout the text, figuring most prominently in “The Grounding” (*Die Gründung*). Heidegger writes that “in restraint, there reigns... a turn toward the hesitating self-withholding as the essential occurrence of beyng. Restraint is the center for shock and diffidence; these latter merely characterize with more explicitness what originally belongs to restraint.”¹¹ He even goes as far as to suggest that restraint could be taken as a name for the basic disposition of the other beginning, that is, as the basic disposition of “the ones to come” (*Die Zukünftigen*), provided this word is understood out of the inventive thinking of the event.¹²

Let us turn to the first way the basic disposition of the other beginning is explicitly unfolded as the guiding disposition of “shock” (*Erschrecken*), sometimes more strikingly translated as “terror.” In *Contributions*, Heidegger suggests that this guiding disposition should be clarified specifically in contrast to wonder.¹³ “To be shocked,” says Heidegger, “is to be taken aback, *i.e.*, back from the familiarity of customary behaviour and into the openness of the pressing forth of what is self-concealing. In this openness, what was hitherto familiar shows itself as what alienates and also fetters.”¹⁴ This description clearly recalls the central motif from Heidegger’s discussion

¹⁰ Cf. Vallega-Neu, “Heidegger’s Imageless Saying of the Event” 319.

¹¹ Heidegger, GA65 11/ CP 11.

¹² Heidegger, GA65 395–96/ CP 313–14.

¹³ Heidegger, GA65 15/ CP 14.

¹⁴ Heidegger, GA65 15/ CP 14.

of the basic disposition of wonder: to recall, in wonder, “the most usual” (*das Gewöhnlichste*)—beings as a whole—become “the most unusual” (*die Ungewöhnlichsten*)—beings as such. But what is now familiar, and what shows itself through the guiding disposition of shock? According to Heidegger, “what is most familiar [*das Geläufigste*] and therefore most unknown is the abandonment by being.”¹⁵ But how can Heidegger claim that the abandonment by being, which essentially occurs in the hidden mode of machination, is the most familiar and “therefore” the most unknown? It is precisely because machination is closest to us—because we rely upon it so thoroughly—that the machination *as machination* remains veiled, and the abandonment by being remains unquestioned. Much like the first beginning, where beings as a whole were the most usual because they were not even noticed in their usualness, machination is the most familiar now insofar it is not even noticed in its familiarity. We get a better sense of what is meant here when we note that machination remains most hidden precisely from those modes of thinking that rely upon it the most. From the perspective of scientific inquiry, for example, the various problems of today—environmental degradation, climate change, and the like—testify not to an essential occurrence of machination as such, but precisely the opposite: they appear as problems that can be solved by a more stringent application of scientific and technological reasoning. And, to be sure, just as the essential occurrence of machination cannot be empirically verified through scientific research, it cannot be deduced from some higher metaphysical principle through more rigorous philosophical argumentation. “It seems to be a law of machination” Heidegger says, “that the more prescriptively machination unfolds... all the more obstinately and machinationally [that is, ‘connivingly’] does it conceal itself *as such*.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Heidegger, GA65 15/ CP 14.

¹⁶ Heidegger, GA65 127/ CP 100, emphasis in the original.

How, then, does shock attune us to the dominion of machination, making it possible for us to recognize it as such, that is, precisely as the distorted essence of being? Once again, it can be helpful to understand shock in relation to wonder. To recall, wonder disposes and attunes the earliest thinkers to question beings as such as a whole, and thus to the realization that beings *are* what they are. In a similar vein, Heidegger now claims that “*shock lets us be taken aback by the very fact that beings are* (whereas, previously, beings were to us simply beings), *i.e.*, that being has abandoned and withdrawn itself from all ‘beings’ and from whatever appeared as a being.”¹⁷ It would appear, at first glance, that the very same ‘fact,’ namely, that beings *are*, is the source of both shock as well as of wonder. This raises an obvious question: how can the same ‘fact’ give rise to two distinct dispositions, if they are indeed distinct? Despite appearances, there is indeed a crucial, if subtle, difference between the two dispositions. Whereas in the first beginning beings *as beings* emerged as the most unusual, and were affirmed as such through questioning, it now appears that beings *as beings* are the most usual—they are to us “simply” beings, and are entirely at our disposal. What accounts for this difference with regard to how beings are taken? Clearly, it is not the case that beings have changed by themselves; they are what they are now, just as they were what they were at the dawn of the first beginning—beings as beings. Instead, what has changed is ‘our’ basic position in the history of being, that is, our dis-position towards those beings. In other words, it is we who have changed and thus our relatedness to those beings has changed.

We can understand better this dispositional change if we remember that in the first beginning thinking had to decide between beings and non-beings by interrogating beings as such as a whole by asking “what are beings?” However, it is no longer disputed, neither by Heidegger nor by anyone else, that beings are; what was affirmed in the first questioning-decision regarding

¹⁷ Heidegger, GA65 15/ CP 14, emphasis added.

the essence of beings or non-beings is now *beyond question*—it remains, indeed, immune from all genuine questioning.¹⁸ That beings are is now the most obvious and superfluous notion. Put differently, beings are the very same beings they were before, but the ‘context’ has changed—that beings *are* clearly means something very different in the transition to the other beginning than what it meant to the earliest thinkers. This is why we must pay attention to the parenthetical remark in the above quotation: “shock lets us be taken aback by the very fact that beings *are* (*whereas, previously, beings were to us simply beings*), *i.e.*, that being has abandoned and withdrawn itself from all ‘beings’ and from whatever appeared as a being.”¹⁹ Whereas ‘prior’ to the basic disposition of wonder one could not even speak of beings as such—they became such only through wonder—prior to the disposition of shock, beings were taken as the most usual and ordinary.

