“No Selfhood... No Freedom: Martin Heidegger’s Radical Definition of ‘Transcendence’ in 20th Century Europe”

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ABSTRACT

This essay endeavors to craft a modern definition of the term “transcendence” based on the work of twentieth-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. For 2,500 years, the term “transcendence” has been employed to describe the distance between man and truth. In Heidegger’s monumental philosophy such limits are shattered. As such, this essay makes an effort to “fetch back” the term “transcendence” in light of Heidegger’s work, and in so doing effect a revival of ideas of “beauty,” “truth,” and “freedom” aimed at restoring the essence of metaphysics itself. Positing a definition of “transcendence” that radically departs from Western historical definitions of the term, this work crafts a philosophical and linguistic argument following the history of metaphysics in the West while pushing it to its breaking point. Written to parallel Heidegger’s own philosophical voice and style, this quest for a modern definition of transcendence aims, above all, to lead readers to the core of Heidegger’s thought and in so doing effect an epochal encounter with what Heidegger refers to as “the Being of beings.” Four of Heidegger’s key essays guide the style and content of this essay: “What is Metaphysics?” “On the Essence of Truth,” “The Origin of the Work of Art,” and “The Question Concerning Technology.” In an effort to revive the metaphysical tradition by pushing it to its most radical yet fundamental extremes a new, essential, definition of the term “transcendence” is forged, which knows neither distance nor limit—which seeks the truth of freedom.

Keywords: Black notebooks, essence, Heidegger, transcendence
“To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands like a star in the world’s sky.”

–Martin Heidegger

“What is transcendence?” The question awakens expectations of a discussion about transcendence. This we will forgo. Instead, we will take up a particular transcendental question. In this way, it seems, we will let ourselves be transposed directly into the transcendental. Only in this way will we provide transcendence the proper occasion to introduce itself.

From where we stand, the world is divided into three broad periods of thought. Thus, we can begin to think of our nearness to the concept of transcendence in two distinct ways: as the dissemination of truth from God to man, and as the ascent to knowledge from man to Reason. These two broad distinctions center on the occurrence of Enlightenment thought, belonging to thinkers such as Locke and Hobbes, in which man’s ascent to Reason is transcendence. Pre-Enlightenment thought, or religious thought, took shape in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and Augustus. Here, God’s dissemination of truth to man defines transcendence. What is so different about these two broad periods of thought? More so, where is the third?

Two Broad Distinctions

It is apparent that there is an empty space in our modern definition of the term transcendence. From God to man and man to Reason, transcendence occurs in that knowledge or “truth” is disseminated. What does truth mean here for each of our transcendental models? How does truth happen?

As in all metaphysical inquiries, the whole of metaphysics must be addressed. The same is then true for transcendence, since we are defining it here in consonance with the entire tradition of Western metaphysics. Transcendence is a metaphysical concept; thus, the entire historical path of transcendence must be brought into question at once with the questioners themselves. The original metaphysical enquiry can only be posited as a whole, which brings existence [Dasein] into its essential mode. It is only with a preliminary sketch of both previous transcendental paths that we can seek to discover the lost definition belonging properly to Post-Enlightenment thought.

2 Heidegger, Martin. “What is Metaphysics?” Basic Writings (London: Routledge, 2010), 93. As homage to the text that first profoundly inspired me to think, this opening paragraph parallels Martin Heidegger’s own introduction to “What is Metaphysics?” As I write this definition of the term transcendence for the modern age, four of Heidegger’s essays in particular are very present in guiding my thesis as well as my style. These are: “What is Metaphysics?” “The Essence of Truth,” “The Origin of the Work of Art,” and “The Question Concerning Technology.” Working closely with Heidegger’s writings I have done my best to both think with and write with the great philosopher of Being on this so far tentatively explored topic. The cyclical style of this essay is meant to parallel Heidegger’s own style and voice as well as to, itself, aid in transporting the reader into the vanishing horizon—the rare Dionysiac twilight—of the question of Being.
3 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 93-94.
When questioning is posited as a whole, we begin to call into question beings as a whole [Das Seiendes im Ganz]. Such inquiry has for the past 2,500 years been the domain of science. “What happens when science becomes our passion?”

The scientific fields begin their inquiry into the nature of beings [Das Seiende] by way of weights and measures. This is a proper investigation into the thingly characteristic of matter. By naming color and size and frequency of occurrence, science names beings as matter-formed. What is this “matter-formed”? What role does it play in our knowledge of truth?

When science analyzes things as matter [hyle, ὕλη], the concept of form [morphē, μορφή] is already given. You can see here that we have begun to use Greek. When science investigates beings as mere things, it is speaking of formed matter. Form means here the particular arrangement of the material parts of a thing, as such, its thing-structure as it exists in a spatial location. This scientific structure becomes truly confusing when it becomes clear that the shape of the form is not a posteriori vis-à-vis the matter that stands; rather, the form determines the arrangement of the matter. These forms, existing after or above matter where it dwells, constitute the realm of ideas.

