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## THE PRINCIPLE OF GROUND\*

Translated from the German by  
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The principle of ground reads : *Nihil est sine ratione*. It is translated : *Nothing is without ground*. What the principle asserts can be rewritten in the following form : Everything has a ground, that is, every thing that in some way or other *is*. *Omne ens habet rationem*. Everything that is real has a ground for its reality. Everything that is possible has a ground for its possibility. Everything that is necessary has a ground for its necessity. *Nothing is without ground*.

In all that surrounds, concerns and meets us, we are on the look out for grounds. We demand the declaration of the ground for our assertions. We insist on having a foundation [*Begründung*] for every behavior. We are often satisfied with the grounds that are nearest at hand; occasionally we seek the grounds which lie further back; in the end we dare to look for the

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Heidegger wants to develop five main issues with regard to the principle of ground (*Der Satz vom Grund*, p. 103) :

1. The incubation of the principle of ground.
2. The establishment of the principle of ground as a supreme principle.
3. The claim of the principle of ground as the all-powerful principle that determines our age.
4. The ground as "why" and as "because."
5. The change of key in the principle of ground.

*Der Satz vom Grund* is, of course, Leibniz' principle of sufficient reason. And *Grund* is the German translation of the Latin *ratio*. But the German word *Grund* also means "ground." For Heidegger, the principle of ground [*Grund*] is prevalent throughout the entire history of metaphysics, although it only becomes formulated as a principle in the seventeenth century, with Leibniz. However, ground is not "reason" for all of metaphysics, but only for modern metaphysics. Ground has variously appeared throughout the history of metaphysics as *logos*, *aitia*, *ratio*, etc. Heidegger wants us to hear this principle "in a different key," and for this we must hear it as the principle of *ground*. *Grund* means the same as Being for all of metaphysics [*Sein und Grund : das Selbe*]. Thus, I have translated *Grund* by "ground," and I have reserved the English word "reason" for the German *Vernunft*. The present lecture seeks to develop the five main issues in order to prepare us for asking the following question : "Is this the last word that can be said about Being : Being means ground ?"

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first grounds and inquire into the final ground. Amidst all of our founding [*Begründen*] and fathoming [*Ergründen*], we are already traveling on the way to a ground. What the principle of ground asserts is therefore familiar to us, and because familiar, immediately obvious. Thus, what the principle of ground says is, to begin with, not even expressly posited as a principle, nor even proclaimed as a law.

The content of the principle, which in a shorter form reads : Nothing without ground, is often known only in the following version : *Nihil fit sine causa*, Nothing happens without cause [*Ursache*]. To be sure, every cause is indeed a kind of ground. But not every ground brings something about in the sense of causation [*Verursachung*]. So, for example, the universally valid assertion, "All men are mortal," does indeed contain the ground for the fact that we understand that Socrates is mortal. However, [192] this general assertion does not bring about, is not the cause of, the fact that Socrates dies.

*Nihil sine ratione*, Nothing without ground; so reads the almost unexpressed formula employed for an opinion that is decisive everywhere and to which we commonly entrust our thought. Nevertheless, in the history of Western thought, which began in the sixth century before Christ, twenty-three hundred years were required until the familiar representation, "Nothing without ground," was expressly posed as a principle and known as a law, was recognized in its full importance, and was deliberately brought to its unlimited validity. It was as if the principle of ground were asleep during this time. Up to this very hour we have scarcely reflected upon this peculiar fact, and without so much as asking how it came about that the short principle should have required such an exceedingly long incubation period. For it was only in the seventeenth century that Leibniz recognized the long current idea, that nothing may be without ground, as a decisive principle, and presented it as the principle of ground. Was something singular and great supposed to have come to appearance by means of the short and universal principle of ground ? Did an unusual awakening, an awakening into an awokeness that no longer permitted sleep, least of all an incubation, a sleep of sanctuary, prepare itself during this unusually long time of incubation ?

