

HEIDEGGER:
What Is Metaphysics? (1929*)
***The basic text of Heidegger's inaugural lecture at the U. of Freiburg in**
1929
(an Afterword and an Introduction were added later)

**Note: I added the section
and paragraph numbers
found in this text. I did this
to make it easier to refer to
the text in the classroom
and in the lecture notes.
-- Based on a translation
by David Farrell Krell**

1. "What is metaphysics?" The question awakens expectations of a discussion about metaphysics. This we will forgo. Instead we will take up a particular metaphysical question. In this way it seems we will let ourselves be transposed directly into metaphysics. Only in this way will we provide metaphysics the proper occasion to introduce itself. Our plan begins with the unfolding of a metaphysical inquiry, then tries to elaborate the question, and concludes by answering it.

I. The Unfolding of a Metaphysical Inquiry

2. From the point of view of sound common sense philosophy is in Hegel's words "the inverted world." Hence the peculiar nature of our undertaking requires a preliminary sketch. This will take shape about a twofold character of metaphysical interrogation.

3. First, every metaphysical question always encompasses the whole range of metaphysical problems. Each question is itself always the whole. Therefore, second, every metaphysical question can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is present together with the question, that is, is placed in question. From this we conclude that metaphysical inquiry must be posed as a whole and from the essential position of the existence [Dasein] that questions. We are questioning, here and now, for ourselves. Our existence—in the community of researchers, teachers, and students—is determined by science. What happens to us, essentially, in the grounds of our existence, when science becomes our passion?

4. The scientific fields are quite diverse. The ways they treat their objects of inquiry differ fundamentally. Today only the technical organization of universities and faculties consolidates this burgeoning multiplicity of disciplines; the practical establishment of goals by each discipline provides the only meaningful source of unity. Nonetheless, the rootedness of the sciences in their essential ground has atrophied.

5. Yet when we follow their most proper intention, in all the sciences we relate ourselves to beings themselves. Precisely from the point of view of the sciences or disciplines no field takes precedence over another, neither nature over history nor vice versa. No particular way of treating objects of inquiry dominates the others. Mathematical knowledge is no more rigorous than philological-historical knowledge. It merely has the character of "exactness," which does not coincide with rigor. To demand exactness in the study of history is to violate the idea of the specific rigor of the humanities. The relation to the world that pervades all the sciences as such lets them — each according to its particular content and mode of being — seek beings themselves in order to make them objects of investigation and to determine their grounds.

6. According to the idea behind them, in the sciences we approach what is essential in all things. This distinctive relation to the world in which we turn toward beings themselves is supported and guided by a freely chosen attitude of human existence. To be sure, man's prescientific and extrascientific activities also are related to beings. But science is exceptional in that, in a way peculiar to it, it gives the matter itself explicitly and solely the first and last word. In such impartiality of inquiring, determining, and grounding, a peculiarly delineated submission to beings themselves obtains, in order that they may reveal themselves. This position of service in research and theory evolves in such a way as to become the ground of the possibility of a proper though limited leadership in the whole of human existence. The special relation science sustains to the world and the attitude of man that guides it can of course be fully grasped only when we see and comprehend what happens in the relation to the world so attained. Man — one being among others — "pursues science." In this "pursuit," nothing less transpires than the irruption by one being called "man" into the whole of beings, indeed in such a way that in and through this irruption beings break open and show what they are and how they are. The irruption that breaks open in its way helps beings above all to themselves.

7. This trinity—relation to the world, attitude, and irruption—in its radical unity brings a luminous simplicity and aptness of Dasein to scientific existence. If we are to take explicit possession of the Dasein illuminated in this way for ourselves, then we must say:

That to which the relation to the world refers are beings themselves—and nothing besides.

That from which every attitude takes its guidance are beings themselves—and nothing further.

That with which the scientific confrontation in the irruption occurs are beings themselves—and beyond that nothing. But what is remarkable is that, precisely in the way scientific man secures to himself what is most properly his, he speaks of something different. What should be examined are beings only, and besides that — nothing; beings alone, and further — nothing; solely beings, and beyond that — nothing.

8. What about this nothing? The nothing is rejected precisely by science, given up as a nullity. But when we give up the nothing in such a way don't we just concede it? Can we, however, speak of concession when we concede nothing? But perhaps our confused talk already degenerates into an empty squabble over words. Against it science must now reassert its seriousness and soberness of mind, insisting that it is concerned solely with beings. The nothing — what else can it be for science but an outrage and a phantasm? If science is right, then only one thing is sure: science wishes to know nothing of the nothing. Ultimately this is the scientifically rigorous conception of the nothing. We know it, the nothing, in that we wish to know nothing about it.

9. Science wants to know nothing of the nothing. But even so it is certain that when science tries to express its proper essence it calls upon the nothing for help. It has recourse to what it rejects. What incongruous state of affairs reveals itself here? With this reflection on our contemporary existence as one determined by science we find ourselves enmeshed in a controversy. In the course of this controversy a question has already evolved. It only requires explicit formulation: How is it with the nothing?

II. The Elaboration of the Question

10. The elaboration of the question of the nothing must bring us to the point where an answer becomes possible or the impossibility of any answer becomes clear. The nothing is conceded. With a studied indifference science abandons it as what “there is not.”

11. All the same, we shall try to ask about the nothing. What is the nothing? Our very first approach to this question has something unusual about it. In our asking we posit the nothing in advance as something that “is” such and such; we posit it as a being. But that is exactly what it is distinguished from. Interrogating the nothing — asking what and how it, the nothing, is — turns what is interrogated into its opposite. The question deprives itself of its own object. Accordingly, every answer to this question is also impossible from the start. For it necessarily assumes the form: the nothing “is” this or that. With regard to the nothing question and answer alike are inherently absurd.

12. But it is not science’s rejection that first of all teaches us this. The commonly cited ground rule of all thinking, the proposition that contradiction is to be avoided, universal “logic” itself, lays low this question. For thinking, which is always essentially thinking about something, must act in a way contrary to its own essence when it thinks of the nothing. Since it remains wholly impossible for us to make the nothing into an object have we not already come to the end of our inquiry into the nothing — assuming that in this question “logic” is of supreme importance, that the intellect is the means, and thought the way, to conceive the nothing originally and to decide about its possible exposure?

13. But are we allowed to tamper with the rule of “logic”? Isn’t intellect the taskmaster in this question of the nothing? Only with its help can we at all define the nothing and pose it as a problem — which, it is true, only devours itself. For the nothing is the negation of the totality of beings; it is nonbeing pure and simple. But with that we bring the nothing under the higher determination of the negative, viewing it as the negated. However, according to the reigning and never challenged doctrine of “logic,” negation is a specific act of the intellect. How then can we in our question of the nothing, indeed in the question of its questionability, wish to brush the intellect aside? Are we altogether sure about what we are presupposing in this matter? Do not the “not,” negatedness, and thereby negation too represent the higher determination under which the nothing falls as a particular kind of negated matter? Is the nothing given only because the “not,” i.e., negation, is given? Or is it the other way around? Are negation and the “not” given only because the nothing is given? That has not been decided; it has not even been raised expressly as a question. We assert that the nothing is more original than the “not” and negation.

14. If this thesis is right, then the possibility of negation as an act

of the intellect, and thereby the intellect itself, are somehow dependent upon the nothing. Then how can the intellect hope to decide about the nothing? Does the ostensible absurdity of question and answer with respect to the nothing in the end rest solely in a blind conceit of the far-ranging intellect? But if we do not let ourselves be misled by the formal impossibility of the question of the nothing; if we pose the question in spite of this; then we must at least satisfy what remains the basic demand for the possible advancing of every question. If the nothing itself is to be questioned as we have been questioning it, then it must be given beforehand. We must be able to encounter it.

15. Where shall we seek the nothing? Where will we find the nothing? In order to find something must we not already know in general that it is there? Indeed! At first and for the most part man can seek only when he has anticipated the being at hand of what he is looking for. Now the nothing is what we are seeking. Is there ultimately such a thing as a search without that anticipation, a search to which pure discovery belongs?

16. Whatever we may make of it, we do know the nothing, if only as a word we rattle off every day. For this common nothing that glides so inconspicuously through our chatter, blanched with the anemic pallor of the obvious, we can without hesitating furnish even a "definition": The nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings. Doesn't this characterization of the nothing ultimately provide an indication of the direction from which alone the nothing can come to meet us? The totality of beings must be given in advance so as to be able to fall prey straightaway to negation — in which the nothing itself would then be manifest.

17. But even if we ignore the questionableness of the relation between negation and the nothing, how should we who are essentially finite make the whole of beings penetrable in themselves and especially for us? We can of course conjure up the whole of beings in an "idea," then negate what we have imagined in our thought, and thus "think" it negated. In this way we do attain the formal concept of the imagined nothing but never the nothing itself. But the nothing is nothing, and, if the nothing represents total indistinguishability, no distinction can obtain between the imagined and the "genuine" nothing. And the "genuine" nothing itself — isn't this that camouflaged but absurd concept of a nothing that is? For the last time now the objections of the intellect would call a halt to our search, whose legitimacy, however, can be demonstrated only on the basis of a fundamental experience of the nothing.

18. As surely as we can never comprehend absolutely the ensemble of beings in themselves we certainly do find ourselves stationed in the midst of beings that are revealed somehow as a whole. In the end an essential distinction prevails between comprehending the ensemble of beings in themselves and finding oneself in the midst of beings as a whole. The former is impossible in principle. The latter happens all the time in our existence. It does seem as though we cling to this or that particular being, precisely in our everyday preoccupations, as though we were completely abandoned to this or that region of beings. No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the "whole," if only in a shadowy way. Even and precisely then when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves this "as a whole" overcomes us — for example in genuine boredom. Boredom is still distant when it is only this book or that play, that business or this idleness, that drags on. It irrupts when "one is bored." Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals beings as a whole.

19. Another possibility of such revelation is concealed in our joy in the present existence — and not simply in the person — of a human being whom we love. Such being attuned, in which we "are" one way or another and which determines us through and through, lets us find ourselves among beings as a whole. The founding mode of attunement [die Befindlichkeit der Stimmung] not only reveals beings as a whole in various ways, but this revealing — far from being merely incidental — is also the basic occurrence of our Dasein.

20. What we call a "feeling" is neither a transitory epiphenomenon of our thinking and willing behavior nor simply an impulse that provokes such behavior nor merely a present condition we have to put up with somehow or other. But just when moods of this sort bring us face to face with beings as a whole they conceal from us the nothing we are seeking. Now we come to share even less in the opinion that the negation of beings as a whole that are revealed to us in mood places us before the nothing. Such a thing could happen only in a correspondingly original mood which in the most proper sense of unveiling reveals the nothing.

21. Does such an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur in human existence? This can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the

fundamental mood of anxiety. By this anxiety we do not mean the quite common anxiousness, ultimately reducible to fearfulness, which all too readily comes over us. Anxiety is basically different from fear. We become afraid in the face of this or that particular being that threatens us in this or that particular respect. Fear in the face of something is also in each case a fear for something in particular. Because fear possesses this trait of being “fear in the face of” and “fear for,” he who fears and is afraid is captive to the mood in which he finds himself. Striving to rescue himself from this particular thing, he becomes unsure of everything else and completely “loses his head.”