In the course of this essay, language will come to play a significant role. The Pre-Socratics spoke of Alētheia (ἀλήθεια) and the Sophists of Veritas. Veritas means: truth, sincerity, and integrity, with the added sense of “fact” and “correctness.” Alētheia means: truth, sincerity, and integrity; however, it also means “unhiddenness.” Roman thought, with truth dominated by sophistry, takes over the Greek word without any thought to the corresponding originality of Greek experience. This is no innocent mistake: “The rootlessness of Western thought begins with this translation.”

In Greek, truth means “unhiddenness.” In German, “unhiddenness” or “unclosedness” is Entschlossenheit: resoluteness.

In much the same way that matter is in accord with its form, so too could one say is the truth of a statement in accord from subject to predicate. Fortunately, we have at hand a very good example: “Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectūs.” From the Latin, we take this to mean that truth [veritas] is the correspondence of matter [rei] to knowledge [intellectūs]. Here, it is clear that veritas “conforms to” and hence posits truth as correctness. In German, correctness is Richtigkeit. But to where have we strayed in our search for the lost definition of transcendence?

4  Ibid, 94.
6  Ibid, 153.
7  Ibid, 154.
8  Ibid.
9  Ibid, 148-149.
10 Ibid, 149.
11 Ibid, 192.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
Veritas, in its propositional statement “Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectūs,” stands as the usual formula for conceptions of knowledge as scientific truth back to its most recent origin in medieval times.\(^{15}\) Let us be quite clear that this does not merely imply the later transcendental conception of Kant—chiefly the basis of the subjectivity of man’s essence in so far as objects conform to man’s knowledge.\(^{16}\) We return now to matter and hence to the Christian theological belief that matter conforms, that is, “is created” \([\text{ins creatum}]\) and \(is\) as such, in its conformity to the intellectus divinis, the mind of God.\(^{17}\) In this sense, objects “measure up” to the idea (form) and only then are correct, thus, the truth. “The theologically contrived order of creation is replaced by the capacity of all objects to be planned by means of worldly reason \([\text{Weltvernuft}],\) which supplies the law for itself.”\(^{18}\)

In this way, it seems we have returned to our two previous distinctions of Western thought that posit definitions of transcendence: that of truth as disseminated from God to man and that of truth as ascent to Reason by man. We have also approached the question of the difference between these definitions and are now prepared briefly to answer it.

In both Enlightenment and Pre-Enlightenment thought, the metaphysical term “transcendence” is defined by the relationship between man and knowledge. In Latin, the heretofore-reigning mode of thought, knowledge as truth, is \(veritas\). \(Veritas\) brings matter under the yoke of the form; in formed-matter, truth as the subject of “correctness” is in accord with the predicate idea of the form.

The notion of creation in faith, and of the laws of reason, however, can lose their guiding power for knowledge of beings as a whole.\(^{19}\) When we define these periods as predominantly scientific, we begin to see that our essential grounding in the sciences has atrophied.\(^{20}\) We consequently say that the metaphysics of the modern age rests upon the form-matter structure of the Middle Ages, its thought only recalling the forlorn experience of \(hyle\) and \(morphē.\)\(^{21}\) Thus, we have learned that when science investigates things by means of this matter-form relationship, be these investigations medieval or Kantian-transcendental, it merely serves to look into the thingness of things and to hold them at a distance from the dwelling of man.

This “holding at a distance” has for 2,500 years defined the work of metaphysics and the status of transcendence. \(Veritas\) as correctness brings matter under the yoke of the form. In other words, thinking becomes scientific in the accordance \([\text{homoiōsis}]\) of a statement \([\text{logos}]\) with a matter \([\text{pragma}].\)\(^{22}\)

Thus far in our line of questioning, we have discovered that transcendence seeks the truth and that in the Western metaphysical tradition “truth” has come to mean “correctness in accordance with.” This is the grammatical distance between God and man, between man and

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid, 119.
20 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 95.
knowing. Posed now to briefly answer our first question concerning these two preliminary distinctions of Western thought, we have come to the point of being able to say: they are hardly different at all. The metaphysical status of transcendence has, for 2,500 years, been held at bay, guardian of a great chasm...

The Lost Truth

Did we not, however, name another word for truth? In pre-Socratic thought, something slumbers… We recall that Alētheia (ἀλήθεια) means “unconcealedness.” We must then ask: how is it with the “unconcealedness?”

In seeking the lost definition of Post-Enlightenment transcendence, we look to history. By looking to history, we are always already within the realm of metaphysics, be it Kantian-transcendental or Platonic. As suggested previously, transcendence is a metaphysical term. It has a claim to metaphysics and vice versa. Thus, the entire historical path of transcendence must be brought into question along with the questioner. The original metaphysical inquiry can only be posited as a whole, which brings existence [Dasein] into its essential mode.

