

HEIDEGGER AND THE FUTURE OF THINKING  
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MEANING  
OF THE HISTORICAL EPOCH OF POST-MODERNITY

A thesis

submitted to the Department of Philosophy

of

McGill University, Montreal

by

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements

of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

November 2015

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity by way of Martin Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy. While Heidegger himself never uses the term “post-modernity” in his writings, his thinking can nonetheless be interpreted as providing important insights towards developing an essential understanding of post-modernity. Uncovering these insights and developing such an understanding form the purpose and goal of the present thesis.

The thesis sets out from the peculiar lack of understanding surrounding the term “post-modernity.” In doing so, it unravels the formal structure of post-modernity as that of a historical epoch lying in-between the end of one historical epoch, namely modernity, and the beginning of another that is still to come. While other thinkers of the Western philosophical tradition can be said to make interesting and important connections in relation to this topic, Heidegger's thinking about the end of philosophy reveals itself as an especially appropriate pathway into answering the question about the meaning of post-modernity.

Heidegger's thinking may be presented in different ways. In order to think along with Heidegger and his project of thoughtfully preparing Western humanity for a “crossing” from metaphysics to the next chapter of their history, Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy is contextualized within the overall structure of his *Gesamtausgabe*. This contextual understanding

of Heidegger's thinking reveals his much neglected 1964 lecture “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” as an appropriate “tool” for uncovering the meaning of post-modernity. “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” *opens up* the horizon with respect to which metaphysical thinking may be transformed into the “other” kind of thinking needed to traverse the crossing of post-modernity.

After projecting a preparatory “preview” of it, the horizon of the other kind of thinking—what Heidegger calls *Ereignis*—is opened up through a restructuring and further uncovering of the subject-matters discussed in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.” This involves a disclosure of the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences; the end of philosophy in the sense of the completion of metaphysics; and the task of thinking at the end of philosophy.

After laying bare the horizon of Ereignis from “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” an answer to the question of the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity is offered. With respect to the horizon of Ereignis, the meaning of post-modernity reveals itself as the threefold phenomenon of entanglement, nihilism, and not knowing. The result of this answer is not so much a better understanding of the meaning of post-modernity as it is a better understanding of why we lack such an understanding in the first place and in what sense this lack is necessary.

## Abrégé

Cette thèse examine le sens de l'époque historique de la post-modernité par le biais de la déclaration de Martin Heidegger sur la fin de la philosophie. Alors que Heidegger lui-même n'utilise jamais le terme « post-modernité » dans ses écrits, sa pensée peut néanmoins être interprétée comme donnant des indications importantes en vue de développer une compréhension essentielle de la post-modernité. Découvrir ces idées et développer une telle compréhension sont l'objectif de la présente thèse.

La thèse commence à partir de l'étrange absence de compréhension entourant le terme « post-modernité ». Ce faisant, elle dénoue la structure formelle de la post-modernité comme étant celle d'une époque historique située entre la fin d'une époque historique, à savoir la modernité, et le début d'une autre qui est encore à venir. Alors que d'autres penseurs de la tradition philosophique occidentale ont peut-être fait des liens intéressants et importants à ce sujet, la pensée de Heidegger sur la fin de la philosophie se révèle comme une voie particulièrement appropriée pour répondre à la question sur le sens de la post-modernité.

La pensée de Heidegger peut être présentée de différentes manières. Afin de penser avec Heidegger et son projet de préparer pensivement l'humanité occidentale pour une « transition » de la métaphysique à la prochaine étape de son histoire, la déclaration de Heidegger sur la fin de la philosophie est contextualisée dans la structure globale de son *Gesamtausgabe*. Cette

compréhension contextuelle de la pensée de Heidegger révèle sa très négligée conférence de 1964 « La fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée » comme un « outil » approprié pour découvrir le sens de la post-modernité. « La fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée » ouvre l'horizon par rapport à la pensée métaphysique qui peut être transformée en « l'autre » sorte de pensée nécessaire pour traverser la transition de la post-modernité.

Après la projection d'un « aperçu » de préparation de celui-ci, l'horizon de l'autre sorte de pensée – ce que Heidegger appelle *Ereignis* – est ouvert par une restructuration et une profonde découverte des sujets abordés dans « La fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée ». Il s'agit d'un dévoilement de la signification de la déclaration de Heidegger sur la fin de la philosophie dans le sens de son développement en sciences indépendantes; la fin de la philosophie dans le sens de l'achèvement de la métaphysique; et la tâche de penser à la fin de la philosophie.

Après avoir découvert l'horizon de Ereignis à partir de « La fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée », une réponse à la question du sens de l'époque historique de la post-modernité est offerte. En ce qui concerne l'horizon de Ereignis, le sens de la post-modernité se révèle comme le triple phénomène d'enchevêtrement, de nihilisme, et de ne pas savoir. Le résultat de cette réponse n'est pas tant une meilleure compréhension de la signification de la post-modernité qu'une meilleure compréhension des raisons de notre manque de compréhension et dans quel sens ce manque est nécessaire.



## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Philip Buckley, for his guidance and advice in preparing this thesis. I would also like to thank my wife, Tracy, and my son, Nicholas, for their enduring patience and support.

## Preface

Truth consists in personal appropriation. [...]

it is not the truth but the way which is the truth.

Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the tenets of Heidegger's philosophy, the basic claim of the following investigation does not so much lie in the answer it gives to the question posed by it, but rather in the *path* it takes in finding an answer to that question. This is not to say that the answer it provides is incorrect or false—far from it; only that the “distinct contributions to knowledge” it makes are not final conclusions, but rather contributions to what may be called the *future of thinking*. In other words, the thesis takes seriously Heidegger's claim that “Every answer remains in effect as an answer only so long as it is rooted in questioning.”<sup>2</sup>

This prioritizing of its path requires the investigation to motivate and think through the possibilities inherent in its question in a manner that is perhaps less straightforward or more indirect than a simple survey of secondary literature on Heidegger's thinking. In taking such an approach, the hope is to pose the question about the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity in an original fashion while nevertheless engaging and contributing to the secondary

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1 Trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 71–2.

2 Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes (1935/36),” in *Holzwege. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 5, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 1–74 at 58.

literature on Heidegger's thinking.

The following investigation contributes to scholarship into Heidegger's thinking insofar as its path into the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity offers what may be described as individual, unique interpretations of Heidegger's thinking in general, in addition to some of his writings and sayings in particular. In this way, it contains elements of “original scholarship,” which include but are not limited to:

- Understanding the wholeness of Heidegger's thinking by way of its “step-wise” and “leap-wise” articulation in his *Gesamtausgabe* in § 6;
- Developing a “synthetic” approach to interpreting Heidegger's writings and using his lecture “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” as a starting-point into laying bare the horizon of Ereignis in § 6;
- Articulating the “ground” of Heidegger's claim that thinking is “much simpler than philosophy but, precisely because of its simplicity, much more difficult to carry out” as the concealing-revealing relationship of a river to its source in § 8;
- Restructuring “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” more essentially according to the non-linear historical temporality of *Contributions* in § 9;
- Using raw data from Google Books' N-gram Viewer to show the extent to which occurrences of philosophical activity are increasing in § 10;
- Using Aristotle's *Poetics* as a backdrop against which to understand Heidegger's claim about the “completion of metaphysics” and the relationship between “clearing and presentness” in §§ 11 and 12;
- Interpreting Heidegger's reading of the history of philosophy in light of Aristotle's

understanding of tragedy as having a “sophisticated” ending and thereby being, like Euripides' plots, the “most tragic,” and distinguishing this from the common interpretation of Heidegger's reading of the history of philosophy as a “straightforward” “negative teleology” or a “history of decline [*Verfallsgeschichte*]” in § 11;

- Articulating the parallel between the plot structure of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Heidegger's understanding of a historical tradition in § 12.

In attempting to think *along* with Heidegger and his project of thoughtfully preparing Western humanity for a crossing from their “first beginning,” namely metaphysics, to the still to be determined “other beginning” of their history, this thesis may be viewed as contributing to the ongoing dialogue we as thinkers have with Heidegger's thinking.

The thesis is structured into three parts. Part I poses the question of the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity. What is meant by “post-modernity” is poorly understood and this is somehow part of what it means to live in a “postmodern” world or age. The formal structure of post-modernity as a historical situation is that of lying *in-between* the end of one historical epoch, namely modernity, and the beginning of another that is still to come.

Simplifying to the extreme, this is how Heidegger understands the end of philosophy. Thus, Heidegger's lecture “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” is chosen as a “tool” to uncover the meaning of post-modernity, given the fact that “thinking is a handwork” according to Heidegger.

Part II lays bare the horizon of Ereignis from Heidegger's 1964 lecture “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.” The subject-matters of this lecture are threefold: (1) the

end of philosophy as the development of independent sciences; (2) the end of philosophy as the completion of metaphysics; and (3) the task of thinking at the end of philosophy. Each is interpreted, resulting in key disclosures towards developing an essential understanding of post-modernity. The end of philosophy as the development of independent sciences is interpreted as the breaching or breaking-up of the horizon with respect to which the ontologies of the various regions of beings were once unified, but no longer are; the end of philosophy as the completion of metaphysics is interpreted as the point of the “tragedy” of metaphysics at which its “plot” is reversed in a final, most extreme possibility; and the task of thinking at the end of philosophy is interpreted as the self-concealing origin of the clearing whence the possibilities of metaphysics originally sprung and so cleared a “space” for philosophical thinking.

Part III offers an answer to the question of the meaning of post-modernity from the field of view of the horizon of Ereignis. The meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity reveals itself as the threefold phenomenon of entanglement, nihilism, and not knowing. With respect to the horizon of Ereignis, to live in a “postmodern” world or age means to live in a world increasingly entangled by “possibilities” that derive no purpose or meaning from a defining historical movement and so leave those standing in their midst perplexed as to where they are and what the fate of thinking will be.

Throughout the investigation, all German translations and all Greek philosophical translations are my own, although I have consulted and greatly benefited from standard translations of Greek philosophical texts. English translations of Greek literary texts used in the thesis are cited in the accompanying footnote.

## **Part I**

### **The Question about the Meaning of Post-Modernity**

## § 1.

### The Perplexity of Post-Modernity

All thinking begins and ends in questions. Questions, however, do not simply arise *ex nihilo* or “out of one's head,” although in metaphysics they often appear to do precisely that. Upon further reflection, it becomes clear that questions more basically arise from *situations*. Thus, for our investigation, if we are to ask a question properly, that is to say, thoughtfully, we must first begin with a description of a situation laden with a question that is to arise from it.

The question that guides this thesis is the question of the meaning of post-modernity. As often as it said that we live in a “postmodern” world or age, it is just as often, if not more, not understood what this saying means. A thick fog engulfs any use of the term “post-modernity.” What makes this situation so curious, however, is not simply that there is a lack of understanding surrounding the term “post-modernity,” but rather that this lack of understanding is somehow part, perhaps an essential part, of what it means to live in a “postmodern” world or age. Post-modernity is characterized by a peculiar ambiguity. This, then, reveals the singular insight from which this investigation is to start: Not to understand what is meant by “post-modernity” belongs in some manner to its meaning.<sup>3</sup>

As opaque as the term is, however, it does provide at least one clue towards gaining a better, perhaps clearer understanding of it. The clue is that the term “post-modernity” cannot be

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<sup>3</sup> This is why, e.g., the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* begins its entry for “postmodernism” by characterizing it as a “debate, a chief concern of which is clarifying the question what the term 'postmodern' actually means.” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, eds. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, vol. 7: P–Q (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 1989), 1142.

said to be a proper name for a historical epoch, but rather only, at best, a *placeholder* for a proper name for a historical epoch. This is shown above all by the use of the “post-” prefix. Prefixing a term with “post-” indicates that whatever the combined, newly formed term is meant to designate is not fully formed and has not (yet) come into its own. Thus, all that can be known for certain is that it marks a span of time that comes *after*, i.e., “post-,” whatever was initially designated by the root term in the first place. In the case of “post-modernity,” this amounts to the fact that post-modernity is the historical epoch that comes after modernity and yet, at the same time, cannot be said to have fully arrived, if indeed it can be said to have come at all, precisely because of the fact that it has not yet come into its own. The parasitic-placeholder quality of its “post-” identity shows that the arrival of post-modernity is *still to come*. In this way, then, the term “post-modernity” can be said to indicate a world or age that is somehow *in-between* historical epochs. Post-modernity is the historical epoch that lies after the end of the historical epoch called “modernity” and yet, at the same time, before the beginning of another historical epoch that is still to come.

From the discussion so far, it should be clear that the sense of “post-modernity” at work within this investigation is not the one found in certain strains of literary theory, art—in particular, architecture—or even philosophy, according to which “post-modernity” is a particular style or attitude defined by a “radical eclecticism”<sup>4</sup> or pluralism of models, approaches, and forms,<sup>5</sup> such that it cannot be “temporally defined.”<sup>6</sup> While this may be an effect or, indeed, a symptom of post-modernity, it is not how the term will be used throughout the present investigation, which understands post-modernity historically as the situation of history unique to

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4 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1977), 7.

5 See, e.g., Ihab Hassan, “POSTmodernISM,” *New Literary History* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 5–30.

6 Umberto Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 67 (trans. modified).



the present. To the extent that this investigation arranges history into a series of epochs and attempts to temporally define them, it can be said to take a “modern” approach to post-modernity.

The foregoing meditation on a particular situation of history has not only helped to clarify the meaning of the term “post-modernity.” It has also made the situation of post-modernity *more perplexing*. The meaning of “post-modernity” has been clarified insofar as what the term designates is now more concrete and determinate. Post-modernity is an in-between world or age that lies at the end of modernity and yet before the beginning of another historical epoch that is still to come. This clarification, however, does not decrease the perplexity surrounding the use of the term “post-modernity,” but rather *increases* it. But how, exactly, or better, whence does this increase in perplexity arise? Why is it that a further determination of post-modernity makes it precisely more odd and question-worthy?

Upon further reflection, the following peculiarity comes to light: Post-modernity marks a situation in which an end happens *before* a beginning in the same phenomenon as opposed to a beginning happening before an end. The historical in-betweenness of post-modernity amounts to a situation in which the end of modernity comes before the beginning of another historical epoch that is still to come within the same historical traditional. This goes against the “commonsensical” understanding of the relationship between beginning and end according to which a beginning happens *before* an end, e.g., a cause or “beginning” always occurs before an effect or “end.” In the situation of post-modernity, however, it is an end or “effect” that happens *prior to* a beginning or “cause” that is still to arrive. Thus, in one manner the fog surrounding the meaning of the term “post-modernity” has dissipated and yet in another it has become even

thicker than before.

If this increase in perplexity is interpreted positively as proof of the legitimacy of the present investigation as opposed to negatively as a lack of “objectivity,” then a first step *into* a path towards understanding the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity can be said to be established. Since, however, our increase in perplexity came as the result of a “mix up” in the relationship between beginning and end, the next, proper step along the path of the investigation would appear to be a meditation on the different manners of understanding the relationship between beginning and end. Through this, in other words, the hope is that our next clue will arrive, and our already questionable situation will become even more pregnant with meaning.

## § 2.

### The Natural and Critical Understandings of Beginning and End

The most common and commonsensical understanding of the relationship between beginning and end is that a beginning happens before an end and that an end, in turn, takes place after a beginning. Thus, a beginning is the start of something that will eventually stop or terminate and an end is the stoppage or termination of that something. We will call this the “natural” understanding of a beginning and an end, since it finds its most concrete expression in relationships of cause and effect, as they appear in the natural world of plants, animals, the cosmos, elements, etc.<sup>7</sup>

There is, however, another manner of understanding such a relationship. It is that a beginning happens *after* an end and that an end, in turn, takes place *before* a beginning. Thus, according to this understanding, a beginning is not yet the “sudden” start of something, but rather the “slow” emergence of something that is still to come, and an end, in turn, is not the “full” stoppage or termination of something already begun, but rather its “ongoing” completion or fulfilment.<sup>8</sup> The difference between this other understanding of the relationship between beginning and end and its natural counterpart turns above all on the kind of beginning primarily

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7 Cf. Aristotle's discussion of causes in *Physics* II.3, 194b16–195a3. While a τέλος as a cause is both a “beginning” (ἀρχή) and an “end,” it may nonetheless be considered “natural” insofar as the kind of movement at work within it involves the start and stoppage of something.

8 Cf. Heidegger's discussion of the difference between *Beginn* and *Anfang* in *Hölderlin's Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein”* (1934/35), *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 39, ed. Susanne Ziegler (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999), 3: “*Beginn* is that by which something sets forth; *Anfang* is that from which something springs.”

at play within each. The kind of beginning primarily at play within the natural understanding of the relationship between beginning and end is a beginning that is already given—i.e., a *past* beginning. In a “natural” state of affairs, an investigator looks *backwards* for a beginning in order to understand and “ground” the end in question. In contrast, the kind of beginning primarily at play within this other understanding of the relationship between beginning and end is a beginning that is *needed*, i.e., it is a *new* or *future* beginning. The situation in which a new or future beginning is needed is not a normal, everyday situation. The need for a new or future beginning, in other words, does not arise in times of relative stability and control. Rather, it arises in times of instability, at crucial stages or turning points in the course of something. It arises, in other words, in and as a *crisis*. A crisis is the point of instability whence the need for a new or future beginning is born. Thus, the other, non-“natural” understanding of the relationship between beginning and end, whereby a beginning happens after an end and an end takes place before a beginning, is the “critical” understanding of a beginning and an end.

Anyone who has been in or is currently undergoing a crisis of some sort, e.g., someone unemployed in search of gainful employment, is aware of this other, critical understanding of the relationship between beginning and end. For such people the beginning primarily at play within their situation is not a past beginning already given. Rather, it is a much needed future beginning. It is the beginning of a job, the beginning of an income, the beginning of a new life. This is not to say that past beginnings are not important to people in a crisis nor that none apply to their situation; on the contrary, a past beginning is often precisely what leads people into a crisis in the first place. What matters most crucially to people in a crisis, however, is not how they got into it, but rather how they can get out of it. In order to get out of a crisis, what is most often needed is a

*deeper reflection* on a past beginning, e.g., figuring out what went wrong or broke down in the first place in order that it may be fixed or addressed the next time around. This need for a deeper reflection on a past beginning, however, does not belie the fact that the beginning primarily at play within a crisis is a future beginning. Rather, it provides further evidence for the latter's primacy. This evidence is the fact that the past becomes meaningful only when it is viewed through the "lens" of the future. Thus, a deeper reflection on the past only ever arises from a more basic, future need. From this, then, we may venture the further claim that the critical understanding of the relationship between beginning and end does not preclude, but rather *includes* its natural counterpart. The primacy of a future beginning gives rise to a deeper reflection on a past beginning, which is precisely what enables someone to get out of a crisis by fixing or addressing what went wrong or broke down in the first place.

While the differences between the natural and critical understandings of the relationship between beginning and end may be expressed in temporal terms such as "before" and "after," "past" and "future," they also find expression, indeed perhaps more originally, in terms of a *limit*. Like the relationship between beginning and end, a limit can also be interpreted as having a "natural" and "critical" understanding. A "natural" limit is a place where something *ends*, whereas a critical limit is a place where something *begins*. In other words, a "natural" limit is understood primarily in the negative sense of something restricted or confined, often times by something else, whereas a "critical" limit is understood primarily in the positive sense of giving shape and form to something, i.e., as being constitutive of something in its *being*. In this way, the negative and positive senses of a limit map directly to the natural and critical understandings of the relationship between beginning and end, respectively. As we shall see, this relationship

between beginning, end, and limit, in both its natural and critical forms, holds the key to uncovering the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity.

### § 3.

#### **Post-Modernity: Crisis or Disruption?**

Post-modernity lies in-between the end of modernity and the beginning of another historical epoch that is still to come. Hence its situation is one in which a beginning happens after an end and an end, in turn, takes place before a beginning. Accordingly, post-modernity may be said to be a time of crisis insofar as the beginning primarily at play within it is not a past or bygone beginning, but rather a new or future beginning that is still to come. Thus, understanding its meaning properly requires one to take a “critical” approach towards it.

Having said that, there is a sense, however, in which the situation of post-modernity, insofar as it has been developed in the present investigation, cannot give rise to a crisis. Despite the “in-between” character of post-modernity, the event that precipitates post-modernity—i.e., the end of the historical epoch of modernity—is not, in and of itself, *great enough* to bring about a crisis in the happening of the Western tradition. The reason is that modernity is but *one* historical epoch, and the end of any one historical epoch is not significant enough of an event to institute a crisis within the overall happening of the historical tradition to which it belongs. It is important to note that the claim being made here is not that modernity is insignificant or unimportant as a historical epoch—far from it; only that its ending cannot give rise to a crisis. Rather than a crisis, the end of modernity may be said to bring about, at best, only a *disruption* in Western history. A disruption, however, is not a crisis—the two differ essentially.<sup>9</sup> For example,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Philip Buckley's discussion of the differences between “positive” and “negative” views of a crisis in *Husserl*,

while similar to a crisis in that it, too, is an “in-between” state of affairs, a disruption nonetheless always comes with an immediately available resolution if only in the form of “waiting it out,” like in the case of a rainstorm. Thus, the arrival of a disruption is only ever experienced as *temporary*, and its resolution is only ever sought through the availability of instrumental means. A crisis, on the other hand, comes with no immediately available resolution. In contrast to a disruption, it cannot be waited out or its responsibility offset on to something or someone else, but rather must be engaged by those standing within it, either directly or indirectly, in order to be resolved. Its engagement, however, provides no guarantee of a resolution. A crisis cannot be handled instrumentally and forced into a resolution one way or the other. Rather, it requires what may be likened to a kind of hope, albeit one that *thinks* the matter *through*. Thus, those undergoing a crisis, despite whether they engage it, deny it, or succumb to despair, know neither if, when, nor ultimately how, it will be resolved.

From this insight, then, a peculiar forking arises on the path of our investigation: either the situation of post-modernity is *not* a crisis in which case it marks only a temporary disruption in the overall happening of the Western tradition or it *is* a crisis in which case the event precipitating it cannot be (only) the end of the historical epoch of modernity. In the case of a disruption, a resolution to the situation of post-modernity will be apparent or at least discernible to those within it. In the case of a crisis, on the other hand, the event precipitating the situation of post-modernity will be something *greater* than the end of a single historical epoch. How, then, can it be decided which path to take? Is post-modernity really a crisis—or simply a disruption in the happening of Western history?

It is often heard that the “Digital Revolution” marked by the advent of the Internet and

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*Heidegger and the Crisis of Philosophical Responsibility* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), xv–xviii.



the World Wide Web has had the effect of increasing not only the availability of information but also the amount of information available about any particular subject-matter. The levelling-down of temporal and spatial “barriers” and the “connectivity” of digital entities made possible by the Internet and Web has created a platform on which content is increasingly published, linked to, and accessed. Thus, one could easily argue that if a Web search for “post-modernity resolution” does not return an adequate result out of the thousands or perhaps millions of hits returned, then it is only a matter of time before such a Web search, in fact, does. If, moreover, one wanted to be proactive, one could even set up a “crowd sourcing” project the goal of which would be to determine how the situation of post-modernity might be resolved if at all; for the more people working collaboratively on a given problem, so the reasoning goes, the quicker a solution to it can be found. In this manner, one could at least discern a resolution to the situation of post-modernity. Indeed, one could even argue that the prevalence of such technologically enabled techniques shows that we have moved historically *beyond* post-modernity and entered into another age altogether—namely, the “Information Age,” where information about any subject-matter whatsoever is immediately available for download at one's “fingertips.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, at a time when so much information is available on so many devices at any time in any place, how could such a scenario ever amount to a crisis? From this perspective, a critical investigation into the meaning of post-modernity would appear to be misplaced either because an instrumental resolution to its situation is currently available, will be available shortly, or the beginning of another historical epoch (the Information Age) has already arrived.

However, while it cannot be denied that we live in a technological age, it is still an open

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10 Cf. “Information Age,” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Age); cf. also Heidegger's remarks on “information” as a “characteristic” and *Leitwort* of our age in *Der Satz vom Grund* (1957), *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 10, ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997) 58, 202–203.

question whether an interconnected web of immediately available information gives rise to the kind of thinking required to overcome or get over the situation of post-modernity, and whether such a levelling-down of temporal and spatial barriers and increased connectivity of digital entities does not rather mark a deeper, indeed more hidden *symptom* of the historical instability at play within post-modernity. For the increase in the amount and availability of information about any subject-matter is *itself increasing* in such a manner and to such an extent that it has become wholly questionable whether this technological enframing of information is something that is *under our control* or whether it is not rather something that stands over us—like a destiny. As Heidegger says in his 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel*, “Technology in its essence is something that human beings cannot master by themselves.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, then, it is an open question whether the Information Age supersedes the historical epoch of post-modernity or whether it is not rather in fact further evidence for its situation being that of a *crisis*.

Thus, if the situation of post-modernity cannot be resolved from the effects of either the Digital Revolution or the Information Age, but rather holds sway as a crisis in spite of them, indeed precisely because of them, then the right path to take in our investigation into the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity would be towards finding an event greater than the end of modernity that could precipitate the situation of post-modernity through its ending. This would solidify post-modernity's giving rise to a crisis as opposed to a mere disruption in the overall happening of the Western tradition, since that event could not then be viewed as a mere continuation or “progression” of history. Does such an event exist? If so, can it be found? Indeed, can we even “think” beyond mere disruptions with instrumental solutions

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11 Heidegger, “Spiegel-Gespräch mit Martin Heidegger (23. September 1966),“ in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 16, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 652–683 at 669.

when it comes to understanding the happening of Western history? And if not, then would this lack not itself be *part* of the crisis?

## § 4.

### **The Crisis of Post-Modernity as the End of Philosophy**

The structure of the overall happening of a historical tradition can be said to be threefold. A historical tradition begins, unfolds into different epochs, and then ends in hopes of being renewed under some other form. This happening sets out from a *defining movement*, which projects the basic form from which the beginning, middle, and end of a historical tradition take shape. Insofar as it shapes the unfolding of a historical tradition into different epochs, a defining movement is more basic than any one single historical epoch of the tradition. This is because, whereas a historical tradition may have many historical epochs, it can only have *one* defining movement at a given “time.” As Heidegger says, “Wherever [great] art happens, that is, there is a beginning, a thrust enters history and history either begins or is renewed.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, an event greater than the end of a single historical epoch within the happening of a historical tradition would be the end of the defining movement from which a historical tradition sets out in the first place; for once the defining movement of a historical tradition ends, there can be no more historical epochs, that is, no more unfolding of its history, unless and until the tradition is renewed or begins again.