22. Anxiety does not let such confusion arise. Much to the contrary, a peculiar calm pervades it. Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of... ,but not in the face of this or that thing. Anxiety in the face of . . . is always anxiety for . . . , but not for this or that. The indeterminateness of that in the face of which and for which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it. In a familiar phrase this indeterminateness comes to the fore.

23. In anxiety, we say, “one feels ill at ease [es ist einem unheimlich].” What is “it” that makes “one” feel ill at ease? We cannot say what it is before which one feels ill at ease. As a whole it is so for him. All things and we ourselves sink into indifference. This, however, not in the sense of mere disappearance. Rather in this very receding things turn toward us. The receding of beings as a whole that closes in on us in anxiety oppresses us. We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this “no hold on things” comes over us and remains. Anxiety reveals the nothing.

24. We “hover” in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves — we who are in being — in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves. At bottom therefore it is not as though “you” or “I” feel ill at ease; rather it is this way for some “one.” In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Dasein is all that is still there.

25. Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the “is” falls silent. That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk only proves the presence of the nothing. That anxiety reveals the nothing man himself immediately

demonstrates when anxiety has dissolved. In the lucid vision sustained by fresh remembrance we must say that that in the face of which and for which we were anxious was “really — nothing. Indeed: the nothing itself — as such — was there.

26. With the fundamental mood of anxiety we have arrived at that occurrence in human existence in which the nothing is revealed and from which it must be interrogated. How is it with the nothing?

III. The Response to the Question

27. We have already won the answer which for our purposes is at least at first the only essential one when we take heed that the question of the nothing remains actually posed. This requires that we actively complete that transformation of man into his Dasein which every instance of anxiety occasions in us, in order to get a grip on the nothing revealed there as it makes itself known. At the same time this demands that we expressly hold at a distance those designations of the nothing that do not result from its claims.

28. The nothing reveals itself in anxiety — but not as a being. Just as little is it given as an object. Anxiety is no kind of grasping of the nothing. All the same, the nothing reveals itself in and through anxiety, although, to repeat, not in such a way that the nothing becomes manifest in our malaise quite apart from beings as a whole. Rather we said that in anxiety the nothing is encountered at one with beings as a whole. What does this “at one with” mean?

29. In anxiety beings as a whole become superfluous. In what sense does this happen? Beings are not annihilated by anxiety, so that nothing is left. How could they be, when anxiety finds itself precisely in utter impotence with regard to beings as a whole? Rather the nothing makes itself known with beings and in beings expressly as a slipping away of the whole.

30. No kind of annihilation of the ensemble of beings as such takes place in anxiety; just as little do we produce a negation of beings as a whole in order to attain the nothing for the first time. Apart from the consideration that the expressive function of a negating assertion remains foreign to anxiety as such, we also come always too late with such a negation which should produce the nothing. The nothing rises to meet us already before that. We said it is encountered “at one with” beings that are slipping away as a whole.

31. In anxiety occurs a shrinking back before . . . which is surely not any sort of flight but rather a kind of bewildered calm. This “back before” takes its departure from the nothing. The nothing itself does not attract; it is essentially repelling. But this repulsion is itself as such a parting gesture toward beings that are submerging as a whole. This wholly repelling gesture toward beings that are in retreat as a whole, which is the action of the nothing that oppresses Dasein in anxiety, is the essence of the nothing: nihilation. It is neither an annihilation of beings nor does it spring from a negation. Nihilation will not submit to calculation in terms of annihilation and negation. The nothing itself nihilates.

32. Nihilation is not some fortuitous incident. Rather, as the repelling gesture toward the retreating whole of beings, it discloses these beings in their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other — with respect to the nothing. In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings — and not nothing. But this “and not nothing” we add in our talk is not some kind of appended clarification. Rather it makes possible in advance the revelation of beings in general. The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that it brings Dasein for the first time before beings as such.

33. Only on the ground of the original revelation of the nothing can human existence approach and penetrate beings. But since existence in its essence relates itself to beings — those which it is not and that which it is — it emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already revealed. Dasein means: being held out into the nothing.

34. Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. This being beyond beings we call “transcendence.” If in the ground of its essence Dasein were not transcending, which now means, if it were not in advance holding itself out into the nothing, then it could never be related to beings nor even to itself. Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.

35. With that the answer to the question of the nothing is gained. The nothing is neither an object nor any being at all. The nothing comes forward neither for itself nor next to beings, to which it would, as it were, adhere. For human existence the nothing makes possible the openedness of beings as such. The nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of beings; rather it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such. In the

Being of beings the nihilation of the nothing occurs.

36. But now a suspicion we have been suppressing too long must finally find expression. If Dasein can relate itself to beings only by holding itself out into the nothing and can exist only thus; and if the nothing is originally disclosed only in anxiety; then must we not hover in this anxiety constantly in order to be able to exist at all? And have we not ourselves confessed that this original anxiety is rare? But above all else, we all do exist and relate ourselves to beings which we may or may not be — without this anxiety. Is this not an arbitrary invention and the nothing attributed to it a flight of fancy?

37. Yet what does it mean that this original anxiety occurs only in rare moments? Nothing else than that the nothing is at first and for the most part distorted with respect to its originality. How, then? In this way: we usually lose ourselves altogether among beings in a certain way. The more we turn toward beings in our preoccupations the less we let beings as a whole slip away as such and the more we turn away from the nothing. Just as surely do we hasten into the public superficialities of existence. And yet this constant if ambiguous turning away from the nothing accords, within certain limits, with the most proper significance of the nothing. In its nihilation the nothing directs us precisely toward beings. The nothing nihilates incessantly without our really knowing of this occurrence in the manner of our everyday knowledge.

38. What testifies to the constant and widespread though distorted revelation of the nothing in our existence more compellingly than negation? But negation does not conjure the “not” out of itself as a means for making distinctions and oppositions in whatever is given, inserting itself, as it were, in between what is given. How could negation produce the not from itself when it can make denials only when something deniable is already granted to it? But how could the deniable and what is to be denied be viewed as something susceptible to the not unless all thinking as such has caught sight of the not already? But the not can become manifest only when its origin, the nihilation of the nothing in general, and therewith the nothing itself, is disengaged from concealment. The not does not originate through negation; rather negation is grounded in the not that springs from the nihilation of the nothing. But negation is also only one way of nihilating, that is, only one sort of behavior that has been grounded beforehand in the nihilation of the nothing.

39. In this way the above thesis in its main features has been

proven: the nothing is the origin of negation, not vice versa. If the power of the intellect in the field of inquiry into the nothing and into Being is thus shattered, then the destiny of the reign of "logic" in philosophy is thereby decided. The idea of "logic" itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning.

40. No matter how much or in how many ways negation, expressed or implied, permeates all thought, it is by no means the sole authoritative witness for the revelation of the nothing belonging essentially to Dasein. For negation cannot claim to be either the sole or the leading nihilative behavior in which Dasein remains shaken by the nihilation of the nothing. Unyielding antagonism and stinging rebuke have a more abysmal source than the measured negation of thought. Galling failure and merciless prohibition require some deeper answer. Bitter privation is more burdensome.

41. These possibilities of nihilative behavior — forces in which Dasein bears its thrownness without mastering it — are not types of mere negation. That does not prevent them, however, from speaking out in the "no" and in negation. Indeed here for the first time the barrenness and range of negation betray themselves. The saturation of existence by nihilative behavior testifies to the constant though doubtlessly obscured manifestation of the nothing that only anxiety originally reveals. But this implies that the original anxiety in existence is usually repressed. Anxiety is there. It is only sleeping. Its breath quivers perpetually through Dasein, only slightly in those who are jittery, imperceptibly in the "Oh, yes" and the "Oh, no" of men of affairs; but most readily in the reserved, and most assuredly in those who are basically daring. But those daring ones are sustained by that on which they expend themselves — in order thus to preserve a final greatness in existence.

42. The anxiety of those who are daring cannot be opposed to joy or even to the comfortable enjoyment of tranquilized bustle. It stands outside all such opposition — in secret alliance with the cheerfulness and gentleness of creative longing. Original anxiety can awaken in existence at any moment. It needs no unusual event to rouse it. Its sway is as thoroughgoing as its possible occasionings are trivial. It is always ready, though it only seldom springs, and we are snatched away and left hanging.

43. Being held out into the nothing — as Dasein is on the ground of concealed anxiety makes man a place-holder of the nothing. We are so finite that we cannot even bring ourselves originally before the nothing through our own decision and will. So

profoundly does finitude entrench itself in existence that our most proper and deepest limitation refuses to yield to our freedom. Being held out into the nothing — as Dasein is — on the ground of concealed anxiety is its surpassing of beings as a whole. It is transcendence.

44. Our inquiry concerning the nothing should bring us face to face with metaphysics itself. The name “metaphysics” derives from the Greek *meta ta physika*. This peculiar title was later interpreted as characterizing the inquiry, the meta or trans extending out “over” beings as such. Metaphysics is inquiry beyond or over beings which aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp.

45. In the question concerning the nothing such an inquiry beyond or over beings, as being as a whole, takes place. It proves thereby to be a “metaphysical” question. At the outset we ascribed a twofold character to such questions: first, each metaphysical question always encompasses the whole of metaphysics; second, every metaphysical question implicates the interrogating Dasein in each case in the question. To what extent does the question concerning the nothing permeate and embrace the whole of metaphysics?

46. For a long time metaphysics has expressed the nothing in a proposition clearly susceptible of more than one meaning: *ex nihilo nihil fit* — from nothing, nothing comes to be. Although in discussions of the proposition the nothing itself never really becomes a problem, the respective views of the nothing nevertheless express the guiding fundamental conception of beings. Ancient metaphysics conceives the nothing in the sense of nonbeing, that is, unformed matter, matter which cannot take form as an informed being that would offer an outward appearance or aspect (*eidos*). To be in being is to be a self-forming form that exhibits itself as such in an image (as a spectacle). The origins, legitimacy, and limits of this conception of Being are as little discussed as the nothing itself. On the other hand, Christian dogma denies the truth of the proposition *ex nihilo nihil fit* and thereby bestows on the nothing a transformed significance, the sense of the complete absence of beings apart from God: *ex nihilo fit — ens creatum* [From nothing comes— created being]. Now the nothing becomes the counterconcept to being proper, the *summum ens*, God as *ens increatum*. Here too the interpretation of the nothing designates the basic conception of beings. But the metaphysical discussion of beings stays on the same level as the question of the nothing. The questions of Being and of the nothing as such are not posed. Therefore no

one is bothered by the difficulty that if God creates out of nothing precisely He must be able to relate Himself to the nothing. But if God is God he cannot know the nothing, assuming that the “Absolute” excludes all nothingness.

47. This cursory historical review shows the nothing as the counter-concept to being proper, that is, as its negation. But if the nothing becomes any problem at all, then this opposition does not merely undergo a somewhat more significant determination; rather it awakens for the first time the genuine formulation of the metaphysical question concerning the Being of beings. The nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but reveals itself as belonging to the Being of beings.

