

Heideggerian Existentialism:
Ereignis and the experience of *Eros*

By

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Abstract

This work examines Heidegger's understanding of Being and the implication it has for our sense of Reality. For Heidegger, Being is a mysterious phenomenon whose self-articulation in history—through human engagement—is what makes it intelligible. Here, there is an emphasis on the Appropriation of Being, which Heidegger refers to as *Ereignis*. This thesis examines Heidegger's understanding of Being as Appropriation. It argues that with such an understanding we are cut off, in a profound way, from an experiential dimension of human existence, which traditionally is referred to as *Eros*. As such, Heidegger's existentialism is distortive of our ability to experience Reality.

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Introduction

Heidegger's critique of modern philosophical thinking, and ultimately the modern way of life, is a powerful one to say the least. It provides us with a deep insight into the nature of modernity. However, with Heidegger we are given an account of Being that criticises modernity, and yet, at the same time, sees it as that which will allow for the opening of a new horizon of possibilities for the understanding of Being. Here, we are in the midst of historicism, of which existentialism is a profound expression. In *Being and Time* Heidegger sought the meaning of Being independent of human beings. But the inquiry into the essence of Being as such (*Sein*) led to an understanding of Being that is always in relation to, i.e. inseparable from, beings (*Seiendes*). In this relation, which is signified by the *thereness* in Being-there, lies the essence of truth, or more precisely the meaning of Being. This meaning is not to be sought in an objective or a subjective reality but rather in the way entities exist in the world. That is to say that ultimately, at least in *Being and Time*, Heidegger sought *how* beings exist in the world through which their relation to the essence that gives their existence meaning is established. As such, truth is an existential meaning that takes significance from Dasein's involvement *with* the world (amongst equipment and others), but equally so, it is a historical meaning because the world is not only an existential space, far less a physical one, but also a historical opening of a particular possibility of Being: a paradigm. Therefore, in his later works, while Heidegger turned towards Dasein's historicity, his emphasis gradually shifted back towards his original aim—to explicate Being without regard to beings.

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Here, Heidegger's understanding of Being is thoroughly modern. In so far as it sees Being as a historical possibility it speaks from the very core of modernity—from the inability to recognise a dimension of human experience that transcends historical 'awareness'. Hence, the necessity to confine all experiences to the realm of a historical *happening*. Consequently, modernity, for Heidegger, far from being a derailment of Western experiential life, becomes tied to the Destiny of Being as it unfolds through human engagement (Dasein), and, as such, manifests itself—not in the sense of actualisation but in a tacit way: in the form of distinct possibilities for Dasein in various epochs.

By the destiny of Being, however, Heidegger does not mean a deterministic unfolding of Being in history. Destiny is to be understood in the sense of an end—of something reaching its final destination—of a preconception of Being that shapes the history of a particular people; in the case of the West, Modernity is taken as the end of Western metaphysics. As such, it entails a dire consequence for human beings as much as it carries the potential for openness to Being—for potentiality could lead to its opposites, a closing off of possibilities. For Heidegger, as it stands, this end poses a danger to human potentiality, for it has codified the understanding of Being into a single possibility that has culminated in modern technological thinking and its mastery over nature. Hence, his emphasis on reinvigorating the Western spirit in order for the question of Being to be posed anew. For this, Heidegger links Modern thinking and its understanding of Being to Classical philosophy, namely the philosophy of Plato. Being in Plato is grasped through the *idea* of a thing, distinct from its appearance. This

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understanding, according to Heidegger, posits fixity in the essence of things, and therewith, a Reality from which everything stems is erected. Such a formulation became the guiding ground for all the subsequent philosophies. As a result, the question of Being is skipped over all together, because the emphasis fell on the *whatness* rather than on the *how* of Being. In other words, theoretical knowledge emerged as the authoritative ontology, and through its subject-object presupposition the essence of Being is grasped in terms of an abstract universal construct. In so doing, Being, as originally experienced, is shrouded and rendered meaningless. For Heidegger, as long as we view knowledge of Being in this manner, i.e. through the relation of a subject contemplating the nature of an object, we miss not only the mystery of Being but also the *uncanniness* with which Being manifests itself through us. Thus, to overcome modernity and its nihilism (the closing off of Being) demands the undoing of the entire tradition of Western metaphysics. This Heidegger aims to achieve by returning metaphysics back to its pre-philosophic truth, to the originary inception of Being that first took place in the poetic thinking of the early Greeks.

It is my contention that Heidegger's existential language is a profound expression of a modern spirit. For, while it presents itself as a strange way of doing philosophy which goes against our established tradition of logic, in a peculiar way it is perhaps the most familiar to us, for it expresses something that lies closely connected to our modern way of life. As I have mentioned above, Heidegger's language speaks from the very modern desire that associates all human experiences, especially the transcendent good, to the realm of history. Here, the question of Being becomes intertwined with the question

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of freedom. Platonic *Eros*, which provided us with an account of our longing for the just, the beautiful and the good, is no longer attainable as the fundamental experience of human existence. In fact, the only fundamental experience, for Heidegger, is the one that takes place in a “fundamental happening” in history (*Ereignis*). My hypothesis is that, owing to this, Heidegger’s language clarifies for us the nature of modernity, but most important, this clarification comes at the cost of our losing the ability to experience Reality, traditionally understood.

Before we proceed, I would like to say that my aim in this work is not to reject Heidegger and reaffirm the Platonic good, but rather it is to show that there is a close affinity between our modern way of experiencing reality and the influence of German idealism. Contrary to Heidegger, I believe that our ontology is not the direct heir of classical thinking, but rather it is the result of a break with it. Beyond the obvious differences in approaches and concerns between modern philosophy—be it rationalism or romanticism—and German idealism, one thing remains consistently the same in both, and that is the preoccupation with the state of man as he finds himself in a world devoid of meaning. In the face of such a condition, freedom surfaces as man’s highest good. Unlike, the Platonic good, freedom is an immanent good; it lies within man’s reach, and thereby, it is potentially achievable through man’s action.

When viewed politically, which is often the case, man could limit his freedom for the sake of the political order, as in the case of Machiavelli and Hobbes, or he could maximise it against the political order, as in the case of modern subjectivism. In both instances, the old tension between philosophy and the city is rearticulated, not from the

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point of truth (the good) and politics, but rather through freedom and politics (or more precisely, political stability). Hence, the emphasis falls on the polemic nature of the tension, rather than on the harmonious relation which it sustains between two antagonistic poles (philosophy and politics).

Heidegger, on the other hand, saw a connection between truth and freedom. In fact, as we will see, Heidegger's understanding of truth, or the meaning of Being, as *presencing* blurs the distinction between the two. In that respect, the concept of freedom in Heidegger is radically different from the modern conception. Freedom, be it negative or positive, is a metaphysical conception. That is, the actualization of freedom requires either a subject who seeks an object, or the release from it. In other words, it is linked to an idealistic notion of truth, one that is characterised as a guiding fixity. As such, it remains confined within the language of subject-object, and therefore, is incompatible with Heidegger's understanding of truth as grounding, which is a dynamically established historical paradigm. Freedom for Heidegger is freedom of *thought* as such. Here, we are no longer speaking of the freedom of the individual nor the collective, either *from* or *towards* an object, but rather freedom of man's essence, which is determined by the openness of the open region of Being. Here, while Heideggerian freedom is radically different, it seems to originate from the modern desire to liberate man from fundamental determinations. With Heidegger, not only is human essence dislodged from its metaphysical ground, but Being itself is set prior to these determinations.

That being said, there is no doubt that Heidegger's fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* is unique, not to mention, that of his later work on *Ereignis*. But, ironically,

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that uniqueness stems from the very ground that drives modern thinking which exalts freedom as the highest good. The consequence, though not so obvious when dealing with German idealism, and particularly with Heidegger, we are disconnected in a more profound way from any understanding of ourselves in relation to a history which revealed to us the experience of the transcendent. Even direr, such an experience itself becomes unintelligible to us.

Concerning the approach I will take on Heidegger's writings, my aim is to understand him on his own terms. This demands close attention to Heidegger's own words, and equally important, the suspension of one's own prejudice. Of course, neutral reading is impossible—one always arrives at a given text with some prejudice. After all, what is education if not the appropriation of the material one learns? In saying that, I would like to situate my own prejudice within the Platonic tradition which holds that there is a harmony between reason and our experiential life.

Literature Review

The main texts that I will be focussing on are *Being and Time*, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, "The Origin of the Work of Art", "On the Essence of Truth" and "Time and Being". These texts were chosen specifically because they reflect, though in no complete way, the development in Heidegger's thought concerning the question of Being. They should suffice to give us a clearer picture of his existentialism.

As far as the secondary sources go, I will confine my analysis to the works of a few authors whom I believe are important to the subject matter at hand—their assessment

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of Heidegger's historicism relates directly to the aim this thesis undertakes to understand the connection between Heidegger's Being and our experiential life. These are Leo Strauss, Michael Gelven, Hubert Dreyfus, Richard Polt, and Eric Voegelin.