In terms of our investigation, this insight opens up our thinking to a simple yet decisive possibility. What if the event that precipitated the situation of post-modernity did not only amount to the end of the single historical epoch called “modernity,” but rather *included* the end

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<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 65.

of the defining movement of the Western tradition itself? This would institute a crisis in the happening of the Western tradition, since the end of the defining movement of a historical tradition strikes the core of the latter's being as an original setting-down and singular unfolding of form.

What, then, is the defining movement of the Western tradition? A brief look at the history and development of the West, especially in regard to its thinking, shows that the defining movement of the Western tradition is *philosophy*. For example, according to Heidegger, “The West and Europe, and only them, are in their innermost historical path originally 'philosophical'.”<sup>13</sup> And similarly for Husserl, it was “[i]n the breakthrough of philosophy [...] in which all sciences are thus contained” that he saw “the original phenomenon of spiritual Europe.”<sup>14</sup> Thus what if the “post-” in post-modernity marked not only the end of the historical epoch of modernity, but rather also, indeed more basically, the end of the defining movement of Western history—i.e., the *end of philosophy*? This event would not only be enough to institute a crisis in the happening of the Western tradition. In terms of the way in which our investigation has developed thus far, it would mark a further step *into* the meaning of post-modernity.

Due to the critical and thereby historical nature of the present investigation, evidence for the fact that the end of philosophy precipitates the crisis of post-modernity can only be gathered *along the way* of its path. That being said, there is some preliminary, as it were, anecdotal support for this claim. If, as Aristotle says, it is “owing to wonder [θαυμάζειν] that human beings both now begin and at first began to philosophize,”<sup>15</sup> then it is at least plausible that the end of

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13 Heidegger, “Was ist das – die Philosophie? (1955),” in *Identität und Differenz, Gesamtausgabe* vol. 11, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006), 10.

14 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisen der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Husserliana* vol. 6, ed. Walter Biemel (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), 321.

15 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.2, 982 b 12–3.

philosophy precipitates the situation of post-modernity insofar as a symptom of post-modernity is the “Information Age” in which there is no longer a place for authentic, philosophical wonder. There is no longer a place for authentic, philosophical wonder in the Information Age because the “space” required for it has been closed off and covered over by a limitless technological drive towards *organizing* the ever-increasing amount and availability of information about all that is.

## § 5.

### Heidegger and the End of Philosophy

Many philosophers have spoken about the end of philosophy or claimed outright that philosophy is at an end. For example, Marx, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Rorty—to name four representatives—have each made claims to the effect that philosophy is at an end. Of these claims, Heidegger's may be singled out as somewhat unique in that the situation or context of affairs from which it arises may be said to be a crisis as opposed to a “natural” state of affairs. While there are interesting and important connections between the aforementioned thinkers in relation to their remarks about the end of philosophy, for the purposes of our investigation, it suffices to make the following, perhaps overly simplistic remarks about Marx, Wittgenstein, and Rorty, in order to distinguish their respective claims about the end of philosophy from Heidegger's.

Neither Marx's graphic remark that “philosophy is to the natural sciences [*Studium der wirklichen Welt*] as masturbation is to sex,”<sup>16</sup> nor Wittgenstein's radical assertion, later withdrawn, that “the problems [of philosophy] have in their essentials been solved once and for all,”<sup>17</sup> nor Richard Rorty's distinction between the epistemologically erroneous “Philosophy” with a capital “P” and the playfully conversational “philosophy” with a lowercase “p”<sup>18</sup> generally understand the end of philosophy as an ongoing completion or fulfilment of a past beginning in

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16 Karl Marx, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, vol. 3, *Marx-Engels-Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1961), 217–18.

17 Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Preface,” in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

18 Richard Rorty, “Introduction,” in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982).

need of a future beginning that is still to come. Rather, for the most part they all treat the end of philosophy as a stoppage or termination of a past beginning with no need for a future beginning, because another “natural” context of affairs has already arrived. For Marx, philosophy terminates in its material-historical sublation into the natural sciences; for Wittgenstein, it ceases with the therapeutic, linguistic resolution of its post-Cartesian problems; and for Rorty, it ends in the playfully edifying self-acknowledgement of its erroneous epistemological position of the “spectator theory” of knowledge.

Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy, on the other hand, does not understand its context of affairs as a mere stoppage or termination of a past beginning in need of no future beginning, but rather as an ongoing completion or fulfilment of a past beginning in need of a future beginning that is still to come. For Heidegger, the end of philosophy marks a transitional, *in-between* epoch of Western history, one which calls for a deeper reflection on its first, past beginning, in hopes of renewing or beginning the Western tradition again. This deeper reflection on a past beginning, however, is not done in spite of a future beginning, but rather precisely *for* one; for more deeply reflecting on the past beginning of philosophy is the thoughtful-poetic path towards founding another beginning of the Western tradition. In this way, then, the end of philosophy marks a *crisis* as opposed to a “natural” state of affairs for Heidegger. As Heidegger says in his second major work *Contributions to Philosophy (Of Ereignis)*, “Da-sein is the *crisis* between the first and the other beginning [of Western history].”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, if the crisis of post-modernity is precipitated by the end of philosophy and Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy issues from a crisis as opposed to a “natural” state

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19 Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, 3rd ed. *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 65, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2004), § 173.



of affairs, then a further step into the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity would entail an investigation into the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy. While Heidegger never uses the term “post-modernity” in his writings, his thinking about the end of philosophy provides a unique pathway into answering the question about the meaning of post-modernity. This shift in subject-matter does not mark a change in the path of our investigation, but rather a *deepening* of the path we were already travelling. In choosing Heidegger's claim over others, I do not mean to say that these other claims bear no connection to, or have nothing important to say about, post-modernity, only that the nature of their connection is not “critical” in the sense developed above. In issuing from a crisis as opposed to a “natural” state of affairs, Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy travels into the perplexity surrounding any use of the term “post-modernity.”

Given the above decision, the next step in travelling into the perplexity of post-modernity requires an understanding of Heidegger's claim. Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy, however, is not standalone, but rather plays a specific role within the overall trajectory of his thinking, which comprises many subject-matters in different ways and at different times. Thus, in order for its meaning to be properly disclosed, Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy must be contextualized within the complex simplicity of his thinking as a whole. To do this, however, requires an understanding of the wholeness of Heidegger's thinking. In terms of the path of our investigation, this is equivalent to finding an appropriate way *into* Heidegger's thinking such that the meaning of his claim about the end of philosophy is prepared for disclosure. As we have known since Aristotle, the appropriate way into a particular subject-matter is its “method” [in Greek: μέθοδος], which may differ from other subject-matters in terms

of its degree of accuracy, and depth of presentation.<sup>20</sup> Thus, this way into Heidegger's thinking is the method of our investigation into the meaning of post-modernity by way of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1 1094 b 11–27.

## § 6.

### **The Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Method of the Investigation**

There are different ways in which Heidegger's thinking can be grasped as a whole, each following a different thread that leads to an understanding of it in one piece, as it were. A common approach to grasping Heidegger's thinking as a whole is to follow Heidegger's *own* interpretation of his thinking according to which he is posing anew the question of being or, as Aristotle puts it, “What is a being [τί τὸ ὄν]?”<sup>21</sup> This approach sets out from the overall *matter* of Heidegger's thinking. It takes the *question* of Heidegger's thinking and attempts to show how Heidegger's thinking proceeds according to it. Since the publication of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, however, a new approach towards understanding the wholeness of his thinking has become possible. Rather than the matter of Heidegger's thinking, this approach sets out from the overall *shape* or form of Heidegger's thinking precisely *in* its reposing of the question of being.

While both approaches lead to an understanding of the wholeness of Heidegger's thinking, for the purposes of our investigation the understanding granted by the shape-based approach is to be preferred, insofar as it contextualizes Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy such that its subject-matter *comes to the fore* of his thinking. In other words, seeing as how our investigation seeks an answer to the question about the meaning of post-modernity by way of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy, the approach it will take towards

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<sup>21</sup> *Metaphysics* VII.1, 1028 b 4.

understanding the wholeness of Heidegger's thinking will be to set out from the overall shape (not matter) of Heidegger's thinking, precisely in its reposing of the question of being. This approach will be formulated by means of projecting Heidegger's thinking according to its articulation in his *Gesamtausgabe*. Since the structure of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* displays the shape of his reposing of the question of being with respect to the *totality* of his writings, projecting Heidegger's thinking according to it gives rise to an understanding of the wholeness of his thinking. Doing this, as we will see, emphasizes Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy and awards it a special role within his thinking.

### **a) The Shape of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* and its Way into his Thinking**

The motto of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* is “Ways [*Wege*], not works.” These words, written mere days before his death in 1976 and affixed in handwriting to volume 1 of his *Gesamtausgabe*, characterize the “genre” of Heidegger's thoughtful output. This motto expresses what Heidegger takes to be the distinguishing character of his writings in relation to those of the Western philosophical tradition as it is canonically understood. Heidegger's writings are not closed, systematic “works” of metaphysics in the sense of full expositions of a particular answer to the question of being. Rather, they are open-ended “pathways” of thinking directed towards asking and unravelling the question of being in a more original, primordial manner. Whereas “works” lie squarely within the bounds of the Western philosophical tradition, “pathways” share

an all together different, indeed “post-modern” relationship to the Western philosophical tradition. The relationship is that they lie neither squarely within the Western philosophical tradition nor completely outside it. Rather, they *straddle* the bounds of the Western philosophical tradition: They extend beyond the end of the Western philosophical tradition and in so doing attempt to extend *beneath* its beginning. In attempting to extend beneath the beginning of the Western philosophical tradition in and through their straddling of its end, they remain *underway* towards founding another beginning of Western history, one that is still to come—hence the motto for Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*: “Ways, not works.”

In accordance with their straddling of the boundaries of metaphysics and their resulting project of thoughtfully preparing Western humanity for a crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of their history, Heidegger's “pathways” come in two “sub-genres.” There are those of his writings that attempt to think the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history *step-wise* and there are those that attempt to think the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history as a whole—i.e., *leap-wise*. Thinking the crossing step-wise entails venturing one or more steps *from* the bounds of metaphysics *into* the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history. These “pathways,” as it were, test the waters of the other kind of thinking. Thinking the crossing as a whole or leap-wise, on the other hand, entails venturing an entire leap *across* the crossing itself (by way of uncovering the *origin* of metaphysics) such that the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history begins to announce *itself*. In contrast to their step-wise counterparts, these “pathways” dive into the waters of the other kind of thinking—and hope to swim.

As a result of this distinction, Heidegger's step-wise and leap-wise writings bring with them different “epistemologies.” As those “pathways” of his that keep one foot in metaphysics while venturing only a step into the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history, Heidegger's step-wise writings are his *most understandable* and yet, precisely because of this, his *least thoughtful* in the sense of thinking the other kind of thinking. On the other hand, Heidegger's leap-wise writings, as those “pathways” of his that go furthest in terms of overcoming or getting over metaphysics by venturing an entire leap across the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history, are his *most thoughtful* and yet, precisely because of this, his *least understandable*. These different “epistemologies” may be understood as stemming from the limited extent to which Western humanity has crossed the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of its history. To put it simply, seeing as how metaphysics is our “culture,” we in the West understand step-wise attempts to get over it more readily than leap-wise attempts, precisely because of their being *closer* to metaphysics, relatively speaking. Thus, on top of the division inherent in Heidegger's thinking between his step-wise and leap-wise writings, an additional, hermeneutic feature may be added, namely that Heidegger's step-wise writings are *less thoughtful yet more understandable* than his leap-wise writings and his leap-wise writings are *less understandable yet more thoughtful* than his step-wise writings.

This additional, hermeneutic feature of Heidegger's “pathways” offers a clue as to how an understanding of the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history can be worked towards precisely *within* the division between Heidegger's step-wise and leap-wise writings. Since Heidegger's step-wise writings are less thoughtful yet more

understandable than his leap-wise writings and his leap-wise writings are less understandable yet more thoughtful than his step-wise writings, the entire leaps across the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history attempted in Heidegger's leap-wise writings can be understood as *leaps from the single steps* attempted in his step-wise writings and the single steps from metaphysics into the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history attempted in Heidegger's step-wise writings can be understood as *steps towards the entire leaps* attempted in his leap-wise writings. The old adage that “one must walk before one can run” is true. In terms of Heidegger's thinking, this translates into the fact that, to cross the crossing, one must first step into it before one can venture an entire leap across it.

An important aspect of this approach to understanding Heidegger's project of thoughtfully preparing Western humanity for a crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of their history is the fact that its unique hermeneutic character allows it to understand Heidegger's project while remaining *internal* to his thinking. It does not stand outside of Heidegger's thinking, setting it over against itself, in order to evaluate it from an “objective” standpoint. Rather, it *gets inside* of Heidegger's thinking by interpreting the division inherent in Heidegger's thinking between his step-wise and leap-wise writings such that it may *think along* with Heidegger's thinking in terms of working towards an understanding of the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history. In this way, it participates in Heidegger's project by helping those for whom philosophy is a defining movement to reflect more deeply on their post-modern situation, as opposed to merely evaluating and classifying it as an “object.”

In order for it to be realized, however, this approach requires the selection of one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings and one or more of his step-wise writings. Only when one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings and one or more of his step-wise writings are selected can an entire leap across the crossing be understood as a leap *from* a series of single steps into the other kind of thinking and a series of single steps into the other kind of thinking be understood as steps *towards* an entire leap across the crossing. Thus, two questions arise at this juncture of our investigation: Which of Heidegger's leap-wise writings should be selected as a leap across the crossing? And which or which combination of Heidegger's step-wise writings should be selected as a series of steps, or single step, into the other kind of thinking attempted in the leap-wise writing selected?

As to the question of which of Heidegger's leap-wise writings to select, a clue towards an answer is provided by Heidegger himself in passages from two of his step-wise writings. In a marginal note to his essay "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger remarks that "since 1936 'Ereignis'<sup>22</sup> has been the guiding-word of my thinking"<sup>23</sup>; and in the account "Minutes to a Seminar on the Lecture 'Time and Being'," Heidegger makes the parenthetical remark that "The relations and connections constituting the essential structure of Ereignis were worked out between 1936 and 1938."<sup>24</sup> These comments indicate that *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom*

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22 Throughout the investigation, the German word *Ereignis*, as it said by Heidegger, will remain untranslated. This is in keeping with Heidegger's claim that "The word 'Ereignis' is [...] to be said as a guiding word in the service of thinking. As a guiding word thought in such a manner, it is as little translatable as the Greek guiding word λόγος and the Chinese Tao." Martin Heidegger, "Der Satz der Identität (1957)," in *Identität und Differenz. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 11., ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006), 31–50 at 45.

23 Heidegger, "Brief über den Humanismus (1946)," in *Wegmarken. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 9, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 313–64 at 316.

24 Heidegger, "Protokoll zu einem Seminar über den Vortrag »Zeit und Sein« (1962)," in *Zur Sache des Denkens. Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 14, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 31–64 at 52.



*Ereignis*) or *Contributions to Philosophy (Of Ereignis)*<sup>25</sup>, first published in 1989 as volume 65 of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, holds a preeminent position in Heidegger's thinking with respect to his leap-wise writings.<sup>26</sup> In following this lead of Heidegger's, this is not to say that Heidegger's other leap-wise writings, e.g., *Besinnung*, *Über den Anfang*, *Das Ereignis*, *Die Stege des Anfangs*,<sup>27</sup> are somehow unimportant or not deserving of scholarly attention—far from it; only that, by Heidegger's own account, *Contributions* can be said to be his main leap-wise writing and thereby can be used as a basis for working towards an understanding of the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history. Indeed, one could even go further and argue that *Contributions should* be used as a leap-wise writing for Heidegger's thinking, since, as the least understandable yet most thoughtful of his writings, Heidegger's leap-wise writings require special care and guidance in terms of their selection.

As to the question of which or which combination of Heidegger's step-wise writings to select, no direct clue is offered by Heidegger himself (as was the case above in our selection of *Contributions*). At the same time, however, it is not as if Heidegger leaves us empty handed. In the case of selecting one or a set of Heidegger's step-wise writings, Heidegger offers indirect clues, which, when properly interpreted against the whole of his thinking, lead to a selection of his step-wise writings in which his claim about the end of philosophy comes to the fore.

In the subsections to follow, for the sake of further establishing our approach to Heidegger's thinking, some scholarship on Heidegger's thinking will be presented and discussed

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25 *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, 3rd ed. *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 65, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2004). Hereafter referenced in text as *Contributions*.

26 The executive editor of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, makes a similar claim insofar as he describes *Contributions* as not only Heidegger's "second major work" next to *Being and Time*, but also as the "'first thorough elaboration' of the second, beyng-historical path of working out the question of being." See von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis. Zu Heideggers »Beiträgen zur Philosophie«* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994) 6.

27 These have been published as GA 66, GA 70, GA 71, and GA 72, respectively.

in a somewhat simplified, indeed “metaphysical” manner, in order to differentiate our path and selection of texts from others. In doing so, the intent is not to dismiss or refute other scholarship, but rather to show different possibilities of engaging with Heidegger's thinking in light of specific “critiques” of other approaches. In addition, the language used to describe and differentiate our approach from others will also be somewhat metaphysical. This, however, should not be viewed as an arbitrary, poor choice of “style,” but rather as a necessary first step towards deepening our engagement with metaphysics. As Heidegger says in “Overcoming Metaphysics,” “At first the overcoming of metaphysics can only be represented in terms of metaphysics itself, so to speak, in the manner of a heightening of itself through itself.”<sup>28</sup>

#### **α) The Analytic Approach to Heidegger's Thinking**

In comparison to other aspects of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*,<sup>29</sup> a somewhat less controversial matter was Heidegger's decision to delay the publication of his leap-wise writings, which had remained intentionally unpublished throughout his lifetime, until the full publication of his step-wise writings, which included many of his previously unpublished lecture courses.<sup>30</sup> It is worth mentioning that the hermeneutic character of our approach to understanding Heidegger's project and the other kind of thinking it means to bring about is fully consistent with this decision of Heidegger's. Since Heidegger's leap-wise writings are less understandable yet more thoughtful

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28 Heidegger, “Überwindung der Metaphysik (1936–1946),” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 7, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 67–98 at 77 (IX).

29 One of the controversial aspects of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* remains the fact that it is not a critical, but rather a “final-touch edition [*Ausgabe letzter Hand*]” of Heidegger's writings. For a criticism of this aspect, see Theodore Kisiel, “Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*: An International Scandal of Scholarship,” *Philosophy Today* 39 (1995): 3–15.

30 See Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, “Nachwort des Herausgebers,” in *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 511–21 at 513.

than his step-wise writings and his step-wise writings are less thoughtful yet more understandable than his leap-wise writings, it only makes sense that Heidegger would want to release his leap-wise writings to the public for the first time only *after* his step-wise writings had been published first; for it is only in this way that his leap-wise writings could be understood as leaps *from* the single steps attempted in his step-wise writings and his step-wise writings could be understood as steps *towards* the entire leaps attempted in his leap-wise writings. In this way, Heidegger's "step-wise" writings may be seen as preparatory for his "leap-wise" writings, rather than as alternatives to them. From this synergy between the hermeneutic character of our approach and Heidegger's decision to delay publication of his leap-wise writings, it can be said that the more of Heidegger's step-wise writings at play within an understanding of one of his leap-wise writings, the better that understanding is; for, then, the combined understandability of Heidegger's step-wise writings would provide the largest backdrop against which one of his leap-wise writings could be understood.

Thus, it would appear as though the answer to the question of which or which combination of Heidegger's step-wise writings to select as our series of steps into the other kind of thinking is to select *all* or *a maximal number* of step-wise writings relative to the scope of our investigation. This is, for example, the route taken by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, the executive editor of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, in his book *Wege ins Ereignis: Zu Heideggers »Beiträgen zur Philosophie«*.<sup>31</sup> There, after an introductory chapter, von Herrmann restructures the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions* according to different pairings of subject-matters. These "ways into Ereignis" are "technology – art," "language – poetry," and "human

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31 Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis. Zu Heideggers »Beiträgen zur Philosophie«* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994).

beings – god.”<sup>32</sup> For each subject-matter, von Herrmann interprets the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions* against various presentations of the subject-matter from a maximal number of Heidegger's step-wise writings. In this way the “larger” leap across the crossing attempted in *Contributions* is analyzed in terms of the “smaller” steps from metaphysics into the other kind of thinking attempted in Heidegger's step-wise writings.

This analytic approach, which is by no means exclusive to von Herrmann,<sup>33</sup> has the effect of *adding detail and a systematic structure* to the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions*. In detailing the thoughtful leap attempted in *Contributions* with particularities from Heidegger's step-wise writings, von Herrmann's analyses interpret the structure of *Contributions* as being “systematically” amenable to further supplementation by Heidegger's step-wise writings. According to von Herrmann, “The ‘Contributions to Philosophy’ are *systematic* in the manner of the *six-time jointed jointure* of the truth of beyng.”<sup>34</sup> Von Herrmann supports this interpretation of the structure of *Contributions* by referencing Heidegger's claim from his 1936 lecture course on Schelling, which states that “Every philosophy is systematic, but not every philosophy is a system.”<sup>35</sup> However, from this and von Herrmann's undoubtedly true claim that “The inner order that prevails between the six joinings [of *Contributions*] does not entail a system,”<sup>36</sup> it does not follow that the structure of *Contributions* is systematic, as von Herrmann claims, for the simple reason that *Contributions* is not a work of philosophy! The

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32 See *ibid.*, Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively.

33 Cf. Daniela Neu, *Die Notwendigkeit der Gründung im Zeitalter der Dekonstruktion: Zur Gründung in Heideggers „Beiträgen zur Philosophie“ unter Hinzuziehung der Derridaschen Dekonstruktion* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1997), esp. §§ 16–20.

34 Von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis*, 23; first emphasis mine.

35 Martin Heidegger, *Schelling. Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)* (Summer Semester 1936). *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 42, ed. Ingrid Schüßler (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), 51. Von Herrmann quotes this passage at *Wege ins Ereignis*, 23.

36 Von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis*, 22.

systematic yet non-system philosophy referred to by Heidegger in the above claim from his Schelling lecture course is not *Contributions*, but rather *pre-modern* philosophy, i.e., philosophy before the subjectivity of Descartes; for, according to Heidegger, the certainty required to build a “system” of philosophy is only possible with the advent of the “subject” and subjectivity as a result of the *cogito sum*. Thus, the structure of the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions* goes beyond the distinction between system and systematic. That Heidegger himself thought this is indicated by the remark Heidegger makes immediately after his above claim on philosophy as systematic versus system. He says: “On the other hand, where there is the appearance of a system, there is not always systematic thinking, that is, philosophy.”<sup>37</sup> In contrast to von Herrmann's interpretation, this, so it would appear, is where Heidegger refers to *Contributions*; for as an entire leap across the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history, *Contributions* has the appearance of a system but, as a “pathway” of thinking, it is nonetheless not philosophy. Thus, while von Herrmann's well crafted and scholarly analyses add more detail and a systematic structure to the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions*, it is questionable whether they in fact lead across the crossing to the other kind of thinking or whether they simply remain locked in metaphysics.

Indeed, despite its detailing, systematic effect—or, rather, precisely because of it—this kind of approach brings with it an often overlooked yet decisive side effect. Precisely *in* adding detail and a systematic structure to the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions*, the approach of analyzing one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings in terms of a maximal number of step-wise writings is more prone than other approaches to *losing sight of the entirety* of the very leap of which it is to work towards an understanding. In other words, in interpreting the other

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<sup>37</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Schelling*, 51.

kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history systematically, such an approach fails essentially to go “beyond” metaphysics. Why is this the case? What exactly “fails” or “breaks down” in von Herrmann's analyses?

I contend that the reason behind such a “break-down” is, above all, *phenomenological*, involving the essence of thinking as Heidegger understands it. What, however, is the essence of thinking for Heidegger? In order to unravel this question towards uncovering another, less metaphysical and more thoughtful approach to Heidegger's thinking, a clue is needed. In his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” after discussing the circularity of essential thinking, Heidegger states that “thinking is a handwork.”<sup>38</sup> Taking this clue as our guide, we may then make the following step into Heidegger's thinking. If thinking is a handwork, then Heidegger's step-wise writings can be thought of as *tools* the purpose of which is to *work* towards an understanding of one or more of his leap-wise writings. If such a relationship between thinking and handworking were applied to the “analytic” approach discussed above, then the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself in one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings can be said to diminish itself as a result of the latter's entire leap across the crossing being systematically detailed with particularities taken from single steps into the other kind of thinking attempted in a maximal number of Heidegger's step-wise writings. To understand how and why this would be, a discussion of an all-important analysis from Heidegger's earlier thought is in order.

One of the most insightful sections of *Being and Time* is its “Analysis of Environmentality and Worldliness in General.”<sup>39</sup> For Heidegger, environmentality and

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38 Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 3.

39 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927). *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 2, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), §§ 14–18.

worldliness are “existentials” or fundamental structures of being of Dasein by virtue of its ability to work with, and comport itself towards, tools. Heidegger calls the being of tools “readiness-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*]” in contradistinction to the being of objects—natural or otherwise—which he calls “presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*].” Heidegger’s analysis of environmentality and worldliness in general is grounded on an insight into the workability of tools. According to Heidegger, “The peculiarity of what is first of all ready-to-hand is that, in order to make itself actually ready-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw into its readiness-to-hand.”<sup>40</sup> This means that, in order to be effective, a tool must *recede* into the background of the work it is doing, in order that the work being done may *proceed* in the foreground of what it is being done *for*. Once, however, the readiness-to-hand of a tool is disrupted through what Heidegger calls its “conspicuousness,” “obtrusiveness,” or “rebelliousness,”<sup>41</sup> the tool ceases to recede into the background and enters into the foreground of the work being done, thereby *crowding* its “space.” This alters, above all, the mode of being of the tool. Once disrupted a tool is still understood by Dasein as something *in order to do* something else. Its in-order-to-do, however, is no longer in the mode of ready-to-hand, but rather now in the mode of *present-at-hand*. The tool is no longer at work within a project, but rather at rest in front of Dasein—lying, as it were, *in itself*.