But the Latin title which Leibniz gives to the principle reveals the kind of propositions to which he assigns the principle of ground. Nothing without ground, *nihil sine ratione*, is called the *principium rationis*. The prop-

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osition [*Satz*] is now a principle [*Prinzip*]. The proposition concerning the ground becomes a fundamental proposition, a principle [*Grundsatz*]. But it is not merely one principle among others. For Leibniz, it is one of the supreme principles, if not the supreme principle. That is why Leibniz [193] characterizes the principle of ground with several epithets. He calls it the *principium magnum, grande et nobilissimum* : the great, the powerful, the most noble and renowned principle. To what extent does the principle of ground merit this characterization ? The content of the principle will be able to enlighten us on this point.

Leibniz elevates the *nihil sine ratione*, nothing without ground, to the supreme principle by showing to what extent the principle of ground founds [*begründet*] all propositions, that is, originally founds each proposition as a proposition. This character of the principle of ground comes to light in the complete Latin title which Leibniz gives to the principle. Leibniz characterizes the principle of ground as the *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*. We shall translate this title by elucidating its individual determinations. The *principium rationis* is *principium reddendae rationis*. *Rationem reddere* means : to render the ground [*den Grund zurückgeben*]. We shall raise three questions :

1. For what is the ground that is to be rendered on each occasion the ground ?
2. Why must the ground be rendered, that is, be expressly brought forward ?
3. To where is the ground rendered ?

Leibniz replies to the first question with a brief, but far-reaching, remark. The ground has to be rendered, *quod omnis veritatis reddi ratio potest* (Gerh. *Phil.* VII, 309), "because a truth is always truth, only if the ground can be rendered to it." For Leibniz, truth is always — and this remains decisive — *propositio vera*, a true proposition, that is, a correct judgment. The judgment is *connexio praedicati cum subiecto*, the connection of what is asserted with that about which something is asserted. The foundation, the ground of the judgment, is that which, as the unifying unity of subject and predicate, bears their connection. The ground of the judgment gives the justification for the connection. The ground gives the account for the truth of the judgment. Account is called *ratio* in Latin. The ground of the truth of the judgment is represented as *ratio*.

[194] Accordingly, Leibniz writes in a letter to Arnauld, "Hanover, July 14, 1686 : il faut tousjours qu'il y ait quelque fondement de la connexion des

termes d'une proposition, qui se doit trouver dans leur notions. *C'est là mon grand principe, dont je croy que tous les philosophes doivent demeurer d'accord, et dont un des corollaires est cet axiome vulgaire que rien n'arrive sans raison, qu'ont peut tousjours rendre pourquoy la chose est plustost allé ainsi qu'autrement...*" In translation : "it is always necessary that there be some foundation for the connection of the terms of a judgment, which must be found in their concepts. This is precisely my great principle, to which I believe all philosophers must concede, and hence this common axiom, that nothing happens without a ground, which can always render why the matter has turned out this way rather than some other way, remains one of the corollaries." (*Correspondence Between Leibniz, Arnauld, and the Count Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels*. Edited by C.L. Grotefend, Hanover, 1846, p. 49; cf. Gerhardt, *Phil.* II, 62.)

The great principle is the *principium reddendae rationis*, the principle of the ground that is to be rendered.

We now raise the second question : Why must the ground be expressly brought forward as ground ? Because the ground is *ratio*, that is, account. If the account is not given, the judgment remains without justification. It lacks the proven correctness. The judgment is not a truth. The judgment is a truth only if the connection is accounted for, only if the *ratio*, that is, the account, is rendered. Such an accounting requires a place where the account is deposited and rendered.