It is clear that we are traveling in a circle. This is no mistake. At this point in our search, it has also become clear that we must look into the essence of truth [Alētheia] as unconcealedness. What is “essence?” Moreover, who is this questioner of essence, and why must he be brought into his essential mode in the original realm of metaphysics? 23

We must now take up the particular transcendental question we spoke of in order to be ourselves transposed directly into metaphysics, as the transcendental. In the Western intellectual tradition, man—one being among others—has pursued science. 24 In this pursuit, man irrupts into beings as a whole. 25 In this irruption, beings break open, showing what and how they are in their particular mode of existing in a spatial location. But not only this: “The irruption that breaks open helps beings to themselves.” 26 How is it with these beings that are helped to themselves in the irruption into beings as a whole? Now we arrive at what is truly remarkable. At the precise moment when scientific man leaps forward to secure what is properly his, he finds himself speaking of something entirely different. 27

What does scientific man investigate? He looks into the qualities and quantities of beings—and besides that, nothing. When matter is formed, scientific man has the task of stretching it to reason—and besides that, nothing. In his irruption into beings as a whole he investigates how it is with beings—and besides that, nothing. 28

23 The choice to use “he” here instead of “it” is intended to mark the reference to Dasein (who has not yet been properly introduced). Though Heidegger denotes Dasein as “it” with the famously neuter “Das Dasein,” I have chosen the pronoun “he” to guard against any ambiguity or confusion “it” might create in the context of the above sentence.


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.
To what odd end have we arrived in our strange circle? What is all this talk about nothing? In investigating beings, in irrupting into beings as a whole, the total aggregate of scientific knowledge has come to nothing.29

We must now press resolutely onward and ask: “How is it with the nothing?”30

Several clues quickly and clearly present themselves. It is clear that science does not investigate this nothing. It is clear that the nothing is not simply the totality of beings. But is this not how we arrived at the phantasm of the nothing in the first place? It is clear that scientific man irrupts into beings as a whole. What of this irruption? For the time being, this mystery remains veiled.

In its investigation of beings, science gives up the nothing, as a void, as a phantom. Nevertheless, we are resolved to coming before how it stands with the nothing; and yet, when this nothing is questioned, the object is always already devoured by the subject.31 For example, when we begin by making a hypothesis about this nothing that we wish to investigate in our inquiry, we begin with “the nothing is.”32 We are already lost in an inherent absurdity.33

However, we must not be discouraged by our apparent inability to question the nothing. Logic, whose methods we have thus far detailed, would suffice to say that the nothing is “not” this or that thing. Thus, we now have the idea of the nothing as “It is not.” Subject and predicate persist, signaling only some negated matter; harking to the great distance of knowledge, we have sunk ourselves into investigating only to arrive at nothing. At this point in our argument, I must boldly assert that the nothing is far more original than that.34

Standing now as not simply a negated subjective matter, some nullity, a clearing arises. If this nothing is not simply this or that, yet still not nothing, persistently more original than a negation, “We must be able to encounter it…”35

In man’s irruption into beings as a whole, he investigates all but nothing. This is the realm of discovery, of pure exploration, of the quest. Do we not know the nothing? Is it not something we rap our fingers on or breathe in silently in the night… a thin veil of morning fog? The learned, familiar taste of things, a word, a specter… But are we not still dealing with beings? With matter and things? A rap of fingers, the morning fog? Absolutely not. “For the nothing is the negation of the totality of beings; it is non-being pure and simple.”36

Non-being. This certainly signals a frightful turning back and fleeing from the gaping jaws of what is clearly a phantom in our midst. How have we been drawn out into the realm of this empty, nihilating oblivion? We have questioned beings as a whole, their qualities and quantities across the earth; we have had them formed correctly into matter. And yet in standing before beings as a whole, the nothing rushes up to meet us. But from where has it taken its

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29 Ibid, 96.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid, 96-97.
32 Ibid, 97.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibid, 97.
origin? In the towering form of all matter pressing down on scientific man? [Das Seiendes im Ganz]. Indeed.

In the totality of beings’ matter, all gathers round, and the power of the nothing grows. Instead of thinking of beings as things in accordance with their ideas, the nothingness of their lost essence presses forward most dangerously. This is the profound anxiety.\(^\text{37}\)

It is in the comportment of our human emotion that we are brought before this nothing for the very first time.

Let me be clear, this original anxiety is not simply “fear for” or “fear in the face of” this or that particular thing.\(^\text{38}\) This “fear for,” however, remains in relation to the nothing. In our investigation, we have insisted that, when posing transcendence as a metaphysical question, it is a requirement (of metaphysics proper, which we aim to rediscover here as well) that the questioner himself be brought into question along with the whole of metaphysics itself. Finally, who is this questioner? What profound anxiety grips him in the face of the nothing and brings him to tremble before it?