This disruption of the readiness-to-hand of a tool, however, does not only alter the mode of being of the tool now disrupted. It also simultaneously alters Dasein’s “sight” in the sense of how beings as a whole show themselves to it. While working on a project with tools withdrawn into their readiness-to-hand, Dasein “sees” beings first and foremost in terms of their connection to the *whole* of its project. For example, while in its mode of readiness-to-hand, a hammer is

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40 Ibid., 69.

41 See *ibid.*, 73–4.

something in order to nail nails, which in turn are used to fasten together beams of wood, which form the structure of a house, which is for Dasein to dwell in. In this way, then, a hammer is “seen” in connection to this whole. However, once the readiness-to-hand of a tool is disrupted, beings no longer show themselves to Dasein in terms of their connection to the whole of its project, but rather in terms of their *particularity*. This is shown by the fact that the particular “properties” of a tool, e.g., its weight, height, colour, composition, etc., make themselves known to Dasein only while its readiness-to-hand is disrupted. For example, once disrupted, the hammer shows itself to be made of cast iron, which is precisely what made it too heavy for the task at hand.<sup>42</sup> Thus, as a result of the disruption of the readiness-to-hand of a tool and the latter's alteration in its mode of being, Dasein's “sight” undergoes a *narrowing-down*. It no longer “sees” primarily according to the whole of its project, but rather according to the particularity of the beings now present-at-hand within it.

This analysis of Heidegger's illuminates how the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself can be diminished if the entire leap across the crossing attempted in one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings is systematically detailed with particularities taken from single steps into the other kind of thinking attempted in Heidegger's step-wise writings; for *such systematic detailing is tantamount to the readiness-to-hand of Heidegger's step-wise writings being disrupted*. If we follow Heidegger's clue that “thinking is a handwork”<sup>43</sup> and so interpret Heidegger's step-wise writings as tools the purpose of which is to work towards an understanding of his leap-wise writings, then, in order to be effective, they must recede into the background of such work, in order that the other kind of thinking attempted in one of

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42 Cf. Heidegger's example in *ibid.*, § 33.

43 Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 3.



Heidegger's leap-wise writings may proceed in the foreground of preparing Western humanity for another beginning of their history. If their readiness-to-hand is disrupted, e.g., through their being used within a systematic *analysis* of one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings, then the “sight” according to which the other kind of thinking begins to show itself could be narrowed-down. This is precisely the meaning of Heidegger's 1937/38 reflection in *Besinnung* on the uniqueness of *Contributions* vis-à-vis his other writings. There, in a supplemental “Retrospective on my Pathway,” Heidegger notes, “These 'Contributions to Philosophy' are to make visible the breadth of the question of being in a new approach; here the unfolding [*Ausfaltung*] into particulars does not work [*gilt nicht*], because this all too easily diminishes the actual horizon and allows the basic thrust of questioning to depreciate.”<sup>44</sup>

In this passage, the “new approach” taken by *Contributions* is that of venturing an entire leap across the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history and the “unfolding into particulars” is the approach taken by Heidegger's step-wise writings, which is that of venturing single steps from metaphysics into the other kind of thinking. This passage confirms the results of our discussion about an analytic approach to understanding Heidegger's project exemplified by von Herrmann. In referring to the fact that the “single step” approach of Heidegger's step-wise writings “all too easily diminishes the actual horizon [of the other kind of thinking] and allows the basic thrust of questioning to depreciate,” it gives support to our development of Heidegger's claim that “thinking is a handwork.” Thus, in interpreting the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history systematically, the approach of analyzing *Contributions* in terms of a maximal number of step-wise writings can

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44 Heidegger, “Ein Rückblick auf den Weg (1937/38),” in *Besinnung. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 66, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), 411–28 at 427.

“all too easily” lose sight of, i.e., diminish, the entirety of the leap across the crossing of which it is to work towards an understanding.

This deficiency in an analytic approach to Heidegger's thinking makes it appear as though there is no positive or successful answer to the question of which or which combination of Heidegger's step-wise writings to select; for any *explicit* use of Heidegger's step-wise writings within an interpretation of one of his leap-wise writings is tantamount to a disruption in the former's readiness-to-hand, which would diminish the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking attempted in the leap-wise writing begins to announce itself. Such an impasse, however, would be the case only if all of Heidegger's step-wise writings were the same in terms of their *tool-like functionality*. What if, then, there were “tools” of Heidegger's step-wise writings that, rather than disrupt or break down the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history, helped to sculpt it, indeed to lay it *bare*.

### **β) The Synthetic Approach to Heidegger's Thinking**

While all of Heidegger's step-wise writings venture single steps from metaphysics into the other kind of thinking, some of these steps can be thought of as being, as it were, *thicker* than others. “Thicker” here is meant in the sense of *projecting more* of the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself. Rather than concentrating on a particular subject-matter inherent in the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history—e.g., art, poetry, technology, language, nihilism, the history of metaphysics, Dasein, temporality, etc.—Heidegger's “thick” step-wise writings can be said to deal with a full swath of

these subject-matters *in a single shot*, as it were. Because of this, their steps into the other kind of thinking straddle not only the end of the Western philosophical tradition but also its beginning. As a result of their double straddling, Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings do not merely indicate or point out the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history. Rather, they also *open out into it* precisely in their mode of indication. Thus, while their use in an interpretation of one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings still entails a disruption of their readiness-to-hand and thereby a diminishment of the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself, the diminishment they enact can be said to differ essentially from that of Heidegger's "thin" step-wise writings. Their diminishment does not constitute a narrowing-down of the horizon, but rather an *opening-up* of it. Due to the full swath of subject-matters dealt with in Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings, the horizon of the other kind of thinking may be diminished not in the negative sense of something going out of focus, but rather in the positive sense of something *coming into focus*. Thus, rather than maintaining, or perhaps even widening, the hermeneutic gap between Heidegger's more understandable yet less thoughtful step-wise writings and his more thoughtful yet less understandable leap-wise writings, the use of Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings in an interpretation of one of his leap-wise writings can have the effect of bringing the two sides closer together. Its potential for opening up (as opposed to narrowing down) the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself makes this approach to understanding one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings not "analytic," but rather what may be called *synthetic*.<sup>45</sup> In disrupting the readiness-to-hand of Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings, such an approach works towards building a footbridge, as it were, across the crossing from metaphysics to the

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45 See the previous discussion on the initial necessity of metaphysical language on p. 27.

other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history. Which, however, of Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings should be selected as a step or steps towards the entire leap across the crossing attempted in *Contributions*?

Of all of Heidegger's step-wise writings, his "thickest" would appear to be his 1964 lecture "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking."<sup>46</sup> The "thickness" of this lecture is indicated, above all, by its title, which can be glossed into a formulation of the basic claim of Heidegger's later thought: We stand at the end of philosophy and as a result there is an inceptual task for something other than philosophy called thinking, which thinks the other beginning of Western history. This claim carves out a full swath of subject-matters inherent in the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history in a single cut, as it were. The swath of its cut projects in outline the full horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history begins to announce itself.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it can be said to provide a sufficient answer to the question of which or which combination of Heidegger's step-wise writings to select. As one of Heidegger's "thickest" step-wise writing, EPTT is an appropriate tool for working towards an understanding of the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions*. In order to cut through the dense forestry of post-modernity in travelling across the crossing towards the other beginning, the right tool is needed. This is not a "thin," as it were, detailing tool such as a chisel. Rather, what is needed is something "thick"—like an *axe*.

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46 Heidegger, "Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens (1964)," in *Zur Sache des Denkens. Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 14, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 67–90. Hereafter referenced in text as EPTT. An English translation of this lecture is available as "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 55–73.

47 Cf. John Sallis's characterization of EPTT as "Heidegger's final retrospective text" in "End(s)," *Research in Phenomenology* 13 (1983): 85–96 at 88 and Werner Marx's characterization of it as Heidegger's "legacy" in "Thought and Issue in Heidegger," *Research in Phenomenology* 7 (1977): 12–30 at 13.

To be clear, in working out and selecting a “synthetic” approach that uses “thick” step-wise writings in order to work towards an understanding of the other kind of thinking attempted in Heidegger's leap-wise writings, e.g., *Contributions*, I do not mean to say that “analytic” approaches that use “thin” step-wise writings are, by their very nature, self-undermining in terms of their efforts at understanding Heidegger's thinking. My claim is not that all analysis distorts phenomena by automatically objectifying them; for not all analysis is objectifying. A case in point for this is Heidegger's own “Analysis of Environmentality and Worldliness in General” from *Being and Time*, which we discussed above. In this analysis, Heidegger employs a “content-less” hyper-descriptive method called “formal indication”<sup>48</sup> that does not objectify the phenomenon at issue, but rather “*first lets what is interpreted itself speak out so that it can decide of its own accord whether it, as this being, yields the being-constitution towards which it was disclosed in a formally indicative manner in the projection.*”<sup>49</sup>

Thus, in proposing a synthetic approach, my claim is that any attempt at understanding Heidegger's thinking should be *phenomenologically aware* of the consequences of its *own* thinking as a “handwork.” When crafted skillfully, a handwork does not overpower its subject-matter with any and every tool in the box, but rather encourages it to speak for itself by making use of the appropriate tool at the appropriate time in the appropriate manner. Rather than breaking down its subject-matter into smaller and smaller pieces, a handwork must let its subject-matter show itself from itself. In our case, this means that an appropriate tool for working towards an understanding of the other kind of thinking attempted in *Contributions* is not a

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48 Heidegger's treatment of formal indication is found in “Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion (1920/21),” in *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens, Gesamtausgabe* vol. 60, ed. Matthias Jung and Thomas Regehly (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), 62–65 and *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (1921/22), *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 61, ed. Walter Bröcker and Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 31–5.

49 *Sein und Zeit*, § 63, 314–15.

maximal number of Heidegger's step-wise writings, despite the fact that the more at play within an understanding—albeit remaining in the *background*—the better that understanding is. Rather, an appropriate tool is one or more of Heidegger's “thick” step-wise writings, since a disruption of their readiness-to-hand entails an opening-up (as opposed to a narrowing-down) of the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself, i.e., a disruption of their readiness-to-hand is synthetic as opposed to analytic. In this way, our approach heeds Heidegger's all-important warning about analysis in *Besinnung* that “unfolding into particulars [...] all too easily diminishes the actual horizon and allows the basic thrust of questioning to depreciate.”<sup>50</sup>

## **b) Additional Considerations**

In addition to the above hermeneutic-phenomenological reasons, there are some, as it were, “external” considerations for selecting EPTT over Heidegger's other step-wise writings. Foremost is the fact that EPTT has been overlooked as a foundational text of Heidegger's in past scholarly attempts at understanding his thinking. While there are some noteworthy exceptions—above all, the work of John Sallis<sup>51</sup> and Samuel IJsseling<sup>52</sup>—EPTT appears never to have taken a *leading role* in research into Heidegger's thinking as a whole.<sup>53</sup> Rather, it has only ever guided or

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<sup>50</sup> “Ein Rückblick auf den Weg,” 427.

<sup>51</sup> See John Sallis, *Echoes: After Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), esp. 22–43, and his article “End(s).”

<sup>52</sup> See Samuel IJsseling, “The End of Philosophy as the Commencement of Thinking,” in *Critical Heidegger*, trans. and ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1996), 191–205.

<sup>53</sup> Some additional articles that discuss EPTT, albeit only briefly or in passing, are Joan Stambaugh, “Nihilism and the End of Philosophy,” *Research in Phenomenology* 15 (1985): 79–97; Peter Blum, “Heidegger and Rorty on the End of Philosophy,” *Metaphilosophy* 21, no. 3 (July 1990): 223–238; and Gregory Bruce Smith, “Heidegger,

been used in research into a *particular* subject-matter inherent in the crossing. For example, the proceedings of the 1984 Leiden Heidegger symposium discuss EPTT, but only in the context of the essence of modern technology and science; it thereby overlooks the more future-oriented themes of the task of thinking.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Ernesto Grassi and John Michael Krois analyze some themes of EPTT, but only insofar as they relate to a particular historical movement, namely Italian Humanism.<sup>55</sup> In addition, there are a number of articles that discuss Heidegger's thinking within the context of the end of philosophy but make no reference to EPTT.<sup>56</sup>

There would appear to be a twofold reason for EPTT's general lack of treatment in Heideggerian scholarship. On the one hand, there is what Hans-Georg Gadamer once described as Heidegger's "radical talk about the end of philosophy" according to which Heidegger, long since (in)famous for his transgressive vocabulary, even "outdid himself [*verstieg sich*]."<sup>57</sup> However, in contrast to Heidegger's other writings, above all *Being and Time*, EPTT's "radical talk" is not due to its novelty of expression. Rather, what makes EPTT's talk so radical is precisely its *straightforwardness*. EPTT does not attempt to describe phenomena covered over in and by the workings of the Western tradition with "formally indicative" expressions. Rather, it attempts to say once again "the oldest of the old"<sup>58</sup> with the right poetic words in the proper,

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Technology and Postmodernity," *The Social Science Journal* 28, no. 3 (1991): 369–389.

54 See Marcel F. Fresco, Rob J. A. van Dijk, H. W. Peter Vijgeboom, eds., *Heideggers These vom Ende der Philosophie: Verhandlung des Leidener Heidegger-Symposiums April 1984* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1988).

55 See Ernesto Grassi and John Michael Krois, "Italian Humanism and Heidegger's Thesis of the End of Philosophy," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 13, no. 2 (Spring, 1980): 79–98.

56 See Reginald Storrs Lilly, "Umschläge: Nietzsche and Heidegger at the End of Philosophy," *Research in Phenomenology* 15 (1985): 99–111; Cornelius Castoriadis, "The 'End of Philosophy'?" *Salmagundi* no. 82/83 (Spring-Summer 1989): 3–23; and Calvin Schräge, "Rhetoric Resituated at the End of Philosophy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71, no. 2 (1985): 164–174.

57 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Oberflächlichkeit und Unkenntnis: Zur Veröffentlichung von Victor Farias," in *Antwort. Martin Heidegger im Gespräch*, ed. Günther Neske and Emil Kettering (Pfullingen: Neske, 1988), 152–56 at 154.

58 Cf. "Vorbemerkung," in *Wegmarken. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 9, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann), IX–X at IX.

thoughtful manner. Thus, it would appear as though one reason for EPTT's lack of foundational treatment in Heideggerian scholarship is that once Heidegger's ideas are “dressed in plain clothes,” they become even *more radical* than their expression in his earlier iconoclastic vocabulary.<sup>59</sup> For a thinker like Heidegger, the irony of such a situation is unmistakeable.

At the same time, however, rather than being a reason for its lack of foundational treatment, EPTT's “radical talk about the end of philosophy” is precisely *why* it could be selected and used in an interpretation of one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings. In order to be captured in a single “thick” step, the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history requires straightforward, “tell-it-like-it-is” expression. Rather than systematically detailing one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings with particularities, an approach which ultimately narrows down the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself, the single “thick” step of EPTT *cuts to the chase* in terms of its expression of the crossing and thus works towards laying bare the horizon of Ereignis. Thus, in this way, a reason for EPTT's lack of foundational treatment in Heideggerian scholarship turns out to be a reason for its selection in our investigation. The straightforward “radical talk” by which its swath of subject-matters is handled is precisely what gives it the breadth required to lay the groundwork for a footbridge between metaphysics and the other kind of thinking attempted in one of Heidegger's leap-wise writings.

A second potential reason for EPTT's neglect in Heideggerian scholarship circles back to an earlier thread of our investigation. As its title indicates, EPTT's subject-matter includes the end of philosophy and, as was worked out in § 4, the situation of the end of philosophy is that of

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<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., Herbert Spiegelberg's characterization of Heidegger's language as a “reckless and violent approach to the problem of communication” in *The Phenomenological Movement*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 411.



a *crisis*. It is, however, the very nature of a crisis to be *disregarded*. For it is far easier to dismiss and disregard a crisis than to face it head-on, far easier to deceive oneself into believing that one is not in a crisis rather than to accept and confront its challenges, however difficult they may be. In this way, a crisis brings with it a paradoxical logic: *The less a crisis is acknowledged, the more critical its situation is*. Thus, there is a sense in which the lack of treatment of EPTT as a foundational text of Heidegger's is not merely a “lacuna” in Heideggerian scholarship, but rather indirect proof of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy. If EPTT's lack of foundational treatment is not simply a contingent fact, but rather in some way tied to its critical subject-matter, then the very fact that it has been overlooked as a foundational text of Heidegger's thinking gives rise to a further positive clue to be followed by our investigation.

## § 7.

### Outline of the Investigation

The meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity is not only poorly understood but the lack of understanding surrounding it belongs in some manner to its meaning. As an in-between historical epoch that lies after the end of modernity and yet before the beginning of another historical epoch that is still to come, the situation of post-modernity is that of a crisis. The event that precipitates this crisis is the end of the defining movement of the Western tradition, namely the end of philosophy. Part of Heidegger's uniqueness as a thinker is that he treats the end of philosophy as a crisis as opposed to a “natural” state of affairs. As such, the hermeneutic-phenomenological method of our investigation into the meaning of post-modernity consists in projecting Heidegger's “thickest” step-wise writing, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (EPTT), as a single step towards understanding the entire leap across the crossing attempted in his main leap-wise writing, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of Ereignis)*. This approach does not represent an analysis or “break down” of Heidegger's thinking, but rather a *synthesis* of it towards laying bare the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history begins to announce itself in and as the horizon of Ereignis. This laying-bare of the horizon of Ereignis forges a deeper path *into* the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity, since Heidegger's thinking thinks *through* the crisis of post-modernity.

In accordance with the above-recounted situation and the hermeneutic-phenomenological method that we have developed into it, the main part of our investigation is divided into five sections:

- Preview
- The More Essential Structuring of “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”
- The End of Philosophy as the Development of Independent Sciences
- The End of Philosophy as the Completion of Metaphysics
- The Task of Thinking at the End of Philosophy

A brief description of the contents of each section is as follows.

Laying bare the horizon of Ereignis from the “positive” disruption of the readiness-to-hand of EPTT requires that the horizon be *kept in sight* throughout the accompanying disclosure of the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy. Before something can be kept in sight, however, it must first be *located*. In the case of a horizon, locating it means that one must *enter into in the right way*. A horizon is not an object the possession of which is realized all at once through its being transferred or exchanged in a marketplace. Rather, it is a kind of “sight” the gaining of which is realized in a step-wise manner through its being *opened up* in thinking. Thus, in the same manner in which *Contributions* begins with a *Vorblick* that “looks ahead to the whole”<sup>60</sup> of its leap across the crossing, our investigation will begin with a “Preview” that looks ahead to the whole of its thoughtful synthesis between EPTT and *Contributions*. This “Preview” will consist of an interpretation of Heidegger's concluding response from his 1969 television interview with Richard Wisser. As is the case with many of Heidegger's writings, the significance

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60 Von Herrmann, “Nachwort des Herausgebers,” in *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 512.

of what is said builds throughout the discussion up to the point where, in a final outburst of meaning, Heidegger gathers together the entirety of what has been said into a key summoning of words. In the case of Heidegger's concluding response from his 1969 television interview, this has the effect of delineating the horizon of Ereignis such that we may enter into it in the right way.

Once entered into, the horizon of Ereignis can begin to be opened up by way of synthesizing the subject-matters of EPTT and *Contributions*. As Heidegger's "thickest" step-wise writing and his main leap-wise writings, respectively, EPTT and *Contributions* deal with a number of similar subject-matters inherent in the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history. Their similarity in content, however, is hidden by their dissimilarity in form, above all, through the different way in which their common subject-matters are arranged. In order to disclose the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy such that the thinking of EPTT is brought together synthetically with the thinking of *Contributions*, however, the arrangement of their subject-matters must be aligned; more specifically, EPTT's subject-matters must be rearranged according to their non-linear trajectory in *Contributions*. Carrying this task out comprises the second section of the main part of our investigation, i.e., § 9 "The More Essential Structuring of 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking'."

Once the subject-matters of EPTT and *Contributions* have been aligned, each subject-matter of EPTT will be interpreted with a view towards gaining an understanding of the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history. The subject-matters of EPTT are threefold: (1) the end of philosophy as the development of independent

sciences; (2) the end of philosophy as the completion of metaphysics; and (3) the task of thinking at the end of philosophy. As single steps towards the entire leap across the crossing attempted in *Contributions*, the meanings of the subject-matters of EPTT reveal themselves respectively as:

1. the breaching or breaking-up of the horizon with respect to which the ontologies of the various regions of beings were once unified, resulting in a limitless drive towards organizing the ever-increasing amount and availability of information about all that is;
2. the historical locus of the “tragedy” of metaphysics at which the single affair with which the various dimensions of grounding are concerned is reversed in a final, most extreme possibility; and
3. the self-concealing origin of the clearing (unconcealment) whence the possibilities of grounding of beings by being originally sprung and so cleared a “space” for philosophical thinking.

These meanings constitute the conclusions to the third, fourth, and fifth sections of the main part of our investigation, i.e., §§ 10–12.

After the horizon of Ereignis has been opened up from EPTT, an answer to the question about the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity can be offered with respect to that horizon. This comprises the conclusion of the investigation. After focussing our “sight” through a brief recapitulation of the main steps of the investigation, the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity reveals itself as the threefold phenomenon of entanglement, nihilism, and not knowing. With respect to the horizon of Ereignis, to live in a “postmodern” world or age means to live in a world increasingly entangled by “possibilities” that derive no purpose or meaning

from a defining historical movement and so leave those standing in their midst perplexed as to where they are and what the fate of thinking will be.

## **Part II**

### **Laying Bare the Horizon of Ereignis from “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”**

## § 8.

### Preview

The importance of EPTT to Heidegger's project of thoughtfully preparing Western humanity for a crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of their history can be shown by Heidegger's reference to it in his 1969 television interview with Richard Wisser.<sup>61</sup> In what turns out to be the final question of the interview, Wisser asks Heidegger whether he sees any indication that the change in Western thinking he has thought necessary will one day become a reality. Initially, Heidegger's response would appear to indicate a “powerlessness” in his thinking, especially when compared to the “efficacy” and “instrumentality” characteristic of the thinking of the Western philosophical tradition.<sup>62</sup> He responds, “No one knows what the fate of thinking will be.”<sup>63</sup> While this statement is in no way a claim of efficacy or instrumentality on the part of Heidegger about his thinking, it is neither an admission of impotency or forlornness. Rather, this initial response of Heidegger's indicates the *need* of (his) thinking as it arises from our current historical epoch of. This epoch of post-modernity—what Heidegger calls “the crossing [*der Übergang*]”<sup>64</sup>—lies in a peculiar situation in need of another kind of thinking and thereby does not know the fate of its own.

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61 “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch (17. September 1969),” in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 16, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 702–11. An English translation of this interview is available as “Martin Heidegger in Conversation with Richard Wisser,” in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, trans. Lisa Harries (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 81–7.

62 Cf. *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, § 18.

63 “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch,” 709.

64 Cf. *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, §§ 40, 89.



As its name suggests, what defines the crossing as a historical epoch is that it lies *in-between* historical epochs. More specifically, it lies in-between the end of the first beginning of the Western tradition and the other beginning that is still to come. In lying in-between eventful happenings of a historical tradition, the crossing or, rather, those standing within it necessarily find themselves in the position of not knowing whether the other beginning will one day arrive or whether they will remain lost in the “homelessness” of the end of the first beginning.<sup>65</sup> This need for a home is whence Heidegger's project of thoughtfully preparing Western humanity for a crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of their history arises. Whereas historical epochs within the first beginning thought according to an underlying form already granted to them, those standing within the crossing think insofar as they remain open to receiving another thoughtful form by which a future thinking will be shaped and guided in terms of other possibilities. This need for another thoughtful form, and the essential incertitude that comes with it, is what distinguishes Heidegger's thinking from the causal-instrumental efficacy inherent in the thinking of the first beginning of the Western philosophical tradition.

The incertitude of Heidegger's initial response compels him to clarify the needful situation of the crossing and attempt to describe, to the extent that is currently possible, the thoughtful form by which a future thinking might one day hopefully be guided. Heidegger continues his response: “In 1964 in a lecture in Paris, which I myself did not give but was delivered in French translation, I spoke under the title: 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking'. I make therefore a *distinction* between philosophy, i.e., metaphysics, and thinking as I understand it.”<sup>66</sup>

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65 Heidegger, “Brief über den »Humanismus« (1946),” in *Wegmarken. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 9, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 313–64 at 339.

66 “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch,” 709.

This distinction between philosophy/metaphysics and thinking articulates the thoughtful juncture at which Western humanity stands within the crossing, straddling bounds of the Western philosophical tradition. On the one hand—or perhaps better—*foot*, there is philosophy/metaphysics. This is the thinking of the first beginning, which is currently in its final stage. On the other hand (foot), there is what Heidegger calls “thinking,” which can be said to be equivalent to his own. This is the thinking that is to prepare Western humanity for the arrival of the other beginning of their history as a result of philosophy/metaphysics's being at an end. Heidegger's thinking, therefore, is not the thinking *of* the other beginning, but rather a thinking that is *underway* towards it. It prepares for the arrival of the other beginning of Western history by thinking its first beginning more originally than the thinking of its first beginning, that is, philosophy/metaphysics. In terms of the fate of thinking, the current juncture of post-modernity manifests itself in a decisive disjunction: Either the final, technological stage of philosophy/metaphysics will hold sway as the predominant thinking of Western humanity despite the fact that, as a defining historical movement, philosophy/metaphysics has exhausted all of its essential possibilities or a form of thinking in some way “other” than philosophy/metaphysics will one day arrive, thus instituting another beginning in the happening of Western history.

While being underway towards the other beginning requires a thinking that is more original than philosophy/metaphysics, the originality of this thinking is not that of a “ground.” For this reason, Heidegger continues to clarify his response and describe further the distinction between philosophy/metaphysics and his thinking: “The thinking that I contrast with philosophy in this lecture [i.e., EPTT] [...] is, in comparison to metaphysical thinking, much simpler than philosophy but, precisely because of its simplicity, much more difficult to carry out.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

This description characterizes thinking by a difficult simplicity relative to philosophy/metaphysics and philosophy/metaphysics, in turn, by an easy complexity relative to Heidegger's thinking. At first blush it would appear as though this difference is *absolute*, i.e., the opposing characterizations of thinking and philosophy/metaphysics would appear to indicate no essential connection or relation between them. This is the case, however, only if Heidegger's characterizations are understood metaphysically, e.g., as defining necessary and sufficient conditions or characterizing “properties” of objects. If understood thoughtfully, on the other hand, Heidegger's characterizations do not separate thinking from metaphysics, but rather bring them together in a non-metaphysical manner. In this way, the difference inherent in Heidegger's description is not a differentiating difference, but rather a *unifying difference*—in the sense of, as Heidegger says in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the “intimacy of the simple belonging together” of opponents in a fight.<sup>68</sup> This unity indicates an essential *turning* that does not remove or sever Heidegger's thinking from philosophy/metaphysics, but rather *joins* the two together in a manner more original than a “ground.” To see how and why this is, however, the paradox of Heidegger's characterization must be unravelled and understood in a manner more original than philosophy/metaphysics.