We raise the third question with regard to the *ratio reddenda* : To where must the ground be rendered ? Answer : Back to man, who, in the manner of judgmental representations, determines ob-jects [*Gegenstände*] as ob-jects. But to represent [*Vorstellen*] is : *repraesentare* — to present something to [195] man, to make something, present to him. However, since Descartes, whom Leibniz and all of modern thinking follow, man experiences himself as the ego [*Ich*] that relates itself to the world by positing the world at its disposal in correct representational connections, that is, judgments, and thus posits the world opposite itself as its ob-ject. Judgments and assertions are correct, that is, true, only when the ground of the connection between subject and predicate is presented and rendered to the representing ego. The ground is only such a ground as *ratio*, that is, as the account that gives an account of something to man and for man as the judging ego. The account is only an account if it is explicitly given. That is why the *ratio* is in itself *ratio reddenda*; as such, the ground is the ground that is to be rendered. Only by

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means of the ground of the representational connection that is rendered to the ego and expressly presented to it, does what is represented thus come to stand [*kommt... zum Stehen*] in such a way that it is certified as an object [*Gegenstand*], that is, as an object [*Objekt*], for the representing subject.

But the ground that is to be presented accomplishes such a bringing to stand of ob-jects [*zum-Stehen-Bringen der Gegenstände*] only when it gives, in a sufficient manner, an adequate account for the certification of ob-jects. The ground that is to be presented must be a *ratio sufficiens*.

Leibniz once wrote the following about the principle of ground : (*principium rationis*) *quod dicere soleo nihil existere nisi cuius reddi potest ratio existentiae sufficiens*. The principle of ground "which I tend to express (in this form) : nothing exists for which the ground of its existence cannot be sufficiently presented." In every judgment about an ob-ject, the ground that lays claim to its indispensable presentation at the same time demands that it suffice as a ground, that is, as an account it must be completely sufficient.

[196] For what ? So that, according to every view and for everyone, it may bring an ob-ject to stand within the whole of its stand, that is, so that it may fully bring an ob-ject to its stand. Only the completeness of the grounds that are to be presented, the *perfectio*, guarantees that something is con-"firmed" [*"fest"-gestellt*, literally, "firmly"-placed] and secured in its stand as an ob-ject (in the literal sense) for human representation. Only the completeness of the account, its perfection, guarantees that every representation can count on the ob-ject, and reckon with the ob-ject, everytime and everywhere.

Nothing is without ground. The principle now says : Everything is considered as a being [*seiend*] when, and only when, it is secured as a calculable ob-ject for representational thought [*Vorstellen*].

Wherein consists the greatness of the principle of ground as the *principium magnum, grande et nobilissimum*, the great, the powerful, the most noble and renowned principle ? Answer : Its greatness consists in that this principle determines what is allowed to pass for an ob-ject of thought, in general, for some kind of being [*etwas Seiendes*]. This claim to determine what is allowed to pass for the Being of a being is expressed in the principle of ground. When Leibniz, for the first time, lays down the principle of ground, expressly and completely as such a principle, he wants to express that in the meantime human thought, in a decisive and thus inevitable manner, is monopolized by the *principium rationis*, and is completely dominated by its power. The *principium rationis*, the principle of ground, becomes the

fundamental principle of all thought. This means : Representational thought, completely dominated by the *principium rationis*, now becomes thoroughly rational, dominated by reason [*Vernunft*]. For from ancient times, *ratio* does not only signify account in the sense of what justifies, that is, founds, something else. *Ratio* also signifies account in the sense of vindicating something, calculating it as justified and correct, and securing it by means of such calculation. Understood in this broad sense, calculation is the manner [197] in which man conceives of [*aufnimmt*] something, undertakes [*vornimmt*] and engages in [*annimmt*] something, that is, generally per-ceives [*vernimmt*] something. *Ratio* is the manner of perceiving [*Vernehmen*], that is, reason [*Vernunft*]. Reasonable, rational thought obeys the *principium rationis*. The principle of ground is the supreme principle of reason because through it reason first succeeds in the full unfolding of its essence as reason. The principle of ground is the principle of rational thought in the sense of a calculation that certifies. We speak of rational arguments [*Vernunftgründen*]. In this way, Leibniz reformulated the short, scarcely expressed principle — *Nihil sine ratione*, Nothing without ground — into the complete and rigorous version of the powerful principle, and thus the incubation period of the principle of ground was terminated in one respect. Since then, the claim, which at first was only implicit in the principle, has unfolded a previously unforeseen domination. This achieves nothing less than the most inner, but at the same time, the most concealed, character of the age of Western history which we call "modern." The domination of the powerful principle becomes all the more powerful in the history of mankind, the more universally, the more obviously, and consequently, the more inconspicuously, the principle of ground determines all representational thought and behavior. So it stands today.