48. “Pure Being and pure Nothing are therefore the same.” This proposition of Hegel’s (*Science of Logic*, vol. I, *Werke* III, 74) is correct. Being and the nothing do belong together, not because both — from the point of view of the Hegelian concept of thought — agree in their indeterminateness and immediacy, but rather because Being itself is essentially finite and reveals itself only in the transcendence of Dasein which is held out into the nothing.

49. Assuming that the question of Being as such is the encompassing question of metaphysics, then the question of the nothing proves to be such that it embraces the whole of metaphysics. But the question of the nothing at the same time pervades the whole of metaphysics, since it forces us to face the problem of the origin of negation, that is, ultimately, to face up to the decision concerning the legitimacy of the rule of “logic” in metaphysics.

50. The old proposition *ex nihilo nihil fit* is therefore found to contain another sense, one appropriate to the problem of Being itself, that runs: *ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit* [From the nothing all beings as beings come to be]. Only in the nothing of Dasein do beings as a whole, in accord with their most proper possibility — that is, in a finite way — come to themselves. To what extent then has the question of the nothing, if it is a metaphysical question, implicated our questioning Dasein? We have characterized our existence, experienced here and now, as essentially determined by science. If our existence so defined is posed in the question of the nothing, then it must have become questionable through this question.

51. Scientific existence possesses its simplicity and aptness in that it relates to beings themselves in a distinctive way and only to them. Science would like to dismiss the nothing with a lordly

wave of the hand. But in our inquiry concerning the nothing it has by now become manifest that scientific existence is possible only if in advance it holds itself out into the nothing. It understands itself for what it is only when it does not give up the nothing. The presumed soberness of mind and superiority of science become laughable when it does not take the nothing seriously. Only because the nothing is manifest can science make beings themselves objects of investigation. Only if science exists on the base of metaphysics can it advance further in its essential task, which is not to amass and classify bits of knowledge but to disclose in ever-renewed fashion the entire region of truth in nature and history.

52. Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us. Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder — the revelation of the nothing — does the “why?” loom before us. Only because the “why” is possible as such can we in a definite way inquire into grounds, and ground them. Only because we can inquire and ground is the destiny of our existence placed in the hands of the researcher. The question of the nothing puts us, the questioners, in question. It is a metaphysical question.

53. Human existence can relate to beings only if it holds itself out into the nothing. Going beyond beings occurs in the essence of Dasein. But this going beyond is metaphysics itself. This implies that metaphysics belongs to the “nature of man.” It is neither a division of academic philosophy nor a field of arbitrary notions. Metaphysics is the basic occurrence of Dasein. It is Dasein itself. Because the truth of metaphysics dwells in this groundless ground it stands in closest proximity to the constantly lurking possibility of deepest error. For this reason no amount of scientific rigor attains to the seriousness of metaphysics. Philosophy can never be measured by the standard of the idea of science.

54. If the question of the nothing unfolded here has actually questioned us, then we have not simply brought metaphysics before us in an extrinsic manner. Nor have we merely been “transposed” to it. We cannot be transposed there at all, because insofar as we exist we are always there already. “For by nature, my friend, man’s mind dwells in philosophy” (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 279a). So long as man exists, philosophizing of some sort occurs. Philosophy — what we call philosophy — is metaphysics getting under way, in which philosophy comes to itself and to its explicit tasks. Philosophy gets under way only by a peculiar

insertion of our own existence into the fundamental possibilities of Dasein as a whole. For this insertion it is of decisive importance, first, that we allow space for beings as a whole; second, that we release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say, that we liberate ourselves from those idols everyone has and to which he is wont to go cringing; and finally, that we let the sweep of our suspense take its full course, so that it swings back into the basic question of metaphysics which the nothing itself compels: 'Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?'

HEIDEGGER:

On the Essence of Truth (1943*)

***Date of original version. This translation is based on fourth edition of the essay (1961)**

**Note: I added the section and paragraph numbers found in this text. I did this to make it easier to refer to the text in the classroom and in the lecture notes.
Based on a translation by John Sallis**

1. Our topic is the essence of truth. The question regarding the essence of truth is not concerned with whether truth is a truth of practical experience or of economic calculation, the truth of a technical consideration or of political sagacity, or, in particular, a truth of scientific research or of artistic composition, or even the

truth of thoughtful reflection or of cultic belief. The question of essence disregards all this and attends to the one thing that in general distinguishes every "truth" as truth.

2. Yet with this question concerning essence do we not soar too high into the void of generality which deprives all thinking of breath? Does not the extravagance of such questioning bring to light the groundlessness of all philosophy? A radical thinking that turns to what is actual must surely from the first insist bluntly on establishing the actual truth which today gives us a measure and a stand against the confusion of opinions and reckonings. In the face of this actual need what use is the question concerning the essence of truth, this "abstract" question that disregards everything actual? Is not the question of essence the most inessential and superfluous that could be asked?

3. No one can evade the evident certainty of these considerations. None can lightly neglect their compelling seriousness. But what is it that speaks in these considerations? "Sound" common sense. It harps on the demand for palpable utility and inveighs against knowledge of the essence of beings, which essential knowledge has long been called "philosophy." Common sense has its own necessity; it asserts its rights with the weapon peculiarly suitable to it, namely, appeal to the "obviousness of its claims and considerations. However, philosophy can never refute common sense, for the latter is deaf to the language of philosophy. Nor may it even wish to do so, since common sense is blind to what philosophy sets before its essential vision.

4. Moreover, we ourselves remain within the sensibleness of common sense to the extent that we suppose ourselves to be secure in those multiform "truths" of practical experience and action, of research, composition, and belief. We ourselves intensify that resistance which the "obvious" has to every demand made by what is questionable. Therefore even if some questioning concerning truth is necessary, what we then demand is an answer to the question as to where we stand today. We want to know what our situation is today. We call for the goal which should be posited for man in and for his history. We want the actual "truth." Well then — truth!

5. But in calling for the actual "truth" we must already know what truth as such means. Or do we know this only by "feeling" and in a general way"? But is not such vague "knowing" and our indifference regarding it more desolate than sheer ignorance of the essence of truth?

1. The Usual Concept of Truth

6. What do we ordinarily understand by “truth”? This elevated yet at the same time worn and almost dulled word “truth” means what makes a true thing true. What is a true thing? We say, for example, “It is a true joy to cooperate in the accomplishment of this task.” We mean that it is purely and actually a joy. The true is the actual. Accordingly, we speak of true gold in distinction from false. False gold is not actually what it appears to be. It is merely a “semblance” and thus is not actual. What is not actual is taken to be the opposite of the actual. But what merely seems to be gold is nevertheless something actual. Accordingly, we say, more precisely, actual gold is genuine gold. Yet both are “actual,” the circulating counterfeit no less than the genuine gold. What is true about genuine gold thus cannot be demonstrated merely by its actuality. The question recurs: what do “genuine” and “true” mean here? Genuine gold is that actual gold the actuality of which is in accordance [in der Ubereinstimmung steht] with what, always and in advance, we “properly” mean by “gold.” Conversely, wherever we suspect false gold, we say: “Here something is not in accord” [stimmt nicht]. On the other hand, we say of whatever is “as it should be”: “It is in accord.” The matter is in accord [Die Sache stimmt].

7. However, we call true not only an actual joy, genuine gold, and all beings of such kind, but also and above all we call true or false our statements about beings, which can themselves be genuine or not with regard to their kind, which can be thus or otherwise in their actuality. A statement is true if what it means and says is in accordance with the matter about which the statement is made. Here too we say, “It is in accord.” Now, though, it is not the matter that is in accord but rather the proposition.

8. The true, whether it be a matter or a proposition, is what accords, the accordant [das Stimmende]. Being true and truth here signify accord, and that in a double sense: on the one hand, the consonance [Einstimmigkeit] of a matter with what is supposed in advance regarding it and, on the other hand, the accordance of what is meant in the statement with the matter.

9. This dual character of the accord is brought to light by the traditional definition of truth: *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*. This can be taken to mean: truth is the correspondence [Angleichung] of the matter to knowledge. But it can also be taken as saying: truth is the correspondence of

knowledge to the matter. Admittedly, the above definition is usually stated only in the formula *veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem* [truth is the adequation of intellect to thing] Yet truth so conceived, propositional truth, is possible only on the basis of material truth [*Sachwahrheit*], of *adaequatio rei ad intellectum* [adequation of thing to intellect]. Both concepts of the essence of *veritas* have continually in view a conforming to ... [*Sichrichten nach . .*]' and hence think truth as correctness [*Richtigkeit*].

10. Nonetheless, the one is not the mere inversion of the other. On the contrary, in each case *intellectus* and *res* are thought differently. In order to recognize this we must trace the usual formula for the ordinary concept of truth back to its most recent (i.e., the medieval) origin. *Veritas* as *adaequatio rei ad intellectum* does not imply the later transcendental conception of Kant — possible only on the basis of the subjectivity of man's essence — that "objects conform to our knowledge." Rather, it implies the Christian theological belief that, with respect to what it is and whether it is, a matter, as created (*ens creatum*), is only insofar as it corresponds to the idea preconceived in the *intellectus divinus*, i.e., in the mind of God, and thus measures up to the idea (is correct) and in this sense is "true." The *intellectus humanus* too is an *ens creatum*. As a capacity bestowed upon man by God, it must satisfy its idea. But the understanding measures up to the idea only by accomplishing in its propositions the correspondence of what is thought to the matter, which in its turn must be in conformity with the idea. If all beings are "created," the possibility of the truth of human knowledge is grounded in the fact that matter and proposition measure up to the idea in the same way and therefore are fitted to each other on the basis of the unity of the divine plan of creation.

11. *Veritas* as *adaequatio rei (creandae) ad intellectum (divinum)* guarantees *veritas* as *adaequatio intellectus (humani) ad rem (creatam)*. Throughout, *veritas* essentially implies *convenientia*, the coming of beings themselves, as created, into agreement with the Creator, an "accord" with regard to the way they are determined in the order of creation. But this order, detached from the notion of creation, can also be represented in a general and indefinite way as a world-order. The theologically conceived order of creation is replaced by the capacity of all objects to be planned by means of a worldly reason [*Weltvernunft*] which supplies the law for itself and thus also claims that its procedure is immediately intelligible (what is considered "logical"). That the essence of propositional truth consists in the correctness of statements needs no further special proof.

12. Even where an effort is made — with a conspicuous lack of success — to explain how correctness is to occur, it is already presupposed as being the essence of truth. Likewise, material truth always signifies the consonance of something at hand with the "rational" concept of its essence. The impression arises that this definition of the essence of truth is independent of the interpretation of the essence of the Being of all beings, which always includes a corresponding interpretation of the essence of man as the bearer and executor of intellectus. Thus the formula for the essence of truth (*veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei*) comes to have its general validity as something immediately evident to everyone. Under the domination of the obviousness which this concept of truth seems to have but which is hardly attended to as regards its essential grounds, it is considered equally obvious that truth has an opposite, and that there is untruth. The untruth of the proposition (incorrectness) is the non-accordance of the statement with the matter. The untruth of the matter (non-genuineness) signifies non-agreement of a being with its essence. In each case untruth is conceived as a non-accord. The latter falls outside the essence of truth. Therefore when it is a question of comprehending the pure essence of truth, untruth, as such an opposite of truth, can be put aside.