In Heidegger's characterization of thinking by a difficult simplicity and, in turn, philosophy/metaphysics by an easy complexity, philosophy/metaphysics and thinking are not joined together metaphysically as an effect to its cause, parts to their whole, indeed thesis and anti-thesis to their dialectical synthesis; rather, they are joined together thoughtfully, indeed poetically as a *river to its source*. This is hinted at in Heidegger's lecture “Time and Being” when Heidegger remarks that “Ereignis neither *is*, nor is Ereignis *given*. To say the one or the other

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<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 35.

amounts to a distortion of the matter, just as if we wanted to derive the source from the river.”<sup>69</sup>

What is important about Heidegger's use of the terms “river” and “source” is not the terms themselves or the imagery they invoke, but rather their meaning and relationship. If philosophy/metaphysics is a river, then thinking is its source. Thinking is whence philosophy/metaphysics sprung into the multiplicity of its various streams throughout the happening of its history. In this way, thinking is “much simpler than philosophy” because what is to be thought by it is not variegated, but rather *singular*. As the source of philosophy/metaphysics, thinking has for its matter the *original onefold* whence philosophy/metaphysics sprung into history as the being of beings. This onefold matter, however, does not make thinking easier than philosophy/metaphysics, but rather “much more difficult to carry out.” This is because, in order to think the original onefold of philosophy/metaphysics, thinking must not only swim against the established current of metaphysical streams already sprung within the history of philosophy but, even more difficultly, it must swim *into places unthinkable by philosophy/metaphysics*. No matter how powerful or systematic they are, the streams of philosophy/metaphysics can never access their source. The reason for this is not only because a river, by its very nature, streams away from its source but, more basically, because the beginning of a defining historical movement always happens as an *overflow* the flowing of which *conceals* the original source of its flowing as well as the fact, uncovered here, that the streams rushing from it are related to whence they sprung as a river to its source. As Heidegger says in his 1942 lecture course *Hölderlin's Hymn “The Ister:”*

The flowing of the river [...] is a unique temporal activity that is concealed. This

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<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, “Zeit und Sein (1962),” in *Zur Sache des Denkens, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 14, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 3–30 at 29.

concealment of the activity of the river is what characterizes it. The poet knows of this concealment. [...] The poetic word unveils this concealment of the river's activity, and indeed as such an activity. This unveiling is poetic.<sup>70</sup>

The concealment of a river's source from it is not a lack, but rather belongs essentially to its flowing.<sup>71</sup> Translated into thinking, it is as Heidegger states in *What Is Called Thinking?*, “The more original a thinking is, the richer will its unthought be. The unthought is the greatest gift that a thinking has to bestow.”<sup>72</sup>

Thus, as a river, philosophy/metaphysics cannot “think” the source of its own history because such a source remains concealed to it as whence its essential possibilities originally sprung. It is only when the essential possibilities sprung from a source have been exhausted at the end of a defining historical movement that the original onefold of their source begins to reveal itself, albeit indirectly, indeed hintingly. As a result of this thoughtful relationship, philosophy is easier to carry out than thinking due to its streaming *with* the established current of its springing-forth and yet more complex due to the multiplicity of its various historical streams, whereas thinking is “much more difficult to carry out” than philosophy due to the overflowing source-like concealment of its matter and yet “much simpler than philosophy” due to the singularity of what is to be thought in and through it.

Even with its paradox unravelled as the self-concealing source of the springing-forth of a river, Heidegger's characterization of thinking as a difficult simplicity is still only a nominal definition. In order to cross the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western

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70 Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymne “Der Ister”*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 53, ed. Walter Biemel (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), 21.

71 See Jsseling, “The End of Philosophy,” 193.

72 Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?*, *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 8, ed. Paola-Ludovika Coriando (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), 82.

history, the *matter* of thinking must be understood in addition to how thinking relates to philosophy/metaphysics. Accordingly, Heidegger continues his response: “And it [i.e., thinking] requires a new carefulness [*Sorgfalt*] with language rather than the invention of new terms, as I once thought; on the contrary, it requires a return to the original content of our own constantly decaying language.”<sup>73</sup>

The first half of this statement shifts the matter of Heidegger's thinking away from his early attempts at fundamental ontology and places it in the direction of a non-instrumental, *care-full* relationship with language. The second half reveals *our own language* to be the domain wherein the source of the river of metaphysics is to be uncovered. On the basis of its two halves, this statement indicates that the crossing to the other beginning realizes itself, above all, in a *re-saying of the original poetic words* whence the river of metaphysics originally sprung into the multiplicity of its various streams but which, precisely because of their source-like concealment, have long since decayed and atrophied. This is why Heidegger, earlier in the response in which he introduces EPTT and the distinction made therein between philosophy/metaphysics and thinking, describes EPTT as “an attempt to clarify the essence of the Greek ἀλήθεια.”<sup>74</sup> As one of the “thickest” of Heidegger's step-wise writings, EPTT is an attempt at uncovering the original onefold whence metaphysics sprung into its historicity by re-saying the original poetic content thoughtfully projected at and for the first beginning of Western history in the form of the Greek ἀλήθεια. This is why, moreover, Heidegger translates ἀλήθεια not as “truth,” which is its correct metaphysical-historiographical translation,<sup>75</sup> but rather as “unconcealment [*Unverborgenheit*].”

As “unconcealment,” Heidegger's translation of ἀλήθεια attempts to re-say the *clearing* in which

73 “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch,” 709.

74 Ibid.

75 For a criticism of Heidegger's translation of ἀλήθεια, see Paul Friedländer, *Plato*, vol. 1, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 221–29. Heidegger responds to this criticism in EPTT, 87.

beings came to presence in the form of being grounded by being for the first time; for the clearing projection of ἀλήθεια is the source whence the founding question of τί τὸ ὄν or “What is a being?”<sup>76</sup> first arrived upon the Dasein of Western humanity and so shaped the first beginning of their history accordingly. Thus, the essence of the Greek ἀλήθεια is an example of what is to be thought by thinking in order for Western history, now at an end, to begin or resume again. If the experience of ἀλήθεια as unconcealment once enthralled and enraptured Greek thinkers to set themselves the task of asking and unravelling the simplest and yet most radical of all questions—the *question of being*—then a thinking that seeks to uncover the hitherto concealed source of such a questioning is underway towards founding another beginning of its historicity.

After having characterized the essence of thinking relative to philosophy/metaphysics and the matter of thinking by way of its careful-relationship to language, Heidegger ends his response, and as it turns out the interview, by gathering together the whole of what has been said into a final saying. He concludes: “A future thinker, who will perhaps be faced with the task of really taking over this thinking that I am attempting to *prepare*, will have to acknowledge the following words, which Heinrich von Kleist once wrote: ‘I step back before one who is not yet here, and bow, a millennium before him, towards his spirit’.”<sup>77</sup>

With these words of the German romanticist poet Heinrich von Kleist, Heidegger's response comes full circle. The future of thinking calls for a return to the original onefold of poetic content thoughtfully projected at and for the first beginning of Western history. In this way, those standing within the crossing “step back.” Their stepping-back, however, is not in reaction to someone who is *already there*. Rather, it is a stepping back “before one who is not yet

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76 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII.1, 1028 b 4.

77 “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch,” 709–10.

here.” Thus, the returning of those standing within the crossing to the original onefold of poetic content of the first beginning marks an *opening-up* of “space” for a thinking that is still to come. Once enacted, however, this movement does not result in those standing within the crossing simply awaiting for the other form of thinking that is still to come. Rather, it means that they participate in the future of thinking and help to bring its arrival forth. In this way, they “bow, a millennium before him, towards his spirit.” This movement is further evidence for the fact that the situation of the historical epoch of post-modernity (the crossing) is that of a crisis; for it parallels the critical understanding of the relationship between beginning and end according to which an end takes place *before* an beginning and a beginning happens *after* an end. In standing before the end of the first beginning of their history, those standing within the crossing step *back* into the source of the first beginning in order to bow *towards* the arrival of the other beginning. This movement projects in outline the horizon of the end of philosophy/metaphysics and the beginning of a thinking that is still to come.



## § 9.

### **The More Essential Structuring of “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”**

Now that we have located the horizon of Ereignis and caught a “glimpse” of it, we may begin to open it up through a synthesis of the subject-matters of EPTT and *Contributions*. The historiographical genesis of EPTT will serve as an initial clue towards such a synthesis, since the conditions of EPTT's delivery are somewhat unique as a step-wise writing within Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*. It was originally given as a lecture translated into, and delivered in, French—neither by Heidegger—at a UNESCO conference held in Paris between April 21 and 23, 1964. Until 1969 it was only available in French translation in a collection of essays delivered at the conference, which was dedicated to the (belated) occasion of the centenary of Kierkegaard's death. The collection of essays was published by Gallimard in 1966 and entitled *Kierkegaard vivant* or “Kierkegaard—Alive and Well.”<sup>78</sup>

The lecture form of EPTT and its initial appearance in translation required its ideas to be presented in a manner suitable to such a public delivery and reception. This requirement is fulfilled, above all, through its structure. EPTT is divided into two sections each phrased as questions to be answered by the content of what follows them in the lecture. The sections are entitled:

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<sup>78</sup> René Maheu, ed., *Kierkegaard vivant : Colloque organisé par l'Unesco à Paris du 21 au 23 avril 1964* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

- In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end? (69/55)<sup>79</sup>
- What task remains for thinking at the end of philosophy? (74/59)

This bifurcated structuring is a direct result of the all-important distinction made in EPTT, which, as Heidegger remarks in his television interview with Richard Wisser, is that “between philosophy, i.e., metaphysics, and thinking as I understand it.”<sup>80</sup> First, EPTT discusses philosophy/metaphysics, the essential possibilities of which are at an end, and then it discusses thinking, which is assigned a special task precisely as a result of philosophy's being at an end. In this way, EPTT presents the content of its ideas *contrastingly*. This fulfils the presentational requirements of EPTT in that an idea is almost always grasped most immediately and understood most easily in light of its differences to something else.

In general, this structuring of EPTT poses no problem to the development of its ideas. As long as the differences between philosophy/metaphysics and thinking are understood as unifying differences as opposed to differentiating differences, philosophy/metaphysics is joined to thinking as a river to its source,<sup>81</sup> and the distinction between them projects in outline the full horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking begins to announce itself.<sup>82</sup> However, once the particularities of EPTT come to light, an issue arises in the development of its ideas insofar as they take place *within* the distinction between philosophy/metaphysics and thinking. This issue has to do with the hidden, as it were, *temporal* structuring of EPTT.

A structural feature easily overlooked in EPTT is that its first section offers not one but

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<sup>79</sup> Throughout the investigation, references to EPTT will be made inline according to the following format. First, the pagination of *Zur Sache des Denkes. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 14 will be given, followed by a slash (“/”), and then the pagination of Stambaugh's English translation from *On Time and Being*. The pagination from Stambaugh's English translation is given for reference purposes only.

<sup>80</sup> “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch,” 709.

<sup>81</sup> See § 8, p. 36.

<sup>82</sup> See § 6, p. 26.

two distinct answers to the question of “In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” (69/55) This feature is easily overlooked since Heidegger does not divide the first section into subsections, one for each of the distinct answers provided in it, but rather presents the section as a single contiguous whole. The two answers provided in the section are that philosophy, in the present age, has entered into its end in the sense of (1) “the completion [*Vollendung*] of metaphysics” (70/56) and (2) “the development [*Ausfaltung*] of philosophy into the independent sciences.” (72/58) Thus, within the distinction between philosophy/metaphysics and thinking, Heidegger makes a *further* distinction between “the completion of metaphysics” and “the development of philosophy into the independent sciences” on the side of philosophy/metaphysics in terms of the sense in which philosophy is at an end.

This further distinction allows for a tripartite structuring of EPTT; which, in turn, reveals the hidden temporal order in which the ideas of EPTT are presented. First, the *past* of Western thinking is discussed as “the completion of metaphysics,” then its *present* is discussed as “the development of philosophy into the independent sciences,” and finally the *future* of Western thinking is discussed as the task that remains as a result of philosophy's being at an end. Insofar as in EPTT the past enters before the present and the present, in turn, before the future, its temporal ordering follows a straightforward one-dimensional path. From this we may conclude that the concept of time at work within the development of the ideas of EPTT is that of *linear temporality*.

This raises an issue for our attempt at synthesizing the subject-matters of EPTT and *Contributions* insofar as, for Heidegger, time or temporality is not authentically disclosed to human beings within their historical existence in a linear or straightforward manner. Rather,

human beings properly experience time or temporality *decayingly* as a result of an original overflowing of possibilities at and for the beginning of their history. As Heidegger says in his 1927 lecture course “The Basic Problems of Phenomenology,” albeit importantly within his early, still Husserlian perspective of “fundamental ontology”: “All origination and genesis in the field of ontology is not growth and development, but rather *degeneration*, insofar as all origination *springs from*, i.e., escapes, as it were, and becomes estranged from, the overpowering of its source.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, to the extent that the concept of time or temporality at work within EPTT is that of linear temporality, an issue arises in the development of its ideas, since such an ordering conflicts with Heidegger's own account of how time or temporality is authentically disclosed to human beings within their historical existence. In order to address this problem, EPTT must be restructured such that its concept of time or temporality *agrees with* Heidegger's own. This gives rise to the more essential, as it were, *thoughtful structuring* of EPTT.

It is important to note, however, that, while the linear temporality at work within EPTT conflicts with Heidegger's own account, this is not to be thought of a mistake or oversight on the part of Heidegger. Rather, developing the ideas of EPTT according to sequential logic of linear temporality is a necessary compromise between the presentational requirements of EPTT and the thoughtful content of its ideas. This kind of compromise, moreover, is not unique to EPTT but is found in most if not all of Heidegger's step-wise writings. As those “pathways” of his that keep one foot in metaphysics while venturing a single step into the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history, Heidegger's step-wise writings project their ideas against a horizon that always retains some basic character of metaphysics. In the case

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83 Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Summer Semester 1927). *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 24, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975), 438 (first emphasis mine).

of EPTT, what remains metaphysical is the linear concept of time or temporality at work within the development of its ideas. For in metaphysics time or temporality is not understood decayingly as the result of an original overflowing of historical possibilities, but rather either numerically, e.g., as “a moving image of eternity,”<sup>84</sup> or teleologically, e.g., as the dialectical movement of absolute spirit,<sup>85</sup> or a variation thereof, since these are the two essential possibilities of temporality granted to it in and through its history.

If human beings properly understand time or temporality decayingly as the result of an original overflowing of historical possibilities, then it is not the past that enters upon them first, but rather the *future*. This entry point, however, changes if, in addition, the historical tradition of the human beings in question is at an end and so in need of another beginning that is still to come. In such a case, which marks the crucial shift in Heidegger's understanding of the question of being from his “early” to his “late” thought, it is not the future that enters upon human being first, even though it is still the primary mode in which time or temporality is disclosed to human beings, but rather the *present*. The reason for this is that human beings who stand at a crossing to another beginning of their history have not yet been granted another future. As such, the crisis of their situation will initially manifest itself to them in and through the present. Once the end of the first beginning of their history is experienced in the present, it is then the *past* that enters upon human beings as what once overflowed with possibilities but no longer does. If the present manifests the crisis of a future-less situation, then it is only because the past was once rife with possibilities that somehow became exhausted since their original springing forth. Thus, after the present, it is the *past* that enters upon those who stand within the crossing. Finally, a history that

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84 See Plato, *Timaeus* 37d.

85 See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

once overflowed with possibilities but no longer does always holds within itself a *last* possibility of a future renewal. This possibility is to be found in the self-concealing source of the original overflow of possibilities. Thus, once the past is experienced as “throwing” no more essential possibilities of the first beginning, its hitherto concealed source must be uncovered as what is to be thought in hopes of founding a *future* beginning. In this way, after the past, it is the future that enters upon human beings as they stand at a crossing to another beginning of their history.

Restructured according to this non-linear, historical understanding of temporality, EPTT follows a *river-like decaying trajectory* according to which the present of the Western tradition is discussed first, then its past, and finally the future of thinking. In accordance with this thoughtful, more essential structuring, our investigation will discuss the ideas of EPTT as follows:

- The end of philosophy as the development of independent sciences;
- The end of philosophy as the completion of metaphysics;
- The task of thinking at the end of philosophy.

This, then, is the thoughtful, more essential structuring of EPTT.

Restructuring EPTT such that it agrees with Heidegger's understanding of temporality has the additional effect of aligning the content of its ideas with the arrangement of subject-matters in *Contributions*, which is Heidegger's main leap-wise writing. The core content of *Contributions* is divided into six chapters, which Heidegger calls “joinings [*Fügungen*]” due to the non-linear, historical temporality at work within their structuring. The first joining is called “the echo [*der Anklang*].” It understands the *present* of Western thinking as the challenge to re-hear the question of being from out of the distress of the abandonment of being in the current

age. The second joining is called “the pass [*das Zuspiel*].” It understands the *past* of Western thinking as the crossing-over of the first beginning to the other beginning such that this other, more thoughtful beginning comes into play. The third and fourth joinings are called “the leap [*der Sprung*]” and “the grounding [*die Gründung*],” respectively. They understand the *future* of Western thinking as the leap into the hitherto concealed source of philosophy/metaphysics such that the preparatory groundwork for the other beginning is established. The two remaining joinings of *Contributions*—“the ones to come [*die Zu-künftigen*]” and “the last god [*der letzte Gott*]”—deal with subject-matters not directly discussed in EPTT, i.e., the poetic founding of the other beginning of Western history and the god or absence thereof that is to come as a result. These concern the future of thinking in a deeper, more profound sense than EPTT in that they are what its thinking is in preparation *for*. As such they go beyond the content of its ideas—lying, as it were, farthest off in the horizon of Ereignis, in the future of thinking. This essential limit of EPTT is indicated by Heidegger when he says, “The thinking hinted at here remains above all modest because its task is only of a preparatory, not of a founding character. It is content with awakening a readiness in human beings for a possibility whose contour remains obscure, whose coming remains uncertain.” (75/60) This limitation, however, is not a negative outcome of our approach to Heidegger's thinking, resulting in a “shutting down” of possibilities of Heidegger's thinking. Rather, it is precisely what allows them to *open up* and show themselves *towards* the horizon of Ereignis.

The alignment of the content of ideas of EPTT with the arrangement of subject-matters in *Contributions* brings together the thinking of EPTT and *Contributions* such that the historical temporality at play within the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western

history is manifested. In this way, our bringing-together of EPTT and *Contributions* allows for a laying-bare of the horizon of Ereignis as it is thought in *Contributions* on the basis of a disruption in the readiness-to-hand of EPTT.



## § 10.

### **The End of Philosophy as the Development of Independent Sciences**

Now that the subject-matters of EPTT and *Contributions* have been aligned (and a “glimpse” of the horizon of Ereignis has been caught), each may be interpreted with a view towards gaining an understanding of the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history.

Heidegger's second answer in EPTT to the initially posed question in it of “In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” (69/55) deals with the matter of the relationship between philosophy and science. Heidegger's answer is that “The development [*Ausfaltung*] of philosophy into the independent sciences [...] is the legitimate completion of philosophy.” (72/58)

When EPTT was initially delivered in 1964, this was surely one of the least controversial claims of the lecture, if not its most accepted. The reason for this is that sciences were viewed at the time as being in direct competition with philosophy in terms of providing answers to the most fundamental of questions. For example, what Heidegger calls “the independence of psychology, sociology, anthropology as cultural anthropology” and “the role of logic as logistics and semantics” (71/57)—these sciences were viewed as undermining the legitimacy of philosophy as an academic discipline insofar as they provided competing answers to fundamental questions

such as what is the nature of consciousness, what is a good life, what is the human being, or even how is meaning formed? As Heidegger says, “The sciences are now taking over as their own task what philosophy in the course of its history tried to present piecemeal, and even then only inadequately, i.e., the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art).” (73/58) The apparent success of the sciences at providing answers to the most fundamental of questions meant that they were no longer dependent upon philosophy for knowledge or understanding of their regional categories. Without knowledge of the ontologies of the various regions of beings under its reign, philosophy has suffered a serious setback to say the least.

What is so curious about this situation, however, is that now, fifty years later, an almost complete reversal appears to have taken place. Rather than the sciences posing a threat to philosophy, for some they are precisely what *enables* it to be a progressive discipline within a university. For if there were no independent sciences, there would be little to no “useful” philosophical research because, then, there would be no *philosophies*, i.e., philosophies “of” particular independent sciences, for example, philosophy of biology and “bioethics,” philosophy of physics, philosophy of neuroscience, philosophy of math, philosophy of law, philosophy of history, philosophy of language, philosophy of business, etc.<sup>86</sup> The purpose of such philosophies is to define and articulate current “problems” occurring in independent scientific disciplines and to make extra-scientific “insights” into these problems through the creation of new worldviews or “-isms.” Through the creation of possible worldviews, a philosophy “of” an independent science helps that science to consider and calculate new theoretical models that produce

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86 Cf. John Passmore’s remark that “There is more than idle talk about introducing philosophy into [professional] schools. Although there is no novelty in philosophers writing on matters of public concern, philosophers have never before been professionally involved, as ‘applied philosophers’, in such areas as bioethics, hospital ethics committees, even business committees” in his article “The End of Philosophy?,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 1 (1996): 1–19 at 2.

evermore efficient results in its particular subject-area. As Heidegger says, pointing towards this new “partnership” between philosophy and the sciences:

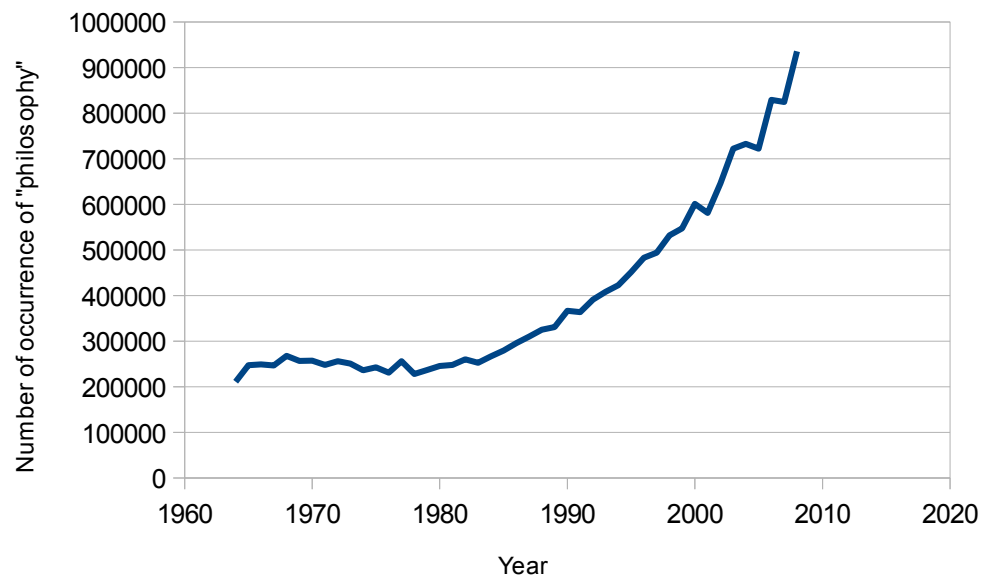
The interest of the sciences is directed towards the theory of the necessary structural concepts of each associated subject-area. “Theory” means now: supposition of categories entitled only a cybernetic function but deprived of any ontological meaning. The operational and model character of representational-calculative thinking achieves dominance. (73/58–9)

Insofar as philosophy now aids and abets the sciences in achieving their dominance, what once supposedly marked its end—i.e., the development of philosophy into independent sciences—now, ironically, appears to be its saviour.

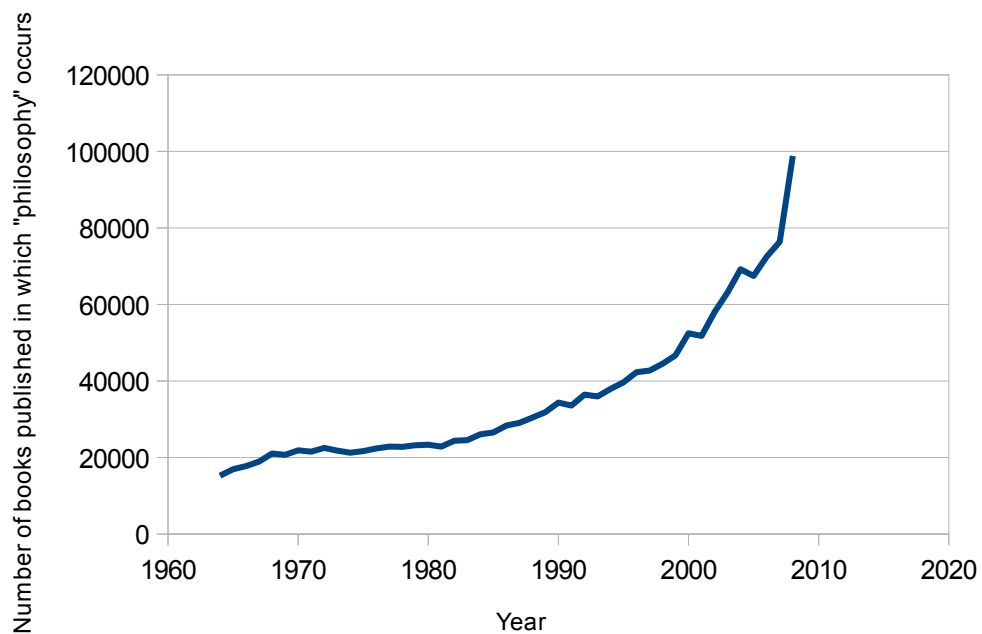
### **a) First Objection**

This strange turn of events leads to an obvious objection against Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences. The objection is that philosophy *cannot* be at an end for the simple reason that, through the aiding and abetting of the sciences, philosophical activity is not only still occurring but occurrences of it are *increasing*. Indeed, such an increase in philosophical activity can be shown empirically, through analysis of the frequency of various terms found in the corpora of books written in English and published yearly between 1964 and 2008, respectively. These raw data are available through Google Books' Ngram Viewer. (1964 is the year EPTT was initially delivered and 2008 is the latest year of book

data available through Google Books' Ngram Viewer.)