We have established that the nothing is the negation of the totality of beings. It is nonbeing pure and simple.\(^\text{39}\) In all our lives, we are always already within it, even if only in some shadowy way. The nothing nihilates.\(^\text{40}\) In this original nihilation, negating the totality of beings in the astounding presence of the pressing whole, anxiety grips us, and in this profound anxiety we are thrown out into a primeval encounter with the nothing itself. “Anxiety robs us of speech… in the face of anxiety all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent.”\(^\text{41}\) Standing out in the nihilating oblivion of the original openness of the nothing: “pure Da-sein is all that remains.”\(^\text{42}\)

In the original openness of this abyssal plain, the questioner, for the first time, comes forward into the totality of beings and gazes long into the oblivion of existence itself. This being—one being among others, gazing long into the abyss of Being—is Dasein.

For Dasein, beings hide and show themselves, they glitter in the light they make, and in the irruption of this unconcealing light, he sees them for the first time. In the emotion of anxiety, he is thrown out into the open region of their Being. In the emotion of love, he sees into the essence of beings, and in his comportment of care, he fears for them. This “fear for” the essential essence of beings, as beings and not nothing, is not the profound anxiety that first propels man into the nothing proper; it is an essential mode of Dasein nonetheless. In the light of the open region, Da-sein knows the original essence of matter and thing for the first time. Here, Da-sein knows too the last things—death and judgment.\(^\text{43}\) Authentic Da-sein turns resolutely to gaze long into the blinding light of Being.

“In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings—and not nothing… The essence of the originally nihilating nothing

\(^{37}\) Ibid, 100-101.

\(^{38}\) Ibid, 100.

\(^{39}\) Ibid, 97.

\(^{40}\) Ibid, 103.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, 101.

\(^{42}\) Ibid, 101.

lies in this, that it brings Da-sein for the first time before beings as such,”⁴⁴ and he is “held out” into their Being as well as his own…

Da-sein trembles on this precipice, breathless before the breaking of the world… In German Das Da-sein means: the there-Being. “Da-sein means: Being held out into the nothing.”⁴⁵

At this point in our search, each of us, as Da-sein, has always already been brought before the primary occurrence of the truth of Alētheia. This is the most original occurrence of beauty.

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.⁴⁶

“Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.”⁴⁷

**Freedom**

We have thus returned to our origin. In being brought before the Being of beings [Das Seiende des Seiendes], we are held out into the nothing, the oblivion of Being itself. The primordial occurrence of this question, when man first seeks Being, was from the time of Plato and Aristotle originally called “philosophy” and later “metaphysics.”⁴⁸ Metaphysics must think Being. Under the yoke of the form, in simple grammatical accordance with veritas, it has not. The question “What is metaphysics?” here too receives an answer that has been denied to its essence for centuries. Metaphysics means: transcendence.

Have we not then answered our original question? With regard to the first two broad distinctions of Western historical thought, we have said that transcendence was held at bay, safeguarding the bridge between man and the gods. But what is the third distinction? Is the open region not the proper realm of the lost third distinction? Here, the nothing as such was there, and Dasein held out into it. We have defined this moment of being beyond beings as transcendence—as authentic Da-sein holding itself out into the nothing.

Our circle draws tightly around itself once again. We have sought the questioner of essence and sent him resolutely on his heroic quest into the nihilating oblivion of Being. Yet we are still left questioning. In the abyss of the nothing, we gazed into the essence of truth [Alētheia] as unconcealedness and the irruption of scientific man into beings as a whole [Das Seiendes im Ganz], throwing Da-sein out into the profound anxiety, where he loves and cares for the Being of beings in the open region of their shimmering truth. We know that this is transcendence.

We also know that without the original revelation of the nothing, as Da-sein transcends in his “being beyond beings,” there is “no selfhood and no freedom.”⁴⁹

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⁴⁴ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.
⁴⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁶ Ibid.
⁴⁷ Ibid.
⁴⁹ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.
It is clear that man is always already Dasein, briefly glimpsing beings who hide and show themselves in everyday light. Is this Dasein’s selfhood? Is Dasein free? At this point in our search, we are led to ask: what is freedom?

Being held out into the nothing, into the origin of metaphysics itself, and even the primeval resting place of something more original than that, transcendence reveals the blinding light of Being as such. We are now aware that without this original realization, there is no selfhood, no freedom. What of selfhood and freedom? As products of transcendence, the original essences of these concepts have been lost to the ages. When we speak of Dasein transcending, we find ourselves making a resolute turn to the occurrence of truth. The thinking of Being, lost to the definition of metaphysics over the ages, seeks the truth of freedom.

When Dasein is transcending, he is in the open region of truth as unconcealedness. This is the original glimpse of Alētheia’s veil, the atrium of the open region, where beings come to stand in the light of their Being.