That is why we, we men of today, must ask whether and how we hear the claim that speaks through the great principle of all representation. Do we feel the power of this claim ? Yes. Modern man does indeed hear this claim. He listens [*hört*] to it in a peculiarly decisive manner such that he, more and more exclusively, faster and faster, is becoming a slave [*hörig wird*] to the power of the principle. What is more : Modern man runs the risk of measuring the greatness of everything great only against the extent of the domination of the *principium rationis*. We know today, although we have not understood it correctly, that modern technology incessantly strives to drive its contrivances and products into the all-encompassing, greatest

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[198] possible perfection. This perfection consists in the completeness of the calculable certification of ob-jects, of calculating with them, and of the assurance of the calculability of the possibilities of calculation.

The perfection of technology is only the echo of the claim to the *perfectio*, that is, to the completeness of the foundation. This claim speaks through the *principium reddendae rationis sufficientis*, through the principle of the sufficient ground that is to be presented. The steps of thinking, which we have completed thus far, may be briefly summarized in the following form :

Modern technology drives forward into the greatest possible perfection. This perfection consists in the universal calculability of ob-jects. The calculability of ob-jects presupposes the unlimited validity of the *principium rationis*. Thus, the characteristic domination of the principle of ground then determines the essence of our modern, technological age. And today mankind has come so far that it is willing to let itself be carried away toward that which was incapable of coming forth earlier in its history. Mankind is entering into the age which has been named the "atomic age." A recently published book, intended for the general public, bears the title, *We Shall Live Through Atoms*. The book is provided with a preface by the Nobel prize winner, Otto Hahn, and with a foreword by the present Minister of Defense, Franz Joseph Strauss. At the conclusion of the introduction, the authors of the book write :

The atomic age can therefore become a hopeful, blooming, happy age, an age in which we shall live through atoms. It all depends on us !

[199] Indeed — it all depends on us; it depends on us, and on several other things, namely, whether we still meditate, whether we are in general able and willing to still meditate. If, in the meantime, we are to attain to a path of meditation, we must, above all, first agree with regard to a distinction which keeps in mind the difference between merely calculative thinking and meditative thinking. In order that we may see this distinction, we shall now attempt a meditation on the principle of ground.

We shall begin our meditation by finally paying heed to what conceals itself in the apparently harmless naming that calls our age the atomic age. What is unusual about this ? For the first time in his history, man interprets an epoch of his historical existence in terms of the forceful impact [*Andrang*] and manufacture of a form of nature's energy. And it already seems

as though we were lacking the standards and the power of reflection in order to still experience freely enough the strangeness and the uncanniness of such an interpretation of our present age, and thus to be struck by it, incessantly and more and more decisively.

The existence [*Dasein*] of man is characterized by atomic energy !

Whether atomic energy is used peacefully or is mobilized for warlike purposes, whether the one sustains and provokes the other, these remain secondary questions. For we must first question far ahead into the future and even further back into the past : *What does it mean that an age of world history is characterized by atomic energy and its liberation ?* Perhaps many of us already have the answer in that we judge : Atomic age means the domination of materialism, so that it is a matter of saving the old spiritual values in the face of the forceful impact of material values. Nevertheless, this answer would be much too simplistic. For materialism is absolutely nothing material-like. It is itself a form of the spirit. It does not blow from the West any less than from the East. In the American journal [200] *Perspectives, USA*, whose German edition is distributed by the publisher S. Fischer, there is the following (Max Lerner, "Big Technology and Neutral Technicians," vol. 14, 1956, pp. 123-124) :