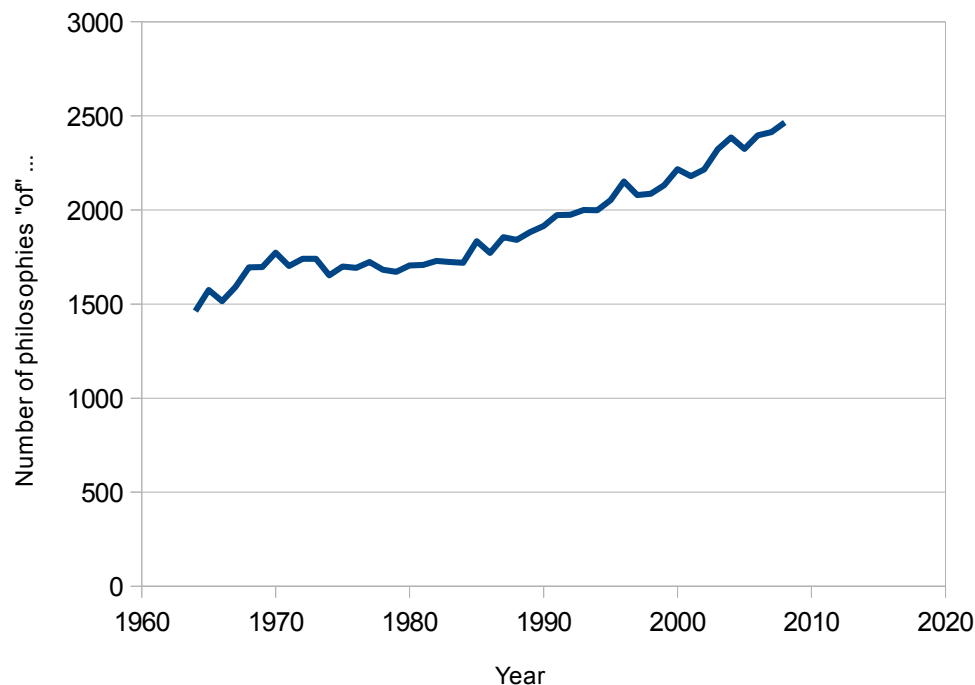


*Illustration 1: Number of occurrences of "philosophy" per year*



*Illustration 2: Number of books published per year in which "philosophy" occurs*

For example, as is shown in Illustrations 1 and 2 above, in 1964 the word “philosophy” occurred a total of 211011 times in 15270 books and in 2008 it occurred a total of 935497 times in 98807 books.<sup>87</sup> Thus, from 1964 to 2008, there was a fourfold increase in the number of yearly occurrences of the word “philosophy” and a sixfold increase in the number of books published yearly containing the word “philosophy.” In addition, as is shown in Illustration 3 below, in English books published in 1964 there occurred 1463 distinct three-word phrases beginning with “philosophy of”; in 2008, however, there occurred 2465 distinct three-word phrases beginning with “philosophy of.” This marks an increase of 68% in the number of different philosophies.<sup>88</sup>



*Illustration 3: Number of philosophies "of" ... per year*

<sup>87</sup> See lines 25122894–25122938 from the “p” file of the English 1-grams from the raw data of Google Books' Ngram Viewer available at <http://storage.googleapis.com/books/ngrams/books/googlebooks-eng-all-1gram-20120701-p.gz>.

<sup>88</sup> See the number of matches returned by applying the Perl regular expressions “`^philosophy\ of\ [A-Z]?[a-z] +_NOUN\t1964`” (and subsequent years up to 2008) to the “ph” file of the English 3-grams from the raw data of Google Books' Ngram Viewer available at <http://storage.googleapis.com/books/ngrams/books/googlebooks-eng-all-3gram-20120701-ph.gz>.

These results do not merely indicate but show concretely, indeed empirically, that from the time of EPTT's initial delivery in 1964 to roughly the present day, there has not only been an increase in the sheer volume of occurrences of philosophical activity but also an increase in different types of philosophical activity. From 1964 to 2008, in other words, philosophy has experienced both a “quantitative” and a “qualitative” increase in activity. Thus, contrary to Heidegger's claim in EPTT that “The development [*Ausfaltung*] of philosophy into independent sciences [...] is the legitimate completion of philosophy” (72/58), philosophy cannot be at an end. Indeed, rather than being at an end, philosophy—or better—philosophies would appear to be *just getting started*. This sort of “sheer increase” argument has been advanced by some critics of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy.<sup>89</sup>

The strength and obviousness of the above objection is undeniable. As a “user” of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy, our investigation is obligated to respond to it. This obligation, however, does not constitute a deviation from our path into the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity, but rather a continuation of it. For in responding to the objection, the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy will be disclosed in a manner that brings the horizon of Ereignis closer into our “sight.”

The above objection against Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences is grounded on an understanding of “end” that *excludes* the possibility of an increase in philosophical activity. “End,” in other words, is

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89 Cf. John Passmore's observation that “On the face of it, this is a particularly odd time to be forecasting the end of philosophy. For is not philosophy flourishing to a completely unprecedented degree? As many English-language philosophical books, professional works, not idle speculation, are published in a month as would once have appeared in a century. In Australia there are roughly ten times as many philosophy teachers as there were in pre-war years, roughly seventeen times as many papers were delivered at the recent philosophy conference. [...] Philosophy at an end? On the contrary, [...] it is only just realising the full extent of its responsibilities,” in “The End of Philosophy?,” 2.

understood in the sense of a stoppage or termination of something. Thus, in order to respond to the objection, a case must be made to the effect that the sense of “end” at work within Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences does not exclude the possibility of an increase in philosophical activity, but rather *includes* it.

It is important to note that, in laying out such a case, I will be making some possibly simplistic assumptions about the “scientific method” in the present age. While perhaps appearing simplistic at first, these assumptions or, better, possibilities will become more concrete as the investigation continues, with further evidence being presented along the way of its path.

As noted in a quote from Heidegger above, philosophy has attempted, throughout the course of its history, to present “the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art),” and this task is now being taken over by the sciences. (73/58) A key difference between philosophy's attempt to present the ontologies of the various regions of beings and the sciences' attempt to do the same is that in the case of philosophy, there is *one* discipline attempting to present *all* of the ontologies of the various regions of beings, whereas in the case of the sciences, there are *multiple* disciplines each attempting to present *only* the ontology of the region of beings *unique* to them. Thus a key difference between philosophy's and the sciences' attempt at presenting the ontologies of the various regions of beings is that in the case of philosophy the ontologies remain *unified* under a single discipline, whereas in the case of the sciences the ontologies become *dispersed* across multiple disciplines.

This dispersion, however, is not simply a contingent fact of how the sciences function today. Rather, it belongs essentially to the history of philosophy in that it is a result of the

*horizon* with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings *being breached* or *broken*.<sup>90</sup> This breaching or breaking-up of philosophy's horizon is the sense of “end” at work within Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences. In what follows, we will attempt to show how the present day “quantitative” and “qualitative” increase in philosophical activity issues from this phenomenon.

Without a unifying “limit” (in Greek: ὅρος) in place, there is nothing to gather the sciences and their various ontologies together into a whole. As a result, they become isolated not only from each other but from what Heidegger calls their “origins [*Herkunft*] in philosophy.” (73/59) As Heidegger says, “The working-out [*Ausbildung*] of the sciences is at the same time their detachment from philosophy and the establishment of their independence. This process belongs to the completion of philosophy. Its unfolding is in full swing today in all regions of beings.” (71/57)

This dispersion of ontologies, however, does not only work externally in the sense that the sciences become isolated from each other as well as from philosophy. Rather, it also works internally in the sense that the sciences become isolated from *themselves* insofar as their subject-matters are pushed towards further restriction and confinement—i.e., towards what is today called “specialization.”<sup>91</sup> For once the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings is breached or broken, the measure of what constitutes an advancement in knowledge is such that it is no longer enough for an investigation to unravel a *question* according to the wonderment it bestows upon a questioner. Rather, in order

90 Cf. Husserl's discussion of the ideal of universal philosophy having suffered an “inner dissolution [*innere Auflösung*]” in *Die Krisen der europäischen Wissenschaften*, 10.

91 Cf. Trish Glazebrook's discussion of Heidegger's attempt to save science from specialization in her book *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 139–148.



to be considered an advancement of knowledge in a particular region of beings, an investigation must produce, above all, *answers*, resulting in what Heidegger elsewhere refers to as a state of “busyness” or *Betrieb* in the sciences.<sup>92</sup> At the end of philosophy, what matters most for the formation of knowledge is no longer the path or journey—i.e., the wonderment of a question. Rather, what matters most is the destination or end result—i.e., the utility of an answer. As Jean-François Lyotard says in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*:

The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer “Is it true?” but “What use is it?” In the context of the mercantilization of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to: “Is it saleable?” And in the context of power-growth: “Is it efficient?” Having competence in a performance-oriented skill does indeed seem saleable in the conditions described above, and it is efficient by definition. What no longer makes the grade is competence as defined by other criteria true/false, just/unjust, etc.—and, of course, low performativity in general.<sup>93</sup>

This shift from question to answer, from wonderment to utility, with respect to the formation of knowledge does not leave the subject-matters of the sciences unaffected. Rather, it results in their being continually broken up into *smaller and smaller pieces*. For in order to advance knowledge, an investigation must yield something unique. The simplest, most direct manner of producing a unique answer within an already disclosed region of beings, however, is

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92 See Heidegger's remark in “Die Zeit des Weltbildes (1938),” in *Holzwege. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 5, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977) 75–113 at 97: “Ongoing activity [in the sciences] becomes mere busyness when in its procedure it no longer keeps itself open on the basis of an ever-new performance of its projection, but rather only leaves this behind itself as given and does not once more confirm its accumulating results and their calculation, but simply chases after these. Mere busyness must at all times be combatted precisely because research is in its essence ongoing activity.”

93 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 51.

to restrict one's "sight" even further until a new, more specialized "finding" is made. This is typically done by disrupting the "readiness-to-hand" of an open thoughtful question with more "theories" and "techniques" up to the point where what was once questionable becomes levelled down into the "present-at-hand" of a closed system. This is in contrast to the creation of a unique path or journey according to which what is required is not a restriction of one's "sight," but rather an *opening-up* of it. Thus, once the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings is breached or broken, the sciences become isolated not only from each other as well as from philosophy; they also become isolated from themselves and their subject-matters. In this way, there belongs to the end of philosophy not only an external "spreading-out" but a deeper, internal *spreading-thin* of ontologies.

What is remarkable, however, is that this internal dispersion or spreading-thin of ontologies does not hinder the growth or development of the sciences. Rather, it *promotes* them insofar as it gives rise to an *increase* in not only the total number of sciences but the overall efficiency of their results. For each specialization or further breaking-up of the subject-matter of a particular region of beings results in the discovery or "finding" of a new kind of being. For example, in philosophy it was recently discovered that a "third" Wittgenstein exists.<sup>94</sup> A new kind of being, however, requires its own mode of comportment or manner of being disclosed within an investigation. The working-out of the modes of comportment or manners of disclosure of a particular kind of being is the business of science. Thus, each specialized discovery of a new kind of being, combined with the working-out of its mode of comportment or manner of being disclosed, results in the establishment of a new, more specialized science. Since the internal

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94 Cf. Daniele Moral-Sharrock, ed., *The Third Wittgenstein: The Post-Investigations Works* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004).

dispersion of ontologies results in the specialization of subject-matters of the various regions of beings, it gives rise to an increase in the total number of sciences. In the words of Joseph Kockelmans, “Specialization is thus not the consequence but the ground of the progress in every form of research.”<sup>95</sup>

In addition, the establishment of a specialized science is equivalent to a division of labour being introduced into the task or set of tasks associated with the scientific study of a particular region of beings. Dividing up the labour of a task allows for an increase in the overall efficiency of its results. For the simpler a task becomes, the less thought it requires; the less thought a task requires, not only the quicker can it be done but the quicker it can be re-done and so “mastered” by an “expert.” As Theodore Kisiel states, “The advantage of this strategy of minimizing thinking is to maximize results, so that the overall effect of the multiplication of specialties is the accumulation of a vast store of detailed, technically useful information.”<sup>96</sup> In this way, there is an *easy complexity* when it comes to the further specialization of sciences.<sup>97</sup> Specialization can be compared to doing the same “jigsaw puzzle,” albeit with increasingly smaller pieces. Indeed, today the pieces have become so small and so abundant that connections between them are no longer most effectively discovered by hypothesizing models of causality. Rather than theory, what is now a more effective means of gathering “knowledge” is the mere statistical correlation of “Big Data” sets.<sup>98</sup> As Chris Anderson, editor in chief of Wired Magazine, rightly points out, not only do the words of statistician George Box—“All models are wrong, but some are useful”—ring true, but their update by Google's research director Peter Norvig—“All models are

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95 Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger and Science* (Lanham, MI: University Press of America, 1985), 158.

96 Theodore Kisiel, “Heidegger and the New Image of Science,” *Research in Phenomenology* 7 (1977): 162–181 at 178.

97 Cf. § 8.

98 See Chris Anderson, “The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete,” *Wired Magazine*, June 23, 2008, [http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb\\_theory](http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb_theory).

wrong, and increasingly you can succeed without them”—rings *truer*.<sup>99</sup>

In order to do the work of their original task, specialized tasks must be combined. The combination of tasks simplified through their specialization, however, does not only result in an aggregation of results. Rather, it results in their *automation*. This increases the overall efficiency of results produced by a task or set of tasks. For automation is the near or complete absence of thought in the carrying-out of a task. As Heidegger says:

The sciences understand the categories upon which they remain dependent for the articulation and delineation of their subject-areas instrumentally as working hypotheses. The truth of the sciences is measured not only by the effect brought about by their application within the progress of research. Scientific truth is equated with the efficiency of these effects. (72–3/58)

Since the internal dispersion of ontologies results in the establishment of specialized sciences, it gives rise to an increase in the overall efficiency of their results. Thus, the internal dispersion or spreading-thin of ontologies gives rise to an increase in both the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results.

This dual increase is the ground of philosophy's having experienced a “quantitative” and a “qualitative” increase in activity from the time of the initial delivery of EPTT to the present day. The “qualitative” increase in philosophical activity is grounded by the increase in the total number of sciences. For the more sciences there are, the more *philosophies* there will be, i.e., philosophies “of” independent sciences. This, in turn, gives rise to more instances of the use of the word “philosophy” in academic scholarship. For not only are there more subject-matters for the various philosophies to discuss but, due to their specialization, making a “distinct

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

contribution to knowledge” has in a way never been easier. While specialization gives off the appearance of rigour and depth due to the increased amount of more detailed information processed by it, its restricted “sight” results in a simplification of questions and a thoughtlessness in answers.

Since the dual increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results issues from the *breaching* or *breaking-up* of the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings, it follows that the sense of “end” at work within Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences does not exclude the possibility of an increase in philosophical activity, but rather *includes* it. In this way, then, our discussion of the dispersion of ontologies across multiple disciplines by the sciences serves as an effective response to the objection against Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences, i.e., the objection that philosophy cannot be at an end for the simple reason that occurrences of philosophical activity are, above all, increasing.

## **b) Second Objection**

Despite its defence of Heidegger's position or, rather, precisely because of it, this response brings with it a further objection—even stronger and more obvious than the first. The objection is that, while the sense of “end” at work within Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences includes the possibility of an increase in

philosophical activity, the increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results that we observe today *has nothing to do with philosophy*. Rather than philosophy or its purported end, this increase is due to the *fact* that “objects” have certain “properties” and human beings have the “will” and “faculties” to comport themselves “rationally” towards such “objects” and “properties” in a manner that allows for an increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results. Philosophy, in other words, is great for pushing the boundaries of ideas and concepts, but at the end of the day it is *objective reality* that determines the validity of a science and the potential application of its results.

On the basis of this objection, it would appear as though our interpretation of the end of philosophy as the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings being breached or broken rests upon a false premise. If this is the case, it would undermine the whole of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences. For it would reopen the original objection that philosophy cannot be at an end for the simple reason that philosophical activity is not only still occurring but occurrences of it are increasing.

If the strength and obviousness of the first objection compelled our investigation to respond to it, then the same applies to this second objection, indeed even more so. At this stage of our investigation, however, only a *partial* response can be given. This is because a full response requires the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy to be disclosed in a manner that takes into account not only the present of Western thinking (the current section: § 10) but also its past and its future (§§ 11 and 12, respectively). A full response, in other words, requires access to the horizon of Ereignis. Thus the remainder of the current section will provide

a partial response to the above objection and the sections to follow will deepen it to the point where the *origin* of metaphysics, as the manner of thinking inherent in the objection, is revealed.

#### **α) “Proof” of Heidegger's Claim in the Technological Structuring of a University**

Unlike the first objection, the dispute between Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences and the second objection to it is not simply a matter of different senses of the word “end.” Rather, it is a matter of different *manners of thinking as such*. The grounding of the increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results on “objects,” “properties,” “will,” “faculties,” etc., flies in the face of Heidegger's attempt to think the history of Western thinking more originally than metaphysics. Thus the first step towards forming a response to the above objection is to elaborate on the essential differences between these two manners of thinking.

In the case of the objection, the manner of thinking at work is one according to which something is understood, or comes to be understood, by putting it together *after the fact* of its disclosure. In the case of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences, on the other hand, the manner of thinking at work is one according to which something is understood, or comes to be understood, *in and as the very happening* of its disclosure. This difference is shown by the fact that the objection *explains* the increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results, and it is able to do this *only after* the increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results has been disclosed against the backdrop of a particular ontological paradigm. The

paradigm is the subject-object dichotomy. In contrast to the objection, Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences describes the *essence* of the increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results, and it does this by indicating how the sciences are *always already* amenable to an increase in both their total number and the overall efficiency of their results. As discussed above, this is through the dispersion of the ontologies across multiple disciplines by the sciences. The former, after-the-fact thinking corresponds to what Heidegger calls “metaphysics” and the latter, always-already thinking corresponds to what Heidegger calls “thinking” in EPTT.

This difference in manners of thinking results in a situation in which dialogue between Heidegger's claim and the second objection to it is difficult if not impossible. For according to the manner of thinking of the objection, Heidegger's claim has no “objectivity” and so cannot be proven, whereas according to the manner of thinking of Heidegger's claim, the objection enters upon the matter of the end of philosophy *too late* and so fails to “see” what is essential to it in the sense of its development into independent sciences. Despite this difficulty, a dialogue must be attempted. In order to respond effectively to the objection, it must be shown to what extent Heidegger's claim can be proven. Although it does not have the “objectivity” of an empirical science due to its thinking's coming *prior* to the appearance of “substances” or the “subject-object dichotomy,” Heidegger's claim is nonetheless able to provide *indications* of its truth. An indication of the truth of a claim thought in and as the very happening of its disclosure is a *manifestation* of the “always already” of its happening. Thus, in order to offer “proof” of Heidegger's claim and so respond to the objection to the extent that is possible within the current section, a concrete manifestation of the “always already” of the happening of the end of



philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences must be provided.

One place or locale in which the “always already” of the end of philosophy is manifested is a *university*. As John Caputo remarks, “[T]oday we philosophize in the university. Accordingly, the work of revolutionizing philosophy, i.e., of conceiving it more radically, involves us in a critique and a radicalization of the university.”<sup>100</sup> A university is the physical and spiritual manifestation of the various regions of beings. It is the site of the totality of sciences each of which is defined by the kind of being it comports itself towards or the manner in which it comports itself towards any kind of being. Thus, taken as a whole a university functions in a manner that mirrors the happening of the ontologies of the various regions of beings. As such its functioning indicates how the sciences and their various ontologies reveal themselves in and as the very happening of their disclosure. For example, depending on its structure and performance, a university may indicate whether the various regions of beings form a unity or a disunity or whether they are coming closer together or moving further apart. It is important to note that this “proof” of Heidegger's claim by way of reference to the functioning of a university is akin to the “enlarging” role a city plays in Plato's search for a definition of justice,<sup>101</sup> albeit with the important difference that the functioning at issue is not imaginary or ideal, but rather all too real. Thus, to the extent that the truth of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences can be shown, it will be indicated through the current functioning of a university.

While a university over time functions in different ways and for different purposes, perhaps the most striking feature, which will serve as our clue into its functioning, is that today a

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100 John D. Caputo, “Heidegger's Kampf: The Difficulty of Life,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14/15 (1991): 61–83 at 64.

101 Plato, *Republic* 368d.

university promotes and works towards the essential *isolation* of its disciplines. This is done for the sake of advancing research in the various disciplines “housed” in a university. For today what mainly constitutes an advancement in research is any increase in the amount of control or mastery that may be exerted over a particular being or region of beings. This, however, requires a discipline to restrict and confine its subject-matter—i.e., to “specialize.”<sup>102</sup> For, as noted above, each specialization or further breaking-up of a subject-matter results in the discovery or “finding” of a new kind of being. Thus, from the fact that a university works towards and promotes the essential isolation of its disciplines, it appears that the purpose of a university today is for it to structure itself such that its disciplines can be isolated to a maximal degree in order to enable as many advancements in research (specializations) as possible.

As an obvious objection to this claim, it is important to note that the recent rise of interdisciplinary studies is not evidence against this trend towards further isolation in a university, but rather precisely evidence *for* it; for interdisciplinary studies did not arise independent of the increasing specialization of subject-matters, but rather as a direct response to it and the resulting need, only superficially addressed by their inter-disciplinary nature, to “counteract” the trend towards specialization in a university. Thus, it is an open question, however, whether such combining of disciplines results in a more “holistic” form of knowledge or whether, rather, it simply gives rise to *further isolation* among disciplines through the creation of a new mode of comportment with its *own* specializations.<sup>103</sup>

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102 Cf. Heidegger's remarks about “the encapsulation of the sciences into separated disciplines [...] their boundless and aimless dispersal into isolated fields and corners” in “Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität (May 27, 1933),” in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 107–117 at 111.

103 Indeed, this would appear to be Heidegger's position in his 1923 summer semester course *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*, *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 63, ed. Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), 32–33, where he states: “The situation of the sciences and the university has become even more dubious. [...] One writes brochures on the crisis of the sciences, on the profession of science. [...] There is

Regardless of the role of interdisciplinary studies, our next clue towards uncovering the functioning of a university today is the fact that a university must *unify* its disciplines in order for them to remain under its “roof” as the physical and spiritual manifestation of the various regions of beings. Thus, what is remarkable about a university today is not only that it promotes and works towards the essential isolation of its disciplines, but that it does so in a manner that allows for its disciplines to be unified in some manner. How, however, is such simultaneity of isolation and unification possible?

A university is able simultaneously to isolate and unify its disciplines since the unity at work within it is not the unity of an origin, but rather the unity of *being organized*. This is indicated by the fact that today the main task of a university is neither to guide nor simply support the research of its disciplines. Rather, it is to *co-ordinate* them such that the results produced by their research are collected, placed, and made available within an ever-increasing network of “findings.” In this way, then, a university comports itself towards its disciplines as though they were *calculated units on an open-ended grid*. This mode of comportment maximizes the isolation of disciplines while nonetheless unifying them through their being organized within, for example, the library's Dewey Decimal System. As a result, disciplines are laid out such that they relate to each other only through the uniformity of their positioning within a numerical system of classification. As Bill Readings says in *The University in Ruins*, albeit following a different thread (the ubiquitous notion of “excellence”) and using a different system of classification (the stock exchange):

The appeal to excellence marks the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University, or rather that the idea has now lost all content. As a non-referential

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today even a specialized body of literature on the question of how matters should be.”

unity of value entirely internal to the system, excellence marks nothing more than the moment of technology's self-reflection. All that the system requires is for activity to take place, and the empty notion of excellence refers to nothing other than the optimal input/output ratio in matters of information. [...] Like the stock exchange, the University is a point of capital's self-knowledge, of capital's ability not just to manage risk or diversity but to extract a surplus value from that management. In the case of the University this extraction occurs as a result of speculation on differentials in information.<sup>104</sup>

From the above working-out of the description of a university, then, it appears that the function of a university today is to structure itself such that its disciplines can be isolated to a maximal degree while nonetheless remaining unified to a minimal degree. This is what Heidegger calls their “technological organization.” As he says in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg “What is Metaphysics?”:

The domains of the sciences lie far apart. The manners of treatment of their subject-matters differ fundamentally. Today this dispersed multiplicity of disciplines is held together only through the technological [*technische*] organization of universities and faculties and finds meaning only through the practical goal-setting of specializations [*Fächer*]. Despite this, the essential rootedness of the sciences in their ground has atrophied.<sup>105</sup>

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104 Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 39–40.

105 “Was ist Metaphysik? (1929),” in *Wegmarken. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 9, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976) 103–22 at 104. For excellent discussions of Heidegger's ongoing project of transforming the university, see Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “Martin Heidegger and the University as a Site for the Transformation of Human Existence,” *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 75–96 and Iain Thomson, “Heidegger and the Politics of the University,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (October 2003): 515–542.

In maximizing the isolation of disciplines while minimizing their unity, the technological organization of a university—what Heidegger more generally calls “enframing [*das Ge-stell*]”<sup>106</sup> as the essence of modern technology—closes off the “space” and “time” required for authentic, philosophical wonder. For when efficiency, control, and mastery hold sway as the measure of beings, wonderment no longer arises in the sense of Aristotle's claim that it is “owing to wonder [*θαυμάζειν*] that human beings both now begin and at first began to philosophize.”<sup>107</sup> Rather, if it arises at all, it is in the form of a limitless drive towards organizing the ever-increasing amount and availability of information about all that is. This, then, offers “proof” of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences. For the current, technological functioning of a university concretely manifests the “always already” at work within the breaking-up or breaching of the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings as the amenability of sciences to an increase in both their total number and the overall efficiency of their results. As Heidegger says in EPTT:

The development of philosophy into independent yet, among themselves, evermore decisively communicating sciences<sup>108</sup> is the legitimate completion of philosophy. Philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific nature of social economic humanity. The fundamental feature of this

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106 Cf. “Die Frage nach der Technik (1953),” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 7, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 5–36 esp. 20–36.

107 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.2, 982 b 12–3.