What does it *mean*, then, to say that beings *are*? Whereas to say that “beings are” meant the presencing of being in the first beginning, in the transition to the other beginning, “that beings are” means precisely the reverse—instead of presencing, it now refers to the withdrawal of being, it refers to beings’ abandonment by being. Whereas in the first beginning, the affirmation of beings as beings heralded an overflow of meaning or sense into the world, the affirmation of beings as beings now heralds a profound *loss of sense* and an age of utter *meaninglessness*. We must be careful to qualify this last statement, however: after all, lest we forget, beings still *are*—it is not that beings have simply ceased to be. In other words, the abandonment by being does not revert us to some hypothetical primordial state ‘prior’ or antecedent to the first beginning of thinking. Beings *are*, they still have sense: even in the context of machination and complete questionlessness,

¹⁸ Indeed, even asking “whether” beings are, or are not, can only be achieved by feigning a genuine act of questioning. In other words, such a pseudo-question can be only posited as a didactic question where the answer is obvious. Of course beings are, they are ‘by definition’ even: the very fact that we may speak of beings means indeed that they are, otherwise we could not even question what they are and that they are.

¹⁹ Heidegger, GA65 15/ CP 14.

we can obviously still make sense of beings—for instance, we can still use language, communicate, calculate, and the like. What those beings have become detached from is their meaning-giving source (the truth of being): we are no longer able to understand what endows them with meaning or sense. Like old sayings whose origins (truth) have long since become obscured, beings remain as empty gestures, as enduring clichés. This is indeed why Heidegger always emphasizes the conjunction: to say that “beings are” means at once that beings are beings *and* that being has abandoned beings (which will become understood as, “beings are, beyng essentially occurs”²⁰).

But how can beings *be* at all if they are abandoned by being? What does it mean to say that “beings are” on the one hand, but also that “being has abandoned beings”? Is this not an obvious contradiction? Once again, we have to remember that, for Heidegger, the abandonment by being does not mean that any notion of being has simply disappeared. Indeed, this very realization first becomes possible through the guiding disposition of shock. Shock attunes us to what is in our age the most usual—the fact that beings are—*and* what is in our age the most familiar—that being has abandoned beings. However, what emerges when these two ordinary thoughts are taken in their conjunction is the most remarkable fact that beings remain what they are, they endure as the beings they are, *in spite of* their abandonment by being—perhaps even *because* of it. Heidegger writes: “Beings are, but the being of beings and the truth of beyng and consequently the beyng of truth are denied to beings. Beings are, yet they remained abandoned by beyng and left to themselves, so as to be mere objects of our machinations.”²¹ Indeed, this is where shock must be contrasted with wonder, and can be understood as its dispositional counter-thrust. Whereas in the first beginning

²⁰ Heidegger also uses this expression instead of saying “beyng is.” He emphasizes the difference between beyng and beings, the fact that beyng stands out in relief from all beings and thereby distinguishes itself unilaterally from them (what can no longer be simply called “the ontological difference”).

²¹ Heidegger, GA45 185/ BQP 159.

the remarkable fact that beings are pointed to an understanding, however provisional, of beings with regard to their being, or beingness, the now remarkable fact that beings still are what they are points to an understanding, however provisional, of the abandonment by being. On the one hand, there is no longer anything wondrous or even remarkable about beings at all—they are as they always were, beings as beings—*except* for the fact that they are *and* that being has abandoned them. In shock, these two ordinary and usual elements are brought together and, in so doing, both become remarkable, alienating, and indeed shocking: how can it be, at the very same time, that beings are and that they have been abandoned by being? That is what now calls for thinking.

Let us return for the moment to our previous question: how, in the most concrete terms, does shock allow us to grasp machination as such, and come to terms with the abandonment by being? To recall, once abandoned by being, beings are reduced to mere things—that is to mere objects for various kinds of implementation, calculation, and objectification. However, by attuning us to what is now the most obvious—beings as beings—and to what is most familiar, if still unknown as such—machination and the abandonment by being—shock allows us to once again recall, against machination, that although beings are never simply beings, they are treated as mere things. In this moment of shock, what was most familiar—industrial farming, deforestation, and hydraulic fracking—now alienates and fetters. Those beings—livestock, trees, mountains—are no longer simply mere things, they are no longer just “standing reserve” (*Bestand*) to be exploited, yet this is precisely how they are taken. This is also why the uncovering of machination as such, and abandonment by being only becomes possible in the “resonating” of the first beginning and the other beginning of thinking. More precisely, it only becomes possible once thinking becomes seized both by the realization that beings are (what comes down to us from the first beginning) and

that being has abandoned them (what first becomes experienced as such at the end of that beginning and the transition to the other beginning).

However, perhaps what is most terrifying—more shocking than the ‘contradiction’ that beings are *and* that beings has abandoned them, more shocking even than the exploitation of beings—is the simple realization that we no longer *care*. We do not experience the profound exigency and the plight brought about by this condition. We busy about our business as though—and this is correct—we need neither think nor question. Yet, this realization is precisely what shock attunes us to: that the age of a lack of plight becomes shocking allows us to experience the plight of the lack of sense of plight for the very first time. It is also this realization that for the first time makes it possible for us to come to terms with machination as machination, and the abandonment by being as the essential occurrence of beyng—as the refusal of beyng—provided we allow ourselves to heed its call.

The Decision Regarding the Essence of De-cision (*Ent-scheidung*)

Even though shock attunes us to the overwhelming strangeness of beings and alienates us from the familiarity of machination—thus making it possible for us to come to terms with the plight of the lack of a sense of plight—shock is not by itself sufficient to allow us to grasp machination as such and the abandonment by being as the essential occurrence of beyng. “Such a grasping” Heidegger writes, “can take place only in a *deciding*, through which one side of machination as such and, along with it, machination in its unconcealed essencing in general, first comes to a halt.”²² This is because, again, machination cannot be grasped machinationally—for instance, by contriving ever more devious metaphysical schemes and schematisms—instead, it must first be stopped in order to be pinned down. To this end, it is important to note that, for Heidegger, the essence of

²² Heidegger, GA66 18–19/ M 14.

machination manifests itself precisely as an inability to decide, that is, as a lack of decision and complete “decisionlessness” (that is, questionlessness).²³ For instance, the kind of thinking that represents beings as objects of manipulation and consumption that is most characteristic of machination always proceeds by implementing, organizing, and calculating based on pre-established rules and procedures. This is not only true of technological and scientific thinking, but also of philosophical, legal, and political reasoning—the latter is evident, for instance, with the rise of modern technocracies and bureaucracies, which dispense with all political decisions and instead approach politics in terms of governance and administration. In contrast to this decisionlessness of machination, then, it is deciding itself that will prove to be an overcoming of machination whereby it can be halted and recognized as such.