The pre-Socratics used the word Alētheia to mean truth. We know also that Alētheia means “unhiddenness.” This original notion of Alētheia as unhiddenness speaks to the concealed purpose of metaphysics, when it once adhered, at the advent of Western historical thinking, in the strictest sense, to that which is.50

Coming into the openness of Alētheia to stand in the light of the Being of beings is only possible once Dasein is free. In the course of Western history, the essence of freedom has been mistaken and misconstrued in “negative” and “positive” freedom, in the equality of freedom, in freedom of speech and creed and taste and so on.51 For too long, we have thought of freedom as the property, the right, of humanity. At best, we will come to see that the opposite is true: “Freedom, ek-sistent, disclosive Da-sein, possesses man—so originally that only it secures for humanity that distinctive relatedness to beings as a whole as such which first founds all history.”52

The ek-sistence of Da-sein, which means here “the ecstatic character of freedom standing outside of itself,”53 is only set forth when the veil of Alētheia shimmers before him for the first time. It is here, at the advent of history, that man asks: “What are beings?”54

We come now to the breaking point, standing out in the nothingness of the original anxiety as ek-static Da-sein. When we ask: “What are beings?” and seek the truth of their Being in the open field, we are at the same time looking into the essence of freedom. To free oneself is only possible by being free toward the moment of unconcealedness housed in Alētheia. When asked, “What is freedom?,” we come now, through the circle, to our answer: “The essence of truth is freedom.”55

When we speak of existence, of Being, Dasein’s existence becomes ek-static, meaning that in the moment of unconcealedness—when Dasein is beyond beings as a whole—the ecstatic

51 Ibid, 126.
52 Ibid, 127.
53 Ibid, 126.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid, 123.
character of freedom is standing outside of itself.\textsuperscript{56} In this way, too, we recall that this being beyond beings we call “transcendence.”

Standing resolutely outside of itself, in the original open region of the oblivion for the first time, Da-sein is ablaze in the dawning light of Being. Da-sein is transcending.

Da-sein is free.

Freedom, standing now in its rightful place as the essence of truth, evokes the unhiddenness of beings as such when they come to stand in the light of Alētheia. Out in the open region, we see that “Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be.”\textsuperscript{57} This “letting be” is not simply some passive indifference. Letting beings be, in fact, requires Da-sein to turn toward the unclosedness of the open region and gaze into beings as such, letting them be in their Being.\textsuperscript{58} In this way, historical Dasein takes up his fate and turns toward his destiny as “the coming preserver.”

Who is this coming preserver? Moreover, can he stand at all times held out into the nothing in daring? In speaking of the essence of truth as freedom, freedom to stand in the open region and reveal, we discover the overgrown path to our answer. If the essence of truth is revealing, and this is freedom, what then is the essence of untruth? (We can feel the circle shifting its weight.) Of the essence of untruth, we must come to the conclusion that when Da-sein “lets beings be,” there is at the same time a concealing that takes place.\textsuperscript{59} But was this “letting beings be” not proper to the unconcealed freedom that possesses Da-sein? In the exsistent freedom of Da-sein, beings show themselves and how it stands with their Being. We recall that Da-sein knows beings as such, just as he knows the final things…

Concealment deprives Alētheia of disclosure yet does not render it sterēsis [privation]; rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to Alētheia as its own… The concealment of beings as a whole, untruth proper, is older than every openness of this or that being. It is already older than letting-be itself. What conserves letting-be itself, which in disclosing already holds concealment? This is nothing less than the mystery.\textsuperscript{60}

In Da-sein’s freedom to “let beings be” in their unconcealedness, they always already are slipping away, swallowed back up into the sheltering earth and held therein. This is the forgotten mystery of Being, its essence proper to ek-static Da-sein. If the essence of truth is freedom, then the essence of non-truth is mystery. Let us not be confused here in thinking that non-truth is something negative. It is simply a “pre-essential essence.”\textsuperscript{61} Both remain proper to the power of the goddess Alētheia.

Yet, in this always already occurring concealment, Da-sein can become forgetful of the mystery he conserves altogether; he sinks down into his own world, “proposing and planning

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] Ibid, 125.
\item[57] Ibid.
\item[60] Ibid.
\item[61] Ibid.
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and creating standards…” In his forgetfulness of the concealing mystery of Alētheia’s veil, he takes himself as subject, as standard, and begins again to seek the weights and measures of the beings at hand. When man takes up his standards and no longer gazes into the nothing that nihilates, humanity is turned away from the mystery of Being. We call this “inauthenticity.” Turning away from the mystery is “erring.” In German erring [irren] means: “to stray.”

In Dasein’s forgetting of the mystery, we find the essential counteressence to the pre-primordial essence of truth, not untruth, but erring as “straying.” This erring, however, (as a most egregious form of inauthenticity) is, for Da-sein, a part of his world, for man knows the final things…

In the pre-primordial essence of truth as untruth, there is concealment in which Dasein slips and always already strays off the path into erring.

What must Da-sein do?

When at the advent of metaphysics, when man first thinks Being, he is always already beyond beings as a whole, as ek-static Da-sein. He is transcending. He is free. This is the liberation that grounds all history. Yet the primacy of this freedom as the essence of truth [Alētheia] takes its originality from the ever more primeval concealment of the mystery. Showing and concealing themselves, beings lead Dasein to the question of the Being of beings, out of errancy to turn resolutely toward the mystery [Entschlossenheit zum Geheimnis]. Here, authentic Da-sein resolutely holds himself out into the nothing. We have said that in “letting beings be” historical Da-sein stands in the open region and that here he turns toward his fate and joins destiny, taking up his historical task as the coming preserver.