13. But then is there any further need at all for a special unveiling of the essence of truth? Is not the pure essence of truth already adequately represented in the generally accepted concept, which is upset by no theory and is secured by its obviousness?

Moreover, if we take the tracing back of propositional truth to material truth to be what in the first instance it shows itself to be, namely a theological explanation, and if we then keep the philosophical definition completely pure of all admixture of theology and limit the concept of truth to propositional truth, then we encounter an old — though not the oldest — tradition of thinking, according to which truth is the accordance (*homoiosis*) of a statement (*logos*) with a matter (*pragma*). What is it about statements that here remains still worthy of question — granted that we know what is meant by accordance of a statement with the matter? Do we know that?

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2. The Inner Possibility of Accordance

14. We speak of accordance in various senses. We say, for example, considering two five-mark coins lying on the table: they are in accordance with one another. They come into accord in the oneness of their outward appearance. Hence they have the latter in common, and thus they are in this regard alike. Furthermore, we speak of accordance whenever, for example,

we state regarding one of the five-mark coins: this coin is round. Here the statement is in accordance with the thing. Now the relation obtains, not between thing and thing, but rather between a statement and a thing. But wherein are the thing and the statement supposed to be in accordance, considering that the relata are manifestly different in their outward appearance? The coin is made of metal. The statement is not material at all. The coin is round. The statement has nothing at all spatial about it. With the coin something can be purchased. The statement about it is never a means of payment.

15. But in spite of all their dissimilarity the above statement, as true, is in accordance with the coin. And according to the usual concept of truth this accord is supposed to be a correspondence. How can what is completely dissimilar, the statement, correspond to the coin? It would have to become the coin and in this way relinquish itself entirely. The statement never succeeds in doing that. The moment it did, it would no longer be able as a statement to be in accordance with the thing. In the correspondence the statement must remain — indeed even first become — what it is. In what does its essence, so thoroughly different from every thing, consist? How is the statement able to correspond to something else, the thing, precisely by persisting in its own essence?

16. Correspondence here cannot signify a thing-like approximation between dissimilar kinds of things. The essence of the correspondence is determined rather by the kind of relation that obtains between the statement and the thing. As long as this “relation” remains undetermined and is not grounded in its essence, all dispute over the possibility and impossibility, over the nature and degree, of the correspondence loses its way in a void. But the statement regarding the coin relates “itself” to this thing in that it presents [vor-stellt] it and says of the presented how, according to the particular perspective that guides it, it is disposed. What is stated by the presentative statement is said of the presented thing in just such manner as that thing, as presented, is. The “such-as” has to do with the presenting and its presented.

17. Disregarding all “psychological” preconceptions as well as those of any “theory of consciousness,” to present here means to let the thing stand opposed as object. As thus placed, what stands opposed must traverse an open field of opposedness (Entgegen) and nevertheless must maintain its stand as a thing and show itself as something withstanding [ein Standiges] This appearing of the thing in traversing a field of opposedness takes place within an open region, the openness of which is not first

created by the presenting but rather is only entered into and taken over as a domain of relatedness. The relation of the presentative statement to the thing is the accomplishment of that bearing [Verhältnis] which originally and always comes to prevail as a comportment [Verhalten]. But all comportment is distinguished by the fact that, standing in the open region, it adheres to something opened up as such. What is thus opened up, solely in this strict sense, was experienced early in Western thinking as “what is present” and for a long time has been named “being.”

18. Comportment stands open to beings. Every open relatedness is a comportment. Man’s open stance varies depending on the kind of beings and the way of comportment. All working and achieving, all action and calculation, keep within an open region within which beings, with regard to what they are and how they are, can properly take their stand and become capable of being said. This can occur only if beings present themselves along with the presentative statement so that the latter subordinates itself to the directive that it speak of beings such as they are. In following such a directive the statement conforms to beings. Speech that directs itself accordingly is correct (true). What is thus said is the correct (the true). A statement is invested with its correctness by the openness of comportment; for only through the latter can what is opened up really become the standard for the presentative correspondence. Open comportment must let itself be assigned this standard. This means that it must take over a pregiven standard for all presenting. This belongs to the openness of comportment. But if the correctness (truth) of statements becomes possible only through this openness of comportment, then what first makes correctness possible must with more original right be taken as the essence of truth.

19. Thus the traditional assignment of truth exclusively to statements as the sole essential locus of truth falls away. Truth does not originally reside in the proposition. But at the same time the question arises of the ground of the inner possibility of the open comportment which pregives a standard, which possibility alone lends to propositional correctness the appearance of fulfilling the essence of truth at all.

3. The Ground of the possibility of Correctness

20. Whence does the presentative statement receive the directive to conform to the object and to accord by way of correctness? Why is this accord involved in determining the essence of truth? How can something like the accomplishment of

a pre-given directedness occur? And how can the initiation into an accord occur? Only if this pre-giving has already entered freely into an open region for something opened up which prevails there and which binds every presenting. To free oneself for a binding directedness is possible only by being free for what is opened up in an open region. Such being free points to the heretofore uncomprehended essence of freedom. The openness of comportment as the inner condition of the possibility of correctness is grounded in freedom. The essence of truth is freedom.

21. But does not this proposition regarding the essence of correctness substitute one obvious item for another? In order to be able to carry out any act, and therefore one of presentative stating and even of according or not according with a "truth," the actor must of course be free. However, the proposition in question does not really mean that an unconstrained act belongs to the execution of the statement, to its pronouncement and reception; rather, the proposition says that freedom is the essence of truth itself. In this connection "essence" is understood as the ground of the inner possibility of what is initially and generally admitted as known. Nevertheless, in the concept of freedom we do not think truth, and certainly not at all its essence. The proposition that the essence of truth (correctness of statements) is freedom must consequently seem strange.

22. To place the essence of truth in freedom — doesn't this mean to submit truth to human caprice? Can truth be any more radically undermined than by being surrendered to the arbitrariness of this "wavering reed"? What forced itself upon sound judgment again and again in the previous discussion now all the more clearly comes to light: truth is here driven back to the subjectivity of the human subject. Even if an objectivity is also accessible to this subject, still such objectivity remains along with subjectivity something human and at man's disposal.

23. Certainly deceit and dissimulation, lies and deception, illusion and semblance — in short, all kinds of untruth — are ascribed to man. But of course untruth is also the opposite of truth. For this reason, as the non-essence of truth, it is appropriately excluded from the sphere of the question concerning the pure essence of truth. This human origin of untruth indeed only serves to confirm by contrast the essence of truth "in itself" as holding sway "beyond" man. Metaphysics regards such truth as the imperishable and eternal, which can never be founded on the transitoriness and fragility that belong to man's essence. How then can the essence of truth still have its subsistence and its ground in human freedom? Resistance to the proposition that the

essence of truth is freedom is based on preconceptions, the most obstinate of which is that freedom is a property of man. The essence of freedom neither needs nor allows any further questioning. Everyone knows what man is.

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4. The Essence of Freedom

24. However, indication of the essential connection between truth as correctness and freedom uproots those preconceptions — granted of course that we are prepared for a transformation of thinking. Consideration of the essential connection between truth and freedom leads us to pursue the question of the essence of man in a regard which assures us an experience of a concealed essential ground of man (of Dasein), and in such a manner that the experience transposes us in advance into the originally essential domain of truth. But here it becomes evident also that freedom is the ground of the inner possibility of correctness only because it receives its own essence from the more original essence of uniquely essential truth. Freedom was first determined as freedom for what is opened up in an open region. How is this essence of freedom to be thought? That which is opened up, that to which a presentative statement as correct corresponds, are beings opened up in an open comportment. Freedom for what is opened up in an open region lets beings be the beings they are. Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be.

25. Ordinarily we speak of letting be whenever, for example, we forgo some enterprise that has been planned. "We let something be" means we do not touch it again, we have nothing more to do with it. To let something be has here the negative sense of letting it alone, of renouncing it, of indifference and even neglect. However, the phrase required now — to let beings be — does not refer to neglect and indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is to engage oneself with beings. On the other hand, to be sure, this is not to be understood only as the mere management, preservation, tending, and planning of the beings in each case encountered or sought out. To let be — that is, to let beings be as the beings which they are — means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself. Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as *ta alethea* the unconcealed.

26. If we translate *aletheia* 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. To engage oneself with the disclosedness of beings is not to lose oneself in them; rather, such engagement withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are and in order that presentative correspondence might take its standard from them. As this letting-be, it exposes itself to beings as such and transposes all comportment into the open region. Letting-be, i.e., freedom, is intrinsically exposing, ek-sistent. Considered in regard to the essence of truth, the essence of freedom manifests itself as exposure to the disclosedness of beings.

27. Freedom is not merely what common sense is content to let pass under this name: the caprice, turning up occasionally in our choosing, of inclining in this or that direction. Freedom is not mere absence of constraint with respect to what we can or cannot do. Nor is it on the other hand mere readiness for what is required and necessary (and so somehow a being). Prior to all this ("negative" and "positive" freedom), freedom is engagement in the disclosure of beings as such. Disclosedness itself is conserved in ek-sistent engagement, through which the openness of the open region, i.e., the "there" ["Da"], is what it is.

28. In Da-sein the essential ground, long ungrounded, on the basis of which man is able to ek-sist, is preserved for him. Here "existence" does not mean existentia in the sense of occurring or being at hand. Nor on the other hand does it mean, in an "existentiell" fashion, man's moral endeavor in behalf of his "self," based on his psychophysical constitution. Ek-sistence, rooted in truth as freedom, is exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such. Still uncomprehended, indeed, not even in need of an essential grounding, the ek-sistence of historical man begins at that moment when the first thinker takes a questioning stand with regard to the unconcealment of beings by asking: what are beings?

29. In this question unconcealment is experienced for the first time. Being as a whole reveals itself as physis, "nature," which here does not yet mean a particular sphere of beings but rather beings as such as a whole, specifically in the sense of emerging presence [aufgehendes Anwesen]. History begins only when beings themselves are expressly drawn up into their unconcealment and conserved in it, only when this conservation is conceived on the basis of questioning regarding beings as such. The primordial disclosure of being as a whole, the question concerning beings as such, and the beginning of Western history are the same; they occur together in a "time" which, itself

unmeasurable, first opens up the open region for every measure.

30. But if ek-sistent Da-sein, which lets beings be, sets man free for his “freedom” by first offering to his choice something possible (a being) and by imposing on him something necessary (a being), human caprice does not then have freedom at its disposal. Man does not “possess” freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom, ek-sistent, disclosive Da-sein, possesses man — so originally that only it secures for humanity that distinctive relatedness to being as a whole as such which first founds all history. Only ek-sistent man is historical. “Nature” has no history.

31. Freedom, understood as letting beings be, is the fulfillment and consummation of the essence of truth in the sense of the disclosure of beings. “Truth” is not a feature of correct propositions which are asserted of an “object” by a human “subject” and then are valid somewhere, in what sphere we know not. Rather, truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds [west]. All human comportment and bearing are exposed in its open region. Therefore man is in the manner of ek-sistence.