Before providing an overview of their analyses, I feel that I should say something about Sartre's interpretation of Heidegger. While his assertion that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 1975), in my opinion, is not completely wrong, it is a derivative existential premise that reflects only one dimension of Heidegger's thought. As such, it is a distorted take on Heideggerian existentialism, especially when it is used to explain Heidegger's entire corpus. Moreover, the assertion, taken by itself, leads to the kind of individualistic existentialism that Heidegger himself rebuked in *Being and Time*. For Heidegger, existentialism is a way of being that is always tied to others.

Leo Strauss's criticism that Heidegger espouses nihilism attributes this Sartrean premise to Heidegger. He says:

[G]enerally stated, . . . the principles, the so-called categorical system or essences, are rooted ultimately in the particulars, in something which exists. Existence precedes essence. For what else do people mean when they say, e.g., that the Stoic natural law teaching is rooted in or relative to the decay of the Greek polis and the emergence of the Greek empire?" (Strauss 1989, 35)

What Strauss aimed to point out is the intimate connection Existentialism has with relativism. While Existentialism warns us from the danger of relativism, it, nonetheless, affirms its truth. (Strauss 1989, 36) By appealing to the experience of anxiety, the

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“fundamental uneasiness” which is experienced in the face of the abyss of existence (nothingness), existentialism seems to root all meanings in meaninglessness. As such, it places the emphasis on existence, or more precisely, on man’s choice to exist authentically. In other words, “All truth, all meaning, is seen in the last analysis [through the experience of anxiety] to have no support except [in] man’s freedom.” (Strauss 1989, 36) Essentially, existentialism is a form of historicism, but what is peculiar about it is that it “claims to be the understanding of historicity of man, and yet it does not reflect about its own historicity, about belonging to a specific situation of Western man.” (Strauss 1989, 39)

In this connection, Hubert Dreyfus, for the sake of simplifying, describes the ontological truth revealed through the arts as “style.” The style is “the truth of Being of a particular culture of a specific epoch” which manifests itself in terms of Dasein’s world. (Dreyfus 2005, 407) He then adds that style is to be understood in terms of a paradigm, in the kuhnian sense. Drawing on Taylor’s, Geertz’s and Kuhn’s arguments he says that a style is “a cultural paradigm [that] collects the scattered practices of a group, unifies them into coherent possibilities for action, and holds the resulting style up to the people concerned, who then act and relate to each other in terms of it.” (Dreyfus 2005, 410) In this respect, existentialism is fundamentally historicism.

Against Strauss’s interpretation (and others), Michael Gelven argues that Heidegger’s historicism cannot be tied to relativism. That is, Heidegger’s thought does not espouse nihilism, nor does it lead to it. (Gelven 1989, 13) According to Gelven, “followers of Leo Strauss have read a kind of historicism into Heidegger’s thought.”

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(Gelven 1989, 211) Historicism, says Gelven, “has come to mean that each epoch or period has certain presuppositions that are fundamental to that period only; therefore no real communication between periods is possible.” (Gelven 1989, 210) This kind of historicism when attributed to Heidegger imputes to his philosophy a fundamentally nihilistic understanding of truth. For Gelven, “nothing could be further from Heidegger’s understanding” (Gelven 1989, 211) The key to clarifying this confusion lies in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology in *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger sought to explicate an ontological structure that underlies Dasein’s existence regardless of its epoch. That is to say, “there can only be one world, and that is the world in which Dasein already finds itself.” (Gelven 1989, 212) This suggests that meaning, while perhaps differs in various periods, nonetheless, is accessible to Dasein (regardless of its epoch) because it is shared through *a* world that gives it significance. The past is a part of Dasein as much as its present.

My issue with Gelven’s interpretation is that, in the hope of redeeming Heidegger, it, too, focuses on a particular understanding of historicism that is prevalent in Heidegger’s earlier writings. Heidegger’s historicism, however, while it encompasses the traditional and the existential understanding of the term (i.e. Strauss’s and Gelven’s), it seems to contain an ambiguous characteristic in his later writings. Key, here, is his thoughts on *Ereignis*. Richard Polt argues that *Ereignis* (Appropriation) has manifested in different meanings throughout the various stages in Heidegger’s thought. (Polt 2005, 375–6) Without going into details (for I will explore *Ereignis* at length in Chapter 3) Heidegger’s historicism, and his philosophy as whole, is linked to the realisation that

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Being is not an abstract thing, but rather it is an elusive outcome of the Appropriation of Being.

Eric Voegelin, in “The Eclipse of Reality”, characterises Heidegger’s philosophy as an inquiry into the deformed existence of modern man. (Voegelin 1970, 190) Modern man, he argues, eclipsed the experience of Reality by an act of imagination, whereby he shrank his humanity to a deformed self—“a Self, an Ego, an I, . . . a Transcendental Subject, a Transcendental Consciousness, and so forth.” (Voegelin 1970, 185) In other words, humanity, through which we gain access to the Real, is obscured by an imaginary construct. Insofar as Heidegger’s philosophy concerns itself with existence, it is a part of a late-comer existential movement that reacted against the construct of the early philosophers of history (i.e. Kant, Hegel, Comte, and Marx). (Voegelin 1970, 190) The point in Voegelin is that Reality is no longer recognisable because we lack the broader understanding of humanity, i.e. of our Being, that connects us to it.

While I draw on the arguments of all these authors throughout this work, my own position that I am advancing lies somewhere in between Strauss’ and Voegelin’s. Perhaps it is more akin to the latter. What I aim to do is to draw out the subtleties in Heidegger’s understanding of Being as Appropriation (*Ereignis*) which would have the implication of disconnecting us from an experiential dimension of human existence that has traditionally been the focal point of experiencing Reality. Expressed in Platonic language, *Eros* as the fundamental experience of human existence becomes meaningless because the experience of the divine, the good, is dislodged from its grounds.

Chapters Outline

Chapter 1 is divided into two parts. By way of an analysis the first section will show that Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, resurrects an existential kind of knowing that is rooted in existence, i.e. in Dasein's primordiality, which is gained through Dasein's engagement with equipment and others. Another way of expressing this primordial existence is to say that Dasein gains 'awareness' of its existence through its *familiarity* with the world. Here, Heidegger seems to emphasise the importance of sense perception over Reason. In section 2, I will contrast this existential knowing with the Platonic knowing. My argument is that Platonic knowing is grounded in the distinction between Being and becoming. At the heart of this division is the body-soul metaphor that reflects the experiential and spiritual dimensions of human existence. *Eros* as the force that drives our longing towards the good acts as the connecting thread, so to speak, that binds these two dimensions. The aim of this chapter is twofold: 1) to provide an account of Heidegger's fundamental ontology that will aid us in understanding his later historicism; 2) to lay out from the onset the position this thesis takes on Heidegger's understanding of Being.

Chapter 2 will explore Heidegger's understanding of art as *founding*. What seems to be a direct reversal of Platonic knowing is rather a more complicated attempt to overcome the entire history of Western philosophical thinking, which, for Heidegger, has roots in metaphysics. In going deeper into Heidegger's notion of art as a revelatory medium, I aim to clarify the nature of such a reversal; it is not a simple reversal of dialectic truth and creation (as is the case in Nietzsche) but rather a more complex shift in

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the nature of philosophy itself that perhaps blurs the line between philosophic *theoria* and *poiesis*. Through art a people's way of life, which is to say their relation to Being, is grounded in a paradigmatic truth that unfolds historically. It is a return to a pre-Socratic understanding of Being as *phusis*.

Chapter 3 contains the core of the argument of this thesis. In the first section I will examine the historicity of Heidegger's existentialism through the phenomenon of *presencing*. It is through *presencing* that the meaning of Being takes form, i.e. appears. This meaning, understood originally, comes to be as a result of a poetic articulation. In other words, *presencing* is a temporal phenomenon that takes place in language. Here, Being is grounded in a "fundamental happening," *Ereignis*. Section 2 will be devoted to Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* and how it relates to *presencing*, language and the question of freedom.

Chapter 4 is the concluding chapter, in which I draw out some of the implications of the various Heideggerian elements discussed throughout this paper, and provide some final thoughts on the subject matter.