Who is this coming preserver? In the whole history of metaphysical thought, does he come into question in his appointed age? It is clear that he arrives as ek-static Da-sein in its unrepeatability. It is also clear that he stands resolutely in the open region, holding out into the nothing, that he lets beings be. The coming preserver shines a light out of history.

To comprehend this coming preserver, we have taken up a particular metaphysical question that has transposed us into the realm of metaphysics itself. In our search, we have encountered the whole of metaphysical inquiries, along with the questioner himself. This questioner is Da-sein. Out of the shadows cast by the unbroken distance between the essence of man and the essence of truth, historical Da-sein comes to stand in the blinding light of the Being of beings. He is always already transcending.

As the coming preserver, historical Da-sein has turned toward his fate to join destiny, which gathers. For 2,500 years, metaphysics has been stretched to bridge the gap between man and truth while Being has slumbered in its origin, the dragon of the West.

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63 Ibid, 134.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
Origin and Essence

In the course of this essay, we have spoken time and again of origin. It is time now for us to seek it. Origin means here, “that from which and by which something is what it is as it is.” This already sounds strikingly similar to what we have heretofore called “essence” for Da-sein, as well as for truth and untruth. In our quest for the origin, it is now essential to give an example: “The artist is the origin of the work of art.”

We know that art, as a work of art, has a “thingly” character. We mean, of course, that it is a being. When we are faced with the great work of art (and such art is the only art under consideration here), we know that “there is something stony in the work of architecture, wooden in a carving, colored in a painting, spoken in a linguistic work, sonorous in a musical composition.” In this way, the work in its thingly character brings to light something else as well in its composition: “it is an allegory.”

But have we not once again become scientific in our use of metaphysics? Not at all. With the fabled thread of Ariadne, we are making our return.

When Kant affected his Copernican revolution in philosophy, his system named all the world, and even God himself, as a thing, more precisely, a “thing in itself” [Das Ding an sich]. Knowledge of things in themselves was, for Kant, always impossible. Things in themselves can never be known in themselves; rather, they are always mere things—from God himself to a stone in the Rhine. Nowadays, airplanes and radios are among the closest things to us and even more so do death and judgment remain the final things. We have said that the work of art acts as an allegory of mere things, which are thus brought together with their Being [to bring together: symballein [συμβαλλειν].

On the whole, here, as we have previously investigated, this word “thing” signifies what is not simply nothing but a being. In our discussions of Kant, Plato, and Aristotle, we have investigated metaphysics from the Prussians to the Greeks. In the expanse of this Western philosophical tradition, it is only obvious that as soon as thinking sets about on its way to beings, their mere thingness asserts itself time and again. As such, “the thingness of things has since dominated the course of Western thought.” At this point, so much has already become quite clear. In our quest for the lost definition of transcendence, we have arrived at the Being of beings and now seek a tactile method for being transposed directly into the open region.

68 Ibid, 143.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid, 144.
71 Ibid, 145.
72 Ibid, 147.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid, 146.
75 Ibid, 147.
76 Ibid, 148.
77 Ibid.
It is the great work of art that brings beings all the more to themselves in their Being. In the allegory of great art, the darkness of the colors gazes out and we know that they want only to shine.\textsuperscript{78} This shining of the is no talk of aesthetics; rather, it is what we now call the beautiful. In the beauty of the great work of art, Da-sein is brought before the open region, and the work holds it open. In this sense, no less is clear than that: “Art is truth setting itself to work.”\textsuperscript{79}

If the origin of the work of art is the artist himself and in the work of art mere things come to stand in the light of their Being, Da-sein is then holding open the open region himself in the work.

Standing there, the landing of art, with the artist (Da-sein) at its origin, holds its ground before man and god alike. As a Greek temple stands in stony defiance on the rocky edifice, its columns make evident the sculpture of the god within in such a way that the marble itself is the god as such, in all his presence and terrible glory. In resolution, he weathers all the ages and so first makes the storm that rages against his temple manifest in its violence.\textsuperscript{80}

In the great work of art, Da-sein makes manifest the oblivion of Being.

Concealing and revealing, the great chasm of the open region undulates within the world of man, and Being as such was there, and is won. In our thinking of Being at the origin of metaphysics, and over the long years of its life thereafter, we know that in Greek \textit{physis} means that mere thing which sets himself forth.\textsuperscript{81} Not only this, but it names also the dwelling of man—his home in the earth.\textsuperscript{82} Earth means here, “that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such.”\textsuperscript{83}

It is in the world that man dwells on this earth: “the world worlds.”\textsuperscript{84} By world, we mean here that, “world is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse, keep us transported into Being.”\textsuperscript{85}

Tower up within the earth, the world thunders the majesty of the storm.