To be sure, the decision regarding machination cannot proceed by simply choosing between machination and something else, as though both alternatives were already fully formed and grasped as such.²⁴ Quite the opposite: Heidegger stresses that it is only through a decision that we can come to grasp it as such in the first place, and reveal it as the distorted essence of being (this resonates with the first decision regarding beings and non-beings wherein both were recognized as such only through that very deciding). What is the decision then? And how do we go about deciding? In order to decide, do we not need to understand what it is to decide in the first place? Certainly. However, according to Heidegger, to truly understand decision *as such*, it is necessary to actually decide—we can talk about decisions all we want, and we may know a lot about what it is to decide, but the only way to understand decision *as decision* (and not merely *about* decision) is to decide for ourselves. This becomes clearer if we recall that, for Heidegger,

²³ Heidegger, GA65 109/ CP 86.

²⁴ Heidegger, GA65 100/ CP 79.

decision is always thought in terms of questioning. In the broadly hermeneutic tradition, to truly understand a question, it is not enough to know the proposition that would purport to answer it, and neither is it enough to turn the question it into a series of propositions about where and when it was first posed and by whom; instead, the only way to know a question *as a question* (and not *as a proposition*) is to actually ask it, here and now, for ourselves.

How, then, do we enter deeper into this apparently vicious circle? Heidegger proceeds in the usual way, by taking what is ordinarily understood as decision. As noted previously, however, decision cannot be taken as a “choice” that can be taken or rejected. Instead, according to Heidegger, decision is in the first place a decision “between an *either* and an *or*.”²⁵ In being thus understood, the question imposes itself: “whence this either-or?” Put differently, why must we decide at all between two alternatives and only these two alternatives? Is there not a third option, namely, indifference and indecision? Can we choose to decline deciding itself? In this way, writes Heidegger, “the decision is originally about whether there is decision or non-decision.”²⁶ Little do we realize, however, that by inquiring into the essence of decision, by placing decision itself up for decision, we have already entered the space of decision, namely, “decidedness” (*Entschiedenheit*), which can also be rendered as “decisiveness.” Heidegger writes, “Yet decision is bringing oneself before the either-or and thereby is already decidedness, because here already there is belonging to the event.”²⁷

Once thinking acquires the character of decidedness, it already breaks the hold of machination, and we can for the first time recognize machination as such, that is, precisely as that non-deciding and indifference. Only through the disposition of shock do we finally recognize that

²⁵ Heidegger, GA65 102/ CP 80, emphasis added.

²⁶ Heidegger, GA65 102/ CP 80.

²⁷ Heidegger, GA65 102/ CP 80.

indifference (which also means, ‘carelessness’) is no longer an option, we come face to face with the realization that ‘something must be done.’ Heidegger writes:

Prepared here in the transition is the most originary and thus the most historical decision, that either-or which allows no hiding places and no regions for evasion: either to remain trammled to the end and to its running out, i.e., to ever new variants of “metaphysics” which become ever cruder, more groundless, and more aimless (the new “biologism” and the like), or to initiate the other beginning, i.e., to be resolved toward its long preparation.²⁸

We also understand better that to decide against deciding, to avoid deciding altogether, is itself always a decision. In other words, once this decidedness takes hold, there is no going back: now we understand that in avoiding decisions we were always already deciding—deciding to avoid the decision, that is to say, deciding in favour of machination and the abandonment by being. Once we inquire into the essence of decision, and grasp decision as decision, however, there is no longer room for evasion.

It is through this decidedness that for the first time human beings become attuned to the history of being itself, not a collection of propositions about being that were laid down over the course of centuries, but precisely as a series of decisions that stretch back to the original Greek decision. It is through shock and its corresponding decision that we also become attuned, for the very first time, to both the end of metaphysics as an end, and to its beginning as a beginning. Through this decidedness, machination is for the first time ground to a halt and laid bare as the distorted “essential occurrence” (*Wesung*) of being, which is now recognized as the “essential decay” (*Verwesung*) of being.²⁹

²⁸ Heidegger, GA65 229/ CP 180.

²⁹ Heidegger, GA65 115/ CP 91.

But we are not there yet. For the moment, let us proceed by asking: ‘who’ decides here? To be sure, as with the first decision regarding the essence of beings or non-beings, Heidegger does not believe that human beings can by themselves compel the new beginning in thinking. Nevertheless, at this point in the history of being, in our questionless age, it is precisely human beings—“the few and the rare”—who are now called upon to break the spell of machination and initiate the transition to another beginning, or at least to prepare for it. Once again, this can be understood in its resonance to the first beginning of thinking. To recall, ‘prior’ to the first inception one could not speak of human beings as such (or, more precisely, “the Greeks,” in Heidegger’s sense), and humans came to themselves as a result of an inceptual questioning of beings as such as a whole. However, insofar as we find ourselves as humans (if not quite “the Greeks”) situated within that original beginning of thinking, this decision to decision must indeed proceed from human beings, there is no one else who will do it for us.

‘Which one’ decides, then, if indeed there is one? Is it the “man of power” (*Machhaber*, that is, ‘dictator’) who would be ‘the decider,’ that is, the deciding one who would embody the will to decision of the multitude? No—according to Heidegger, decision is always of such a character that it cannot be passed on to another person; one cannot embody the will to decision for another. No one can be resolute and decisive in my stead any more than others can experience my death for me. Indeed, to the extent that thinking acquires the character of decisiveness, we understand that everyone must decide for herself or himself, “even by not deciding and by not wanting to know about it through an avoidance of the preparation.”³⁰ Nevertheless, even though shock attunes us to the realization that deciding cannot be avoided, this still does not mean that everyone will decide to decide, and not everyone will understand the decision as a decision. In

³⁰ Heidegger, GA65 100/ CP 79.

other words, even though everyone is always already deciding, they may still delude themselves into thinking that they are not deciding at all. For this reason, if any such man of power is possible today, he is only possible insofar as we avoid and abnegate deciding altogether. Instead of a will to decision, such a man would then embody precisely the collective will to indecision. As Heidegger writes in 1938, “that is why all men of power [*Machthaber*] eagerly exploit the ‘youth’ [*Jugend*] that suits them because ‘youth’ brings along the required ignorance... necessary for carrying out, under the guise of a new awakening, the planned destruction and thereby evading all decisions.”³¹