Chapter 1: Existential 'Knowing' in Being and Time

What is that which always is and has no becoming, and what is that which becomes but never is? The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account. It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense perception. It comes to be and passes away, but never really is. (Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a)

The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence. (Heidegger 2008a, 42)

What we have, here, are two accounts of Being that are at least 2,500 years apart. The Platonic understanding of Being, according to Heidegger, has hitherto been constitutive of our understanding of human existence. It has established a static view of Being upon which our sciences found their ground. But this ground takes the concept of Being as something “universal”, “indefinable” and “self-evident”, says Heidegger. (Heidegger 2008a, 2–4) Here, the question of the meaning of Being becomes superfluous, and thus, it is reformulated in terms of “knowing the world” (in the sense of a detached cognitive experience) and not existence. What I intend to do in this chapter is to explore Heidegger’s concept of *Being-in-the-world*; for I believe that: 1) through ‘grounding’ Being in existence, the experience of *everydayness*, Heidegger recovers an existential way of ‘knowing’. Consequently, he reverses the order of reason and ‘sense perception’, whereby the deepest understanding of Being is to be found not in reason (*ontic*) but in the primordial existential relationship we have *with* the world (*pre-ontological*), which

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depends on being-with-others; 2) This reversal is a reaction to the modern emphasis on 'reason'—on a rational account of Being that elevates theoretical knowledge over the passions and sense experience—while, at the same time, it marks a break with the Platonic understanding of Being in terms of an experience between *permanence* (*Forms*) and *change* (the world of appearance).¹

Given the focus of this chapter—on Heidegger's primordial knowing—I will confine my analysis to the relevant parts in "Division One" of *Being and Time*, which, I believe, contain the foundation of Heidegger's existential account of Being. This existential account, as will be shown in the subsequent chapters, acts as the fundamental route through which Heidegger turns to the question of Dasein's historicity. It shall serve for us as the basis upon which Heidegger's later concepts are explained and buttressed. Concerning this chapter, however, I will begin by exploring Heidegger's concept of *Being-in-the-world*, and how Heidegger presents us with an existential kind of 'knowing' of Being. From there, I will then address the second part of the argument, which is that this existential 'knowing' is a reaction to modern rationalism and also a fundamental break with the Platonic understanding of existence.

¹ It is important to note, here, that the nature of this reversal is quite peculiar and not straight forward. By prioritising existence over reason, the early Heidegger focused on retrieving the meaning of Being from Dasein's everyday existence, i.e. from its world. In his later works, however, the aim shifts towards the historical dimension of Dasein—that which makes possible any meaning to take place within the context Dasein finds itself. Owing to this, what at first glance seems as a mere reversal is revealed to be an overcoming of the entire tradition of Western thought. I will address this shift in chapter 2 in more detail.

§1 The Basic Condition of Dasein's Existence—Pure Possibility

Before we delve into Heidegger's concept of *Being-in-the-world*, it would be helpful to recall the basic condition of Dasein, namely the condition of pure possibility. Key, here, are the two characteristics of Dasein, *existence* and *mineness*.

In the introduction of *Being and Time* Heidegger provides us with a preliminary 'definition' of Dasein. He says: "Dasein is an entity that which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it." (Heidegger 2008a, 12) This, Heidegger tells us, means that Dasein has a relation with itself through which it understands its being. This relation, though explicitly expressed (i.e. ontically distinguished), is grounded in a pre-ontological understanding. He then adds that "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up with them." (Heidegger 2008a, 12) Here, Heidegger introduces us to the kind of existential 'knowing'—the pre-ontological existence—that he aims to recover. Dasein, our Being, is distinguished from other Beings in that its Being is an issue for it. It is an issue for it in the sense that it takes a stance on existence through confronting and choosing its possibilities. This type of relation Dasein has with itself (towards its possibilities) is formed through an existential understanding of itself. It is not the case that Dasein understand itself through thinking its existence, its factual potentiality (although this is a possibility for Dasein), but rather through assuming and becoming its possibilities.

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Thus, by *understanding* Heidegger means an existential activity through which Dasein takes a stance on life, a stance towards its possibilities. This understanding is rooted in the way Dasein dwells in the world—in *dealing* with entities within the world (equipment) and encountering others. In this way of existence, which Heidegger calls the *everydayness*, “Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up with them.” What all this amounts to is that “Dasein always understand itself in terms of existence.” (Heidegger 2008a, 12)

Thereafter, in section 9, Heidegger explains that such an analysis of Being points to the two characteristics of Dasein: 1) existence; 2) Dasein is in each case its own. (Heidegger 2008a, 42)

Heidegger tell us that “the ‘essence’ of this entity [Dasein] lies in its ‘to be’.” He clarifies what he means by essence. By ‘essence’ (*essentia*) he does not mean the traditional term *existentia*, which in traditional ontology “is tantamount to *Being-present-at-hand*”. For Heidegger, Dasein has no essence in the sense of a *whatness*, but rather, its essence is to be determined in its “to be”, which is existence. Another way of phrasing this character of Dasein is to follow Sartre in saying “existence precedes essence.” (Sartre 1975) This means human beings have no fixed essence; they exist first and acquire their essence through living—through choosing and becoming the possibilities that lay ahead of them (possibilities that are either their own or not their own).

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That being said, however, a note of caution serves us well here. What we mean by the condition of pure possibility must not be confused with utter nothingness. Insofar as we lack a vantage point by which we can claim the existence of a permanent ground of Being, we exist in the condition of pure possibility. But this state of total lack of standards to judge the essence of Being is always limited by what is already given to man in the form of a world of meaning. The important thing to note here is that what is given in the world is given to Dasein in the form of temporal phenomena, and as such, it is subject to change from one epoch to another. So, Sartre was not completely off the mark when he, claiming to follow Heidegger, said that “existence precedes essence.” The problem with Sartre, however, is that he tied this understanding of essence with individual freedom. As he says: “For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism—man is free, man *is* freedom.” (Sartre 1975) He, therefore, according to Heidegger, remained within the tradition of metaphysics that Heidegger aimed to overcome. We will return to this point in chapter 2. For the purposes of this chapter, let it suffice to say that the condition of pure possibility is the condition that man finds himself in in the absence of a fixed ground of Being. It is not to be taken as a premise for espousing individual or collective freedom from restraints.

Thus, our possibilities, which are given to us in the world, are what determine us. This is what is meant by the phrase “the essence of Dasein lies in its existence.” (Heidegger 2008a, 42) This interpretation of human existence, therefore, brings into question the notion of human nature and its connection to metaphysics. To say that

Dasein's essence is to be determined in its "to be", existence, is to say that Dasein is an entity that exists in the condition of pure possibility—i.e. Being-towards possibilities and actuality. Here, the fundamental break with the Platonic tradition takes place and a reversal occurs. As Michael Gelven puts it, Heidegger "simply, but profoundly, turned the entire metaphysics approach upside down. We do not first ask what a man is and then wonder what it means; rather we begin by asking what it means to be a man, and then can decide what man is." (Gelven 1989, 11)

The condition of pure possibilities is the premise upon which Heidegger lays bare the whole phenomenon of Being. Traditionally, human essence is always interpreted in terms of its connection to the divine. In that respect, ontology and metaphysics were inseparable. When Plato reaffirmed the distinction between *Being* and *becoming* it is precisely this connection that he had in mind to establish. With Heidegger, however, *becoming* does not find meaning in what is beyond its experience (*Being*), but rather, it itself is the meaning. That being said, we must be careful with using Platonic terminologies when speaking about Heidegger, for he is not merely reversing the order of the distinction between *Being* and *becoming*, but rather, by grounding Being in the primordality of existence, he is going underneath the Platonic distinction altogether.

Thus, if there is no human essence, but only the condition of pure possibility, the inquiry into existence is not one of contemplating Dasein's connection to an essence that lies outside of it, but rather comes from it and is determined by it (as long as Dasein is understood existentially as an entity with its basic structure of *Being-in-the-world*: it belongs to a world). The question of Being, then, becomes an inquiry into the

possibilities that give rise to something like the self, or more precisely the modern Self; hence, the second characteristic of Dasein, *mineness*.

Heidegger says: "that Being [Dasein] which is an issue for this entity in its very Being, is in each case mine." (Heidegger 2008a, 42) Moreover, he says that "Dasein is never to be taken ontologically as an instance or special case of some genus or entities as things that are present-at-hand." (Heidegger 2008a, 42) Dasein, then, is not a universal concept of Being that encompasses all things Being, such as the Platonic Being. Heidegger is not interested in founding another metaphysical or ontological interpretation of Being. Instead, he says that "one must always use a *personal* pronoun when one addresses it: 'I am', 'you are'." This, I believe, refers back to the first characteristic of Dasein, existence. In more than one sense, for Heidegger existence is intrinsically 'personal', especially in *dealing* with the *readiness-to-hand* of equipment, and therefore, it must be grasped as such. That being said, one must be careful not to take this to mean that Dasein denotes a subjective or a solipsistic meaning. In fact, as we shall see, Dasein in its state of *Being-with-others* is not personal at all, but rather, *falls* back on the collective *they-self*. The point here is that Dasein is the Being that every person could call his own, yet what one calls his own (*authentic* existence) is in most cases is not really his own (*inauthentic* existence). That is so because Dasein for the most part exists *inauthentically*, i.e. it exists not towards its own possibilities. In short, Dasein is not to be confused with the modern Self, for Dasein always belongs to a world.

With this preliminary sketch of Dasein's Being as an inquiry into the Self (*mineness*) that aims to ground it in existence we can proceed to explore its basic structure, which is *Being-in-the-world*.