In the work of art, the artist as its origin sets up a world that the work holds in force. This “setting up a world” is the first essential feature of the work of art. The second essential feature is this: “The work in its essence is a setting forth” \textit{[physis, φύσις] [Herstellung]}.\textsuperscript{86} Setting up and setting forth, the work of art opens up a world and grounds it in the earth. It is in the world that historical man dwells on this earth. “The work lets the earth be an earth.”\textsuperscript{87}

As such, the work of art “moves the earth itself into the open region and keeps it there.”\textsuperscript{88} In the open region, which we have now seen into before, we come face to face with the

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 165.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 167.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 168.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 169.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 167.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 170.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 172.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
Being of beings, their oblivion and our own. We have called this clearing the beautiful. We have said that “art is truth setting itself to work.”\(^89\) And in the totality of our search, we have found that “this being beyond beings we call ‘transcendence.’”\(^90\)

At the origin of the work of art is Dasein, holding out and holding open. We know, too, then, that at the origin of Dasein is Being. Da-sein is, himself, a great work of art.

The work of art holds open the open region as the earth settles back into its essential self-seclusion, and the world towers up within it. One in the same, as is the Being of beings, world and earth are eternally at odds, which binds them together.\(^91\) As with the Being of beings—who time and again refuse themselves to us, the earth seeks to draw the world into itself and seclude it therein.\(^92\) This is the original strife [Der Kampf]. It is the realm of the mystery of concealment, at the same time as much on the precipice of the open region as it is always already beyond it. “The essence of truth is, in itself, the primal strife in which the open center is won within which beings stand and from which they set themselves back into themselves.”\(^93\) As we have said, “the nothing itself nihilates.”\(^94\)

In our search for the lost definition of transcendence, we have also raised the lost definition of metaphysics and found contained within it the forgotten essence of truth as \(\text{Alētheia}\), of this truth as the essence of freedom and of the view of the open region as the beautiful. In coming to face all of these questions as a whole, the questioner himself, too, came into question. Winning his selfhood and freedom, historical Da-sein now resolutely holds open the open region as the coming preserver.

How is it that truth as unhiddenness sets itself to work in the great work of art? Which now means to say: “How does truth happen in the instigation of strife between world and earth? Is it only a curiosity or even the merely empty sophistry of a conceptual game, or is it—an abyss?”\(^95\) A revival of Greek philosophy here is neither necessary nor possible. In the grand metaphysical tradition, beginning with the Greeks and working toward Kant, truth as \(\text{Alētheia}\) did not define the task of philosophy.\(^96\) In this way, “the essence of truth that is familiar to us—correctness in representation [veritas]—stands and falls with truth as unconcealment of beings.”\(^97\) Thus, at this point in our questioning, the circular motion of our thought, always already on its way to the open region out of the truth of history, is won:

\textit{As the fundamental theme of philosophy Being is not a genus of beings; yet it pertains to every being. Its ‘universalty’ must be sought in a higher sphere. Being and its structure transcend every being and every possible existent determination of a being. Being is the}

\(^{89}\) Ibid, 165.
\(^{90}\) Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.
\(^{92}\) Ibid, 178.
\(^{93}\) Ibid, 180.
\(^{94}\) Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.
\(^{95}\) Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 177.
\(^{96}\) Ibid, 176.
\(^{97}\) Ibid, 177.
transcendens pure and simple. The transcendence of the being of Da-sein is a distinctive one since in it lies the possibility and necessity of the most radical individuation. Every disclosure of being as the transcendens is transcendental knowledge. Phenomenological truth (disclosedness of being) is veritas transcendentalis.\footnote{Heidegger, Martin. \textit{Being and Time} (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 33-34.}

For the first time in 2,500 years of Western thought, the third distinction wins for itself a definition of transcendence—as a holding open of the open region by the coming preservers who gaze long into the oblivion of the Being of beings and so too into themselves. Out in the nihilating nothing, Da-sein knows selfhood—Da-sein is free.

But how long can he “hold out?” Contrary to our two previous periods of thought, the realm of the third knows transcendence as being there.

We know that just as beings hide and show themselves, the earth swallows up the world, which towers up within it, and that this is the essential strife, closely akin to the mystery. What is so essential in the eternal strife of opposites, which are intimately crucial to one another? “In essential strife … the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their essential natures. In strife each opponent carries the other beyond itself.”\footnote{Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 174.} Carried beyond itself in the essential strife, we find the open region held wide open, already transcending. We have said that the two first essential features of the work of art are setting up a world and setting forth an earth. This is the instigation of the primal strife in the work of art, as the open region is held open in unconcealment, where the truth of Being is won.\footnote{Ibid, 182.}

Setting up, setting forth, and preserving are all fundamental characteristics of the essence of truth as freedom setting itself to work in the work of art, bringing about the original experience of the beautiful. Holding itself out into the nothing, Da-sein, possessed by freedom, is “letting beings be.” Yet we know that here there is also concealment. “Through Being there passes a veiled fatality that is ordained between the godly and the counter godly.”\footnote{Ibid, 178.}