The loss of some of the old life-values may affect the long-range survival of the culture, but what counts for the cohesion of a culture in the generations immediately ahead is whether people have — or think they have — what their culture has taught them to value... The values of income, consumption, and status and popular culture are a different set of values from those of soil, and craft and small-scale productive property, and in that sense the whole ground tone of American civilization has changed under the Big Technology... That is to say, it is the machine itself that has cut American industrial, white-collar, and professional workers away from the machine, and has transferred their interest and life energies from the making of goods to the making of money with which to buy and enjoy the goods.

It becomes clear from these few sentences that materialism is the most threatening form of the spirit because we misjudge most readily and most persistently the deceitful form of its violence.

That is why we repeat the question : What does it mean that an age of world history is characterized by atomic energy and its liberation ? It means nothing other than this : The atomic age is governed by the power of the claim that threatens to overpower us through the principle of the sufficient ground that is to be presented.



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[201] How should we understand this ? Atomic energy is liberated in vast amounts through the splitting of the atomic nucleus. The liberation of this energy of nature takes place through the work of the most modern science of nature, which more and more clearly turns out to be a decisive function and form of the essence of modern technology. Until recently, the science of atoms only knew of the proton and neutron as parts of the atom. Today there are already more than ten particles. Through these facts, research is driven toward transferring the scattered diversity of elementary particles back into a new unity. It is a matter of eliminating the contradictions that are constantly prominent in the observed facts, as well as in the theories which have been drawn up to explain these facts. This is done by bringing the judgments that contradict one another into a unanimous agreement. This requires a unity that connects what is contradictory. However, the sufficient ground that is presented is on each occasion what bears and determines the connection of the representations in the judgments. Hence, it becomes clear that the impulse to inquire into the non-contradictory unity of judgments, and the enthrallment with the corresponding verification of this unity, come from the power of the claim that demands the presentation of the sufficient ground for all representation. The domination of the powerful principle of ground is the element in which the sciences move, as does the fish in water and the bird in the air.

In the most beautiful way possible, Goethe tells us about all of this in the last two lines of one of his late poems (*Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten*, X) :

Yet research [*Forschung*] untiringly strives and struggles  
For the law, the ground, *why* and *how*.

[202] Goethe well surmised how the untiring character of research — if it only blindly follows the pursuit of its enthrallment — fatigues man and earth in their innermost essence. However, Goethe was not able to foresee where the untiring character of modern research leads when it relinquishes itself without reservation to its sole standard, to the domination of the powerful principle of the sufficient ground that is to be presented. To where has this led ? It has led to a transformation of scientific thought by means of which what is still implicit in the essence of modern science comes to completion.

Science, which is commandeered by modern technology, is now released,

through the liberation of immense atomic energy, from henceforth searching for new sources of energy. But this release [*Entbindung*] immediately turns back into a still more powerful bond [*Bindung*] to the claim of the principle of ground. Research must now direct all of its efforts, in a new style, to master the liberated energies of nature. What does this mean ?

It means : To secure the usefulness of atomic energy and, prior to this, its calculability, in such a manner that this securing on its part constantly provokes the inserting of new assurances. In this manner, the power of the claim upon the presentation of the sufficient ground is interminably increased. Under the power of this claim, the fundamental characteristic of contemporary human existence, which seeks security everywhere, is strengthened. (Incidentally, Leibniz, the discoverer of the principle of sufficient ground, is also the inventor of "life insurance.") The work for the securing of life, however, must constantly secure itself anew. The guiding word for this fundamental attitude of contemporary existence speaks : Information. We must hear this word in its American-English accent.