§2 Being-in-the-world and Primordial Existence

In sections 14-16 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger deconstructs the modern Self, the abstracted subject that sees itself as an entity detached from the world. It seems that he aims to return it to a *cosmocentric* interpretation that predates Plato, an interpretation that sees the 'self' as an indistinguishable part of the whole, and existence as a fluid and spontaneous phenomenon. But that is not all. The novelty of Heidegger lies in grounding the phenomenon of Being in Dasein's primordial existence in the world; hence, the state of *Being-in-the-world*. In so doing, he, as we have said, turns the order of Platonic knowing on its head—it is 'sense perception', not reason, that make up our deepest understanding of Being.

The expression *Being-in-the-world* stands for a "unitary phenomenon", says Heidegger, and thus, it must be taken as a whole. (Heidegger 2008a, 53) Nevertheless, its structure consists of three constitutive elements that can be analysed but not separated: 1) the '*in-the-world*' which denotes the idea of *worldhood*; 2) the "who" of that entity in the state of *Being-in-the-world*, which relates to "the mode of Dasein's average everydayness" (*they-self*); 3) "*Being-in* as such", which is "the ontological structure of *inhood*." (Heidegger 2008a, 53)

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I will go through these elements systematically, while focusing on the relevant parts pertaining to our subject matter, which is Heidegger's existential knowing.

Before this, however, we should explain what Heidegger means by being-in. Here, he draws our attention to the primordial spatiality of Dasein. Being-in is derived from "*innan*". (Heidegger 2008a, 54) Broken into two components, *inn* means "to reside" or "to dwell", while *an* means "to be familiar with" or "to be accustomed to". Thus, being-in roughly means to dwell or to reside in an environment with which one is familiar. This primordial being-in he calls "Being alongside", which means that Dasein in its *Being-in-the-world* is always amidst the world, and can never understand itself from outside of it. He says that "'Being alongside' the world in the sense of being absorbed in the world . . . is an *existentiale* founded upon Being-in." (Heidegger 2008a, 54) The idea, here, is to point to "the primordial structure of Dasein's Being" which is the world, in which it is already *thrown* into, and through which it gains and develops its own understanding of itself.

Dasein relation to the world, then, is not to be conceived in terms of a corporeal spatiality, which is how traditional ontology grasps the phenomenon of being-in, but rather in terms of an existential structure, a 'space' that Heidegger calls *Worldhood* of the world.

§2.1 *Worldhood* and Equipment

In existing in the world we *deal* with the entities which Heidegger calls equipment. Equipment can be thought of as the tools we use in our everyday lives in the world.² We have a kind of familiarity with equipment that we cannot get by merely observing it; this familiarity is gained through a special 'sight' Heidegger calls *circumspection*. (Heidegger 2008a, 69) He says that "this kind of *dealing* ... [with equipment] is closest to us as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of 'knowledge'." (Heidegger 2008a, 67)

The Being of equipment Heidegger calls the *ready-to-hand* as opposed to the *present-to-hand*. (Heidegger 2008a, 69) *Circumspection* is a kind of 'sight' through which we gain 'knowledge' of the *ready-to-hand* of equipment. This 'Knowledge' could only be gained through 'practical' behaviour. That is to say that in order to know the *ready-to-hand* of equipment one must have a primordial relationship with it. Unlike the *present-to-hand*, which is the *ontic* understanding of entities in the world, the *ready-to-hand* of equipment, such as a hammer, can be known only if we pick the hammer up and start using it. No matter how hard we stare at the hammer and try to categorise its properties and functions, we remain blind to its *readiness-to-hand*. (Heidegger 2008a, 360–1)

² Tools, in the ordinary sense of aid devices, are not the only type of equipment we *deal* with in the world. For Heidegger a chair, a room or a building is also a piece of equipment. The metaphor of equipment stands for entities that we *dwell* "alongside" in the world by comporting ourselves towards them. In that sense, we use a room just as much, i.e. in the same manner, as we use a hammer.

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The primordial relationship we have with the *Being-ready-to-hand* of equipment makes up our understanding of the world, which is bound up with *referential totality* of equipment. It is a pre-ontological understanding of the world that precedes any ontic theorising. (Heidegger 2008a, 86) In *dealing* with equipment in such a way we are absorbed in the world. What we call 'understanding' or 'knowledge' of existence comes from this sort of practical engagement with entities in the world, which is prior to any cognitive awareness.

In this way of Being, i.e. primordially, the world is always familiar to us. For Heidegger, the familiarity of the world gained through *circumspection* forms our deepest understanding of Being. He says:

That *wherein* Dasein already understands itself in this way is always something which it is primordially familiar. This familiarity with the world does not necessarily require that the relations which are constitutive for the world as world should be theoretically transparent. However, the possibility of giving these relations an explicit ontological-existential interpretation, is grounded in this familiarity with the world; and this familiarity, in turn is constitutive for Dasein, and goes to make up Dasein's understanding of Being. (Heidegger 2008a, 86)

Moreover, the world becomes intelligible, that is, it becomes "theoretically transparent" (an object of cognition) only when something goes wrong—when it becomes unfamiliar. This happens when a piece of equipment breaks down and its *ready-to-hand* becomes *unready-to-hand*, and thereby, potentially it turns into a *present-*

at-hand—it becomes unusable, and as such, it stand in the way of our *concerns*. There are three ways in which this can occur: when the *assignment* of equipment is disturbed by *conspicuousness*, *obtrusiveness* or *obstinacy*. (Heidegger 2008a, 73–4) In these modes of disturbance something is announced, and that is the world itself. When theorising, we take hold of this intelligibility (of the world) by conceptualising it. Eventually, however, we lose sight of the constitutive primordially of this intelligibility, and consequently, assert it as an *a priori* knowledge.

To sum up, by emphasising the primordially of existence as the source of our knowledge, Heidegger seems to reverse Platonic knowing. Knowledge for Heidegger is grounded in the 'sense perception' one gains from existence. But 'sense perception' for Heidegger is neither blind nor relates to consciousness (the mind). Rather it has its own kind of awareness, which is *circumspection*. We understand Being by having a primordial relation with the world, in which *circumspective* awareness comes before reason. This *awareness* when it is appropriated makes up the *worldhood* of the world, in which even the encounter with others is rooted.

§2.2 The "Who", the they-self, and Being-in As Such

Circumspective knowing, however, is not the only primordial understanding Dasein has of itself. In *Being-in-the-world* we dwell not only alongside equipment but also alongside Others. The Others, we are told, are not entities who are thought of as objects we encounter in the world. They are "encountered' in a ready-to-hand [manner], [through] the environmental context of equipment." (Heidegger 2008a, 118) As such, he

says: By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too." (Heidegger 2008a, 118)

This way of being alongside Others, or Being-with Others, is the cultural aspect of Dasein existence. Heidegger calls this dimension *Publicness*. (Heidegger 2008a, 127) From Being-with Others we acquire a 'Public' understanding of ourselves, which is constituted by the *they*—by its "*distantiality, averageness and a 'levelling down' of all possibilities of Being*" (Heidegger 2008a, 127) Although, such understanding is historical and cultural, we appropriate it in a very primordial way. (Heidegger 2008a, 118) Heidegger says that the "Others are encountered *environmentally*" (Heidegger 2008a, 119), namely, through our day-to-day *concerns* in *dealing* with the *ready-to-hand* of equipment. The Others, then, are always *there* with us in a very familiar way (*distantiality*). We are absorbed in this familiarity of the Others in a way that the *they* of Others is indistinguishable from the "I" of the self (*averageness*). This has the consequence of "levelling down" all possibilities of Dasein's existence to a common public possibility that we identify ourselves with, and that is the *they-self*.

To give an example of *public* understanding, a child comes to know the world through having a direct experience with things, i.e. through the environment of the *ready-to-hand* of equipment. By using his sense perception he familiarises himself with the world. Yet, this familiarity is conditioned by the cultural context within which he lives. This cultural context is constituted by the Others—the social rules and norms that tell him how to behave and act in a certain situation. As such, it gives him an understanding of

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himself as a self which he calls his own, but in actuality it is not his own; it is the *they-self*.

The two forms of understanding we called *circumspective* and *public*, which make up the existential knowing of Being, are alluded to in the concept of *falling* (*verfallen*). *Falling* is the mode of Being of Dasein when it is *absorbed* in the world, which “signif[ies] that Dasein is proximally and for the most part *alongside* the world of its concerns.” (Heidegger 2008a, 176) Dasein is *alongside* the world, i.e. absorbed in it, in two ways: in the environment of the *ready-to-hand* of equipment and in Being-with Others. (Heidegger 2008a, 181) In falling, Dasein exists *inauthentically*; it *flees* in the face of its own possibilities (its authentic mode of Being) and takes refuge in the familiarity of the world (in the *ready-to-hand* of equipment and Others). (Heidegger 2008a, 189) This, however, does not mean that *falling* is a negative mode of Being for Dasein, for “authentic Being-one’s-Self . . . is rather an *existentiell* modification of the ‘they’.” (Heidegger 2008a, 130) In Being-in the world Dasein is always *falling*. (Heidegger 2008a, 181) Therefore, Dasein exists for the most part *inauthentically*, and as such, it understands itself through this modality. In other words, the familiarity of the world in which Dasein has *fallen* constitutes Dasein understanding of its existence. This is the existential ‘awareness’, *circumspective* and *public*, that makes up our understanding of Being.