What is this “veiled fatality?” If we looked back to the original strife in the world of Greek thought, we could see that between Plato and Aristotle, art’s philosophical status constituted a point of contrition. For Plato, art was a representation of a representation and consequently worthless. For the Greeks, who knew few things about works of art, the word technē [τέχνη] was given to both craft and art.\footnote{Ibid, 184.} The Greek technē means not to create or to build but “to know.” In Greek thought, the essence of this knowing that belongs to technē is also held in Alētheia.\footnote{Ibid.} Consequently, the knowing of the work is unhidden in the thinking of Being. As Alētheia consists in the veil, the moment of transcendence, so does technē consist of the “bringing forth” of beings out of concealment into unconcealment: together Alētheia and technē set up an earth and bring forth a world.\footnote{Ibid.}
In our search for the lost definition of transcendence proper to the modern age, we have posed a metaphysical question, bringing into question the whole of metaphysics, along with the questioner himself. If the Greek Physis [φύσις] (understood in accordance with metaphysics [μεταφυσική]) is understood as the arising of something from outside of itself, it is also a “bringing forth.” "Bringing forth” in Greek, however, is properly Poiesis [ποιήσις]—it is something poetic.

While Alētheia as truth has been hidden in the shadow of truth as correctness [veritas] through the ages, technē gave its name to technology. Against technē as a knowing proper to Poiesis as a “bringing forth,” technology is based on modern physics as a calculable science. When science becomes our passion, the revealing that rules modern technology becomes not the artistic “bringing forth” proper to Poiesis, but a challenging [Herausfordern]. In the technological age, man is challenged forth into revealing in a particularly striking manner; a manner that brings the strife of world and earth before us in nothing less than the Battle of the Giants Concerning Being [Gigantomachia Peri tes Ousia].

Yet when the mystery persists, concealment and unconcealment as the original strife of world and earth remain proper to one another. Contained in technē and Alētheia as property of Poiesis, “The essential unfolding of technology harbors in itself the possible rise of the saving power.”

In Poiesis, the proper poetic heart of “bringing forth” the Being of beings, there slumbers too a great destining. We know that the essence of truth as Alētheia is freedom, open to the blinding light of the open region and for the first time transcending. In the bringing forth of Poiesis as also a destining, transcendence becomes the destiny of the coming preservers, that is, of a historical group of men. And yet this destining is also endangering; challenged forth in the modern age, the destining of revealing hails the return of Being to Da-sein in nothing less than the most extreme danger.

In the modern age, as we quest for the lost definition of transcendence, “art and technology draw past each other like two stars in the course of the heavens—the stellar course of their essences as the unveiling, i.e., of truth.”

Our circle winds around again, sweeping back to survey the historical progression of our inquiry. Through 2,500 years of Western historical thought, we have sought the meaning of the term “transcendence” and with it were brought before metaphysics proper. In the course of our search, truth, freedom, and beauty, too, were fetched back from out of sophistry and science. And yet, technē holds in its power the memory of Alētheia and the possible rise of the

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106 Ibid, 318.
107 Ibid, 319.
108 Heidegger refers to Plato’s discussion of “gigantomachia peri tes ousia” in Sophist 246a-249c at the conclusion of Being and Time, speaking of “the strife in relation to the interpretation of being.” Heidegger, Being and Time, 398.
110 Ibid, 333.
111 Ibid, 337.
saving power. The eternal strife of opposites, who raise one another to their essential essences and beyond, are making a return to the dwelling of man. “This being beyond beings we call ‘transcendence.’”

“Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.”

For Martin Heidegger, the spirit of humanity is itself historical, founded on the first question, which we have made the effort to pose here in our thinking. Heidegger’s political affiliation with the Nazi party is common knowledge. In light of the publication of the Black Notebooks [Die Schwarze Hefte], Heidegger’s philosophical anti-Semitism is becoming common knowledge, bringing with it a new scrutiny of his philosophy, and of his political commitments.

With the publication of the Black Notebooks, scholars of our time have been given significant means to make crucial decisions about the earth-shattering thought of the great philosopher of Being. Now, more than ever before, we must make the demanding effort to take a founding leap [Ursprung] into the unsaid, and in so doing, endeavor to “think with” Heidegger. Only in this effort can we hope to open the way to truth, to justice, and begin again the task of thinking. For those who have, or have ever had, ears for Heidegger’s truth, now is the moment to turn resolutely towards the mystery [Entschlossenheit zum Geheimness]. The publication of the Black Notebooks can easily damn Martin Heidegger. This much is clear and simple. What is actually at hand, however, is a much more challenging task. With Heidegger we now approach that “veiled fatality,” as ordained between the godly, and the counter-godly… and we find ourselves standing on the precipice of “the most extreme danger.” In the face of what appears to be simply an abyss, we must recall, with Heidegger, the words of the poet Hölderlin: “Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst Das Rettende auch.”

_The violent one, the creative one who sets forth into the unsaid, who breaks into the unthought, who compels what has never happened and makes appear what is unseen—this violent one stands at all times in daring… This decided setting out upon the way to the ‘Being of beings,’ moves humanity…_ [115]

—Martin Heidegger

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112 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.
113 Ibid.


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