[203] In the first place, information means the reporting that instructs modern man, as quickly and as comprehensively as possible, as clearly and as completely as possible, about the securing of his needs, their requirement and their provision. Consequently, the representation of man's language as an instrument of information gains the upper hand in increasing measure. For the definition of language as information first of all provides the sufficient ground for the construction of thinking machines and for the building of large calculators. However, while information in-forms, that is, reports, at the same time it forms, that is, it organizes and directs. As reporting, information is already also the organization which places man, all objects and constructions [*Bestände*], into one form that suffices in order to assure the domination of man over the entire earth, and even beyond this planet.

In the form of information, the powerful principle of the sufficient ground that is to be presented completely dominates all representational thought and so determines the present world epoch as one in which everything depends on the delivery [*Zustellung*] of atomic energy.

In order to preface a meditative thinking, we asked whether modern and contemporary man hears the claim which speaks through the powerful principle of all representational thought. We answered yes and showed how. Contemporary man constantly pays heed to [*hören auf*] the principle of ground in that he progressively becomes a slave [*höriger wird*] to the

principle.

But supposing that this slavery [*Hörigkeit*] is not the only, and thus the authentic, manner of hearing, then we have to ask the question once more : Do we hear the claim of the principle of ground ? However, we now heed the fact that we genuinely hear a claim only when we cor-respond to what [204] authentically addresses itself to us. Does an appeal [*Zuspruch*] speak in the claim [*Anspruch*] of the principle of ground ? And do we hear from where the powerful principle speaks ? We must confess : No ! To what extent no ? Insofar as we do not hear clearly and decisively enough, and do not ponder what the principle of ground genuinely says.

In its best-known formulation, the principle of ground reads : *Nihil est sine ratione, Nothing is without ground.*

In the usual expression of the principle, we do not usually pay attention to the fact that we ignore — as though it were something obvious — the little word “is.” Why should we listen to the “is” ? The principle of ground says : Every being has a ground. The principle is an assertion about being [*das Seiende*]. But we experience the being as being only when we pay heed to how it *is* and that it *is*. Hence, in order to genuinely hear what the principle says about being, we must direct our attention to the “is” which sets the all-harmonizing tone in the principle “Nothing is without ground.” If we listen to, that is, if we freely give ourselves to, what is genuinely spoken in the principle, then the principle will suddenly sound differently. The principle will no longer read : *Nothing is without ground*, but rather : *Nothing is without ground*. Whenever it is said about being, the little word “is” names the Being of being. While the “is” now wants to say : “Being,” while it now sets the tone in the principle, the ground is stressed at the same time : *Nothing is without ground*. Being [*Sein*] and ground now ring in a harmony. In this ringing, there rings out the fact that Being and ground belong together in a oneness. The differently sounding principle now says : The ground belongs to Being. The principle of ground no longer speaks as the supreme principle of all representation of being, it no longer says that every being has a ground. The principle of ground now speaks as a word about Being. This word answers the question : What does Being mean ? Answer : Being means ground. However, the principle of ground, [205] as a word about Being, can no longer want to say : Being [*Sein*] has a ground. If we were to understand the word about Being in this sense, then Being would be represented as a being. Only being has a ground, and indeed

necessarily so. It *is* only as grounded. Being [*Sein*], however, because itself the ground, remains without ground. Insofar as Being, itself the ground, grounds, it allows the being to be a being at any given time.

[However, because Leibniz and all of metaphysics insist on the principle of ground only as a principle about being, metaphysical thinking consequently demands of the principle a first ground for Being : a ground that is to be found in a being, and indeed in the supreme being; cf. Leibniz, VII, 289ff.]

So every being, because Being as the ground has given it into Being, inevitably has the dowry of a ground. For otherwise it would not be a being. The principle of ground, understood as the principle of the sufficient ground that is to be presented, is only true, therefore, because in it a word about Being speaks which says : Being and ground are the same [*Sein und Grund : das Selbe*].