§3 The Concept of Being and Traditional Ontology and Metaphysics

In this section I will address the latter part of my argument, which is that Heidegger's fundamental ontology marks a stark break with the Platonic tradition.

In the Platonic understanding, human existence is articulated through the distinction between *Being*, "that which always is and has no becoming", and *becoming*, "that which becomes but never is". Here, we get the *idea* of permanence and the phenomenon of change. The universe (and everything in it) has a body, and thus, it is tangible and visible. As such, it is perceptible to sense experience, which makes its existence belong to *becoming*—it is never fixed, but rather undergoes flux. (*Timaeus*, 28a-c) The essence of things *becoming* lies not in their causality but rather in the *idea* (*form*) they imitate or conform to. The *idea* which is fixed, permanent and invisible can be grasped v by reason, as opposed to sense experience. *Ideas* belong to *Being*. (*Timaeus*, 29a-b)

With this account we have a separation between the two realms of *Being* and *becoming* that have the characteristics of being invisible and visible respectively. In addition, we have a distinction between the two forms of knowing by which we gain insights into these two realms: understanding and true opinion, i.e. reason and sense perception. Based on this formulation, these two types of knowledge are not only separate but also seem to be contradictory with respect to one another. What I would like to do in the following is to show that, contrary to what it this division may seem to imply,

there is a deep connection between these two forms of knowledge that must not be missed.

If we think of the distinction, between *Being* and *becoming*, in terms of the analogy of the "divided line" from the Republic (*Republic*, 509d-513e), the connection between reason and sense perception becomes clearer. Contemplation of *Being* would correspond to the realm of the intelligible (to *noéton*), while knowledge of becoming to the visible (to *horaton*). At its highest level the visible is made up of the world of *things*. Our knowledge of things comes from our *trust* (*pistis*) in their appearance. In the Platonic dialogues trust in appearance plays an important role at all levels of the divided line. It is the starting point for the inquiring into the higher knowledge of Being, which lies in the invisible (*forms*) and which is grasped by intellection (*noésis*). Without trust the inquiry into the nature of Being becomes problematic, for there is no ground from which one could intimate knowledge of higher things. Once the *form* of a thing has been 'clarified' in speech, however, it becomes the illuminating fixity by which the essence of becoming is revealed. It is important not to miss this connection between the fixity of *Being* and the flux of *becoming*, for in it reason and sense perception become inseparable for the Greeks.

Moreover, the connection between reason and sense perception can be seen in another crucial Platonic 'dichotomy'. At the heart of the distinction between *Being* and *becoming* lies the duality of the soul and body, in which both the soul and the body are inseparable and interconnected poles whose unity reflects the condition of human existence. In the Republic for example, Socrates describes the *psyché* as a multiplicity of

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forms that pertain to both the soul and the body: a multi-headed beast, a lion, and a human. (*Republic*, 588c-d) This tells us that there is no clear distinction between the soul and the body, but rather that they are intertwined through the passions, spiritedness and reason.

Through this duality, and its interconnection, the two 'dimensions' of human existence, the permanent (intelligible) and change (visible), were understood in terms of the two corresponding experiences of the "divine" and the "mortal". In the *Phaedo*, Socrates tells us that "the soul resembles the divine, and the body resembles the mortal." (*Phaedo*, 80a) Human existence, then, was understood in relation to these two experiences, and their connection to one another. Reason which belonged to the soul was interconnected to the sense experiences of the body, and both were part of a larger experience of Being, the whole. Thus, under this interpretation of Being, speculative metaphysics, led to the highest articulation of existence—the experience of the divine or the good—which was illuminated through reason and trust in sense perception; there was no contradiction between the two here.

In brief, for Plato, reason and sense perception articulated human life in terms of an existence between two worlds (*metaxy*), permanence and change, or Being and becoming. Through the soul-body duality the two worlds were distinguished, and, yet, at the same time, were interconnected. In that respect, Greek speculative metaphysics did not detach Man from the world but rather connected his world of *becoming* with the permanent existence of *Being*. Obviously, Heidegger would disagree with this.

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Christian Metaphysics bases its own understanding of human existence on this relationship between permanence and change. In which the permanent is perceived as the eternal, outside time, and change in terms of the temporal, in time. Here, human existence is seen as a yearning towards the eternal, the Transcendent. Of course, the difference between the Platonic and the Christian metaphysics is that the former is speculative while the latter is doctrinal and dogmatic. Nevertheless, here, too, the soul and body duality plays a part at the center of the understanding of Being.

In Modernity, however, with the rise of the scientific enquiries since Descartes, 'reason', or more precisely rationality, takes precedence over sense perception. Human existence becomes interpreted in accordance to the limits set by 'reason'. Here, the distinction between the body and the soul is radicalized, whereby, the soul and its reason is severed from the body. As such, the soul, which to the Greeks made no sense without the body, becomes an entity on its own; it becomes the Self.

It is rather the Self—the Self as the thinking subject and not man (man with a soul and a body)—that is at the center of human existence in modernity. Here, we can observe two movements occurring. First, the old interpretation of human existence between (*metaxy*) the experiences of permanence (*Being*) and change (*becoming*) becomes contradictory. Metaphysics, whether speculative or dogmatic, becomes unattainable, for it lies outside the scope of what the Self can know through its 'reason'—it becomes irrational. Second, in addition to the rejection of traditional metaphysics, sense experience loses its connection to any fixity, and therefore, it becomes unreliable for giving an accurate account of Being. With this movement, we get modern scepticism

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and its so-called ontological problem of Being—a problem that did not exist for the Greeks—which sees a contradiction between the *forms* and sense perception. Modern scepticism found its highest expression in the philosophy of Descartes, in the Cartesian *doubt*. The answer to the ontological problem as Descartes saw it is to posit 'fixity' in the Self. Thus, here, the fixity by which all things existent are gauged comes from the Self and its 'reason', i.e. logic.

With these two movements, modernity rejects traditional metaphysics and escapes the relativity of sense perception by falling back onto the Self; in doing so it created an 'imaginary' fixity perceivable only to the Self. It is imaginary in the sense that it is a thinkable fixity that is completely detached from the world. Here, we get the language of consciousness and its subject-object imposition.

One could interpret the modern tendency to reduce Being to a subjective experience as the 'metaphysics' of the self. Eric Voegelin in his essay entitled "The Eclipse of Reality" captured this phenomenon eloquently when he said:

By an act of imagination man can shrink himself [his humanity] to a self that is 'condemned to be free'. To this shrunken or contracted self, as we call it, God is dead, the past is dead, the present is the flight from the self's non-essential facticity toward being what it is not, the future is the field of possible among which the self must choose its project of being beyond mere facticity, and freedom is the necessity of making a choice that will determine the self's own

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being. The freedom of the contracted self is the self's damnation not to be able not to be free. (Voegelin 1970, 185)

Insofar as Heidegger's philosophy was a response to modern subjectivism, his philosophy is a reaction to the second movement we spoke of in the above. In the Cartesian tradition the essence of man is known through the thinking subject, the Self. This Self becomes the measure of all things Being in modernity, and, here, we see the subject-object relation by which the world is perceived and known. The thinking Self, which is an abstracted "I", contemplates the world as an object of its cognition. To such an ontology the question of the meaning of Being becomes superfluous. Instead, it becomes preoccupied with how the Self comes to know the world. Heidegger's inquiry into the question of Being shatters this notion of the thinking self, the "I", and returns it back to its context, the world. For Heidegger, whatever understanding we have of Being presupposes existence. That is to say that it takes for granted the primordial understanding of Being that is at the basis of all our theoretical accounts (Heidegger 2008a, 13), and therefore, the character of being remains hidden to it. As such, theoretical knowledge, says Heidegger, "remains blind and perverted from its own most aim." (Heidegger 2008a, 11) But Heidegger is not claiming that such an interpretation of Being, as knowing the world, is wrong; rather, he sees the necessity of grounding knowing as such in existence.

Against our effort thus far to establish a breaking point between the Greek and modern interpretation of Being, Heidegger's position sees the entire tradition of Western philosophy as a part of one continuous, albeit derailed, movement that started with Plato. According to Heidegger, traditional ontology and metaphysics all the way down to

Descartes—and which found their end in Husserl's "intentionality" of consciousness—took the Platonic two-world understanding of *Being* as the basis for their interpretation.³ (Heidegger 2008a, 22) That is to say that modern subject-object imposition is a perverse outgrowth of the Platonic soul-body duality.⁴ It is a search for a fixity outside of existence.