108 Cf. Joan Stambaugh's mistranslation of this phrase as “The development of philosophy into the independent sciences which, however, interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly [...]” (“The End of Philosophy,” 58) At the end of philosophy, the sciences do not “interdependently” communicate for the simple reason that, as Heidegger says in “What is Metaphysics?,” quoted above, “The domains of the sciences lie far apart.” (104) Indeed, nothing even corresponds to “interdependently” in the original German: *Die Ausfaltung der Wissenschaften in die eigenständigen, unter sich jedoch immer entschiedener kommunizierenden Wissenschaften* [...]. (“Das Ende der Philosophie,” 72)

scientific nature, however, is its cybernetic, i.e., technological [*technischer*], character. (72/58)

This science [of cybernetics] corresponds to the determination of human beings as trading-social creatures. For it is the theory of the control of the possible planning and arrangement of human labour. Cybernetics reshapes language into an exchange of news. The arts become controlled-controlling instruments of information. (ibid.)

Thus, as the breaching or breaking-up of the horizon with respect to which the ontologies of the various regions of beings were once unified, resulting in a limitless drive towards organizing the ever-increasing amount and availability of information about all that is—this is the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of the development of independent sciences, i.e., Heidegger's claim that “The development of philosophy into the independent sciences [...] is the legitimate completion of philosophy.” (ibid.)

## § 11.

### **The End of Philosophy as the Completion of Metaphysics**

Now that the meaning of Heidegger's second of two answers to the question of “In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” (69/55) has been disclosed, our investigation will turn to his first. This is because, in order to be aligned with the thinking of *Contributions* and so work towards laying bare the horizon of Ereignis, the more essential, thoughtful structuring of EPTT must be followed.<sup>109</sup> Due to its river-like decaying trajectory, the more essential, thoughtful structuring of EPTT follows a non-linear temporality according to which the past enters upon human beings *after* the present. Whereas Heidegger's second answer deals with the present of Western thinking, his first deals with its past. As a discussion of the meaning of Heidegger's first answer to the question of “In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” (69/55), this, then, marks a further step along the path of our investigation into the meaning of post-modernity.

As a kind of “sight” or mode of “seeing,” a horizon forms a unitary field or backdrop against which beings show themselves in a particular manner, i.e., under a particular “light.” The unity of this backdrop, however, is not an aggregating or classifying of previously disclosed beings according to a common or shared “property.” Rather, it is akin to the establishment of an “a priori” *lens* through which beings as a whole are always already viewed. This viewing of

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. § 9.

beings as a whole through the lens of a horizon grants beings a specific “look” or appearance.<sup>110</sup> This “look” or appearance corresponds to the particular manner in which beings show themselves against the backdrop of their historically granted horizon. Thus, in order to deepen the overall meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy, the “look” or appearance granted to beings in and by the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings (but no longer does due to its development into independent sciences) must be determined. This, however, is precisely what Heidegger does in offering his first answer to the question of “In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” (69/55), namely that “by the 'end of philosophy' what is meant is the completion [*Vollendung*] of metaphysics.” (70/56) Thus, deepening the overall meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy requires the meaning of its sense as the completion of metaphysics to be disclosed.

The name for the “look” or appearance granted to beings in and by the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings (but no longer does) is *metaphysics*. As Heidegger says right at the start of the first section of EPTT: “Philosophy is metaphysics.” (69/55) Although our investigation understands metaphysics as a “look” or appearance granted to beings, what characterizes metaphysics as a “look” or appearance is precisely that, when in play, beings show themselves such that they *cannot* be understood in and as the very happening of the “look” or appearance granted to them; rather, they can only be understood *after the fact* of their disclosure. This is due to the character of metaphysics as a “look” or appearance. As noted above, however, the “look” or appearance of

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110 Cf. Heidegger's claim of how “[p]hilosophy never builds immediately upon beings, it prepares the truth of being and stands ready with the paths of sight [*Blickbahnen*] and fields of view [*Gesichtskreisen*] that hereby open up” in *Contributions*, § 16.



metaphysics is the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings (but no longer does). Thus, in order to determine the character of the “look” or appearance of metaphysics, the unitary field or backdrop against which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings must be uncovered.

### **a) The Question of Being**

According to Aristotle, the beginning of philosophy is “owing to wonder [θαυμάζειν].”<sup>111</sup> From this, it follows that the form of the backdrop against which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings (but no longer does) is a *question*; for a question is the linguistic articulation of wonder. Furthermore, since the ontologies of the various regions of beings each determine the mode of comportment towards, or manner of disclosure of, a particular kind of being, then the unifying question of the horizon of philosophy would appear to be not just any question but the *most basic* and *most universal* with respect to beings; for the ontologies of the various regions of beings deal with the totality of *all that is*. The most basic and most universal question with respect to beings is—*what is a being?*<sup>112</sup> Thus, it would appear as though the unitary field or backdrop against which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings (but no longer does) is the question of what is a being. Although evidence for the holding-sway of a horizon can only be gathered along the way of its path, once again Aristotle provides some preliminary, as it were, anecdotal support. In *Metaphysics* Book

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<sup>111</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.2, 982 b 12–3.

<sup>112</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 9.

VII, he says, “what has both long ago and now always been enquired into and always bewildered those who do so [is the question of] what is a being [τί τὸ ὄν].”<sup>113</sup>

As a result of its being the most basic and most universal of questions, the question of what is a being has the following peculiarity: its subject-matter and its matter of enquiry are not of the same “kind,” but rather differ in terms of the particular domain in which their respective meanings are revealed. The subject-matter of the question of what is a being is anything that is. Its matter of enquiry, however, is not itself a being. Rather than something that is, the matter of enquiry inherent in the question of what is a being is the *being* of beings, i.e., what and how anything that is “is.” This difference is fundamental and is the reason why Aristotle, e.g., claims that “being cannot be a genus.”<sup>114</sup> Since beings and the being of beings differ in terms of their source of meaning, being cannot “be” in the mode of a being.<sup>115</sup> Thus, the working-out of the question of what is a being turns on a radical difference between its subject-matter and its matter of enquiry. This essential relationship is what Heidegger understands as the *ontological difference*—i.e., “the not [*das Nicht*] in-between beings and being.”<sup>116</sup> Since its matter of enquiry is not a being, but rather the being of beings, the question of what is a being is often referred to by Heidegger as the “question of being”—i.e., *die Seinsfrage*. From this, then, it follows that the “look” or appearance of metaphysics manifests the ontological difference between beings and being, since the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings (but no longer does) is the question of being.

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113 Ibid., VII.1, 1028 b 2–4.

114 Ibid., III.3, 998 b 22.

115 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 6.

116 “Vom Wesen des Grundes (1929),” in *Wegmarken. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 9, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann), 123–76 at 123.

## **b) The “Look” or Appearance of the Ontological Difference**

The “look” or appearance of metaphysics manifests the ontological difference through the happening of its disclosure. According to the “look” or appearance of metaphysics, beings show themselves such that they are always already viewed *in terms of being*. As Heidegger says in EPTT, “Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole—the world, human beings, God—with respect to being, with respect to the belongingness-together of beings in being.” (69/55–6) While being and beings belong together in metaphysics, in terms of their standing therein, they are not equals—far from it. Rather, within the “look” or appearance of metaphysics, being is held in “higher” regard to beings; being is valued as “greater” than beings, either individually or as a whole. This is due to the specific role awarded to being in metaphysics, in order for beings to show themselves in the way that they do. Within the “look” or appearance of metaphysics, the role of being is to act as *what is most basic* with respect to beings. This is whence the understanding of “cause,” “explanation,” “principle,” etc., arises as what and how the being of beings “is.” For what is most basic with respect to beings is their *ground* as what supports them in their impermanence. As Heidegger says:

Metaphysics thinks beings as beings in the manner of a representing that provides support [*begründenden Vorstellens*]. For since the beginning of philosophy and with it, the being of beings has showed itself as a ground (ἀρχή, αἴτιον, principle). A ground is whence beings as such are what they are and how they are in their becoming, perishing, and persisting as what is knowable, handled, and worked

upon. (69/56)

As a ground, being stabilizes beings. This means that within the “look” or appearance of metaphysics being interacts with beings by holding them steady or, from the other way around, that beings interact with being by being held in place by it. To be held in place by a stabilizing ground, however, is equivalent to being placed out in front of it. To be placed out in front, in turn, is equivalent to being brought forth. To be brought forth is equivalent to standing forth, and to stand forth is equivalent to presenting oneself. Finally, to present oneself is equivalent to *showing oneself as what is present*. Thus, if the role awarded to being within the “look” or appearance of metaphysics is to act as a ground, then the role played by beings is to act as *what presences* hither from that ground. As Heidegger says:

As a ground, being brings beings into their particular presencing [*Anwesen*]. The ground of being shows itself as presentness [*Anwesenheit*]. Its here and now [*Gegenwart*] consists in the fact that it brings each of what presences according to its mode of presencing forth into presentness. (69–70/56)

What characterizes metaphysical thinking, which establishes a ground for beings, is that, starting out from what presences, it represents the latter in its presentness and portrays it in this manner hither from its ground as something grounded.  
(70/56)

Thus, in manifesting the ontological difference between beings and being, the “look” or appearance of metaphysics, as the once unifying horizon of the question of being, characterizes being as a *ground* and beings as *what presences* hither from that ground. This is whence beings

show themselves such that they cannot be understood in and as the very happening of the “look” or appearance granted to them, but rather only after the fact of their disclosure as something caused, produced, or otherwise explained. In order to understand beings in and as the very happening of their disclosure as the “look” or appearance granted to them, through the finite essencing of their historical tradition, thinking must go deeper than the being *of* beings and attempt to think being *itself*. It must make the leap from ground—to origin.

### **c) The Play of Metaphysics**

Although the “look” or appearance of metaphysics is static in the sense that being always plays the role of ground and beings always play the role of what presences hither from the ground of being, how being *acts out* its role of ground in it (and thereby also how beings act out their role as what presences hither from the ground of being) is not static, but rather *dynamic*. Rather than having only a single dimension of grounding to portray within the “look” or appearance of metaphysics, the role of ground played by being is *multidimensional*. Evidence for the fact that being portrays a multiplicity of dimensions of grounding is found throughout the history of philosophy. As Heidegger says:

The ground [of being] has, according to each imprint of presentness, 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 absolute spirit and of the historiographical [*historischen*] process of production,

as the value-positing will to power. (70/56)

The philosophers associated with each of these possibilities of metaphysics are easy enough to identify. They are Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, respectively. Heidegger, however, does not name them, because, according to his thinking, it is not philosophy that arises from and through the activity of the philosopher, but rather the philosopher who arises from the springing-forth of the question of being.

If the springing-forth of the question of being results in a multiplicity of dimensions of grounding becoming manifest throughout the history of philosophy, then it follows from this that the “look” or appearance of metaphysics is equivalent to a *play with many acts*. For each dimension of grounding portrayed by being in and through its acting-out of the role of the ground within metaphysics would be equivalent to a single act within the overall play of metaphysics. If this is the case, then the main character of such a play would be being. For the role of ground played by being is more basic than the role of beings as what presences hither from that ground. Thus, if the “look” or appearance of metaphysics is a play with many acts, then being is the *protagonist* who acts out the multiple dimensions of grounding portrayed in and through it as the history of philosophy. This re-thinking of history marks the beginning of the leap from ground to origin in which the structure of being itself is hintingly shown as the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history.

Although the dimensions of grounding portrayed by being as the protagonist of metaphysics are multiple, they are nonetheless not infinite, but rather *finite* in number.<sup>117</sup> This is shown by the fact that the play of metaphysics is not open-ended or unscripted, but rather to it

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117 Cf. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, § 147: “Das Wesung des Seyns (seine Endlichkeit).”

there belongs a discernible *plot*.<sup>118</sup> Thus, rather than having unlimited acts to be acted out within its “staging,” the play of metaphysics is circumscribed and essentially shaped by a beginning and an end. This plot-like structuring of the “look” or appearance of metaphysics lends itself to concepts and terminology found in literary theory. Thus, in order to facilitate our discussion of Heidegger's thinking, both in terms of its disclosure of the meaning of his claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of the completion of metaphysics and the task of thinking as the experience of clearing and presentness, insights from Aristotle's *Poetics* will be used as a means of uncovering the thoughtful matter and form of the plot-like structuring of the play of metaphysics. In other words, while Heidegger's thinking is often used to develop a “theory of tragedy,”<sup>119</sup> in what follows the opposite approach will be taken, i.e., Aristotle's *Poetics* will be used as a backdrop against which to understand Heidegger's thinking with respect to his claim about the completion of metaphysics and the task of thinking. Heidegger's understanding of Western history is an attempt at carrying out a non-, or better, *pre*-metaphysical thinking. Thus, while Heidegger's understanding of Western history can be said to appropriate tragedy for its narrative model,<sup>120</sup> this does not mean that it “contains” a “theory of tragedy.” If anything, the reverse is true: tragedy may provide clues into the form and matter of thinking at the end of philosophy. It is in this sense that Aristotle's *Poetics* will be used.

The plot of metaphysics follows the dimensions of grounding portrayed by being in and through its acting-out of the role of ground for beings. The dimensions of grounding, however, are not “episodic” in the Aristotelian sense of “when there is neither probability nor necessity in

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118 Indeed, we could even say: *Geschichte*.

119 See, e.g., Micheal Gelven, “Heidegger and Tragedy,” *boundary 2* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1976): 554–568 and Robert S. Gall, “Interrupting Speculation: The Thinking of Heidegger and Greek Tragedy,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003): 177–194.

120 See, e.g., James Crook, “Getting Over Nihilism: Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Appropriation of Tragedy,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9, no. 1 (Summer 2002): 36–50.

the sequence of episodes.”<sup>121</sup> Rather, they are “poetic” in the Aristotelian sense of “concerning a single affair that is whole and complete, with a beginning, middle, and end, such that it produces its own proper pleasure, as a single whole animal does.”<sup>122</sup> This is indicated by the fact that the “look” or appearance of metaphysics is equivalent to the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings. The single affair with which the dimensions of grounding are concerned is the *opposition* originally set out in Plato's thinking between the “sensible” and the “supersensible.” As Heidegger says, “Throughout the whole history of philosophy, Plato's thinking remains dominant in altered forms. Metaphysics is Platonism.” (71/57) The sensible is that which can be perceived by the senses, e.g., anything that is visible, touchable, audible, etc. The supersensible, on the other hand, cannot be perceived by the senses; rather, it is that which can only be grasped through, as Plato says, the “reasoning power of the mind [τῷ τῆς διανοίας λογισμῷ].”<sup>123</sup> In this way, the supersensible further characterizes being in its role of ground for beings; for it adds an additional “layer” to the structuring of the “look” or appearance of metaphysics. If the ontological difference between beings and being constitutes the *internal* structuring of the “look” or appearance of metaphysics, then the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible constitutes its *overall* structuring. The opposition between the sensible and the supersensible is a *mode* of the difference between beings and being. This is why in addition to his claim that “Philosophy is metaphysics” (69/55), Heidegger says, in regard to the structuring of the question of being, “Metaphysics is Platonism.” (71/57)

As the single affair with which the dimensions of grounding are concerned throughout

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121 Aristotle, *Poetics* I.9, 1451 b 34–5.

122 Ibid., I.23, 1459 a 19–21.

123 Plato, *Phaedo* 79a.



their portrayal by being in and through its acting-out of the role of ground for beings within the play of metaphysics, the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible is also the *beginning* of the plot of metaphysics. This is because the beginning of a “poetic” plot is the unaltered form of the single affair with which its episodes are concerned. As a whole, however, a “poetic” plot has “a beginning, middle, and an end.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, the play of metaphysics must have a middle and an end in addition to a beginning. As a whole that is complete, however, a “poetic” plot also comprises the unity of a “single whole animal”<sup>125</sup> in the sense that there *is* probability or necessity in the sequence of its episodes. In this way, then, the middle and end of the play of metaphysics do not arise independent of its beginning; rather, they stem directly from it as “altered forms” of the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible inherent in Plato’s thinking.

In terms of its ending, however, the “poetic” plot of the play of metaphysics is not “straightforward [ἀπλοῖ]” in the Aristotelian sense of “when the change of fortune arises without reversal or recognition.”<sup>126</sup> Rather, it is “sophisticated [πεπλεγμένοι]” in the Aristotelian sense of “when the change of fortune involves a reversal, a recognition, or both.”<sup>127</sup> This is because the dimension of grounding in which the plot of metaphysics ends is represented by *Nietzsche* who, in an early draft of *The Birth of Tragedy*, characterizes his philosophy as “inverted Platonism.” There Nietzsche says, “The further removed from true existence, the purer, more beautiful, better something is. To live in appearances is the goal.”<sup>128</sup> This reverses the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible in that when truth is replaced by “appearances” as what constitutes

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<sup>124</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.7, 1450 b 26–7.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., I.23, 1459 a 19–21.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., I.10, 1452 a 15–6.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., I.10, 1452 a 16–8.

<sup>128</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1869–1874. Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 7, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 199.

the goal, the role of ground is no longer acted out by being as the supersensible, but rather by *beings* as the sensible. It is important to note, however, that this “inverted Platonism” is not only found in Nietzsche's early writings but throughout them, in both his early and late philosophy. For example, in Nietzsche's early philosophy, the role of ground is acted out by the irrational Dionysian element of human existence, whereas in his late philosophy, it is acted out by, as Heidegger says, the “value-positing will to power” (70/56) and its ultimate metaphysical expression in the “eternal recurrence of the same.” In terms of the play of metaphysics, however, this reversal means that the single affair with which the dimensions of grounding are concerned has come to an end; for when the supersensible is replaced by the sensible, i.e., when truth is replaced by appearances, this brings about a *collapse* in the distinction between them. As Heidegger says in “Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'”:

What remains for metaphysics as a result of the reversal accomplished by Nietzsche is only just a downward spiralling into its non-essence. The supersensible becomes a transient product of the sensible. With this diminishing of its opponent, however, the sensible ends up denying its own essence. The dismissal of the supersensible disposes, in turn, of the purely sensible and with it the distinction between them.<sup>129</sup>

In this way, the “either-or” of the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible gives way to a “neither-nor” and a *shutting-down* of possibilities that previously held sway within it. This shutting-down of possibilities as a result of the collapse of the opposition within which the dimensions of grounding are able to be acted out constitutes the end of the plot of the play of

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<sup>129</sup> “Nietzsches Wort »Gott ist tot« (1943),” in *Holzwege. Gesamtausgabe* vol. 5, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977) 209–68.at 209.

metaphysics. As Heidegger says in EPTT: “Nietzsche identifies his philosophy as reversed Platonism. With the reversal of metaphysics, which was already accomplished by Karl Marx, the utmost possibility of philosophy is reached. Philosophy has entered its final stage.” (71/57)

#### **d) The Tragedy of Metaphysics**

Heidegger's use of a “sophisticated” reversal at and for the end of the play of metaphysics is precisely what distinguishes his interpretation of the history of philosophy from others, e.g., Hegel's, Marx's, Nietzsche's. Rather than develop straightforwardly—e.g., according to the continual rise of consciousness in and through absolute spirit, of productivity in the means of technological production, or of decadence in the self-abnegation of slave morality—the history of philosophy for Heidegger undergoes a *twist* at the end. For this reason, then, if Aristotle were to judge—think here of Aristophanes' *Frogs*<sup>130</sup>—Heidegger's interpretation would be considered “necessarily finer” than others, since the “unexpectedness [παρὰ τὴν δόξαν]” of its twist allows the history of philosophy to “develop with the greatest effect on the mind [δὲ γίνεται καὶ μάλιστα].”<sup>131</sup> Like Euripides' plots, Heidegger's interpretation of the history of philosophy is clearly the “most tragic.”

This tragic character speaks against the criticism, often laid against Heidegger, that his interpretation of the history of philosophy *re-inscribes* a kind of (Hegelian) metaphysics back into his thinking. For example, in his 1981 essay “The History of Philosophy,” Gadamer

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130 See the poetic contest between Aeschylus and Euripides judged by Dionysus in Aristophanes, *Frogs*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Newburyport MA: Focus Publishing, 2008), 70–104, lines 830–1478.

131 Aristotle, *Poetics* I.9, 1452 a 3–11.

understands Heidegger's "forgottenness of being" as a "negative teleology" with "something of the logical compulsion into which Hegel's construction of the world history of thought degenerated."<sup>132</sup> Other commentators remark about the "inverted Hegelianism,"<sup>133</sup> the "often-noticed Hegelian tone of [Heidegger's] narrative,"<sup>134</sup> and the "hegeloid fashion" of Heidegger's "linearized" understanding of history.<sup>135</sup> This criticism is also contained, albeit often times only implicitly and without knowledge, in the commonly heard claim that Heidegger's interpretation of the history of philosophy is that of a "history of decline [*Verfallsgeschichte*]." For example, in his 1969 television interview of Heidegger, Richard Wisser premises a question with the statement "[...] your attempt to unveil the previous history of philosophy as a history of decline with respect to being [...]."<sup>136</sup>

Such criticisms, however, fail to appreciate, or notice at all, the tragic character of Heidegger's interpretation of the history of philosophy and how it essentially differs from other, "straightforward" metaphysical interpretations. By understanding the end of the play of metaphysics as culminating in Nietzsche's reversal of Plato's thinking, Heidegger's interpretation does not impose a logical, developmental structure on the history of philosophy. Rather, it allows the history of philosophy to run its course up to a point where, *all of a sudden*, it undergoes a change in fortune through a reversal of its beginning and comes to an end in a most tragic manner. This thinks the history of philosophy more originally than metaphysics. In thinking the history of philosophy more originally than metaphysics, Heidegger's interpretation does not go

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132 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Geschichte der Philosophie," in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), 297–307 at 304.

133 IJsseling, "The End of Philosophy," 203. It is important to note that IJsseling refutes this criticism on the basis that "[e]verything depends on the question of what Heidegger means by *end* and by *commencement*," *ibid.*

134 Daniel Videla, "On the Narratives of Science: The Critique of Modernity in Husserl and Heidegger," *Human Studies* 17 (1994): 189–202 at 196.

135 Castoriadis, "The 'End of Philosophy'?" 6.

136 "Martin Heidegger im Gespräch," 704.

“beyond” metaphysics, but rather *beneath* it by attempting to uncover a kind of thinking that is *older* than metaphysics. As Heidegger says in the Preface to *Pathmarks*, “The determination [of the matter of thinking] brings nothing new. For it leads before the oldest of the old.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, the tragic, “sophisticated” character of Heidegger's interpretation of the history of philosophy does not “re-inscribe” metaphysics back into his thinking, but rather leads into the origin of metaphysics. Indeed, this is why Heidegger responds to Richard Wisser's above suggestion that his interpretation of the history of philosophy is that of a “history of decline” with an all-important correction: “I do not speak of a history of decline, but rather only of the destiny of being.”<sup>138</sup> In allowing the history of philosophy to run its course up to a point where, all of a sudden, it undergoes a change in fortune through a reversal of its beginning and thus comes to an end in a most tragic manner, Heidegger's interpretation is not a “straightforward” teleology, but rather a “sophisticated” outcome stemming from the leaping-ahead of a “genuine” beginning as a destiny.<sup>139</sup>

While Nietzsche's philosophy constitutes the last dimension of grounding portrayed by being, it is important to note that is not simply an end in the Aristotelian sense of “what comes naturally after something else, either of necessity or for the most part, and has nothing else after it.”<sup>140</sup> Rather, as a result of its reversal of the *first* dimension of grounding portrayed by being (in and as Plato's thinking), Nietzsche's philosophy is an end in the sense of a *completion* of the actions and events that came before it. This, however, does not mean that the end of philosophy in and through being's portrayal of the will to power is the “perfection” of metaphysics. As Heidegger says, “Completion does not mean perfection as a consequence of which philosophy

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137 “Vorbemerkung,” in *Wegmarken*, IX.

138 Heidegger, “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch,” 704.

139 See § 12.

140 Aristotle, *Poetics* I.7, 1450 b 29–30.

would have to have reached the highest perfection at its end.” (70/56) Rather, the completion of the play of metaphysics means the *culminating point* wherein the whole of its plot, i.e., beginning, middle, and end, comes together in a final, most extreme possibility of grounding. As Heidegger says, “The end of philosophy is a locus [*Ort*], the locus at which the whole of philosophy's history gathers itself into its utmost possibility. End as completion refers to this gathering.” (70–1/57)

Thus as the historical locus at which the whole of the plot of the play of metaphysics comes together in the form of a final, most extreme possibility, Nietzsche's philosophy or the reversal of the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible originally set out in Plato's thinking as the single affair with which the various dimensions of grounding are concerned throughout their portrayal by being in and through its acting-out of the role of the ground within the “look” or appearance of metaphysics—this is the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of the completion of metaphysics, i.e., Heidegger's claim that “by the 'end of philosophy' what is meant is the completion [*Vollendung*] of metaphysics.” (70/56)

### **e) The Middle of the Play of Metaphysics**

Before moving on to the final section of Part II of our investigation, a “hole” in our interpretation of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of the completion of metaphysics needs to be filled. In understanding the play of metaphysics as culminating in Nietzsche's reversal of Plato's thinking, Heidegger's interpretation of the history of philosophy discusses both

the beginning and the end of metaphysics. As Aristotle says, however, a “poetic” plot is a whole with “a beginning, middle, and end.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, if we are to interpret Heidegger's reading of the history of philosophy in light of Aristotle's understanding of tragedy, then there is a sense in which Heidegger's presentation of the history of philosophy as the play of metaphysics in EPTT is lacking. While it discusses the beginning and the end of the play of metaphysics, it fails to discuss the *middle*. Thus, in order to complete our interpretation of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of the completion of metaphysics, a brief discussion of the middle of the play of metaphysics is in order.

Heidegger's understanding of the middle of the play of metaphysics can be said to be equivalent to the *climax* or “highest point” of metaphysics, after which the actions and events of the plot undergo a tragic downfall, which in the case of metaphysics is “sophisticated,” i.e., “when the change of fortune involves a reversal, a recognition, or both.”<sup>142</sup> For Heidegger, the middle of the play of metaphysics in the sense of its climax or “highest point” manifests itself in Hegel's philosophy of absolute knowledge. This positioning of Hegel's philosophy is present throughout Heidegger's philosophy. For example, in his 1927 lecture course, “The Basic Problems of Phenomenology,” Heidegger remarks: “Philosophy is [...] in a certain sense thought to its end with Hegel. [...] Hegel saw everything that is [philosophically] possible.”<sup>143</sup> And in his collection of insights on “Overcoming Metaphysics” from 1936–1946, Heidegger says:

The completion of metaphysics begins with Hegel's metaphysics of absolute knowledge as knowledge of the will of spirit.