For this reason also decision cannot be understood in terms of the “will to power” since all power becomes powerless in the realm of decision. And although Heidegger notes that the abandonment by being is “the ground and thereby at the same time the more original determination of the essence of that which Nietzsche was the first to recognize as nihilism,” he goes on to write: “Yet, how little did he and all his power succeed in compelling Western Dasein to meditate on nihilism!”³² This is not merely because we lack power of decision, instead, according to Heidegger, “all power and power-possessing beings are essentially an evasion of such decisions.”³³ This powerlessness will prove to be a requirement for the transition to another beginning of thinking: coming to terms with machination and recognizing it as such involves a letting go of all drive to possess “power” (*Macht*) and “coercive force” (*Gewalt*), that is, to control and mastery. Heidegger writes, “the transition to the other beginning is decided, and yet we do not know whither we are going, when the truth of being becomes true, and whence history as the

³¹ Heidegger, GA66 18–19/ M 14.

³² Heidegger, GA65 119/ CP 95.

³³ Heidegger, GA66 19/ M 14.

history of being takes its steepest and shortest path.”³⁴ Thus, even though Heidegger sometimes emphasizes the relation of decision to will, this will is not to power, but, as we will see, it is a will to pain, sacrifice, and even suffering. He writes: “This decisiveness as foreboding, however, is merely the soberness of the *suffering ability* [*Leidenskraft*] on the part of the creative one, in this case the one who projects the truth of being, the truth that opens, to the essential force of beings [*Wesensgewalt des Seienden*], the stillness out of which being (as event) becomes perceptible.”³⁵

The Guiding Disposition of the Other Beginning: Diffidence (*Scheu*)

Let us briefly turn to this powerlessness, or more precisely, that ability to suffer which will allow the essential occurrence of being. In the transition to the other beginning, human beings are attuned to this powerlessness by the guiding disposition of “diffidence” (*Scheu*).³⁶ In ordinary German, *Scheu* can simply mean ‘shyness’ in the sense of ‘timidity.’ However, Heidegger explicitly rejects any such interpretation. “Diffidence” he writes, “is not confused with shyness [*Schüchternheit*] or even understood in that direction. Such a view is out of the question, so much so that diffidence as intended here even surpasses the ‘will’ of restraint and does this out of the depth of the ground of the unitary basic disposition.”³⁷ In contrast to the aggrandizement of machination, diffidence is the acknowledgment of powerlessness, of one’s own limitations and finitude. Indeed, especially when contrasted to the shameless publicness of what Heidegger calls

³⁴ Heidegger, GA65 177/ CP 139.

³⁵ Heidegger, GA65 23/ CP 20. In this passage, the translation of *Leidenskraft* as “power to suffer” can be particularly misleading if we understand power in terms of *Macht*, that is, something that can be possessed, as opposed to an ability.

³⁶ The word “Scheu” is sometimes translated as “awe,” or even, “deep awe” (most notably, in Maly and Emad’s translation of the *Contributions*). However, “awe” also translates “*Bestaunen*” and in any case does not quite capture the experience of reticence and delicate withholding that will become important to his discussion of this guiding disposition. Indeed, what Heidegger attempts to convey is precisely the inadequacy of human being to measure up and control the overflowing gift of being.

³⁷ Heidegger, GA65 15–16/ CP 15.

“lived experience” (*Erlebnis*), which always accompanies machination and is particularly characteristic of our present post-industrial age (as seen on ‘reality television’ and the ‘over-sharing’ on social networks), the connotations of ‘shyness’ in the sense of ‘modesty,’ but not ‘timidity,’ are indeed quite apt.

Above all, diffidence disposes humans to relinquish all pretensions to mastery and control, that is, all power seeking. This is the case not only in everyday behaviour, but especially in thought. Heidegger writes: “From diffidence in particular arises the necessity of reticence [*Verschweigung*]; the latter is what *allows an essential occurrence of beyng as event* [*Wesenlassen des Seyns als Ereignis*] and thoroughly disposes every comportment in the midst of beings and toward beings.”³⁸ How are we to understand this “letting essentially occur” (*Wesenlassen*)? In contrast to the calculative, coercive, and power-seeking machinations of metaphysics, diffidence disposes us to “let beings be,” which will also mean to let beyng essentially occur. We will return to this connection; with respect to beings in particular, whereas machination attempts to control and exploit beings, and represent them as objectively present ‘things,’ diffidence disposes humans to let beings be what they are—beings as beings—and to approach them as such in thought. To be clear, given our position in the history of beyng, diffidence must proceed from beings and is concerned with them; however, this ‘concern’ is not one of intense focus that would expect something from beings; instead, this concern is one of “care” (*Sorge*).³⁹ Against the shocking

³⁸ Heidegger, GA65 15–16/ CP 15.

³⁹ In *Contributions*, Heidegger re-interprets “care” from *Being and Time* in terms of the preserving of beings from out of the truth of beyng. Heidegger, GA65 17–18/ CP 16: “To be seeker, preserver, steward—that is what is meant by care as the fundamental trait of Dasein.” Note that whenever Heidegger writes “Dasein” without the hyphen in *Contributions*, he is referring to the way that notion was understood in the existential analytic in *Being and Time*.

carelessness of our machinational age, diffidence attunes us to care through which human beings may once again become the stewards of beings by protecting and restoring them.

How do we go about restoring beings, and what does it mean to let beings be? To recall, insofar as beings are abandoned by being, those beings have become detached from their grounding in the truth of being. Accordingly, beings have become condemned to a fate of utter senselessness or meaninglessness. For this reason, the primary way beings can be restored is to be once again endowed with meaning or sense. It is crucially important to note, however, that Heidegger does not suggest that we attempt a “renewal” (*Erneuerung*) of beings by imparting upon them the very same meaning or sense they had at some previous point in time—for instance, by a rigorous analysis of their past meanings. Even when Heidegger begins to distinguish between “*Sein*” (being) and “*Seyn*” (being), which is an archaic orthography for the former, he is not simply endowing the word “being” with the meaning of the archaic term. Instead, he is going back to the archaic sense in order to inventively rethink the word and impart a radically unprecedented sense that would allow the thinking of the truth of being. For this reason, Heidegger suggests that one of the main ways (though not necessarily the only way) of restoring beings is by *creative activity*. To let beings be, then, means not to over-determine them with some meaning that would be fixed once and for all time. Instead, it is to allow them to manifest their truth in different and creative ways. To be sure, we must guard against the opposite extreme: to “inventively think” (*erdenken*) is not simply to ‘think up something’ in the sense of ‘make something up’ and impose that meaning upon beings. Instead, to restore beings means to be attuned to hearing the way in which they speak to us and manifest their truth, that is, by sheltering being in art, poetry, and thought.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See Polt, “The Event of Enthinking the Event.”