In this, I believe, Heidegger's existential philosophy marks a breaking point with the Platonic tradition. According to him, the Platonic metaphysical restriction on Being has plagued all subsequent philosophies. Therefore, he rejects the metaphysical understanding of the world based on *Being* and *becoming*. In that respect, his philosophy can be seen as an outgrowth of a modern sentiment for which metaphysics is unattainable, an outgrowth of the first movement. This can be seen in Dasein's condition of pure possibility, which is not specific to Heidegger; its origin could be traced back to the Romanticism of Rousseau, which, incidentally, saw itself as a rebellion against modern rationalism.

Moreover, the break with Plato can be seen in Heidegger's emphasis on existential knowing (sense perception) as the ground for our understanding of Being, which had a tremendous influence on subsequent philosophies. With Heidegger, philosophy moves away from contemplation towards an existential activity—from the realm of *ideas* to a way of *Being-in-the-world* (from which the 'essence' of Being is to be

³ In his later works Heidegger argues that this basis, the Platonic understanding, has roots in an even earlier understanding of Being, an inception that started in early Greek poetry.

⁴ Though Heidegger provides a strong argument for this in *Being and Time*, I believe that the "'metaphysics' and transcendental philosophy of modern times" (Heidegger 2008a, 22) mark a break with the traditional ontology of the Greek. This break, as I have argued reflects a change in the psychology of modern man that is alien to the Greeks. The subject-object division is a product of the modern self.

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'known'). In that respect, it is not the philosopher but rather the artist or the poet that holds the deepest understanding of Being—not Socrates but Homer, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Sophocles.

In Platonic thinking the two-world of the *ideas* and *appearances* are tied together through an experiential dimension to human nature. As we shall see in chapter 3, this dimension is what the Greeks called Eros. In *The Symposium*, the philosopher (the lover of wisdom) ascends Diotima's ladder to the highest truth of the soul through the recognition of his body. He begins with the immediate experience of *Eros*—from loving beautiful bodies, to souls, to conventions, all the way to the beautiful itself. Similarly, in the allegory of the divided line, philosophical contemplation starts with an inquiry into the world, in which trust in the world of things establishes sense perception as the point of departure for the higher knowledge attained through dialectics. In speech, so to speak, the immediate experience is clarified through reasoning, by which act it is connected to the spiritual side of existence. This, however, does not mean that underneath reason there is a fundamental experience that shapes it. The point is that there is a harmonious connection between reason and the experience—as seen through the connection between body and soul—that makes up our sense of Reality as a whole.

In conclusion, Heidegger's existential philosophy is a reversal of Platonic metaphysics and ontology. It provides us with an existential kind of 'knowing' that is grounded in sense perception rather than reason. This 'knowing' is constitutive of Dasein's understanding of its existence, and, thereby, of Being in general. It is gained through a primordial experience of the everydayness Dasein undergoes in *Being-in-the-*

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world, through *circumspection* and *publicness*. This reversal is a reaction to modern rationalism and its subject-object imposition. However, it still remains within the confinement of modernity in the sense that it adopts the condition of pure possibility as its premise. In so doing, Heidegger's recovery of an existential knowing of Being is a fundamental departure from Platonic metaphysics.

Chapter 2: The Overcoming of Metaphysics through Art

The origin of the work of art—that is, the origin of both the creators and preservers, which is to say of a people’s historical existence—is art. This is so because art is in its essence an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical. (Heidegger 2008b, 202)

By grounding the knowledge of Being in the pre-ontological *understanding* of the world, as opposed to the theoretical, we have said that Heidegger seems to reverse Platonic metaphysics. While this statement is generally true, it could be misleading. That is so because it implies that the old distinction between essence (*essentia*) and existence (*existentia*) is upheld by Heidegger, and that, ultimately, he is privileging one over the other. But that is far from the case. For Heidegger, such a formulation is not only inadequate but also symptomatic of the Platonic metaphysical language. The reversal has to do with the way Heidegger approaches the question of Being. By prioritising the question of “what is the meaning of Being” over “What is Being”, Heidegger develops a fundamental ontology that seeks an answer in Dasein’s existence—in its way of Being-in-the-world.

In this chapter, I will explore the nature of this reversal. I shall show that Heidegger’s understanding of Being is not a mere reversal of Western metaphysics, but rather it is an attempt to trace the tradition back to its roots in order to recover its original

ground—what he calls the truth of Being. This original ground is metaphorically expressed in terms of the struggle between the world and the earth. Here, the notion of art becomes central to Heidegger's thought. Art, of which poetry is the highest form, is the medium that brings this struggle into a state of *repose*, and thereby, unconceals truth for us. Through this understanding of art Heidegger is able to speak about the truth of Being without having to succumb to the abstract distinctions of metaphysics. In short, rather than merely reversing Platonic metaphysics, he overcomes it by bringing the founding of truth back to art.

§1 Reversal of Platonic Metaphysics

To clarify the nature of Heidegger's overcoming of Platonic metaphysics, I will start with Sartre's formulation of existentialism and contrast it with Heidegger's account. Thereafter, I will turn to the role art has in this overcoming.

As we have seen, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that "the 'essence' of Dasein lies in existence." Sartre derives the premise for his existential philosophy from this idea, but modifies it to mean "existence precedes essence." (Sartre 1975) What Sartre means by this is that man exists first and then he acquires his essence through living. As such, man's existence, which is to say his nature, is to be found in absolute freedom. Thus, man can make of his existence what he will without having to heed to any metaphysical boundaries. This is the basis of Sartre's "Humanism", a doctrine with which he intends to promote an 'authentic' mode of existence.

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In the “Letter on Humanism”, Heidegger firmly rejected this derivative formulation for the reason that it still operates within the language of Western metaphysics. This language is rooted in the distinction between existence and essence, i.e. *existentia* and *essentia*. This distinction, says Heidegger, is inadequate in addressing the question of Being. (Heidegger 2008b, 232–3) It is the remnant of a philosophical tradition that presumes that a fixed essence is the source of all beings. The aim of *Being and Time* was to go underneath this division, for it conceals rather than discloses the Being of Dasein. Though Sartre opposes the metaphysical tradition, nonetheless, he inadvertently reaffirms it by holding on to this division. Ultimately, what Sartre’s statement tells us is that becoming has priority over Being.⁵ For Heidegger, this is a reversal of the two-world metaphysics, inherited from Plato, and thus, “the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement.”⁶ (Heidegger 2008b, 232)

Dasein, for Heidegger, is always *in* the world, which is to say that it always has a pre-understanding of itself that is informed by the context within which it exists. Thus, there is always a pre-given set of possibilities that shape and condition its own present possibilities. As such, the existence of Dasein must always be viewed in terms of its relation to the world. The crux of this relation, that which binds Dasein to the world, is the fact that Dasein always copes with equipment and encounters others. Herein lies Dasein’s *familiarity* with the world. Through this *familiarity*, however, Dasein knows itself only tacitly, which means that it has not become *aware* of its own possibilities.

⁵ As Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche have done before him.

⁶ As Heidegger says in a slightly different context, “a mere reversing, done for its own sake, reveals nothing.” (Heidegger 2008b, 168)

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Dasein is always *falling* in this mode of existence—it is fleeing from its own possibilities and taking refuge in the *familiarity* of the world. This means that the tacit understandings of our existence are so familiar to us that we lose sight of our own possibilities in the present. This, says Heidegger, is the mode of Dasein's everyday existence.

The emphasis in Heidegger is on Dasein's awareness rather than existence (in the sense of actuality). This awareness, as Heidegger tells us, is derived from Dasein's way of being in the world. Thus, where Sartre would say that man makes his own essence, Heidegger would respond that man's essence comes from the world—it lies in its existence. To put it simply, if Heidegger 'reverses' Platonic metaphysics, it is certainly not in the manner Sartre interpreted it.

So how are we to make sense of this 'reversal'? It is noteworthy to mention, here, that in *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops his fundamental ontology in giving an account of Dasein through an existential analytic—its way of being in the world through the various modes of existence, i.e. *care*, *thrownness*, and *falling*—and its temporality (the sense of finitude that is brought by the experience of death). With this fundamental ontology, Heidegger, seems to come very close to attribute an 'essence' to human 'existence'—an underlying universal phenomenological structure that accounts for our understanding of the world. Phenomenologically, then, Dasein's way of being-in-the-world is taken to be the same across all cultures and epochs. Perhaps, it is tempting to say that with this Heidegger, too, remains within the constraints of metaphysics. But this means that one would have to ignore two important dimensions of Heidegger's thought: 1) from the onset he makes it clear that his aim is to go underneath any metaphysical

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notions, and thus, distinctions such as *essentia* and *existentia* are inapplicable to his phenomenology; 2) In his later works, he turns to the questions of Dasein's historical existence. The latter is what of concern to us here. It marks a turn in Heidegger's thought, whereby the emphasis shifts from the "meaning of Being" to "truth of Being". The aim, however, remains the same—to speak about the truth from within its origin without having to resort to a fixed entity that stands outside of Dasein's world.