32. Because every mode of human comportment is in its own way open and plies itself to that toward which it comports itself, the restraint of letting-be, i.e., freedom, must have granted it its endowment of that inner directive for correspondence of presentator to beings. That man ek-sists now means that for historical human ity the history of its essential possibilities is conserved in the disclosure of beings as a whole. The rare and the simple decisions of history arise from the way the original essence of truth essentially unfolds.

33. However, because truth is in essence freedom, historical man can, in letting beings be, also not let beings be the beings which they are and as they are. Then beings are covered up and distorted. Semblance comes to power. In it the non-essence of truth comes to the fore. However, because ek-sistent freedom as the essence of truth is not a property of man; because on the contrary man eksists and so becomes capable of history only as the property of this freedom; the non-essence of truth cannot first arise subsequently from mere human incapacity and negligence.

34. Rather, untruth must derive from the essence of truth. Only because truth and untruth are, in essence, not irrelevant to one another but rather belong together is it possible for a true proposition to enter into pointed opposition to the corresponding untrue proposition. The question concerning the essence of truth

thus first reaches the original domain of what is at issue when, on the basis of a prior glimpse of the full essence of truth, it has included a consideration of untruth in its unveiling of that essence. Discussion of the non-essence of truth is not the subsequent filling of a gap but rather the decisive step toward an adequate posing of the question concerning the essence of truth. Yet how are we to comprehend the non-essence in the essence of truth? If the essence of truth is not exhausted by the correctness of statements, then neither can untruth be equated with the incorrectness of judgments.

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5. The Essence of Truth

35. The essence of truth reveals itself as freedom. The latter is ek-sistent, disclosive letting beings be. Every mode of open comportment flourishes in letting beings be and in each case is a comportment to this or that being. As engagement in the disclosure of being as a whole as such, freedom has already attuned all comportment to being as a whole. However, being attuned (attunement) can never be understood as “experience and “feeling,” because it is thereby simply deprived of its essence. For here it is interpreted on the basis of something (“life” and “soul”) that can maintain the semblance of the title of essence only as long as it bears in itself the distortion and misinterpretation of being attuned. Being attuned, i.e., ek-sistent exposedness to beings as a whole, can be “experienced” and “felt” only because the “man who “experiences” without being aware of the essence of the attunement, is always engaged in being attuned in a way that discloses beings as a whole.

36. Every mode of historical man’s comportment whether accentuated or not, whether understood or not — is attuned and by this attunement is drawn up into beings as a whole. The openedness of being as a whole does not coincide with the sum of all immediately familiar beings. On the contrary: where beings are not very familiar to man and are scarcely and only roughly known by science, the openedness of beings as a whole can prevail more essentially than it can where the familiar and well-known has become boundless, and nothing is any longer able to withstand the business of knowing, since technical mastery over things bears itself without limit. Precisely in the leveling and planning of this omniscience, this mere knowing, the openedness of beings gets flattened out into the apparent nothingness of what is no longer even a matter of indifference but rather is simply forgotten.

37. Letting beings be, which is an attuning, a bringing into

accord, prevails throughout and anticipates all the open comportment that flourishes in it. Man's comportment is brought into definite accord throughout by the openedness of being as a whole. However, from the point of view of everyday calculations and preoccupations this "as a whole" appears to be incalculable and incomprehensible. It cannot be understood on the basis of the beings opened up in any given case, whether they belong to nature or to history. Although it ceaselessly brings everything into definite accord, still it remains indefinite, indeterminable; it then coincides for the most part with what is most fleeting and most unconsidered. However, what brings into accord is not nothing but rather a concealing of beings as a whole. Precisely because letting be always lets beings be in a particular comportment which relates to them and thus discloses them, it conceals beings as a whole. Letting-be is intrinsically at the same time a concealing. In the ek-sistent freedom of Da-sein a concealing of being as a whole comes to pass [ereignet sich]. Here there is concealment.

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6. Untruth as Concealing

38. Concealment deprives aletheia of disclosure yet does not render it steresis (privation); rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to aletheia as its own. Considered with respect to truth as disclosedness, concealment is then undisclosedness and accordingly the untruth that is most proper to the essence of truth. The concealment of beings as a whole does not first show up subsequently as a consequence of the fact that knowledge of beings is always fragmentary. The concealment of beings as a whole, untruth proper, is older than every openedness of this or that being. It is also older than letting-be itself which in disclosing already holds concealed and comports itself toward concealing. What conserves letting-be in this relatedness to concealing? Nothing less than the concealing of what is concealed as a whole, of beings as such, i.e., the mystery; not a particular mystery regarding this or that, but rather the one mystery — that, in general, mystery (the concealing of what is concealed) as such holds sway throughout man's Dasein.

39. In letting beings as a whole be, which discloses and at the same time conceals, it happens that concealing appears as what is first of all concealed. Insofar as it ek-sists, Da-sein conserves the first and broadest undisclosedness, untruth proper. The proper non-essence of truth is the mystery. Here non-essence does not yet have the sense of inferiority to essence in the sense of what is general (koinon genos), its possibilitas and the ground of its possibility. Non-essence is here what in such a sense would

be a pre-essential essence. But "non-essence" means at first and for the most part the deformation of that already inferior essence. Indeed, in each of these significations the non-essence remains always in its own way essential to the essence and never becomes inessential in the sense of irrelevant. But to speak of non-essence and untruth in this manner goes very much against the grain of ordinary opinion and looks like a dragging up of forcibly contrived paradoxes. Because it is difficult to eliminate this impression, such a way of speaking, paradoxical only for ordinary doxa (opinion), is to be renounced. But surely for those who know about such matters the "non-" of the primordial non-essence of truth, as untruth, points to the still unexperienced domain of the truth of Being (not merely of beings).

40. As letting beings be, freedom is intrinsically the resolutely open bearing that does not close up in itself. All comportment is grounded in this bearing and receives from it directedness toward beings and disclosure of them. Nevertheless, this bearing toward concealing conceals itself in the process, letting a forgottenness of the mystery take precedence and disappearing in it. Certainly man takes his bearings [verhält sich] constantly in his comportment toward beings; but for the most part he acquiesces in this or that being and its particular openedness. Man clings to what is readily available and controllable even where ultimate matters are concerned. And if he sets out to extend, change, newly assimilate, or secure the openedness of the beings pertaining to the most various domains of his activity and interest, then he still takes his directives from the sphere of readily available intentions and needs.

41. However, to reside in what is readily available is intrinsically not to let the concealing of what is concealed hold sway. Certainly among readily familiar things there are also some that are puzzling, unexplained, undecided, questionable. But these self-certain questions are merely transitional, intermediate points in our movement within the readily familiar and thus not essential. Wherever the concealment of beings as a whole is conceded only as a limit that occasionally announces itself, concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgottenness.

42. But the forgotten mystery of Dasein is not eliminated by the forgottenness; rather, the forgottenness bestows on the apparent disappearance of what is forgotten a peculiar presence [Gegenwart]. By disavowing itself in and for forgottenness, the mystery leaves historical man in the sphere of what is readily available to him, leaves him to his own resources. Thus left, humanity replenishes its "world" on the basis of the latest needs and aims, and fills out that world by means of proposing and

planning. From these man then takes his standards, forgetting being as a whole. He persists in them and continually supplies himself with new standards, yet without considering either the ground for taking up standards or the essence of what gives the standard. In spite of his advance to new standards and goals, man goes wrong as regards the essential genuineness of his standards. He is all the more mistaken the more exclusively he takes himself, as subject, to be the standard for all beings. The inordinate forgetfulness of humanity persists in securing itself by means of what is readily available and always accessible. This persistence has its unwitting support in that bearing by which Dasein not only ek-sists but also at the same time in-sists, i.e., holds fast to what is offered by beings, as if they were open of and in themselves. As ek-sistent, Dasein is insistent. Even in insistent existence the mystery holds sway, but as the forgotten and hence "inessential" essence of truth.

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7. Untruth as Errancy

43. As insistent, man is turned toward the most readily available beings. But he insists only by being already ek-sistent, since, after all, he takes beings as his standard. However, in taking its standard, humanity is turned away from the mystery. The insistent turning toward what is readily available and the ek-sistent turning away from the mystery belong together. They are one and the same. Yet turning toward and away from is based on a turning to and fro proper to Dasein. Man's flight from the mystery toward what is readily available, onward from one current thing to the next, passing the mystery by — this is erring.*

44. Man errs. Man does not merely stray into errancy. He is always astray in errancy, because as ek-sistent he in-sists and so already is caught in errancy. The errancy through which man strays is not something which, as it were, extends alongside man like a ditch into which he occasionally stumbles; rather errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the Da-sein into which historical man is admitted. Errancy is the free space for that turning in which insistent ek-sistence adroitly forgets and mistakes itself constantly anew. The concealing of the concealed being as a whole holds sway in that disclosure of specific beings, which, as forgottenness of concealment, becomes errancy.

45. Errancy is the essential counter-essence to the primordial essence of truth. Errancy opens itself up as the open region for every opposite to essential truth. Errancy is the open site for and ground of error. Error is not just an isolated mistake but rather the realm (the domain) of the history of those entanglements in which

all kinds of erring get interwoven.

46. In conformity with its openness and its relatedness to beings as a whole, every mode of comportment has its mode of erring. Error extends from the most ordinary wasting of time, making a mistake, and miscalculating, to going astray and venturing too far in one's essential attitudes and decisions. However, what is ordinarily and even according to the teachings of philosophy recognized as error, incorrectness of judgments and falsity of knowledge, is only one mode of erring and, moreover, the most superficial one. The errancy in which any given segment of historical humanity must proceed for its course to be errant is essentially connected with the openness of Dasein. By leading him astray, errancy dominates man through and through. But, as leading astray, errancy at the same time contributes to a possibility that man is capable of drawing up from his ek-sistence — the possibility that, by experiencing errancy itself and by not mistaking the mystery of Da-sein, he not let himself be led astray.

47. Because man's in-sistent ek-sistence proceeds in errancy, and because errancy as leading astray always oppresses in some manner or other and is formidable on the basis of this oppression of the mystery, specifically as something forgotten, in the ek-sistence of his Dasein man is especially subjected to the rule of the mystery and the oppression of errancy. He is in the needful condition of being constrained by the one and the other. The full essence of truth, including its most proper non-essence, keeps Dasein in need by this perpetual turning to and fro. Dasein is a turning into need. From man's Dasein and from it alone arises the disclosure of necessity and, as a result, the possibility of being transposed into what is inevitable.

48. The disclosure of beings as such is simultaneously and intrinsically the concealing of being as a whole. In the simultaneity of disclosure and concealing errancy holds sway. Errancy and the concealing of what is concealed belong to the primordial essence of truth. Freedom, conceived on the basis of the in-sistent eksistence of Dasein, is the essence of truth (in the sense of the correctness of presenting) only because freedom itself originates from the primordial essence of truth, the rule of the mystery in errancy. Letting beings be takes its course in open comportment. However, letting beings as such be as a whole occurs in a way befitting its essence only when from time to time it gets taken up in its primordial essence. Then resolute openness toward the mystery [Ent-schlossenheit zum Geheimnis] is under way into errancy as such. Then the question of the essence of truth gets asked more originally. Then the ground of the intertwining of the essence of truth with the truth of

essence reveals itself. The glimpse into the mystery out of errancy is a question — in the sense of that unique question of what being as such is as a whole. This questioning thinks the question of the Being of beings, a question that is essentially misleading and thus in its manifold meaning is still not mastered. The thinking of Being, from which such questioning primordially originates has since Plato been understood as “philosophy” and later received the title “metaphysics.”