It is above all in thought, Heidegger insists, that beings can be restored. “The most genuine and broadest leap is the one of thinking” he writes, “in knowledge of the event, the fissure of being is penetrated the furthest and the possibilities of *sheltering the truth in beings* can be gauged most extensively.”⁴¹ Unlike metaphysical thinking, however, which is oriented toward a goal or an end that would answer and resolve all questioning once and for all by representing being as the highest being, and by representing beings as objectively present things, what is experienced in diffidence is the letting go of all such pre-determined ends. In and through diffidence, which remains one aspect of restraint, “the inceptual mindfulness of thought becomes necessitating thought [*notwendigehtes Denken*], which is to say, goal-positing thought.”⁴² The positing of goals should not be understood as conforming to a pre-given end, function, or teleology. Heidegger goes on to clarify: “this goal is seeking itself, the seeking after beyng. Such seeking occurs, and is itself the deepest discovery, when humans decisively become preservers of the truth of beyng, stewards of that stillness.”⁴³ Here, diffidence can be usefully contrasted with the kind of knowing of curiosity. Whereas the latter “greed for the new” attempts to fabricate ever new meanings in order to resolve and put an end to the seeking, the former renounces all solutions in favour of seeking itself. Put differently, the kind of thinking that would restore beings is a kind of thinking that lets them be by not expecting anything from them, by questioning them without attempting to pin them down and resolve the questioning once and for all.

We must be careful here: none of this is to suggest that by positing seeking itself as the goal, inventive thinking involves the renunciation of all finding, that is to say, of all knowledge. As we will see, the positing of questioning as a goal is not to renounce answering altogether. Rather,

⁴¹ Heidegger, GA65 237/ CP 187, emphasis added.

⁴² Heidegger, GA65 17/ CP 16.

⁴³ Heidegger, GA65 17/ CP 16.

it is only to renounce the *privileging of the answer* as the ultimate goal of the inquiry and as its ultimate resolution (or dissolution). For this reason, Heidegger suggests that diffidence disposes towards an inventive thinking of being that would also make possible (although by no guarantee) “genuine,” or “ownmost knowledge” (*eigentliche Wissen*).⁴⁴ To give a very rough idea of the kind of knowledge intimated here, we may contrast the kind of knowing of beings of someone who tends a garden to the kind of knowing of a large agricultural conglomerate. Whereas the former attempts to understand plants with regard to their needs and their ownmost possibilities with the aim of allowing them to flourish, the latter may understand plants in terms of their genetic properties with the aim of extracting the most value from them. We should be careful here, however: though useful, this illustration is slightly misleading since we cannot yet anticipate what kind of knowledge may be possible in the other beginning and, indeed, cannot truly anticipate any knowledge at all, any more than the Greeks could have anticipated the quantum field theory of physics on the basis of their questioning.

The kind of questioning that emerges in diffidence, then, would not attempt to derive or abstract truth or sense from out of beings; instead, such a knowledge would attempt to endow beings themselves with meaning and sense by questioning from out of the truth of being. Put differently, instead of forcing beings to reveal the truth about their being (a static representation about what they are at any given time, and indeed for all time), this kind of questioning lets beings be what they are. Instead of a police interrogation, the kind of questioning of diffidence attempts

⁴⁴ Heidegger, GA65 22/ CP 20. The translation here is particularly difficult because it seems to suggest that such a knowledge would be opposed to something like ‘fake’ or ‘inauthentic’ knowledge; were that the case, however, it would be enough to simply contrast knowledge to the lack thereof. Instead, the operative distinction here is between the kind of knowledge that is appropriate to metaphysical and scientific inquiry—which, to the extent that it is knowledge, certainly involves correct propositions in the contexts of those fields of inquiry—and the kind of knowledge that would be appropriate to the restoration of beings.

to establish a ‘dialogue’ with beings. Instead of smashing them in a particle accelerator until they ‘spill their guts’ and confess about other beings that may still be hiding within and among them, diffidence attunes us to the possibilities of knowing beings differently. As Heidegger points out, in the other beginning “we can never grasp beings by explaining and deriving them on the basis of other beings. They can be known only out of their grounding in the truth of beyng.”⁴⁵ In other words, unlike knowledge that is acquired by representing beings on the basis of other beings (that is, that would take other beings as the ground), the ownmost knowledge of beings would be grounded in the truth of beyng itself. To let beings be, then, means precisely not to over-determine them and fix their meanings or sense by representing them with regard to other beings. It means to endow them with meanings, but also to allow them to continue to develop different meanings depending on the context of questioning.

To care for beings is to retrieve them from out of the truth of beyng; it is to once again connect them to their meaning-giving source wherein they could acquire sense and meaning. At the same time, however, to retrieve beings from out of the truth of beyng also means to shelter beyng in those beings. This is because, according to Heidegger, beyng needs beings to essentially occur and does not occur without them.⁴⁶ It is of crucial importance to note that beyng does not exist somewhere independently of beings, on another realm. Any such interpretation of being would only succeed in representing it as another being (as a transcendent Form, Idea, or God). Rather, beyng essentially occurs as just this meaning or sense of beings and does not exist anywhere else. This is why Heidegger writes that “beyng is nothing ‘in itself’ and nothing ‘for’ a

⁴⁵ Heidegger, GA65 231/ CP 182.

⁴⁶ In *Contributions*, Heidegger writes that beyng “needs” beings, but beings “belong” to being. Heidegger writes: “this oscillation of needing and belonging constitutes beyng as event.” Heidegger, GA65 251/ CP 198. See also Kockelmans, *On the Truth of Being* 82.