Why is this metaphysics only the beginning of the completion and not the

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<sup>141</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.7, 1450 b 26–27.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., I.10, 1452 a 16–8.

<sup>143</sup> Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 400.

completion itself? [...] The possibility of unconditional going-into-oneself as the will of life is not yet achieved. The will has not yet appeared as the will to will in its self-prepared reality. This is why metaphysics is not yet completed with the absolute metaphysics of spirit.

In spite of the superficial talk about the collapse of Hegelian philosophy, one thing remains true: only this philosophy determined reality in the nineteenth century, although not in the external form of a doctrine followed, but rather as metaphysics, as the dominance of beingness in the sense of certainty. The counter-movements to this metaphysics belong to it. Ever since Hegel's death (1831), everything is merely a counter-movement, not only in Germany, but also in Europe.<sup>144</sup>

While Heidegger does not explicitly state that Hegel's philosophy is the climax or “highest point” of the play of metaphysics, such an understanding is implicit in these remarks of Heidegger's; for only when something has reached the climax or “highest point” of its unfolding can “everything” that comes afterwards be “merely a counter-movement,” indeed since “everything that is possible” has been seen.

It is important to note, however, that while Heidegger states in EPTT that the “completion [of metaphysics] does not mean perfection as a result of which philosophy would have to have reached the highest perfection at its end” (70/56), this is said in regards to the *end* of the play of metaphysics, not its middle. Thus, our interpretation of Heidegger's thinking according to which Hegel's philosophy marks the middle of the play of metaphysics in the sense of its climax or “highest point” is in fact consistent with Heidegger's reading of the history of philosophy in

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<sup>144</sup> Heidegger, “Überwindung der Metaphysik,” 74 (VI).



EPTT; for in claiming that Hegel's philosophy is the climax or “highest point” of the play of metaphysics, our interpretation does not say that Hegel's philosophy is “more perfect” than all metaphysics prior to it, only that Hegel's philosophy *arrived* within the historical unfolding of the plot of the play of metaphysics in the *shape* of the climax or “highest point,” after which the actions and events of the plot could only undergo a tragic downfall—ending in Nietzsche's reversal of Plato's thinking. To put it differently, the different stages of a plot are neither “better” nor “worse” than each other. Rather, within the overall structure of a play, they simply *are* what they are. As Heidegger says, “Every epoch of philosophy has its own necessity. That a philosophy is the way it is is something we simply have to acknowledge. It is not our place to choose one over the other, as is possible with respect to various *Weltanschauungen*.” (ibid.) Thus, although Hegel's philosophy of absolute knowledge may be thought of as the climax or “highest point” of metaphysics, it is nonetheless simply one stage—i.e., the middle of the play of metaphysics—among others.

## § 12.

### **The Task of Thinking at the End of Philosophy**

Now that the meaning of Heidegger's first answer to the question of “In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” (69/55) has been disclosed, our investigation will turn to the answer he provides to the second question posed in EPTT of “What task remains for thinking at the end of philosophy?” (74/59) This is in accordance with the more essential, thoughtful structuring of EPTT,<sup>145</sup> which, in laying bare the horizon of Ereignis, discusses the future of Western thinking after its past and the past, in turn, after its present. Whereas Heidegger's first answer to the question of “In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end?” (69/55) deals with the past of Western thinking, his answer to the question of “What task remains for thinking at the end of philosophy?” (74/59) deals with its future. Thus, as a discussion of the future of Western thinking through Heidegger's answer to the question of “What task remains for thinking at the end of philosophy?” (ibid.), this section marks a further step along the path of our investigation into the meaning of post-modernity.

As noted above, in the *Poetics* Aristotle discusses two kinds of plots: “poetic” and “episodic.” The basic difference between a “poetic” plot in the Aristotelian sense of one “concerning a single affair that is whole and complete, with a beginning, middle, and end, such that it produces its own proper pleasure, as a single whole animal does”<sup>146</sup> and an “episodic” plot

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. § 9.

<sup>146</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.23, 1459 a 19–21.

in the Aristotelian sense of “when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of episodes”<sup>147</sup> is that a “poetic” plot is unified, whereas an “episodic” plot is not. An important insight made by Aristotle into the nature of the dramatic arts is that what enables a “poetic” plot to be unified is not so much a matter of the events and actions that occur within it, although these obviously play an important role. Rather, what enables a “poetic” plot to be unified is more a matter of the events and actions that *do not* occur within it. According to Aristotle, this is one of the many respects in which Homer is superior to other poets. As Aristotle says in the *Poetics*:

In composing the *Odyssey*, [Homer] did not put into his poem everything that happened to Odysseus, e.g., that he was wounded on Parnassus and pretended to be insane during recruitment; whether one of these things happened did not make it necessary or probable that the other would happen. Rather, he constructed the *Odyssey* around a single affair of the kind we are discussing, and the *Iliad* similarly.<sup>148</sup>

Conversely, the lack of unity in an “episodic” plot is not so much a matter of the events and actions that do not occur within it, but rather more a matter of those that *do* occur within it. As Aristotle says: “A plot is not unified, as some suppose, if it concerns a single person. Countless many things happen to one person, in some of which there is no unity. So too the actions of one person are many, but do not form a single affair.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, in order to create a unified, “poetic” plot, as opposed to a haphazard, “episodic” one, the appropriate events and actions must be *left out* of the plot. This is what enables a “single affair that is whole and complete” to arise.

While the unity of a “poetic” plot requires certain events or actions to be left out of it, it is

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., I.9, 1451 b 34–5.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., I.8, 1451 a 24–9. The fact that Homer *did* include the story of Odysseus' wounding on Parnassus in the *Odyssey* (see Book 19, lines 399–466) is not relevant to the present discussion.

<sup>149</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.8, 1451 a 16–9.

important to note, however, that these events and actions are not limited to those which would have appeared *inside* the plot had they not been removed from it. Rather, they also include events and actions that lie *outside* the plot insofar as they happen *before* the first act of the play. The manner in which these “outside” events and actions are left out of a “poetic” plot, however, differs essentially from the manner in which “inside” events and actions are left out. The difference turns on two modes of editing or *cutting*. While “inside” events and actions are left out by being cut *from* the plot, “outside” events and actions are left out because of a cut *into* the plot. Since a cut into a plot establishes the starting-point of a play, it forces certain events and actions to happen before the first act of the play and so to lie outside the actual acting-out of the plot. In this way, then, the subject-matter of a cut into a plot is not so much particular events and actions, but rather the *plot itself*. In forcing certain events and actions to happen before the first act of the play, it does not remove events and actions from the plot, but rather moves the starting-point of the play itself such that certain events and actions are left out of it. Accordingly, a cut into a plot can be said to be “a priori” as opposed to a cut from a plot, which would then be “a posteriori.”

Although they happen before the first act of the play, the events and actions left out of a “poetic” plot as a result of a cut into it are not without effect on its acting-out. Rather, they are in a sense more “actual” and have a “greater” effect on the acting-out of the plot than the events and actions that actually appear inside it. This is because, precisely *in* their lying outside the plot, the events and actions left out of a “poetic” plot as a result of a cut into it etch into the plot the *form* of the single affair with which the various acts of the play are concerned. The act of etching the form of a single affair into a “poetic” plot, however, also determines the various paths open to the plot in terms of its acting-out. Thus, in addition to establishing the underlying form of the

single affair with which the various acts of a play are concerned, the events and actions left out of a “poetic” plot as a result of a cut into it also cast forth the overall *shape* of the plot in terms of its acting-out.<sup>150</sup> An example from Greek antiquity will illustrate this phenomenon.

### **a) The Underlying Form and Overall Shape of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus***

Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus* does not start at the very beginning of its story, e.g., with a “Once upon a time ...” or a “Muse, sing to me ....” Rather, it starts with the city of Thebes already “plunged / headlong into the depths of disaster,”<sup>151</sup> namely the disaster of a plague. The cause of Thebes's plague is the fact that its current king, Oedipus, unknowingly killed the previous king, Laius, who also happened to be Oedipus' estranged father. Thus, when Oedipus filled Thebes's vacant throne (by solving the Sphinx's riddle) and married its widowed queen, Jocasta, he unknowingly married his mother, thus instituting within city's royal house an incestuous, patricidal reign—a situation too heinous for the gods to overlook, hence a plague befell the city. What is important to note, however, is that all of the events and actions leading up to the plague happen *before* the first act of the play. In this way, Sophocles makes a cut *into* the plot such that the events and actions leading up to the plague lie outside the actual acting-out of the plot.

Precisely *in* their lying outside the plot, however, the patricidal events and incestuous

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150 Cf. Heidegger's remark in “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 51: “The strife that is brought into the rift and so set back into the earth and thereby determined is the shape [*Gestalt*].”

151 Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in *Theban Plays*, trans. Peter Meineck and Paul Woodrooff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 61–124 at 64, lines 22–3.

actions leading up to Thebes's plague etch into the plot the underlying form of the single affair with which its various acts are concerned. The form is that of a search by a man who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother for his father's killer. This underlying form, however, does not leave the various paths of the plot undetermined, although neither does it logically determine their order or sequence. Rather, it gives the plot its overall shape, which is a reversal of fortune from good to bad brought about by the recognition of a past “error [ἀμαρτίαν]”<sup>152</sup> by its protagonist, Oedipus. The manner by which the form gives the plot its overall shape, however, is not a handing-over, but rather a casting-forth; for a man who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother and who is then required to conduct a search for his father's killer—such a man is *destined* to undergo a reversal of fortune from good to bad through recognition of his past error.

Thus, if, as Aristotle claims, Homer is superior to other poets with respect to his ability to cut events and actions from a plot in order to unify it, then Sophocles is superior to other poets with respect to his ability to cut *into* a plot such that an underlying form is etched into, and an overall shape is cast over, it. In other words, if Homer is the greatest “sculptor” of “poetic” plots, then Sophocles is the greatest *selector of their marble*; for the shape of a selected marble slab forms the “always already” of the completed statue.<sup>153</sup> This “always already” unifies the acting-out of a “poetic” plot as a destiny. As IJsseling says with respect to the founding of philosophy, “In a certain sense, philosophy constitutes itself. It is not however a *creatio ex nihilo* but is necessarily put together out of pre-given material.”<sup>154</sup>

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152 Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* I.13, 1453 a 10.

153 Cf. the saying attributed to Michelangelo: “Every block of stone has a statue inside of it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

154 IJsseling, “The End of Philosophy,” 200.

## **b) From *Oedipus Tyrannus* to Metaphysics**

As a “poetic” plot, *Oedipus Tyrannus* has a beginning, middle, and an end. Due to the unification of its plot as a destiny, however, its beginning is not a beginning in the Aristotelian sense of “that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it.”<sup>155</sup> Rather, it is a beginning in the Heideggerian sense of a “genuine [*echt*]” beginning.

According to Heidegger, “A genuine beginning is [...] always a leaping-ahead in which everything that is to come is already leaped over, even if as something veiled. Such a beginning already contains concealed within itself an end.”<sup>156</sup> In cutting into its plot such that an underlying form is etched into it and an overall shape is cast over it, *Oedipus Tyrannus* leaps ahead of the events and actions that are to appear in it and already contains concealed within itself an end in that Oedipus is destined to recognize his past “error” and so undergo a reversal of fortune from good to bad as a result of his search for Laius' killer.

Turning now to the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the task of thinking in the sense of the experience of clearing and presentness, it is important to note that Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not the only play with a “poetic” plot in the Aristotelian sense of “concerning a single affair that is whole and complete, with a beginning, middle, and end, such that it produces its own proper pleasure, as a single whole animal does,”<sup>157</sup> albeit with a “genuine” beginning in the Heideggerian sense of a “leaping-ahead in which everything that is to come is already leaped

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<sup>155</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.7, 1450 b 27–8.

<sup>156</sup> “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 64.

<sup>157</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.23, 1459 a 19–21.

over, even if as something veiled” and that “already contains concealed within itself an end.”<sup>158</sup>

In addition, *metaphysics* as a tragedy with many acts has a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning. This is shown by the fact that an underlying form is etched into its plot, which, in turn, takes on an overall shape in terms of its acting-out. The underlying form of the single affair with which the various acts of metaphysics are concerned is that of the grounding of beings by being such that beings come to presence hither from their grounding by being (presentness) within the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible. The overall shape of the plot of metaphysics is a reversal of the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible originally set out in Plato's thinking brought about by the advent of Nietzsche's philosophy.

### **c) The Clearing of Metaphysics**

In its leaping ahead of everything that is to come, a “genuine” beginning limits the possibilities of events and actions in a “poetic” plot. This limiting, however, does not close or shut down the possibilities of a “poetic” plot in the sense of diminishing the horizon with respect to which beings show themselves in a particular manner, i.e., under a particular “light.” Rather, it *opens* possibilities *up* for the first time and so lets beings as a whole come to light within the “space” of a historical tradition. This is shown by the fact that the leaping-ahead of a “genuine” beginning does not draw a limit *within* the acting-out of a “poetic” plot. It does not, for example, draw a “logical” limit. Rather, it draws a limit that *gives* the acting-out of a “poetic” plot its underlying form and overall shape. It draws, in other words, a historical limit—i.e., a limit that is

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<sup>158</sup> “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 64.



constitutive for *being*.<sup>159</sup> Thus rather than closing or shutting down the possibilities of a “poetic” plot, the leaping-ahead of a “genuine” beginning opens them up for the first time within the “space” of a historical tradition and so *lets the play itself come into play*. As Heidegger says with respect to metaphysics, “Wherever something that presences comes across something else that presences or even only lingers near it [...] there openness already holds sway, a free region is in play.” (80/64)

This opening-up and standing-free of possibilities in a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning stands in direct contrast to what occurs in an “episodic” plot, i.e., a plot in which “there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of episodes.”<sup>160</sup> In an “episodic” plot, the possibilities according to which its events and actions are to be acted out are not limited, but rather *unlimited*. Despite the fact that “anything can happen” as a result of it, this lack of limits does not open up possibilities. Rather, it closes them down and diminishes the horizon of beings. The reason for this is that the lack of limits in an “episodic” plot *entangles* the events and actions of its plot to the point where there is no “space” for genuine possibilities to arise, no openness for them to stand free.

From this contrast, it follows that the opening-up and standing-free of possibilities in a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning can be likened to a *clearing in the forest*. As Heidegger says:

We call this openness which grants a possible letting-appear and showing—  
clearing [*die Lichtung*]. (80/65)

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<sup>159</sup> Cf. the earlier discussion of “natural” and “critical” limits in § 2.

<sup>160</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.9, 1451 b 34–5.

A clearing in the forest is experienced in contrast to dense forestry, called a “thicket” [*Dickung*] in older language. The substantive “clearing” can be traced back to the verb “to clear” [»*lichten*«]. The adjective “clear” [»*licht*«] is the same word as “light” [»*leicht*«]. To clear something means: to make something light, to make something free and open, e.g., to make the forest free of trees at one place. The freeness arising from this is clearing. (80/65)<sup>161</sup>

#### **d) The Origin of Metaphysics**

A thinking that thinks according to the possibilities opened up within a clearing, however, differs essentially from a thinking that thinks according to that clearing itself. The distinction is between the thinking that happens *while* the possibilities of a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning are still at play and a thinking that happens *after* the play has ended, albeit *about* the openness within which the possibilities first originated. This latter, other kind of thinking thinks the *first* possibility from which the former kind of thinking thinks the “secondary” possibilities opened up within a clearing. This first possibility, however, is that of the clearing now revealed. As Heidegger asks:

But is the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into sciences also already the complete realization of all the possibilities in which the thinking of philosophy was placed? Or is there for thinking besides the aforementioned *last* possibility (the dissolution of philosophy into technologized sciences) a *first*

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161 Cf. IJsseling's remark that “Space, place, and end belong together” in “The End of Philosophy,” 199.

possibility from which philosophical thinking, to be sure, had to start out, but which as philosophy it could not as such experience and take over? (73/59)

And then answers with respect to this first possibility and its relationship to philosophy/metaphysics, “Clearing grants first of all the possibility of a path to presentness and grants the possible presencing of such presentness itself. [...] The quiet heart of clearing is the point of stillness hither from which there first is something like the possibility of a belonging-together of being and thinking,<sup>162</sup> i.e., of presentness and perceiving.” (84/68)

It is important to note, however, that *as* a clearing, the first possibility of philosophy/metaphysics does not arise in the manner of an opening-up or a standing-free, i.e., in the manner of a “secondary” possibility. Rather, it arises only indirectly, indeed hintingly, as a source hidden by the overflowing of what springs from it. This is because a clearing is the *origin* of a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning. In leaping-ahead of everything that is to come within a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning, the first possibility of a clearing conceals itself precisely *in* its opening-up and letting-standing-free of “secondary” possibilities. The possibilities opened up within a clearing are not “caused” by it, but rather joined to it as *a river to its source*.<sup>163</sup> As Heidegger says in *Contributions*, “[...] a beginning is what is *concealed*, the origin not yet misused and put into service which, always withdrawing, grasps farthest ahead and thus preserves within itself the highest reign.”<sup>164</sup>

### e) “Proof” of the Origin of Metaphysics

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162 Cf. Parmenides, DK 28 B 3: “for being and thinking are the same [τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι].”

163 Cf. § 8.

164 *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, § 23.

Evidence for the fact that a clearing conceals itself while leaping-ahead of everything that is to come within it is found in the form of a famous “improbability” in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. As noted above, the underlying form of the plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is that of a search by a man who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother for his father's killer. What appears improbable in the play, however, is that Oedipus, as Laius' successor to Thebes's throne, is wholly ignorant of the circumstances surrounding Laius' death. Indeed, one would think that Oedipus' first order of business as the newly appointed king of Thebes would have been to investigate the mystery of his predecessor's death, rather than wait at least 15 years for a plague to arrive. This improbability is brought out in one exchange in particular. After confronting his brother-in-law Creon for allegedly setting up the prophet Tiresias to accuse him of murdering Laius, Oedipus asks:

OEDIPUS: How long has it been since Laius . . .

CREON: Since he what? I've no idea.

OEDIPUS: Since he vanished, violently?

CREON: You'd have to go back a long, long time.<sup>165</sup>

OEDIPUS: And this old prophet, was he in business back then?

CREON: Yes, as expert then as now and highly revered.

OEDIPUS: And at that time did he ever mention me?

CREON: No. Not that I know of.

OEDIPUS: Was there no murder investigation?

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<sup>165</sup> Since Oedipus' two sons are “grown men now” (121, line 1460), the time having passed since Laius' death must be at least fifteen years, although it is more likely around twenty when factoring in the time between Laius' death and Oedipus' solving of the Sphinx's riddle.

CREON: We tried. We never heard . . . (558–67)

There is obviously a case to be made for psychological repression on the part of Oedipus. Nonetheless, many commentators have found the fact that Oedipus did not previously investigate, nor even ask about, his predecessor's death unconvincing and so detrimental to the overall “poetic” character of the plot. The most notable is Aristotle who, although critical of Sophocles in this regard, nonetheless commends him for at least placing the facts of Oedipus' ignorance outside the plot, i.e., before the first act of the play. As Aristotle says: “A story should not be composed from improbable parts, but rather should contain no improbabilities whatsoever. Otherwise, they should be outside the plot-structure, like Oedipus' not knowing how Laius was killed.”<sup>166</sup>

The improbability of Oedipus' ignorance, however, is not evidence against the “poetic” character of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but rather precisely evidence *for* it. This is shown by the fact that while the possibilities of the plot are still at play, Oedipus' ignorance of Laius' death does not appear *as* improbable. Rather, it is only *after* the play has ended, i.e., after the plot has completed itself, that the improbability of Oedipus' ignorance makes itself known. The ground of this transformation, however, does not lie beyond the plot, e.g., in the “faculties” of audience members to determine what is “rational” or not in the plot's structure. Rather, it lies in *the river-like movement of the play itself* as the self-concealing origin of the clearing within which the possibilities of its plot first open up and stand free. As part of the underlying form etched into the plot, the improbability of Oedipus' ignorance is hidden by the overflowing of possibilities originally sprung from its leaping-ahead. This hiding, however, continues up until the playing of possibilities is completed, at which point the improbability of Oedipus' ignorance begins to

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<sup>166</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.24, 1460 a 27–31.

reveal itself as a hidden aspect of the self-concealing origin whence the “secondary” possibilities of the plot originally sprung.

### **f) Ἀλήθεια as Unconcealment**

Additional evidence for the fact that a clearing conceals itself while leaping-ahead of everything that is to come within a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning is found in the play of metaphysics. In comparison to the improbability of Oedipus' ignorance, however, this evidence is both stronger and yet, precisely because of its strength, weaker in terms of its point of view. This is because, on the one hand, unlike *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the play of metaphysics is not staged as a production, but rather *lived* as a historical tradition. In this way, any evidence for the self-concealing origin of a clearing would be stronger because it stems from real “historiographical” events and actions. At the same time, however, this evidence would be weaker because, unlike the audience for *Oedipus Tyrannus*, those for whom philosophy/metaphysics is a historical tradition cannot leave the “theatre” once its plot has ended; rather, they must remain in it, a consequence of which is that they cannot “analyze” the resulting transformation in thinking from an “objective” point of view. Rather, they can only *listen* for clues and thoughtfully follow them in preparation for the founding of another beginning of their history. As Heidegger says: “The title [“The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”] names an attempt at a meditation that persists in questioning. Its questions are paths to an answer. If an answer were to be granted, it

would consist in a transformation of thinking, not in a statement about a matter of fact.” (69/55)

The additional evidence in the play of metaphysics for the fact that a clearing conceals itself while leaping-ahead of everything that is to come within a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning is found in the Greek word for truth, ἀλήθεια, which more literally translates to “unconcealment.” Whereas “truth” is the metaphysical translation of ἀλήθεια, “unconcealment” is its more thoughtful translation. This is because “unconcealment” indicates the revealing-concealing origin of a clearing insofar as it names a concealing the privation of which brings about a revealing. As a founding word of philosophy, ἀλήθεια indicates the river-like movement of the play of metaphysics. As Heidegger says:

If I stubbornly translate the name Ἀλήθεια as unconcealment, then this happens not for the sake of etymology, but rather because of the matter that must be thought through if we are to think what is called being and thinking according to its matter. Unconcealment is, as it were, the element in which being as well as thinking and their belongingness-together are first given. (85/68–9)

This strong yet weak evidence for the self-concealing origin of the clearing of the beginning of the play of metaphysics underscores the questionableness of Heidegger's thinking. While ἀλήθεια undoubtedly belongs to the history of philosophy as one of its founding words, Heidegger's interpretation of it as unconcealment, rather than truth, is nonetheless a *leap*. According to metaphysics, this leap is ungrounded, without proof, and therefore a leap into sheer conjecture and irrationality. As Heidegger asks rhetorically, “But isn't this all groundless mysticism or even bad mythology, in any case a ruinous irrationality, the denial of reason?” (88/71) This criticism, however, misses the mark, indeed it cannot even “see” its target; for in the

same way that a “genuine” beginning does not draw a limit *within* the acting-out of a “poetic” plot, Heidegger's interpretation of ἀλήθεια is not a leap *in* logic, but rather a leap *over* metaphysics into thinking. In this way, the questionableness of Heidegger's interpretation turns into a question-ability of the “basis” of metaphysics as such. As Heidegger says:

I ask in reply: What does *ratio*, νοῦς, νοεῖν, perceiving mean? What does ground and principle [...] mean? Can this ever be sufficiently determined unless we experience Ἀλήθεια in a Greek manner as unconcealment and then, above and beyond the Greek, think it as the clearing of self-concealing? As long as reason and what is rational remain questionable in what is their own, talk about irrationality is baseless. (88/71–2)

This question-ability of metaphysics, however, re-raises the question of being, albeit not according to the matter of metaphysics, i.e., the question of “What is a being [τί τὸ ὄν]?”<sup>167</sup> Rather, it re-raises the question of being according to the matter of thinking, i.e., the question of “How does being essence [wie west das Seyn]?”<sup>168</sup> While subtle, this difference nonetheless illuminates the essential relationship between being and clearing, i.e., metaphysics and thinking, within the crossing of Western history from the end of its first, to the founding of its other, beginning: While metaphysics does not ask about clearing, but rather about the being of beings, clearing is nonetheless so essential for beings to presence according to the presentness of being that it remains as what is to be thought at the end of philosophy. Ἀλήθεια as unconcealment, in other words, is not simply a thing of the past, but rather a matter of thinking *for* the future. As Heidegger says in EPTT:

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<sup>167</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII.1, 1028 b 4.

<sup>168</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, § 2.



To raise the question of truth is the same as raising the question of Ἀλήθεια, of unconcealment as such. [...] all of metaphysics does not ask about being as being, i.e., the question of how there can be presentness as such. There is presentness only when clearing holds sway. Clearing is named with Ἀλήθεια, unconcealment, but not thought as such. [...] Only what Ἀλήθεια as clearing grants is experienced and thought, not what it is as such.

This remains concealed. Does this happen by chance? Does it happen as a result of a carelessness of human thinking? Or does it happen because self-concealing, concealment, Λήθη belongs to Ἄ-Λήθεια, not as a mere addition, not as shadow to light, but rather as the heart of Ἀλήθεια? And does a sheltering and preserving not rule in this self-concealing of the clearing of presence from which unconcealment can be granted in the first place, and thus what is present can appear in its presentness?

If this were so, then clearing would not be the mere clearing of presentness, but rather the clearing of presentness concealing itself, the clearing of a self-concealing preserving.

If this were so, then with these questions we would arrive at a path to the task of thinking at the end of philosophy. (86–8/70–1)

By re-raising the question of being as the question of beyng, Heidegger's interpretation of

ἀλήθεια opens up a path into the hitherto concealed source of metaphysics as the self-concealing origin of the clearing from which the possibilities of grounding of beings by being originally sprung. This, however, does not answer the question of “What task remains for thinking at the end of philosophy?” (74/59) so much as it *deepens* the questioning of the question itself; for in raising the question of being, in questioning the “ground” of metaphysics as such, Heidegger’s interpretation of ἀλήθεια leads into the source of the “space” required for authentic, philosophical wonderment as what once overflowed at and for the beginning of philosophy, but no longer does. This question-able thinking prepares Western humanity for the possibility of renewing their history in the face of its end as the limitless drive towards organizing the ever-increasing amount and availability of information about all that is. As Heidegger says:

Perhaps there is a thinking that is more sober than the relentless pursuit of rationalization and the sweeping character of cybernetics. Presumably it is precisely this sweeping-away that is utmost irrational.