8. Philosophy and the Question of Truth

49. In the thinking of Being the liberation of man for ek-sistence, the liberation that grounds history, is put into words. These are not just the “expression” of an opinion but are always already the ably conserved articulation of the truth of being as a whole. How many have ears for these words matters not. Who those are that can hear them determines man’s standpoint in history. However, in the same period in which the beginning of philosophy takes place, the marked domination of common sense (sophistry) also begins.

50. Sophistry appeals to the unquestionable character of the beings that are opened up and interprets all thoughtful questioning as an attack on, an unfortunate irritation of, common sense. However, what philosophy is according to the estimation of common sense, which is quite justified in its own domain, does not touch on the essence of philosophy, which can be determined only on the basis of relatedness to the original truth of being as such as a whole. But because the full essence of truth contains the non-essence and above all holds sway as concealing, philosophy as a questioning into this truth is intrinsically discordant. Philosophical thinking is gentle releasement that does not renounce the concealment of being as a whole. Philosophical thinking is especially the stern and resolute openness that does not disrupt the concealing but entreats its unbroken essence into the open region of understanding and thus into its own truth.

51. In the gentle sternness and stem gentleness with which it lets being as such be as a whole, philosophy becomes a questioning which does not cling solely to beings yet which also can allow no externally imposed decree. Kant presaged this innermost need that thinking has. For he says of philosophy:

Here philosophy is seen in fact to be placed in a precarious position which is supposed to be stable—although neither in heaven nor on earth is there anything on which it depends or on

which it is based. It is here that it has to prove its integrity as the keeper of its laws [Selbsthälterin ihrer Gesetze], not as the mouthpiece of laws secretly communicated to it by some implanted sense or by who knows what tutelary nature. (Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten. Werke, Akademieausgabe IV, 425.)

52. With this essential interpretation of philosophy, Kant, whose work introduces the final turning of Western metaphysics, envisions a domain which to be sure he could understand only on the basis of his fundamental metaphysical positions founded on subjectivity, and which he had to understand as the keeping of its laws. This essential view of the determination of philosophy nevertheless goes far enough to renounce every subjugation of philosophical thinking, the most destitute kind of which lets philosophy still be of value as an “expression” of “culture” (Spengler) and as an ornament of productive mankind. However, whether philosophy as “keeper of its laws” fulfills its primordially decisive essence, or whether it is not itself first of all kept and appointed to its task as keeper by the truth of that to which its laws pertain, this depends on the primordially with which the original essence of truth becomes essential for thoughtful questioning.

53. The present undertaking takes the question of the essence of truth beyond the confines of the ordinary definition provided in the usual concept of essence and helps us to consider whether the question of the essence of truth must not be, at the same time and even first of all, the question concerning the truth of essence. But in the concept of “essence” philosophy thinks Being. In tracing the inner possibility of the correctness of statements back to the existent freedom of letting-be as its “ground,” likewise in pointing to the essential commencement of this ground in concealing and in errancy, we want to show that the essence of truth is not the empty “generality” of an “abstract” universality but rather that which, self-concealing, is unique in the unremitting history of the disclosure of the “meaning” of what we call Being — what we for a long time have been accustomed to considering only as being as a whole.

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9. Note

54. The question of the essence of truth arises from the question of the truth of essence. In the former question essence is understood initially in the sense of whatness (quidditas) or material content (realitas), whereas truth is understood as a characteristic of knowledge. In the question of the truth of

essence, essence is understood verbally; in this word, remaining still within metaphysical presentation, Being is thought as the difference that holds sway between Being and beings. Truth signifies sheltering that lightens [lichtendes Bergen] as the basic characteristic of Being. The question of the essence of truth finds its answer in the proposition the essence of truth is the truth of essence. After our explanation it can easily be seen that the proposition does not merely reverse the word order so as to conjure the specter of paradox. The subject of the proposition — if this unfortunate grammatical category may still be used at all — is the truth of essence. Sheltering that lightens is — i.e., lets essentially unfold — accordance between knowledge and beings. The proposition is not dialectical. It is no proposition at all in the sense of a statement. The answer to the question of the essence of truth is the saying of a turning [die Sage einer Kehre] within the history of Being. Because sheltering that lightens belongs to it, Being appears primordially in the light of concealing withdrawal. The name of this lighting [Lichtung] is aletheia.

55. Already in the original project the lecture “On the Essence of Truth” was to have been completed by a second lecture “On the Truth of Essence.” The latter failed for reasons that are now indicated in the “Letter on Humanism.” The decisive question (in *Being and Time*, 1927) of the meaning, i.e., of the project-domain (cf. p. 151), i.e., of the openness, i.e., of the truth of Being and not merely of beings, remains intentionally undeveloped. Our thinking apparently remains on the path of metaphysics.

56. Nevertheless, in its decisive steps, which lead from truth as correctness to ek-sistent freedom, and from the latter to truth as concealing and as errancy, it accomplishes a change in the questioning that belongs to the overcoming of metaphysics. The thinking attempted in the lecture comes to fulfillment in the essential experience that a nearness to the truth of Being is first prepared for historical man on the basis of the *Dasein* into which man can enter. Every kind of anthropology and all subjectivity of man as subject is not merely left behind — as it was already in *Being and Time* — and the truth of Being sought as the ground of a transformed historical position; rather, the movement of the lecture is such that it sets out to think from this other ground (*Dasein*). The course of the questioning is intrinsically the way of a thinking which, instead of furnishing representations and concepts, experiences and tries itself as a transformation of its relatedness to Being.

**HEIDEGGER:
The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking (1969)**

**Note: I added the section and paragraph numbers found in this text. I did this to make it easier to refer to the text in the classroom and in the lecture notes.
Based on a translation by Joan Stambaugh**

1. The title designates the attempt at a reflection that persists in questioning. Questions are paths toward an answer. If the answer could be given it would consist in a transformation of thinking, not in a propositional statement about a matter at stake.

2. The following text belongs to a larger context. It is the attempt undertaken again and again ever since 1930 to shape the question of *Being and Time* in a more primordial fashion. This means to subject the point of departure of the question in *Being and Time* to an immanent criticism. Thus it must become clear to what extent the critical question, of what the matter of thinking is, necessarily and continually belongs to thinking. Accordingly, the name of the task of *Being and Time* will change.

3. We are asking:

1. What does it mean that philosophy in the present age has entered its final stage?
2. What task is reserved for thinking at the end of philosophy?

I. What does it mean that philosophy in the present age has entered its final stage?

4. Philosophy is metaphysics. Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole—the world, man, God — with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being. Metaphysics thinks beings as being in the manner of representational thinking that gives reasons. For since the beginning of philosophy and with that beginning, the Being of beings has showed itself as the ground (*arche, aition*, principle). The ground is that from which beings as such are what they are in their becoming, perishing, and persisting as something that can be known, handled, and worked upon. As the ground, Being brings beings to their actual presencing. The ground shows itself as presence. The present of presence consists in the fact that it brings what is present each in its own way to presence. In accordance with the actual kind of presence, the ground has the character of grounding as the ontic causation of the real, as the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of objects, as the dialectical mediation of the movement of the absolute Spirit and of the historical process of production, as the will to power positing values. What characterizes metaphysical thinking that grounds the ground for beings is the fact that metaphysical thinking, starting from what is present, represents it in its presence and thus exhibits it as grounded by its ground.

5. What is meant by the talk about the end of philosophy? We understand the end of something all too easily in the negative sense as a mere stopping, as the lack of continuation, perhaps even as decline and impotence. In contrast, what we say about the end of philosophy means the completion of metaphysics. However, completion does not mean perfection as a consequence of which philosophy would have to have attained the highest perfection at its end. Not only do we lack any criterion which would permit us to evaluate the perfection of an epoch of metaphysics as compared with any other epoch, the right to this kind of evaluation does not exist. Plato's thinking is no more perfect than Parmenides'. Hegel's philosophy is no more perfect than Kant's. Each epoch of philosophy has its own necessity. We simply have to acknowledge the fact that a philosophy is the way it is. It is not for us to prefer one to the other, as can be the case with regard to various world views.

6. The old meaning of the word "end" means the same as place: "from one end to the other" means from one place to the other. The end of philosophy is the place, that place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in its most extreme possibility. End as completion means this gathering. Throughout the whole history of philosophy, Plato's thinking remains decisive in changing forms. Metaphysics is Platonism. Nietzsche characterizes his philosophy as reversed Platonism. With the reversal of metaphysics which was already accomplished by Karl Marx, the most extreme possibility of philosophy is attained. It has entered its final stage. To the extent that philosophical thinking is still attempted, it manages only to attain an epigonal renaissance and variations of that renaissance. Is not then the end of philosophy after all a cessation of its way of thinking? To conclude this would be premature.

7. As a completion, an end is the gathering into the most extreme possibilities. We think in too limited a fashion as long as we expect only a development of recent philosophies of the previous style. We forget that already in the age of Greek philosophy a decisive characteristic of philosophy appears: the development of sciences within the field which philosophy opened up. The development of the sciences is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of their independence. This process belongs to the completion of philosophy. Its development is in full swing today in all regions of beings. This development looks like the mere dissolution of philosophy, and in truth is precisely its completion.

8. It suffices to refer to the independence of psychology, sociology, anthropology as cultural anthropology, to the role of logic as symbolic logic and semantics. Philosophy turns into the empirical science of man, of all of what can become for man the experiential object of his technology, the technology by which he establishes himself in the world by working on it in the manifold modes of making and shaping. All of this happens everywhere on the basis of and according to the criterion of the scientific discovery of the individual areas of beings.

9. No prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences now establishing themselves will soon be determined and steered by the new fundamental science which is called cybernetics. This science corresponds to the determination of man as an acting social being. For it is the theory of the steering of the possible planning and arrangement of human

labor. Cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news. The arts become regulated-regulating instruments of information.

10. The development of philosophy into the independent sciences which, however, interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly, is the legitimate completion of philosophy. Philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity. But the fundamental characteristic of this scientific attitude is its cybernetic, that is, technological character. The need to ask about modern technology is presumably dying out to the same extent that technology more definitely characterizes and regulates the appearance of the totality of the world and the position of man in it.

11. The sciences will interpret everything which in their structure is still reminiscent of the origin from philosophy in accordance with the rules of science, that is, technologically. Every science understands the categories upon which it remains dependent for the articulation and delineation of its area of investigation as working hypotheses. Their truth is measured not only in terms of the effect that their application brings about within the progress of research. Scientific truth is equated with the efficiency of these effects.

12. The sciences are now taking over as their own task what philosophy in the course of its history tried to present in certain places, and even there only inadequately, that is, the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art). The interest of the sciences is directed toward the theory of the necessary structural concepts of the coordinated areas of investigation. "Theory" means now supposition of the categories, which are allowed only a cybernetic function, but denied any ontological meaning. The operational and model character of representational-calculative thinking becomes dominant.