‘subject.’”⁴⁷ For illustration, we may use the somewhat misleading language of metaphysics by saying that being is ‘immanent’ to beings—it “essentially occurs *as* the truth of beings.”⁴⁸ Instead, being is simply nothing other than the manner in which it essentially occurs, it is just this occurrence itself.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, being is never exhausted in any given configuration of beings, in any particular way in which it occurs, but can always be manifested differently provided it is inventively sheltered in beings.⁵⁰

Diffidence and the Leap (*Der Sprung*)

If shock and diffidence (each arising from the basic disposition of restraint) dispose humans to the plight of the abandonment of being, attuning us to the necessity of beginning anew, the transition to the other beginning of thinking must take place as what Heidegger calls “the leap” (*Der Sprung*).⁵¹ This leap is necessary because the transition to the other beginning cannot simply proceed from within the purview of the first beginning but necessitates a drastic change of perspective. In other words, only by leaping outside of the history of metaphysics is it possible to attain the ‘high ground’ that would allow us to grasp metaphysics itself as a historical trajectory, a path with a beginning and an end. For this reason, such a leap is at once a leap out of history (understood as a *history of metaphysics*), but it is also a leap into a more originary appropriation of that history (understood as a *history of being*). Furthermore, because this leap is necessitated and made possible by the very “ungroundedness” of beings as such as a whole, this leap will be a

⁴⁷ Heidegger, GA65 484/ CP 381.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, GA65 235/ CP 185, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, GA65 484/ CP 381.

⁵⁰ Indeed, we had to discover this the hard way through the guiding disposition of shock. To recall, at the end of the first beginning of thinking beings still are, they still have sense, despite the abandonment by being. Beings (still) are; being essentially occurs, albeit as the refusal and abandonment by being.

⁵¹ For a more general discussion of the leap, see Kovacs, “Leap in *Beiträge*.”

leap into a new grounding whereby beings as such as a whole, and amidst them human being, can be understood from out of the truth of being. It is thus not merely a ‘conceptual’ leap, but an ‘inceptual’ one, and it will allow us to gain a foothold in the other beginning of thinking.

According to Heidegger, this leap is guided neither by blind courage nor by bravado that would attempt master it with some determinate end in mind; instead, such a leap must be guided precisely by the hesitant withholding of diffidence. This means that the leap cannot be attempted with the express goal of preserving beings—as pointed out previously, it cannot be attempted *in order to* solve the most pressing problems of today, including the varied social, political, environmental, and other crises of our day. As Heidegger writes:

The leap expects nothing immediate from beings; instead, and before all else, it leaps into the belonging to being in the full essential occurrence of being as event. In this way, the leap appears in the semblance of utter recklessness, and yet the disposition motivating it is precisely that diffidence... in which the will to restraint surpasses itself toward steadfastness in withstanding the most remote nearness of the hesitant withholding.⁵²

The leap appears as recklessness because it renounces all control and calculation. It renounces all claim over beings and lets beings be, which must also include the most extreme possibility of them *not being* and *ceasing to be* (quite literally, it must allow the possibility for those beings to be destroyed and die). In this way, the leap is indeed quite a dangerous one; to deny such a danger would be foolhardy and the height of irresponsibility. Among the most obvious dangers would be those of misinterpretation. On the one hand, the leap could be taken precisely as a ‘conservative’ harkening back to a long bygone era, a “renewal” of old and outmoded ways of thinking. Another equally dangerous interpretation would be to understand the leap as a simple denouncement of all

⁵² Heidegger, GA65 228/ CP 179.

history in the name of radical change and progress. Both dangers are somewhat mitigated, however, if we allow ourselves to be guided by the disposition of diffidence, and renounce attempting to predict and anticipate the leap itself.

Even if these obvious dangers are mitigated, however, danger can never—and should never—be eliminated altogether. Because leap renounces all calculation and pretense of control, there are dangers that cannot be anticipated, even in principle. For instance, in attempting the leap, thought can no longer be consumed with the attempts to solve precisely those problems that at present appear the most difficult and demanding (for instance, climate change, environmental degradation). In the leap, there can be no guarantee that a new beginning of thinking will not exacerbate these problems. Indeed, if it were possible to eliminate all indeterminacy in advance, and assure that the leap would be ‘successful,’ then whatever would come to pass would not and could not be the leap. This is why the leap calls for “steadfastness.” But what is the alternative? To be sure, indifference and indecision is not an option; yet given its obvious as well as unforeseen dangers, *why* should one decide in favour of the leap if such a question can even be asked at this point? There are no “reasons,” or “grounds” (*Gründe*) that could compel this leap, any more than one could have given the earliest Greek thinkers the reason to question beings as such as a whole. If any such reason existed, then that very reason, and not the questioning-decision regarding the essence of beings, would have been the true inception. Likewise, to provide reasons for the leap is not possible since the leap is that which will attempt to attain the ground for the other beginning of thinking. Accordingly, the leap itself is unprecedented and, indeed, groundless: if any grounds for the leap can be given at all, they can be provided only once such a leap has been attempted in the very first place. Everything here depends on the strength of the basic disposition of the other beginning to attune us to plight and the necessity of the leap as well as our ability to allow ourselves

to heed its call: either we experience the radical exigency of shock and diffidence and attempt to attain another beginning; or else, we can resign ourselves to the end and its running out.

The Grounding of/from the Basic Question (*Grundfrage*)

How can thinking carry out this leap into the truth of beyng and attain a foothold into the other beginning? According to Heidegger, such a leap is carried out as a leap into the “basic question,” or “grounding question” (*Grundfrage*), the question of the truth of being.⁵³ More precisely, in *Contributions*, Heidegger maintains that the leap is carried out as the first “formulation,” or “wording” (*Frage-fassung*) of the basic question, namely: “how does beyng essentially occur [*wie west das Seyn*]?”⁵⁴ Likewise, in *Mindfulness*, he writes that “the question of the other beginning (the ownmost basic question [*eigentliche Grundfrage*]) is explicitly formulated as, ‘how does beyng essentially occur?’ and, ‘which is the truth of beyng?’ [*Welches ist die Wahrheit des Seyns?*]”⁵⁵ Heidegger warns that this “how-question” is not to be taken in the sense of a search for explanation on the basis of a ready-made ground; instead, this ‘how’ indicates an attempt at grounding itself, that is, establishing the ground in the first place.