According to the established assertion, this word about Being is supposed to answer the question : What does Being mean ? But is this an answer, when it is said to us : Being means ground ? Instead of accepting an answer in this way, we are forced to ask a new question. For we immediately ask : What does ground mean ? Now there is only the following answer : ground means Being. Being means ground — ground means Being : Everything is turning in circles here. Dizziness overcomes us. Thought is plunged into desperation. For we neither know correctly what “Being” means, nor what “ground” means. But if we were to assume that the word about Being as ground would answer the question of the meaning of Being, then this answer would, above all, remain closed to us. We lack the key which would perhaps unlock the question and thus give us some insight into what the  
[206] word says about Being. Now it is already difficult and cumbersome enough just to look for the missing key. For this reason, in this lecture we shall choose another way in order to perhaps at least unlock a front door. Let our escort be the poet whose verses convey that representational thought which stands under the power of the principle of the sufficient ground that is to be presented.

Goethe says of modern science :

Yet research untiringly strives and struggles  
For the law, the ground, *why* and *how*.

The “yet” at the beginning of the first line contrasts research with another attitude or behavior which no longer strives untiringly for the ground of

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being. Whenever we pursue the grounds of being, we ask : Why ? This interrogative word pursues representational thought from one ground to another. The why allows no rest, offers no pause, gives no support. "Why" is the word for the enthrallment with an untiring and-so-forth which, assuming that research only blindly tires itself out, drives research so far that it might one day drive research too far.

The word about Being as ground says : Being — itself the ground — remains without ground, that is, is now without why. If we try to think Being as ground, we must step back from the question : Why ?

But what should we hold on to ?

In his "Collection of Sayings" from the year 1815, Goethe says :

How ? When ? Where ? — The gods remain silent !

You hold to [*halten sich an*] *because* and ask not *why* ?

[207] The why unfolds itself in the questions : How ? When ? Where ? It asks for the law, the time, the place, of what comes to pass. The question of the sequence of movement which is regulated according to the space-time-law is the manner in which research pursues the why of being. But Goethe says :

You hold to *because* and ask not *why* ?

What does the because [*das Weil*] say ? It wards off the seeking for the why, thus for the foundation. It holds off founding and fathoming. For the because is without why, has no ground, is itself the ground.

The word "ground" [*Grund*] signifies what lies in the depths, for example, the bottom of the sea, the bottom of the valley, the bottom of the heart. Cf. Goethe, *Sonnets*, "Powerful Surprise" :

Whatever may be reflected in the interplay of ground and grounds [*von Grund zu Gründen*],

It incessantly flows toward the valley.

The ground is that upon which everything rests, what is always there for every being as its support. The because names this supporting presence before which we simply stop. The because points into the essence of ground. However, if the word about Being as the ground is a true word, then the because at the same time points into the essence of Being.

But what does "because" [*weil*] really mean ? It is the shortened word for "as long as" [*dieweilen*]. An old saying runs :

Strike while [*weil*] the iron is hot !

"*Weil*" does not mean here : therefore — because, but rather "*weil*" means : *dieweilen*, that is, as long as — the iron is hot — while. *Weilen* means : to last, to remain still, to keep to itself and to stop, namely, in rest. In a beautiful verse, Goethe says :

The fiddle stops, the dancer rests [*weilt*].

To rest, to last, to endure, is, however, the old meaning of the word [208] "to be" [*sein*]. The because that wards off every foundation and each why names the simple, modest presence that is without why, on which everything depends, on which everything rests. The because names the ground. However, the because, as the lingering that endures, at the same time names Being. The because especially names : Being and ground, names the enduring, Being as ground. Being and ground — in the because — : the same. Both belong together.

The short principle of ground : "*Nothing is without ground*," speaks, above all, as the great principle, the *principium grande*. The principle is great through the power of its claim upon all representational thought. The short principle of ground : "*Nothing is without ground*," at the same time speaks as the word about Being and names Being as ground.

But only because the word about Being is true, does it also hold true for the principle of all representational thought. As the word about Being, the principle of ground first gives the ground to the principle of representational thought.