By remaining within the language of *essentia* and *existentia*, in which existence is understood in terms of what is actual, metaphysics, for Heidegger, has forgotten the question of Being altogether. As Charles Guignon puts it: "The history of metaphysics is . . . a history of forgetfulness or "withdrawal," in which entities obtrude as actually existing and as having essential properties while being—that which first makes it possible for anything to show up in its *existentia* and *essentia*—remains concealed." (Guignon 2006, 17–18) In overcoming metaphysics, Heidegger aims to remind us, so to speak, of the ground of Being that lies hidden underneath millennia worth of metaphysical determination.

Here, the question of art becomes central for Heidegger. Art is not only the passageway into the truth of Being but also the medium through which truth occurs. In other words, art opens up a space within Being in which truth (*aletheia*) happens. This space is the world of a particular historical Dasein, the way of being of a particular people in history, or as Dreyfus expressed it, a paradigm of meaning and significance that "reveals the current style [way of being] to those who shares it." (Dreyfus 2005, 414) In the following sections I will examine this side of Heidegger's thought, which is his

understanding of art and its connection to the establishing of the fundamental meaning Being.

§2 Art as Origin

For this we turn to Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art", in which he asks the question, "what is that which we call art?" This question has preoccupied Western philosophy since its inception (the Greeks). Heidegger, however, poses it in a way that is different from the ways that it has been posed before. The question, for Heidegger, is an inquiry into the meaning of art as a discloser of truth. That is, he is not interested in the act of creation of the artist, much less with the aesthetic quality of the artwork, but rather he is concerned with truth as an event that happens in art. Thus, the question about the origin of the work of art acts as an entry point into understanding the essence of truth in general.

In a typical Heideggerian fashion, Heidegger approaches the question of "what is the origin of the work of art?" by returning to a more fundamental question, "what is the meaning of art?" This approach reflects his methods of investigation in *Being and Time*. There, we are told that traditional metaphysics fails to give us an account of Being, because it tries to grasp Being as an abstract entity separated from the world. Being for Heidegger is to be understood in terms of its meaning, which lies in the way Dasein exists in the world. Thus, the question of Being must be reformulated as "what is it to mean to be?" This approach applies to the Being of all entities and not just Dasein; that is because entities are always encountered in a world, in which meaning for their existence

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is given in their modes of existence. In other words, the meaning of the being of an entity, its essence, is always determined through its relation to the world—art is no exception.

In the culture of modern aesthetics, however, the word art has become an empty vessel to which nothing actual corresponds. Whence, then, comes its essence? For Heidegger, the essence of art must be sought in its actual representation, which is presumed to be either the artist or the work. Proceeding from this premise, Heidegger asks the following question: which comes first? As a preliminary answer he provides the following:

The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work are each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely, that which also gives the artists and the work of art their names—art. (Heidegger 2008b, 143)

Thus, both the artists and the work are mutually dependent; neither can subsist sufficiently on its own. The origin of both comes from a third phenomenon, and that is art. But approaching the question from this standpoint proves to be problematic, because it leads us to a closed hermeneutical circle. If we infer the origin of art from the work, e.g., from a piece of painting, we tend to identify that piece of work as art. Here, we have deduced that the origin of art is the work itself, and thus, we say that “this painting is a work of art”. But to do so is to presume that we knew what the essence of art was to

begin with in order to make such a judgement. If that is the case, then, the origin of the work turns out to be art and not the work. Therefore, in our reasoning about the origin, we have returned to a full circle, without even coming any closer to knowing what the essence of art is. The matter is exacerbated further when considering the artist as another constitutive element of the work of art. For Heidegger, this circularity in reasoning about the origin is unavoidable.⁷ The task, then, is not to shy away from the circle, but rather to attempt to break into it (Heidegger 2008b, 144), and therefore, overcome it.

Thus, Heidegger insists that we must seek the essence of the art in its immediate actual representation, i.e. the work, in order to break into this circle. He says: “[our] aim is to arrive at the immediate and full actuality of the work of art, for only in this way shall we discover actual art also with in it.” (Heidegger 2008b, 146) That is to say that the meaning of art lies in the created work. Of course, here, we have to enquire about the nature of the work. What is it? Or, more precisely, what is its meaning? The answer for Heidegger is given in the way we apprehend the work as a thing, or more precisely, as an object.

Every work of art is a thing, but what is this thingly character that is so often taken as Self-evident? When enquiring into the nature of a thing, such as the work of art, we are aiming to arrive at the thingly character of it, its *thingness*. Traditionally, *thingness* is understood as a thing in three ways: “as a bearer of traits, as the unity of a manifold sensation, [and] as formed matter.” (Heidegger 2008b, 156) All three ways

⁷ It is the way language functions.

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conceive of the thing in terms of an object that has its essence outside of itself, and as such, therefore, are inadequate in defining its *thingness*.

Out of the three traditional thing-concepts, however, the matter-form conception provides us with a clue into the *thingness* of a thing. In the Platonic understanding, matter is the physical representation of a form (*eidōs*). That is to say that the essence of a thing is apprehended by a fixed entity that gives shape to its matter. As Heidegger puts it, “[t]he thing is formed matter” (Heidegger 2008b, 152) Here, the emphasis falls on correctness, the degree to which the physical appearance of a thing imitates its form. Though it is still inadequate in defining the *thingness* of a thing, unlike the other three, the matter-form thing-concept provides us with an understanding of a thing that is applicable to both things of nature and manmade things. As such, it serves as starting point for revealing the essence of art.

In linking the essence of art with the matter-form thing-concept, Heidegger aims to reveal that such an apprehension of *thingness* is rooted in a more fundamental understanding of the world, which comes from the being of equipment. (Heidegger 2008b, 154) To apprehend the *thingness* of a thing, then, we must abandon the idea that a thing is a concept that corresponds to an object. *Thingness* is to be understood through the essential nature of equipment, because “[e]quipment has a peculiar position intermediate between thing and work.” (Heidegger 2008b, 155)

To understand what Heidegger means by the essential nature of equipment and its connection to the work of art, it would be helpful to recall elements of the discussion on equipment in *Being and Time*.

§2.1 Equipment and Circumspective Awareness

We have said that in *Being and Time* Heidegger resurrects an existential kind of knowing that is rooted in Dasein's circumspective awareness of its environment. This is derived from the being of equipment, which Heidegger calls *ready-to-hand*. Our circumspective awareness underlies all of our theoretical understanding of the world, which he calls *ontic*. Here, it must be noted that, theoretical understanding is not refuted by Heidegger, but rather, is grounded in Dasein's way of *being-in-the-world*, which is how Dasein *deals* with entities in the world through comporting itself towards equipment.

Dasein comports itself towards equipment in a very primordial way. As Heidegger explains, in its primordial existence, however, Dasein is never conscious of its comportment (because it is always observed *in* the world); it copes with the world of equipment without having to notice or to reflect on its coping. It is only when something goes wrong that Dasein is pulled out of its immediate environment and forced into reflection—it is forced to reflect on its existence, so to speak. This takes place when a piece of equipment breaks down, when it becomes unusable, and therefore, stands in the way of our concerns—it becomes conspicuous, obtrusive or obstinate. (Heidegger 2008a, 73–4) Dasein becomes conscious of its existence in relation to the world when such a

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disturbance of the *ready-to-hand* occurs. In such a process, we also said, something is announced, and that is the world.

Looking at Van Gogh's painting we can see how through the being of equipment we can understand the truth the work reveals. The shoes, when taken simply as shoes (i.e. not as a symbolic representation of something that lies outside of them), they reveal to us the world of the peasant woman. As a piece of equipment, the being of the shoes lies in its *reliability*. That is to say that the being of the shoes remains transparent in her everyday use of them. Heidegger writes: "[t]he peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are. They are the more genuinely so, the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or looks at them at all, or is even aware of them." (Heidegger 2008b, 159)

In such a way equipment mediates between the work and the thing. According to Heidegger, when we think of the pair of peasant's shoes as a thing, an object, we lose sight of its true being. It is only when the shoes are seen as a piece of equipment that its being comes to light. When this happens in art we are transported through the being of equipment into the truth the art reveals. Through its astonishing details and use of colour the Van Gogh painting was able to transpose the essence of the shoes to us, to the extent that when looking at them, we almost *know* how it 'feels' like to be in them; somehow, then, we become aware of the world of the peasant women.

By tying thingness to the being of equipment, Heidegger emphasises the *worldly* character of art, and thereby, in a profound way, of truth. The matter-form thing-concept

based on the matter-form distinction fails to give us an account of the thingness of a thing, and thus, it must be abandoned. As Heidegger argues, even the thing-concept itself bases its own conception on the background understanding we acquire through dealing with equipment. (Heidegger 2008b, 161) Dislodging the matter-form concept is the key to breaking into the circularity of our logic when trying to understand the essence of art; it is an essential step towards the overcoming of metaphysics.