This grounding is attained in the transition from the guiding question to the basic question.⁵⁶ There is a sense in which that formulation of the basic question requires the guiding question. Heidegger points out, however:

Even in its very formulation [that is, wording], the basic question has a completely different character. It is not a continuation of Aristotle’s formulation of the guiding question. For it arises immediately out of a

⁵³ Heidegger, GA65 43/ CP 36: “the questioning of truth is the leap into its essence and thereby into beyng itself.”

⁵⁴ Heidegger, GA65 78/ CP 62.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, GA66 274/ M 243.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, GA65 171/ CP 135.

necessity stemming from the plight of the abandonment by being, an occurrence essentially co-conditioned by the history (and by the misunderstanding) of the guiding question.⁵⁷

Thus although this formulation of the basic question indeed presupposes the progressive unfolding of the guiding question—that is to say, it presupposes that the guiding question is unfolded as the entire series of questions and decisions that will constitute the history of metaphysics⁵⁸—the transition into the basic question cannot occur progressively simply by continuing to unfold the leading question, but can only proceed in the leap and as the leap. And although the basic question is itself conditioned by the guiding question, the basic question will prove to be a more originary and indeed the “ownmost basic question.”

We should be clear on this point, however: the leap is not itself the new beginning, it is merely a transition that will allow us to gain a foothold in the other beginning.⁵⁹ Put differently, the explicit wording of the basic question is not yet the asking of the basic question, but will only allow us to transition into that question as a question. Heidegger writes: “In contrast to the guiding question, the basic question as a formulated question *begins with the very formulation of the question* in order to leap from it back into the originary, basic experience of thinking the truth of being.”⁶⁰ There is something deeply counter-intuitive about this: after all, how can a question be formulated before it is ever actually asked and taken as a question? Is not the explicit formulation of a question the final stage in every act of questioning before that question is taken up and

⁵⁷ Heidegger, GA65 233/ CP 184.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, GA65 77/ CP 61: “Although no progression is ever possible from the guiding question to the basic question, yet, conversely, the unfolding of the basic question does at the same time provide the ground for stepping back into a more original possession of the entire history of the guiding question rather than simply repudiating it as something past and gone.”

⁵⁹ Heidegger, GA65 236/ CP 186: “The leap is the leaping into a preparedness for the belonging to the event.”

⁶⁰ Heidegger, GA65 233/ CP 183.

answered? To recall, in the first beginning the questioning-decision proceeded from a basic encounter with beings as such as a whole, only to be explicitly formulated by Aristotle as the question, “what are beings?” Indeed, the basic disposition of wonder—the encounter with the unknown and the unthought—prompted the earliest thinkers to invent questioning itself, the explicit formulation of which would take centuries. Everything is reversed in the other beginning, however: given our position in the history of being, given our questionless epoch, we must first formulate the question in order to grasp the first beginning as a beginning and come to terms with what remained unasked in the first beginning, namely, the truth of being itself.

Who would be the questioner that would formulate the basic question and put it into words? Is this questioner Heidegger himself? Of course—his being-historical writings constitute attempts to do precisely that. More generally, however, it is human beings—the few and the rare—who first formulate this questioning.⁶¹ The reason for this is clear: human beings cannot afford to wait around until such a formulation falls ‘from the sky,’ as it were. However, in formulating the question of the truth of being, in attempting the leap out of metaphysics and all anthropology and into the basic question, human beings must also place into question their very humanity. We are faced with an obvious difficulty, however. If the basic question can only be prepared as the leap, how does this questioning come to pass? Moreover, if this question involves putting into question and leaping out of what was hitherto understood as a human being, then how does this question essentially occur? That is the question. According to Heidegger, the asking of the basic question, if such a question is genuinely asked, is just the essential occurrence of being itself, it is itself the

⁶¹ Cf. Emad, *On the Way*, 50. Emad suggests that it is Da-sein “who” enacts this questioning in an explicit way. However, as I proceed to argue, at this point in Heidegger’s writings, Da-sein is no longer understood as a “who” at all; instead, Da-sein is understood as a “place,” or a “site” where inceptual questioning takes root, but also as the event of such questioning itself.

event that does not happen through the purposive activity of human beings—their wonder and curiosity—but takes place in and through Da-sein as the appropriation of beyng and beings. Heidegger writes: “Beyng essentially occurs as the event. That is not a proposition; it is the non-conceptual reticence of the essence which opens itself only to the fully historical carrying out of inceptual thinking. Beings first arise historically out of the truth of beyng, and that truth is sheltered in the steadfastness of Da-sein.”⁶² In other words, it is questioning itself that institutes this very grounding, and Da-sein as the ground of the asking of the basic question. In other words, the basic question is “grounding” not simply because it is the deepest and the most originary question. Here “Basic,” or “grounding” should not be understood as an adjective describing the kind of questioning the question of the truth of being is; rather, it refers to the way this question ‘takes place’ or occurs. This questioning is a grounding question insofar as it, in taking root, grounds and transforms Da-sein into the ground wherein beings can be restored, and the truth of being sheltered.

Needless to say, by speaking of ground and grounding, the kind of ground Heidegger is after is fundamentally at odds with the metaphysical conception of ground that would purport to answer the question “why?” (for instance, the grounding question of metaphysics, “why are there beings rather than nothing?”) by pointing to some determinate principle as its ultimate ground or reason (for instance, the principle of sufficient reason). Rather, we should hear in this notion of grounding the sense of ground as the element that grounds an electric current. For instance, lightning takes place when an electrostatic charge is induced in the ground of opposite polarity to that in the storm. In a similar way, the kind of ground that is attained by leaping is like the ground that completes a circuit between sky and the earth when the lightning connects the two. In this example, lightning cannot occur without the connection to the earth that would ground it, thus

⁶² Heidegger, GA65 260/ CP 205.

completing the circuit; and, conversely, the earth is not grounding anything unless there is a current flowing through it. To ground beyng it is not enough to merely formulate the basic question—for instance, by writing it down as a series of words on a page. Instead, it is to provide a site where such a questioning can take root, and become enacted precisely as a question.