Perhaps there is a thinking outside of the differentiation between rational and irrational, still more sober than scientific technology, more sober and thus removed, without effect and yet with its own necessity. When we ask about the task of this thinking, then not only this thinking, but also the question about it is first made questionable. (89/72)

Thus, to think ἀλήθεια, not as truth, but as unconcealment is to work towards crossing the ever-deepening path of thinking from the first to the other beginning of Western history. This is the task of thinking the history of philosophy more originally than metaphysics as the river-like movement of the clearing of self-concealing at the end of philosophy. As Heidegger says:

Does the title of the task of thinking then read instead of *Being and Time*: Clearing and Presentness?

Whence, however, and how is clearing given? What speaks in the “It gives” [*Es gibt*]?

The task of thinking would then be the surrender of previous [metaphysical] thinking to the determination of the matter of thinking. (90/73)

## **Part III**

### **The Meaning of Post-Modernity with Respect to the Horizon of Ereignis**

## § 13.

### Recapitulation

Now that the horizon of Ereignis, i.e., the horizon with respect to which the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history begins to announce itself, has been laid bare, an answer to the question about the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity can be offered. Before this, however, a recapitulation is in order; for re-traversing the main steps of the investigation will help to focus our “sight” such that the meaning of post-modernity is brought into relief.

The investigation started out from the claim that a noticeable fog engulfs the meaning of “post-modernity.” As often as it said that we live in a “postmodern” world or age, it is just as often, if not more, not understood what this saying means. A hint, however, is given by its name, which is not a proper name, but rather a placeholder for one. The “post-” prefix of post-modernity indicates a historical epoch that lies in-between the end of modernity and the beginning of another historical epoch that is still to come. This in-between character, however, is unique in that it marks a situation in which an end happens before a beginning as opposed to a beginning happening before an end. This situation is that of a *crisis*; for the kind of beginning primarily at play is a beginning that is needed, i.e., a new or future beginning, as opposed to a past one already given. In a crisis, however, a past beginning is still important; for in order to get out of a crisis, what is most often needed is a *deeper reflection* on a past beginning. The past

beginning now at an end that precipitates the crisis of post-modernity is the end of the defining movement of the happening of the Western tradition, namely philosophy. Thus an investigation into the end of philosophy marks a first step *into* the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity.

Of all the claims alleging the end of philosophy, Martin Heidegger's is unique in that his alone issues from a crisis as opposed to a "natural" state of affairs. For this reason, a further step into the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity would entail an investigation into the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy. In order for its meaning to be properly disclosed, however, Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy must be contextualized within Heidegger's thinking as a whole. In terms of the path of the investigation, this is equivalent to finding an appropriate way *into* Heidegger's thinking.

As "Ways [*Wege*], not works," Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* is divided into step-wise and leap-wise writings. A step-wise writing ventures one or more steps *from* metaphysics *into* the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history, whereas a leap-wise writing ventures an entire leap *across* the crossing itself such that the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history begins to announce *itself*.

Since "thinking is a handwork,"<sup>169</sup> Heidegger's step-wise writings can be understood as tools the purpose of which is to *work* towards an understanding of his leap-wise writings. As is shown in Heidegger's "Analysis of Environmentality and Worldliness in General" in *Being and Time*, a tool must recede into the background of the work it is doing, in order that the work being done may *proceed* in the foreground of what it is being done *for*. If unsuited for the work, however, a tool may become disrupted, in which case its mode of being is modified from

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<sup>169</sup> Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," 3.

readiness-to-hand to present-at-hand, and Dasein's "sight" typically undergoes a narrowing-down. For these reasons, which of Heidegger's step-wise writings to use in understanding one of his leap-wise writings must be chosen carefully.

Since the explicit use of Heidegger's step-wise writings within an interpretation of one of his leap-wise writings is tantamount to a disruption in the former's readiness-to-hand, one of Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writing was chosen as a tool to work towards understanding Heidegger's main leap-wise writing *Contributions to Philosophy (Of Ereignis)*. Whereas *Contributions* projects the horizon of Ereignis with respect to which the other kind of thinking to be thought at and for the other beginning of Western history begins to announce itself, Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings deal with a full swath of subject-matters inherent in the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history. Thus, while the use of one of Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings still entails a disruption of its readiness-to-hand and thus a diminishment of the horizon of Ereignis, the kind of diminishment resulting from it is not a narrowing-down, but rather an *opening-up*. In this way, the use of one of Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings does not constitute an analytic, but rather a *synthetic* approach to Heidegger's thinking.

The "thickest" of Heidegger's "thick" step-wise writings is his 1964 lecture "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." EPTT carves out a full swath of subject-matters inherent in the crossing from metaphysics to the other beginning of Western history in a single cut, as it were. This allows it to project in outline the full horizon of Ereignis. Thus working with EPTT is an appropriate path towards laying bare the horizon of Ereignis. Since the situation of post-modernity is that of a crisis brought about by the end of philosophy, this laying-bare of the

horizon of Ereignis forges a deeper path *into* the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity.

EPTT is divided into two sections phrased as questions. The sections are:

- In what sense has philosophy in the present age entered into its end? (69/55)
- What task remains for thinking at the end of philosophy? (74/59)

In order to disclose the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy, EPTT must be restructured according to the concept of time or temporality at work within *Contributions*. The concept of time or temporality at work within the horizon of Ereignis is one according to which time or temporality is disclosed to human beings *decayingly* as a result of an original overflowing of possibilities at and for the beginning of their history. Thus the restructuring of EPTT follows a *river-like decaying* trajectory according to which the *present* of Western thinking is discussed first, then its *past*, and finally the *future* of Western thinking. This gives rise to the more essential, as it were, *thoughtful structuring* of EPTT. Accordingly, the ideas of EPTT were discussed in the investigation as follows:

- The end of philosophy as the development of independent sciences.
- The end of philosophy as the completion of metaphysics.
- The task of thinking at the end of philosophy.

### **a) The End of Philosophy as the Development of Independent Sciences**

Since EPTT's initial delivery in 1964, philosophy has experienced a “quantitative” and a



“qualitative” increase in its activity. Thus an obvious objection against Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences is that philosophy cannot be at an end for the simple reason that philosophical activity is not only still occurring but occurrences of it are *increasing*. This objection is grounded on an understanding of “end” that *excludes* the possibility of an increase in activity of whatever it is that is at an end; however, the understanding of “end” at work within Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences *includes* the possibility of an increase in philosophical activity. This latter understanding of the end of philosophy amounts to the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings *being breached or broken*. This manifests itself today in the phenomenon of “specialization” and results in an *increase* in not only the total number of sciences but the overall efficiency of their results.

This response, however, brings with it a further objection, which is that the increase in the total number of sciences and the overall efficiency of their results *has nothing to do with the philosophy*. Rather than philosophy or its purported end, this increase is due to the *fact* that “objects” have certain “properties” and human beings have the “will” and “faculties” to comport themselves “rationally” towards such “objects” and “properties.” In order to respond to this objection, an all-important distinction must be made. Whereas the manner of thinking at work within this objection is one according to which something is understood, or comes to be understood, by putting it together *after the fact* of its disclosure, the manner of thinking at work within Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences is one according to which something is understood, or comes to be

understood, *in and as the very happening* of its disclosure. This difference in manners of thinking results in a situation where, despite its difficulty, a dialogue must nonetheless be attempted by offering “proof” of the “always already” at work within the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences.

As the physical and spiritual manifestation of the various regions of beings, a university functions such that it concretely manifests the “always already” of the happening of the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences. Today a university promotes and works towards the essential *isolation* of its disciplines and towards their further specialization. Despite this, however, a university must nonetheless *unify* the scientific disciplines “housed” within it. The unity at work within the functioning of a university is the unity of *being organized*. In unifying its disciplines through the organized coordination of their results, a university comports itself towards them as *calculated units on an open-ended grid*. This maximizes the isolation of disciplines within a university while nonetheless keeping them unified.

The current functioning of a university indicates the truth of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences insofar as the technological structuring of a university concretely manifests the fact that the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings *has been breached or broken*. This limitless drive towards organizing the ever-increasing amount and availability of information closes off the “space” required for authentic, philosophical wonder. Thus as the effect of the horizon with respect to which the ontologies of the various regions of beings were once unified being breached or broken, cybernetics manifests the “always already”

at work within the end of philosophy in the sense of its development into independent sciences. This is the meaning of Heidegger's claim that "The development [*Ausfaltung*] of philosophy into the independent sciences [...] is the legitimate completion of philosophy." (72/58)

## **b) The End of Philosophy as the Completion of Metaphysics**

The name for the "look" or appearance granted to beings in and by the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings is *metaphysics*. The structuring of the "look" or appearance of metaphysics sets out from the structuring of the question of being, which manifests the ontological difference between beings and being. The role of being within the "look" or appearance of metaphysics is to act as *what is most basic* with respect to beings. What is most basic with respect to beings is their *ground*. Thus the role of beings within metaphysics is to act as *what presences* hither from the ground. This is whence beings show themselves such that they can *only* be understood after the fact of their disclosure and not in and as the very happening of their disclosure.

As the role played by being within metaphysics, the ground is *multidimensional*. The dimensions of grounding portrayed by being are "poetic" in the Aristotelian sense of "concerning a single affair that is whole and complete, with a beginning, middle, and end, such that it produces its own proper pleasure, as a single whole animal does."<sup>170</sup> The single affair with which the dimensions of grounding are concerned throughout their portrayal by being is the *opposition* originally set out in Plato's thinking between the "sensible" and the "supersensible." The

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<sup>170</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.23, 1459 a 19–21.

opposition originally set out in Plato's thinking between the sensible and the supersensible is also the *beginning* of the plot of metaphysics. Thus within the play of metaphysics the middle and the end of the plot stem directly from the single affair with which the various dimensions of grounding are concerned as “altered forms” of the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible.

The end of the plot of metaphysics is “sophisticated [πεπλεγμένοι]” in the Aristotelian sense of “when the change of fortune involves a reversal, a recognition, or both.”<sup>171</sup> The dimension of grounding with which the plot of metaphysics ends is represented by *Nietzsche* who characterizes his philosophy as “inverted Platonism.” Nietzsche's philosophy reverses the opposition originally set out in Plato's thinking between the sensible and the supersensible in that the role of the ground is acted out by *beings* as the sensible as opposed to being as the supersensible. Thus rather than an “either-or,” the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible gives way to a “neither-nor” and a *shutting-down* of possibilities that previously held sway within it.

Nietzsche's philosophy constitutes the last dimension of grounding portrayed by being. This gives rise to the completion of the plot of metaphysics in the sense of the *culminating point* wherein the whole of the plot of metaphysics, i.e., the beginning, middle, and end, comes together in a final, most extreme possibility of grounding. Thus Nietzsche's philosophy or the reversal of the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible originally set out in Plato's thinking is the meaning of Heidegger's claim about the end of philosophy in the sense of the completion of metaphysics.

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171 Ibid., I.10, 1452 a 16–8.

### c) The Task of Thinking at the End of Philosophy

What makes a “poetic” plot unified is more a matter of the events and actions that *do not* occur within it. Thus in order to create a unified, “poetic” plot, certain events that actually befell the protagonist or certain actions that the protagonist actually did must be *left out*. The unifying events and actions left out of a “poetic” plot include events and actions that lie *outside* the plot insofar as they happen *before* the first act of the play. These events and actions, however, are the result of a cut *into* the plot. A cut into the plot sets down the underlying *form* of the single affair with which the various acts of a play are concerned while casting forth the overall *shape* of the plot in the sense of the various paths open to it in its acting out. This was illustrated by the example of Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

*Oedipus Tyrannus* begins with the city of Thebes *already* “plunged / headlong into the depths of disaster.”<sup>172</sup> All of the events and actions leading up to the plague happen before the first act of the play. Thus Sophocles makes a cut *into* the plot such that the events and actions leading up to the plague lie outside the actual acting-out of the plot. Precisely *in* their lying outside the plot, however, the patricidal, incestuous events and actions leading up to Thebes's plague set down the underlying form of the single affair with which the various acts of the play are concerned. This is that of a search by a man who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother for his father's killer. The underlying form of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in turn, gives the plot its overall shape, which is a reversal of fortune from good to bad brought about by the

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<sup>172</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 64, lines 22–3.

recognition of a past “error [ἁμαρτίαν].”<sup>173</sup> Thus Sophocles' cut into the plot unifies the events and actions that appear in *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a destiny, i.e., as the “always already” of what is to happen in a plot due to its underlying form and overall shape.

Due to its being unified as a destiny, the beginning of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a “genuine” beginning in the Heideggerian sense of “a leaping-ahead in which everything that is to come is already leaped over, even if as something veiled. Such a beginning already contains concealed within itself the end.”<sup>174</sup> In leaping ahead of the events and actions that are to appear in the plot, Oedipus' search for Laius' killer already contains within itself Oedipus' recognition of his patricidal, incestuous actions and so his reversal of fortune from good to bad. In addition to *Oedipus Tyrannus*, metaphysics as a tragedy with many acts has a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning.

In its leaping ahead of everything that is to come, a “genuine” beginning *opens* possibilities *up* for the first time and so lets beings as a whole come to light within the “space” of a historical tradition. The limit drawn in and by the leaping-ahead of a “genuine” beginning is a historical limit, which as such gives the acting-out of a “poetic” plot its underlying form and overall shape. In contrast to the entanglement of possibilities in an “episodic” plot, however, the opening-up and standing-free of possibilities in a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning can be likened to a *clearing in the forest*. In the case of metaphysics, a clearing grants a possible letting-appear and showing-forth of beings.

A thinking that thinks according to a clearing thinks the *first* possibility from which the “secondary” possibilities opened up within a clearing arise in the first place. Along the path of

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173 Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* I.13, 1453 a 10.

174 Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 64.

the present investigation, this first possibility is that of the clearing of metaphysics/philosophy. As a clearing, the first possibility of thinking arises only indirectly, indeed hintingly, as a source hidden by the overflowing of what springs from it; for a clearing is the *origin* of a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning. The possibilities opened up within a clearing are not “caused” by it, but rather joined to it as *a river to its source*.

Evidence for the fact that a clearing conceals itself while leaping-ahead of everything that is to come within it is found in the form of a famous “improbability” in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, i.e., Oedipus' ignorance of the circumstances surrounding Laius' death. While the possibilities of the plot are still playing, Oedipus' ignorance of Laius' death does not appear *as* improbable. Rather, it is only *after* the play has ended, i.e., after the possibilities of the plot have been completed, that the improbability of Oedipus' ignorance makes itself known. The ground of this transformation lies in *the river-like movement of the play itself* as the self-concealing origin of the clearing within which the possibilities of its plot first open up and stand free.

Additional evidence is found in the play of metaphysics, albeit in comparison to *Oedipus Tyrannus* this evidence is both stronger and yet weaker. It is stronger because the play of metaphysics is *lived* as a historical tradition and yet, precisely because of this, it is also weaker because those for whom it is a historical tradition cannot leave the “theatre” once its plot has ended. The additional evidence is found in the Greek word for truth, ἀλήθεια, which more literally translates to “unconcealment.” This indicates the revealing-concealing origin of a clearing insofar as it names a concealing the privation of which brings about a revealing

Ἀλήθεια as unconcealment underscores the questionableness of Heidegger's thinking. This questionableness, however, constitutes a leap over metaphysics into thinking such that the

“basis” of metaphysics becomes question-able. This question-ability of metaphysics re-raises the question of being according to the matter of thinking as the question of “How does being essence [*wie west das Seyn*]?”<sup>175</sup> This re-raising opens up a path into the hitherto concealed source of metaphysics as the self-concealing origin of the clearing from which the possibilities of grounding of beings by being originally sprung. Thus it works towards crossing the ever-deepening path of thinking from the first to the other beginning of Western history. This is the task of thinking the history of philosophy more originally than metaphysics as the river-like movement of the clearing of self-concealing at the end of philosophy.

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<sup>175</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, § 2.



## § 14.

### **The Meaning of Post-Modernity**

With respect to the horizon of Ereignis, the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity reveals itself as follows. To live in a “postmodern” world or age is to live in a world increasingly overrun by possibilities that derive no purpose or meaning from a defining historical movement and so leave those who stand in the midst of them perplexed as to where they are and what the fate of their thinking will be. This manifests itself in and as the threefold phenomenon of entanglement, nihilism, and not knowing.

#### **a) Entanglement**

While the Western tradition of philosophy was still in the historical process of playing itself out, its situation was akin to a “poetic” plot with a “genuine” beginning according to which its possibilities essentially held sway within the self-concealing origin of a clearing. Now, at the end of philosophy, the situation of post-modernity is more like an “episodic” plot in which “there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of episodes.”<sup>176</sup> This is indicated by the fact that the development of philosophy into independent sciences mirrors the acting-out of events and actions in an “episodic” plot. For example, in an “episodic” plot, the possibilities according to

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<sup>176</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* I.9, 1451 b 34–5.

which the events and actions of the plot are acted out are *unlimited*. This parallels the current phenomenon of specialization in scientific disciplines, which leads to an unlimited *increase* in not only the total number of sciences but the overall efficiency of their results due to the breaching or breaking-up of the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings. Thus, in the same way that the events and actions of an “episodic” plot are acted out in a haphazard, unlimited manner, so too is the quantity and quality of scientific disciplines undergoing an unlimited increase with respect to their position within the current functioning of a university.

Despite this increase, however, the lack of limits associated with it does not give rise to an opening-up of essential possibilities within the Western historical tradition. Rather, it amounts to a closing or shutting-down of them. This is because such a lack of limits *entangles* the possibilities of a historical tradition in the same way that the lack of limits of an “episodic” plot entangles the possibilities according to which its events and actions are acted out. As a result of this entanglement, there is no longer a “space” for essential possibilities to arise in the Western tradition, there is no openness for them to stand free. This manifests itself in and as the historical epoch of post-modernity in which the “space” required for authentic, philosophical wonder has been closed off and covered over by a limitless drive towards organizing the ever-increasing amount and availability of information about all that is.

At the same time, however, the entangling lack of limits amounting to the closing or shutting-down of the “space” for essential possibilities is precisely whence the *question* of being arises as the *last possibility* of and for thinking in the Information Age. While beings are increasing in evermore efficient and effective manners, being in its essence is “decreasing.”

Precisely in this decreasing, however, *beyng* as the coming-towards of the horizon of Ereignis first appears as the possibility of another beginning of Western history. In this way, the entanglement of beings experienced within the historical epoch of post-modernity is not simply a “negative” phenomenon but a “positive” one as well; for precisely in marking the end of the first (past) beginning of Western history, it looks towards the other (future) beginning. As Heidegger says in “Minutes to a Seminar on the Lecture 'Time and Being':”

Between the epochal formations of being and the transformation of being into Ereignis stands *enframing* [*das Ge-stell*]. Enframing is a way station, as it were; it affords a double perspective; it is—one could even say—a Janus head. It can be understood as a continuation of the will to will, thus as a final shaping of being. At the same time, however, it is an early form of Ereignis itself.<sup>177</sup>

And as the German poet Hölderlin says, quoted by Heidegger in his essay “The Question about Technology:”

Where, however, the danger lies, grows  
The saving power also.<sup>178</sup>

In terms of the historical epoch of post-modernity, the “negative” and “positive” character of the entanglement of beings indicates that post-modernity is the critical *in-between* juncture of Western history at which a decision about the last and thereby first, hitherto concealed possibility of thinking is being made.

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<sup>177</sup> Heidegger, “Protokoll zu einem Seminar über den Vortrag »Zeit und Sein« (1962),” in *Zur Sache des Denkens. Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 14, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 31–64 at 56–57.

<sup>178</sup> Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik,” 29.

## **b) Nihilism**

While a historical tradition is still in the process of playing itself out, its possibilities derive their meaning and purpose from the self-concealing origin of the clearing whence they originally sprung. These possibilities are granted to those who dwell within the historical tradition as that which comes towards them from the leaping-ahead of a “genuine” beginning.

This stands in direct contrast to the situation of a historical tradition that is at an end and so has completed itself, e.g., the Western philosophical tradition. Here possibilities are not granted from the leaping-ahead of a “genuine” beginning. Rather, in the case of the Western philosophical tradition, specialized “findings” are developed within increasingly isolated regions of beings. The meaning and purpose of these “findings,” however, are not derived from essential possibilities, but rather from the overall efficiency of their effects within an ever-narrowing domain of application. The 140-character limit of Twitter and the new “language” developed as a result are perhaps the most telling examples of how, as Heidegger says in EPTT, “Cybernetics reshapes language into an exchange of news. The arts become controlled-controlling instruments of information.” (72/58)

This change in meaning and purpose manifests itself in an essential transformation in the priorities of Western thinking. Rather than unravelling a question according to the wonderment it bestows upon a questioner, the priority of Western thinking is now to produce more and more efficient answers. This is because in post-modernity the cleared “space” of possibilities in which human beings are able to think philosophically is shrinking; for over top of it an open-ended grid of calculated units is growing and becoming evermore organized. Thus, the measure of what

constitutes an advancement in knowledge is now the efficiency of the production of increasingly specialized answers.

This transformation in the essence of Western thinking finds expression in Nietzsche's definition of "nihilism" from his posthumous notes, which Heidegger believes formed part of Nietzsche's planned but unfinished work *The Will to Power*. In a note from 1887, Nietzsche asks and then answers the question, "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer."<sup>179</sup> This definition of nihilism stems from Nietzsche's insight that the Platonic-Christian interpretation of God as the most perfect being, who exists in the supersensible realm of ideas and of what truly is, no longer determines or supports the sensible realm of beings in general nor human life in particular. This is because the sciences, which were thought of and pursued as an extension of God's truth and knowledge, have now replaced Him as the ultimate worldview of Western humanity. This is why the "highest values" are not simply devalued in nihilism but, ironically for Nietzsche, they *devalue themselves*. A further consequence of this devaluation is that an overarching goal or purpose for human life is lacking; for the sciences do not answer the question of "why?" but rather only the question of "what?" This lack of an aim or "why?" manifests itself for Nietzsche in the historical situation of "God is dead." As discussed in § 11, however, Nietzsche's response to this situation is a "reversed Platonism" according to which the role of the ground is not acted out by being as the supersensible, but rather by beings as the sensible.

With respect to the horizon of Ereignis, however, what Nietzsche first experienced as nihilism is taken one step *further* in terms of its path. Rather than simply the Platonic-Christian

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<sup>179</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885–1887. Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 12, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 350.

interpretation of God, what is lacking at the end of philosophy is a ground of beings *as such*. In post-modernity, the essential possibilities of grounding originally granted to the Western tradition at and for its first beginning in and by their leaping-ahead from the self-concealing origin of the clearing of metaphysics have been exhausted. This is equivalent to the river of philosophy/metaphysics *having run dry*, with only the hope of its source remaining. Thus, as the reversal of the opposition between the sensible and the supersensible originally set out in Plato's thinking, Nietzsche's philosophy is not a "solution" to nihilism, but rather its true beginning. As the culminating point wherein the whole of the plot of metaphysics comes together in a final, most extreme possibility of grounding, Nietzsche's philosophy amounts to the breaching or breaking-up of the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings. This deeper sense of nihilism is what Heidegger calls the "abandonment of being [*Seinsverlassenheit*]." As Heidegger says in *Contributions*:

*Abandonment of being*: that beyng abandons beings, leaves beings to themselves and thus lets beings become objects of machination.<sup>180</sup>

Abandonment of being. What is abandoned by what? Beings by beyng, which belongs to them and them alone. Beings appear then *such that* they show themselves as objects and present-at-hand things, as if beyng did not essence. Beings are what is indifferent and obtrusive at the same time, in the same indecisiveness and haphazardness.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, § 52.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, § 55.

The abandonment of being is [...] the more original essential determination of what Nietzsche recognized for the first time as nihilism.<sup>182</sup>

This aspect of our answer to the question of the meaning of the historical epoch of post-modernity can be said to relate most closely to Lyotard's position in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, in which he defines “postmodern” as follows:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal.<sup>183</sup>

As the breaching or breaking-up of the horizon with respect to which philosophy once unified the ontologies of the various regions of beings, nihilism in the deeper sense of the abandonment of being gives rise to an “incredulity towards metanarratives” within the historical epoch of post-modernity.

### **c) Not Knowing**

The historical epoch of post-modernity arises as a result of the end of the defining movement of

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., § 57.

<sup>183</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv.

the Western tradition, namely philosophy. As the completion of metaphysics and the development of independent sciences, the end of philosophy marks neither a continuation nor full stoppage of the Western tradition, but rather a (temporary) suspension of its essencing. In this way, post-modernity is neither “caused” by the end of philosophy, nor does it replace or supplant the end of philosophy, but rather arises in and as the void left behind by it. The arrival of post-modernity, in other words, is not the result of activity, but rather *inactivity*. As in-between histories of the Western tradition, post-modernity is like a purgatorial state arising from the inertia of being.

This situation of post-modernity leaves those standing within it, i.e., those for whom philosophy/metaphysics is a historical tradition, perplexed as to where they are historically. This is because in post-modernity, as the void left behind by the end of philosophy, two opposing historical forces are simultaneously at work. On the one hand, the void of post-modernity is being filled by a limitless technological drive towards organizing the ever-increasing amount and availability of information about all that is. On the other hand, the void of post-modernity is being opened into a “space” of wonderment, of question-ability as such, through an attempt at re-thinking the history of philosophy more originally than metaphysics. The historical simultaneity of these opposing forces is why a peculiar fog engulfs any use of the term “post-modernity.” Not to understand what is meant by “post-modernity” belongs in some manner to its meaning because those standing within it find themselves pulled in two historical “directions” at once.

Whether this fog will be lifted and under what shape or form remains, however, undetermined. Thus, the conclusion of the present investigation is not so much a better understanding of the meaning of post-modernity as it is a better understanding of why we lack



such an understanding in the first place and in what sense this lack is necessary. We lack an understanding of the meaning of post-modernity because one has not yet been granted to us and this lack is necessary insofar as history and the happening of a historical tradition hold sway over us.

In the meantime, throughout the crossing, all that can be done is to think and prepare, to question and hope. “No one knows what the fate of thinking will be.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Heidegger, “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch,” 709.

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