13. However, the sciences still speak about the Being of beings in the unavoidable supposition of their regional categories. They just don't say so. They can deny their origin from philosophy, but never dispense with it. For in the scientific attitude of the sciences, the document of their birth from philosophy still speaks. The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means the beginning of the

world civilization based upon Western European thinking.

14. But is the end of philosophy in the sense of its evolving into the sciences also already the complete actualization of all the possibilities in which the thinking of philosophy was posited? Or is there a first possibility for thinking apart from the last possibility which we characterized (the dissolution of philosophy in the technologized sciences), a possibility from which the thinking of philosophy would have to start, but which as philosophy it could nevertheless not experience and adopt?

15. If this were the case, then a task would still have to be reserved for thinking in a concealed way in the history of philosophy from its beginning to its end, a task accessible neither to philosophy as metaphysics nor, and even less so, to the sciences stemming from philosophy. Therefore we ask:

II. What task is reserved for thinking at the end of philosophy?

16. The mere thought of such a task of thinking must sound strange to us. A thinking that can be neither metaphysics nor science? A task which has concealed itself from philosophy since its very beginning, even in virtue of that beginning, and thus has withdrawn itself continually and increasingly in the times that followed? A task of thinking that — so it seems — includes the assertion that philosophy has not been up to the matter of thinking and has thus become a history of mere decline? Is there not an arrogance in these assertions which desires to put itself above the greatness of the thinkers of philosophy?

17. This suspicion obtrudes. But it can easily be quelled. For every attempt to gain insight into the supposed task of thinking finds itself moved to review the whole history of philosophy. Not only this, but it is even forced to think the historicity of that which grants a possible history to philosophy. Because of this, the thinking in question here necessarily falls short of the greatness of the philosophers. It is less than philosophy. Less also because the direct or indirect effect of this thinking on the public in the industrial age, formed by technology and science, is decisively less possible for this thinking than it was for philosophy.

18. But above all, the thinking in question remains

unassuming because its task is only of a preparatory, not of a founding character. It is content with awakening a readiness in man for a possibility whose contour remains obscure, whose coming remains uncertain. Thinking must first learn what remains reserved and in store for thinking to get involved in. It prepares its own transformation in this learning.

19. We are thinking of the possibility that the world civilization that is just now beginning might one day overcome the technological-scientific-industrial character as the sole criterion of man's world sojourn. This may happen not of and through itself, but in virtue of the readiness of man for a determination that, whether listened to or not, always speaks in the destiny of man, which has not yet been decided. It is just as uncertain whether world civilization will soon be abruptly destroyed or whether it will be stabilized for a long time — in a stabilization, however, that will not rest in something enduring, but rather establish itself in a sequence of changes, each of which presenting the latest fashion.

20. The preparatory thinking in question does not wish and is not able to predict the future. It only attempts to say something to the present which was already said a long time ago precisely at the beginning of philosophy and for that beginning, but has not been explicitly thought. For the time being, it must be sufficient to refer to this with the brevity required. We shall take a directive which philosophy offers as an aid in our undertaking.

21. When we ask about the task of thinking, this means in the scope of philosophy to determine that which concerns thinking, which is still controversial for thinking, which is the controversy. This is what the word *Sache* [matter] means in the German language. It designates that with which thinking has to do in the case at hand, in Plato's language, *to pragma auto* (cf. "The Seventh Letter," 341c 7).

22. In recent times, philosophy has of its own accord expressly called thinking "to the things themselves." Let us mention two cases which receive particular attention today. We hear this call "to the things themselves" in the "Preface" which Hegel has placed before his work which was published in 1807, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*. This preface is not the preface to the *Phenomenology*, but to the System of Science, to the whole of philosophy. The call "to the things themselves" refers ultimately — and that means according to the matter,

primarily — to the Science of Logic.

23. In the call “to the things themselves,” the emphasis lies on the “themselves.” Heard superficially, the call has the sense of a rejection. The inadequate relations to the matter of philosophy are rejected. Mere talk about the purpose of philosophy belongs to these relations, but so does mere reporting about the results of philosophical thinking. Both are never the real totality of philosophy. The totality shows itself only in its becoming. This occurs in the developmental presentation of the matter. In the presentation, theme and method coincide. For Hegel, this identity is called the idea. With the idea, the matter of philosophy “itself” comes to appear. However, this matter is historically determined: subjectivity. With Descartes’ *ego cogito*, says Hegel, philosophy steps on firm ground for the first time, where it can be at home. If the *fundamentum absolutum* is attained with the *ego cogito* as the distinctive *subjectum*, this means: the subject is the *hypokeimenon* transferred to consciousness, is what is truly present, which is unclearly enough called “substance” in traditional language.

24. When Hegel explains in the Preface (ed. Hoffmeister, p. 19). “The true (in philosophy) is to be understood and expressed not as substance, but just as much, as subject,” then this means: the Being of beings, the presence of what is present, is manifest and thus complete presence only when it becomes present as such for itself in the absolute Idea. But since Descartes, idea means perceptio. Being’s coming to itself occurs in speculative dialectic. Only the movement of the idea, the method, is the matter itself. The call “to the thing itself” requires a philosophical method appropriate to it. However, what the matter of philosophy should be is presumed to be decided from the outset. The matter of philosophy as metaphysics is the Being of beings, their presence in the form of substantiality and subjectivity.

25. A hundred years later, the call “to the thing itself” again is heard in Husserl’s treatise *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*. It was published in the first volume of the journal *Logos* in 1910-11 (pp. 289 if.). Again, the call has at first the sense of a rejection. But here it aims in another direction than Hegel’s. It concerns naturalistic psychology which claims to be the genuine scientific method of investigating consciousness. For this method blocks access to the phenomena of intentional consciousness from the very beginning. But the call “to the thing itself” is at the same time directed against historicism, which gets lost in treatises about the standpoints of

philosophy and in the ordering of types of philosophical world views. About this Husserl says in italics (ibid., p. 340): "The stimulus for investigation must start not with philosophies, but with issues and problems."

26. And what is the matter at stake in philosophical investigation? In accordance with the same tradition, it is for Husserl as for Hegel the subjectivity of consciousness. For Husserl, the *Cartesian Meditations* were not only the topic of the Parisian lectures in February, 1920. Rather, since the time following the *Logical Investigations*, their spirit accompanied the impassioned course of his philosophical investigations to the end. In its negative and also in its positive sense, the call "to the thing itself" determines the securing and development of method. It also determines the procedure of philosophy by means of which the matter itself can be demonstrated as a datum. For Husserl, "the principle of all principles" is first of all not a principle of content but one of method.

27. In his work published in 1913, *Ideas toward a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, Husserl devoted a special section (24) to the determination of "the principle of all principles." "No conceivable theory can upset this principle," says Husserl. "The principle of all principles" reads:

Every originally giving intuition [is] a source of legitimation for knowledge; everything that presents itself to us in the 'Intuition' originally (in its bodily actuality, so to speak) [is] simply to be accepted as it gives itself, but also only within the limits in which it gives itself there. . .

28. "The principle of all principles" contains the thesis of the precedence of method. This principle decides what matter alone can suffice for the method. "The principle of principles" requires absolute subjectivity as the matter of philosophy. The transcendental reduction to absolute subjectivity gives and secures the possibility of grounding the objectivity of all objects (the Being of these beings) in their valid structure and consistency, that is, in their constitution, in and through subjectivity. Thus transcendental subjectivity proves to be "the sole absolute being" (*Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 1929, p. 240). At the same time, transcendental reduction as the method of "universal science" of the constitution of the Being of beings has the same mode of being as this absolute being, that is, the manner of the matter most native to philosophy. The method is not only directed toward the

matter of philosophy. It does not just belong to the matter as a key belongs to a lock. Rather, it belongs to the matter because it is “the matter itself.” If one wished to ask: Where does “the principle of all principles” get its unshakable right? the answer would have to be: from transcendental subjectivity, which is already presupposed as the matter of philosophy.

29. We have chosen a discussion of the call “to the thing itself” as our directive. It was to bring us to the path which leads us to a determination of the task of thinking at the end of philosophy. Where are we now? We have arrived at the insight that for the call “to the thing itself” what concerns philosophy as its matter is established from the outset. From the perspective of Hegel and Husserl — and not only from their perspective — the matter of philosophy is subjectivity. It is not the matter as such that is controversial for the call, but rather its presentation by which the matter itself becomes present. Hegel’s speculative dialectic is the movement in which the matter as such comes to itself, comes to its own presence [*Prasenz*] Husserl’s method is supposed to bring the matter of philosophy to its ultimately originary givenness: that means to its own presence [*Prasenz*]. The two methods are as different as they could possibly be. But the matter as such which they are to present is the same, although it is experienced in different ways.

30. But of what help are these discoveries to us in our attempt to bring the task of thinking to view? They don’t help us at all as long as we do not go beyond a mere discussion of the call. Rather, we must ask what remains unthought in the call “to the thing itself.” Questioning in this way, we can become aware how something which it is no longer the matter of philosophy to think conceals itself precisely where philosophy has brought its matter to absolute knowledge and to ultimate evidence.

31. But what remains unthought in the matter of philosophy as well as in its method? Speculative dialectic is a mode in which the matter of philosophy comes to appear of itself and for itself, and thus becomes present [*Gegenwart*] Such appearance necessarily occurs in some light. Only by virtue of light, i.e., through brightness, can what shines show itself, that is, radiate. But brightness in its turn rests upon something open, something free, which might illuminate it here and there, now and then. Brightness plays in the open and wars there with darkness. Wherever a present being encounters another present being or even only lingers near it

— but also where, as with Hegel, one being mirrors itself in another speculatively — there openness already rules, the free region is in play. Only this openness grants to the movement of speculative thinking the passage through what it thinks.

32. We call this openness that grants a possible letting-appear and show “opening.” In the history of language the German word *Lichtung* is a translation derived from the French *clairière*. It is formed in accordance with the older words *Waldung* [foresteering] and *Feldung* [fielding].

33. The forest clearing [or opening] is experienced in contrast to dense forest, called *Dickung* in our older language. The substantive *Lichtung* goes back to the verb *lichten*. The adjective *licht* is the same word as “open.” To open something means to make it light, free and open, e.g., to make the forest free of trees at one place. The free space thus originating is the clearing. What is light in the sense of being free and open has nothing in common with the adjective “light” which means “bright,” neither linguistically nor factually. This is to be observed for the difference between openness and light. Still, it is possible that a factual relation between the two exists. Light can stream into the clearing, into its openness, and let brightness play with darkness in it. But light never first creates openness. Rather, light presupposes openness. However, the clearing, the open region, is not only free for brightness and darkness but also for resonance and echo, for sound and the diminishing of sound. The clearing is the open region for everything that becomes present and absent.

34. It is necessary for thinking to become explicitly aware of the matter here called opening. We are not extracting mere notions from mere words, e.g., “opening,” as it might easily appear on the surface. Rather, we must observe the unique matter which is named with the name “opening” in accordance with the matter. What the word designates in the connection we are now thinking, free openness, is a “primal phenomenon,” to use a word of Goethe’s. We would have to say a “primal matter” [*Ursache*]. Goethe notes (Maxims and Reflections, n. 993): “Look for nothing behind phenomena: they themselves are what is to be learned.” This means the phenomenon itself, in the present case the opening, sets us the task of learning from it while questioning it, that is, of letting it say something to us.