For this reason, Heidegger writes that “beyng needs Da-sein and does not at all essentially occur without this appropriation.”⁶³ Beyng needs Da-sein that would ground its essential occurrence by providing the ‘place’ wherein its truth can become manifest. Here Da-sein can in no sense be understood on the basis of the human beings⁶⁴; neither can Da-sein be understood “formally” as a “ground of the human being” (a condition of possibility, for instance), since that would also turn it into a represented object.⁶⁵ Instead, Da-sein is now understood as just that articulation, as simply the place wherein beyng can be sheltered in beings and beings can be understood from out of the truth of beyng. Instead, Da-sein is now understood as both the ‘site’ of the event—a place of openness wherein beings and beyng are appropriated to each other—and this very happening. Heidegger writes, “we speak of the Da-sein in the human being as the *coming to pass* of that grounding.”⁶⁶ Put differently, Da-sein “essentially occurs only as belonging to the event [*Ereignis*].”⁶⁷ Da-sein just is this mutual belonging.

Whatever in the future can be understood as ‘human beings’ can be understood as such only on the basis of Da-sein and never the reverse. One might ask at this point: are not art, poetry,

⁶³ Heidegger, GA65 254/ CP 200.

⁶⁴ In *Contributions*, Heidegger is particularly critical of his previous discussion of “human Dasein” in *Being and Time* and deems it highly misleading because it suggests on the one hand that there might be plant and animal Dasein, but also because it has the tendency to reduce the notion of Dasein to what is ordinarily understood as a factual human being. See Heidegger, GA65 300–01 / CP 237.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, GA65 308–09/ CP 244.

⁶⁶ Heidegger, GA65 301/ CP 237.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, GA65 308/ CP 244.

and thought human activities, which presuppose human beings to create them? Certainly, Heidegger claims, Da-sein needs physical beings for it to occur and cannot ground anything without them. However, art, poetry, and thought cannot be understood on the basis of what we already understand as human activity—for instance, the production of this or that object of art. Instead, whatever we may understand as human beings in the future must precisely be understood on the basis of their art, poetry, and thought. In this sense, art, poetry, and thought will ‘precede’ human beings themselves insofar as the latter are determined out of the former.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that by instituting Da-sein as the site wherein inceptual questioning can take root, we have not reached the end, the ultimate terminus of questioning. Indeed, we have not even begun. Even if such a beginning did come to pass, it would not be the end of questioning, but rather, its true beginning. This is because, insofar as this questioning continues to be disposed through restraint, the dispositional center of shock and diffidence, in asking ‘about’ being, what is sought is not the ultimate answer to the question of the truth of being—an answer that would close it once and for all and that would silence all future questioning. Instead, to question being in its truth, to question the essential occurrence of being as the truth of beings, is to affirm the very question-worthiness of being itself. “For the basic question,” Heidegger writes, “being is not the answer or the realm in which the answer resides, but is what is most question-worthy.”⁶⁸ It is to continue to affirm seeking itself. None of this is to suggest, however, that the basic question does not have a response. Were that the case, the basic question could not be a genuine question at all, but would instead be a mere rhetorical question that could not open genuine possibilities for thinking or knowing. Indeed, as pointed out previously, the privileging of seeking is not the renouncement of all finding and all knowledge. Quite the

⁶⁸ Heidegger, GA65 76/ CP 61.

reverse: whereas ordinarily seeking is resolved in finding, “the original finding is sheltered in the original sheltering precisely as seeking qua seeking. To honor what is most question-worthy, to abide in the questioning, steadfastness.” What this means is that, the answer (or answers) to the basic question is only possible to the extent that questioning is maintained as a questioning, that is, constantly reinterpreted and posed as a questioning.

CONCLUSION

If the first questioning decision concerning the essence of beings is more fundamental than any decision that will follow in its wake—if it is understood as a genuine inception of thinking, and not a mere starting point—it is such only because it will itself provide the ground and open essential possibilities for thinking and being that will be fully developed over the entire history of metaphysics. Indeed, inasmuch as we still question from within the purview of the first beginning, we are still constrained by that original questioning-decision. This decision has been made for us, but it is nevertheless constantly affirmed in every mode of inquiry. It is affirmed every time we wonder at the what, or, even when we attempt to cover it over by seeking the why, or whatever we may understand today by the term ‘explanation.’ Every questioning that operates from within this purview, no matter how sophisticated, continues to affirm that, at the very least, what is asked about is already given as something that admits of meaning or sense—in other words, is given as a being. In this way, our basic disposition remains one of wonder. Even if we understand curiosity as entirely ‘derivative’ of wonder, it still operates from within the purview of the latter disposition. Thus, although curiosity may be said to fuel technological and scientific inventions and discoveries, it does so only because the latter are made possible on the basis of a questioning that operates within the original space opened by wonder as the first decision of thinking.

Nevertheless, although the originary questioning decision over the essence of beings is continually affirmed, it is never affirmed and grasped precisely *as a decision*, which is why it remains possible to conceive of philosophy as a mere curiosity. However, this is also why Heidegger demands that we return to the first beginning of thinking. To be sure, we cannot simply renew the first beginning as though we could experience its plight for ourselves in the very same way the Greeks did. That is to say, even though this beginning stands in a definite relation to us

today, we cannot experience the unknown and the unthought as though we could erase the entire history of metaphysical and scientific thought. The only responsible way to take up the first decision, then, is neither to return to it by imitating it, nor simply to set it aside; rather, it will be to place it into question, which also means, to grasp it precisely as a decision.

According to Heidegger, only in this way can we become attuned to the need and the necessity of beginning again. Only by going back to the history of the first beginning—that is metaphysics—can we recognize our current condition in its proper historical context. Our current emergency, the planetary dominion of machination, will thus be revealed not as a contingent happening of our time, but as the result of a historical unfolding the possibilities of which were already opened (but not necessarily ‘determined’) in its very inception. In so doing, Heidegger claims, we may find ourselves in a position to experience restraint as the basic disposition. In other words, through a more originary appropriation of our history and our place in it, we might be compelled to retrieve what throughout the long history of metaphysics remained unasked, and formulate the question of the truth of being. Such a formulation, however, would neither be the end of thinking nor the end of questioning, but another beginning.

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