The word about Being as ground makes such grounding possible. It is a powerful word through the power of this capability. It is great, but in an entirely different sense than the greatness of the power of the principle. As the word about Being, the principle of ground is great in the sense of its capacity for greatness, its desire for greatness, and its might. The principle does not speak of the power of the claim upon the why. The mighty word is a word without violence, for it simply tells us the meaning of "Being."

Nevertheless, we must ask : Why ? For we are not able to leap out of our present age which is completely dominated by the principle of the sufficient ground that is to be presented. But at the same time we must not cease to hold ourselves to the because by listening to the word about Being

## THE PRINCIPLE OF GROUND

as ground. We must do the former, for we are compelled to follow the power of the principle for all representational thought. We must not fail to do the latter, for we need to reflect upon the great power of the word about Being.

[209] The principle of ground says : Nothing is without ground. At present, each word of the principle speaks in its own manner.

The claim of the principle speaks in the principle of ground. The appeal of the word about Being speaks in the principle of ground. The appeal, however, is considerably older than the claim. For during the unusually long incubation period of the principle of ground, the word about Being as ground addressed itself to Western man again and again. There would not be thinking in the form of philosophy if it were not for this appeal. Without philosophy, there would not be any Western-European science, any freeing of atomic energy. But the appeal in the word about Being as ground remains unarticulated as opposed to the articulation of the principle in the at present noisy, all-alarming power of its claim.

As long as this is so, people will continue, amidst the noise, to ignore the appeal which speaks even today throughout the principle of ground in the most obstinate and loudest manner.

Thus it was said : it depends on us. But not on whether we live through atoms, but rather on whether we are capable of being the mortals who we are, namely, those who stand within the appeal of Being. Only such beings [*Wesen*] are capable of dying, that is, of taking over death as death.

What is at stake is whether we shall be guardians and watchmen who watch for the triumph of the stillness of the appeal in the word about Being over the noise in the claim of the *principium rationis* as the fundamental principle for all representational thought. What is at stake is whether or not the power of the claim upon the why will submit itself to the capacity for greatness of the appeal of the because.

You hold to *because* and ask not *why* ?

[210] Goethe's word is a hint. Hints remain hints only if thinking does not interpret them in definitive assertions in order then to abide by them. Hints are hints only as long as thinking follows their direction in that it reflects upon them. Thus, thinking attains to a path which, from time immemorial, leads to what shows itself in the tradition of our thinking as what is worthy of thought, and at the same time, conceals itself therein.

This simple matter, which has perhaps become a little closer to us, belongs to what is worthy of thought. We name what is worthy of thought when we say : Being becomes experienced as ground. Ground is interpreted as *ratio*, as account.

Consequently, man is the *animal rationale*, the living creature that demands and gives an account. According to this definition, man is the calculating creature, calculating understood in the broad sense, which Cicero already attributed to the word *ratio*, originally a word of Roman merchants, in a time when Greek thinking was transposed into Roman thought.

Being becomes experienced as ground. Ground is interpreted as *ratio*, account. Man is the living creature that calculates. All this holds true throughout the various transformations and is present throughout the entire history of Western thought. As modern-European, this thinking has brought the world into the contemporary age, the atomic age. In view of this simple, and at the same time, for Europe, uncanny matter, we ask :

Does the definition of man as the rational animal exhaust the essence of man ? Is this the last word that can be said about Being : Being means ground ? Or does not the essence of man remain, does not his relationship to Being remain, does not the essence of Being still remain, and more and more dazzling, remain what is worthy of thought ? May we, if this should [211] be the case, abandon what is worthy of thought in favor of the madness of exclusively calculative thinking and its immense success ? Or are we obliged to find paths upon which thinking may be capable of cor-responding to what is worthy of thought, instead of remaining bewitched by calculative thinking, and thus overlooking what is worthy of thought ?

That is the question. It is the world-question of thinking. Our reply to it will decide what will become of the earth and what will become of the existence of man upon the earth.