35. Accordingly, we may suggest that the day will come

when we will not shun the question whether the opening, the free open, may not be that within which alone pure space and ecstatic time and everything present and absent in them have the place which gathers and protects everything. In the same way as speculative dialectical thinking, originary intuition and its evidence remain dependent upon openness which already dominates, upon the opening. What is evident is what can be immediately intuited. *Evidentia* is the word that Cicero uses to translate the Greek *enargeia*, that is, to transform it into the Roman. *Enargeia*, which has the same root as *argentum* (silver), means that which in itself and of itself radiates and brings itself to light. In the Greek language, one is not speaking about the action of seeing, about *videre*, but about that which gleams and radiates. But it can radiate only if openness has already been granted. The beam of light does not first create the opening, openness, it only traverses it. It is only such openness that grants to giving and receiving and to any evidence at all what is free, in which they can remain and must move.

36. All philosophical thinking that explicitly or inexplicitly follows the call “to the thing itself” is already admitted to the freespace of the opening in its movement and with its method. But philosophy knows nothing of the opening. Philosophy does speak about the light of reason, but does not heed the opening of Being. The *lumen naturale*, the light of reason, throws light only on openness. It does concern the opening, but so little does it form it that it needs it in order to be able to illuminate what is present in the opening. This is true not only of philosophy’s method, but also and primarily of its matter, that is, of the presence of what is present. To what extent the *subjectum*, the *hypokeimenon*, that which already lies present, thus what is present in its presence is constantly thought also in subjectivity cannot be shown here in detail. (Refer to Heidegger, Nietzsche, vol. 2 (1961), pages 429 if.)

37. We are concerned now with something else. Whether or not what is present is experienced, comprehended or presented, presence as lingering in openness always remains dependent upon the prevalent opening. What is absent, too, cannot be as such unless it presences in the free space of the opening. All metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato. The basic word of its thinking, that is, of its presentation of the Being of beings, is *eidos*, *idea*: the outward appearance in which beings as such show themselves. Outward appearance, however, is a manner of presence. No outward

appearance without light — Plato already knew this. But there is no light and no brightness without the opening. Even darkness needs it. How else could we happen into darkness and wander through it? Still, the opening as such as it prevails through Being, through presence, remains unthought in philosophy, although it is spoken about in philosophy's beginning. How does this occur and with which names?

38. Answer: In Parmenides' thoughtful poem which, as far as we know, was the first to reflect explicitly upon the Being of beings, which still today, although unheard, speaks in the sciences into which philosophy dissolves, Parmenides listens to the claim:

. . but you should learn all:
the untrembling heart of unconcealment, well-rounded, and
also the opinions of mortals
who lack the ability to trust what is unconcealed. [Fragment 1, 28 ff.]

Aletheia, unconcealment, is named here. It is called well-rounded because it is turned in the pure sphere of the circle in which beginning and end are everywhere the same. In this turning there is no possibility of twisting, distortion, and closure. The meditative man is to experience the untrembling heart of unconcealment. What does the phrase about the untrembling heart of unconcealment mean? It means unconcealment itself in what is most its own, means the place of stillness which gathers in itself what grants unconcealment to begin with. That is the opening of what is open. We ask: openness for what? We have already reflected upon the fact that the path of thinking, speculative and intuitive, needs the traversable opening. But in that opening rests possible radiance, that is, the possible presencing of presence itself.

39. 'What prior to everything else first grants unconcealment is the path on which thinking pursues one thing and perceives it: *hopos estin*. . . *einai*: that presencing presences. The opening grants first of all the possibility of the path to presence, and grants the possible presencing of that presence itself. We must think *aletheia*, unconcealment, as the opening which first grants Being and thinking and their presencing to and for each other. The quiet heart of the opening is the place of stillness from which alone the possibility of the belonging together of Being and thinking, that is, presence and apprehending, can arise at all.

40. The possible claim to a binding character or commitment of thinking is grounded in this bond. Without the preceding experience of *aletheia* as the opening, all talk about committed and noncommitted thinking remains without foundation. Whence does Plato's determination of presence as idea have its binding character? With regard to what is Aristotle's interpretation of presencing as *energeia* binding? Strangely enough, we cannot even ask these questions, always neglected in philosophy, as long as we have not experienced what Parmenides had to experience: *aletheia*, unconcealment. The path to it is distinguished from the street along which the opinion of mortals wander. *Aletheia* is nothing mortal, just as little as death itself.

41. It is not for the sake of etymology that I stubbornly translate the name *aletheia* as unconcealment, but for the sake of the matter which must be considered when we think adequately that which is called Being and thinking. Unconcealment is, so to speak, the element in which Being and thinking and their belonging together exist. *Aletheia* is named at the beginning of philosophy, but afterward it is not explicitly thought as such by philosophy. For since Aristotle it became the task of philosophy as metaphysics to think beings as such onto-theo-logically.

42. If this is so, we have no right to sit in judgment over philosophy, as though it left something unheeded, neglected it and was thus marred by some essential deficiency. The reference to what is unthought in philosophy is not a criticism of philosophy. If a criticism is necessary now, then it rather concerns the attempt, which is becoming more and more urgent ever since *Being and Time*, to ask about a possible task of thinking at the end of philosophy. For the question now arises, late enough: Why is *aletheia* not translated with the usual name, with the word "truth"? The answer must be:

43. Insofar as truth is understood in the traditional "natural" sense as the correspondence of knowledge with beings, demonstrated in beings, but also insofar as truth is interpreted as the certainty of the knowledge of Being, *aletheia*, unconcealment in the sense of the opening, may not be equated with truth. Rather, *aletheia*, unconcealment thought as opening, first grants the possibility of truth. For truth itself, just as Being and thinking, can be what it is only in the element of the opening. Evidence, certainty in every degree, every kind of verification of *veritas* already move with that *veritas* in the realm of the prevalent opening.

44. *Aletheia*, unconcealment thought as the opening of presence, is not yet truth. Is *aletheia* then less than truth? Or is it more because it first grants truth as *adaequatio* and *certitudo*, because there can be no presence and presenting outside of the realm of the opening. This question we leave to thinking as a task. Thinking must consider whether it can even raise this question at all as long as it thinks philosophically, that is, in the strict sense of metaphysics which questions what is present only with regard to its presence.

45. In any case, one thing becomes clear: to raise the question of *aletheia*, of unconcealment as such, is not the same as raising the question of truth. For this reason, it was inadequate and misleading to call *aletheia* in the sense of opening, truth. The talk about the "truth of Being" has a justified meaning in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, because here truth means the certainty of absolute knowledge. But Hegel also, as little as Husserl, as little as all metaphysics, does not ask about Being as Being, that is, does not raise the question how there can be presence as such. There is presence only when opening is dominant. Opening is named with *aletheia*, unconcealment, but not thought as such.

46. The natural concept of truth does not mean unconcealment, not in the philosophy of the Greeks either. It is often and justifiably pointed out that the word *alethes* is already used by Homer only in the *verba dicendi*, in statement and thus in the sense of correctness and reliability, not in the sense of unconcealment. But this reference means only that neither the poets nor everyday language usage, nor even philosophy see themselves confronted with the task of asking how truth, that is, the correctness of statements, is granted only in the element of the opening of presence.

47. In the scope of this question, we must acknowledge the fact that *aletheia*, unconcealment in the sense of the opening of presence, was originally experienced only as *orthotes*, as the correctness of representations and statements. But then the assertion about the essential transformation of truth, that is, from unconcealment to correctness, is also untenable. Instead we must say: *aletheia*, as opening of presence and presenting in thinking and saying, originally comes under the perspective of *homoiosis* and *adaequatio*, that is, the perspective of adequation in the sense of the correspondence of representing with what is present.

48. But this process inevitably provokes another question:

How is it that *aletheia*, unconcealment, appears to man's natural experience and speaking only as correctness and dependability? Is it because man's ecstatic sojourn in the openness of presencing is turned only toward what is present and the presenting of what is present? But what else does this mean than that presence as such, and together with it the opening granting it, remain unheeded? Only what *aletheia* as opening grants is experienced and thought, not what it is as such. This remains concealed. Does this happen by chance? Does it happen only as a consequence of the carelessness of human thinking? Or does it happen because self-concealing, concealment, *lethe*, belongs to *a-letheia*, not just as an addition, not as shadow to light, but rather as the heart of *aletheia*? And does not even a sheltering and preserving rule in this self-concealing of the opening of presence, from which unconcealment can be granted to begin with, so that what is present can appear in its presence? If this were so, then the opening would not be the mere opening of presence, but the opening of presence concealing itself, the opening of a self-concealing sheltering. If this were so, then with these questions we would reach the path to the task of thinking at the end of philosophy.

49. But isn't all this unfounded mysticism or even bad mythology, in any case a ruinous irrationalism, the denial of *ratio*? I ask in return: What does *ratio*, *nous*, *noein*, apprehending, mean? What do ground and principle and especially principle of all principles mean? Can this ever be sufficiently determined unless we experience *aletheia* in a Greek manner as unconcealment and then, above and beyond the Greek, think it as the opening of self-concealing? As long as *ratio* and the rational still remain questionable in what is their own, talk about irrationalism is unfounded. The technological scientific rationalization ruling the present age justifies itself every day more surprisingly by its immense results. But this says nothing about what first grants the possibility of the rational and the irrational. The effect proves the correctness of technological scientific rationalization. But is the manifest character of what is exhausted by what is demonstrable? Doesn't the insistence on what is demonstrable block the way to what is?

50. Perhaps there is a thinking which is more sober-minded than the incessant frenzy of rationalization and the intoxicating quality of cybernetics. One might aver that it is precisely this intoxication that is extremely irrational. Perhaps there is a thinking outside of the distinction of rational and

irrational, more sober-minded still than scientific technology, more sober-minded and hence removed, without effect, yet having its own necessity. When we ask about the task of this thinking, then not only this thinking but also the question concerning it is first made questionable. In view of the whole philosophical tradition this means:

51. We all still need an education in thinking, and first of all, before that, knowledge of what being educated and uneducated in thinking means. In this respect Aristotle gives us a hint in Book IV of his *Metaphysics* (1006a if.): . . . - "For it is uneducated not to have an eye for when it is necessary to look for a proof and when this is not necessary." This sentence demands careful reflection. For it is not yet decided in what way that which needs no proof in order to become accessible to thinking is to be experienced. Is it dialectical mediation or originally giving intuition or neither of the two? Only the peculiar quality of what demands of us above all else to be admitted can decide about that. But how is this to make the decision possible for us when we have not yet admitted it? In what circle are we moving here, indeed, inevitably?

52. Is it the *eukukleos Aletheia*, well-rounded unconcealment itself, thought as the opening?

Does the title for the task of thinking then read instead of *Being and Time*: Opening and Presence?

But where does the opening come from and how is it given?

What speaks in the "There is / It gives"?

The task of thinking would then be the surrender of previous thinking to the determination of the matter for thinking.