§2.2 Unconcealment

Here, too, though, we must be careful. By moving beyond the matter-form distinction and rooting the essence of a thing in the being of equipment, Heidegger is not expressing another propositional truth, nor is he establishing another metaphysical ground for truth. On the contrary, truth for Heidegger is a dynamic, changing phenomenon. To understand this, we must go deeper into his notion of truth as unconcealment. Here, we must follow his etymology of key Greek words, namely, *aletheia*, *phusis* and *techné*. In their reinterpretation, Heidegger aims to uncover the fluidity of their original content, which stemmed from the flexibility of the Greek language. This fluidity has hardened through their translation into Latin. (Heidegger 2000, 10–11) Therefore, for Heidegger, a “leap over” backward is required—a ‘return’ to a pre-philosophical understanding of art before it was shrouded by the determinations of the metaphysical tradition. (Heidegger 2000, 11)

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Aletheia is often translated as truth. This reflects a long tradition—starting with Plato and culminating in modern philosophy—that is in search for a fixity by which the essence of matters is explained. As such, it has stultified the original meaning of *aletheia*, and therefore, provided a foundation for truth based on the presumption of an essence that stands outside of Being. This understanding of truth is so familiar to us that we take it as self-evident. Heidegger shook this foundation by dislodging the matter-form distinction. For Heidegger, the original content of the term *aletheia* denoted “the unconcealment of beings” (Heidegger 2008b, 176)

Essential to Heidegger’s concept of unconcealment is the term *phusis*. In the *Intro to Metaphysics* Heidegger provides us with an interpretation of *phusis* that is more akin to its original pre-Socratic usage. Through the Latin *natura*, which Heidegger tells us really means “to be born” or “birth”, the term *phusis* is usually translated as nature. (Heidegger 2000, 10) Here, *phusis* is taken as a process with a “fixed continuity”, or a force, amongst others. It is the material world—a composite of related objects and phenomena—which is contrasted with human affairs and practices, convention (*nomos*). With this translation “the originary content of the Greek word *phusis* is thrust aside” and the meaning is destroyed. (Heidegger 2000, 10) *Phusis*, says Heidegger, is the all-encompassing, self-originating, and self-secluding ground of Being. The meaning of *aletheia* as unconcealment is to be understood in relation to this notion of *phusis*. Heidegger says: “[for] the Greeks essence of truth [*aletheia*] is possible only together with the Greek essence of Being as *phusis*.” (Heidegger 2000, 78)

Closely related, and which connects art to truth, is *techné*. The term has been, and often still is, translated as craft or art. For Heidegger, however, “*techné* never signifies the action of making”; it “denotes rather a mode of knowing.” (Heidegger 2008b, 184) Here, *techné* is elevated, so to speak, from the activity of craftsmanship to the realm of knowledge. Art, in this meaning of *techné*, is the “knowledge experience” that unconceals truth. It does this by letting truth interpret itself through the work of the artist. Thus, knowledge is neither the private experience of the artist, nor the contemplative act of the philosopher. Rather, it is the sound that emanates from the depth of Being—from the tension between earth (*phusis*) and world—that reverberates tacitly in art.

§2.3 The Interplay between Earth and World

Up to this point we brought out the worldly character of Art. Earlier in chapter 1 we pointed out that Heidegger emphasises the existential knowledge gained from the familiarity of the word as the deepest understanding of Being. But there are experiences that bring us into a new ground of Being, such as joy and anxiety, and as such they are experiences that precede any already given, i.e. established, understanding of Being. They are experiences of “illuminations”, of stepping away from what is familiar and into a new ground for Being. In that sense they do not belong to any world, but rather they are “pre-worldly” experiences. (Polt 2005, 378–80)

These *pre-worldly* experiences happen in art, or more specifically in poetry. For Heidegger Being first appeared in the West through such a *pre-worldly* experience in

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Greek tragedies, in which the uncanniness of Being (*phusis*), and of human existence by extension, is revealed and let to come to *presence*. Just as in the case of *anxiety*, this poetic experience is characterised by the feeling of uneasiness Dasein experiences in the face of the unfamiliar, for it is lifted violently from what it is accustomed to and from which it calls home (i.e. the world itself). In reinterpreting Sophocles, Heidegger takes Oedipus and Antigone as exemplars of such a *pre-worldly* experience. Through their actions, which required the use of violence, they transcended the *polis*, and thereby, were jolted into a new moral and ethical ground, a new paradigm of truth, or, to use Heidegger's own language, a new "site of history" (Heidegger 2000, 117) As a consequence, they, in this new ground, experienced the uncanny, *phusis*, which rendered them *apolis* (i.e. without a world). In this state, they are presented with the potentiality of becoming founders of a new way of life. He says:

Rising high in the site of history [the polis], they . . . become *apolis*, without a city and site, lonesome, un-canny, with no way out amidst beings as a whole, and at the same time without ordinance and limit, without structure and fittingness (*Fug*), because they *as creators* must first ground all this in each case. (Heidegger 2000, 117)

What we have, here, is the twofold meaning of awareness. To be clear, Dasein becomes aware of its existence always through its engagement with the world. But the world is made possible by virtue of its struggle with *phusis*. So, awareness denotes Dasein's deepest understanding of Being and yet at the same time in rare instances it is the

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illumination that comes from the depth of Being, the never seen or heard before experiences. The latter dimension of existence is what Heidegger calls the earth.

Heidegger uses the metaphor of earth-world to explain the happening of truth. The world is the environment in which man deals with equipment and encounters others. The earth is the totalising and all-encompassing force that stands up against the world. In art, the earth and the world are unified. This, however, does not mean that the tension between the two is relaxed. On the contrary, the unification ossifies the struggle by bringing it into *repose*, which Heidegger tells us is a motionless state of continuous agitation. (Heidegger 2008b, 175) Here, the world is revealed to us in connection to the earth—the world, grounds itself in the earth, and the earth reveals itself as that which is concealed.

The relation of the world to the earth is what governs man's existence. In everyday life the world and the earth are in an incessant state of struggle. For the most part, we go about our daily existence without noticing this struggle, for it is concealed from us. Nonetheless, at a very tacit level we are aware of it. A peasant, for example, is aware of the relation the earth has with the world, through his dealing with equipment. When his roof is leaking due to a rain storm, he tacitly knows that he needs to fix it. Being amidst equipment the peasant's life is closer to the earth-world relation than a city dweller. His is the more authentic mode of existence. Art, or more precisely great art, is able to bring into illumination this relationship by going through the peasant mode of existence, whereby the primordially of the struggle is still experienced in the *figure*. (Heidegger 2008b, 189)

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From Van Gogh's painting we can see this taking place. The earth-world struggle is unconcealed in the way that the shoes are brought in a direct tension with the soil. As a piece of equipment, the shoes give the world of the peasant woman certainty amidst the earth. The shoes belong to the earth and they are protected by the world. Through this piece of equipment the tension between the two is held, and thereby, an opening of a ground is established. It is upon this ground that a peasant's way of life is rooted. This openness, the ground that connects her world with the earth, is what gives her life meaning. For her, and for those who share with her this mode of being, it is truth. (Heidegger 2008b, 160) This truth, which she experiences tacitly in everything she does in her world, is unconcealed in the work of art—in a 'simple' portrait of rugged peasant shoes.

Truth, then, is in the opening that is created by the dynamic struggle of world and earth. (Heidegger 2008b, 187) As such, truth can never be permanent. It changes from culture to culture and from epoch to epoch. The great works of art "set up" a world and "set forth" the earth. (Heidegger 2008b, 173) Through this struggle an open 'space' is unconcealed. In this opening truth happens. Here, the fundamental meaning for human existence, or, in Heidegger's language, a new ground of possibilities is found.

§2.4 Art as Founding of Truth

Poetry, here, plays an essential role. For Heidegger all forms of art are poetry. Linguistic poetry, however, is the pinnacle of them all. That is because the meaning of the question of Being unfolds in language. Thus, to put it in the context of what

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Heidegger's attempt to overcome Western metaphysics entails, it would be helpful to view art in light of the relationship of philosophy to poetry (i.e. *theoria* to *poesis*).

While his interpretation of art as the “becoming and happening of truth,” (Heidegger 2008b, 196) places poetry on an equal footing with philosophy, it is not clear whether the former takes precedence over the latter. Here, poetic understanding of reality is as equally valid as the philosophical one. That being said, poetry, for Heidegger, seems to have a special kinship with ‘truth’, which traditional philosophy and its reason lack—in the sense that it is the medium through which the experience, human existence, is ‘grasped’ and articulated in a very primordial way. This, of course, requires that truth itself is to be grasped in the original sense of *aletheia*, as unconcealment of the opening created in the struggle between world and earth.

In unconcealment, thus, the essence of poetry does not lie in its ‘creative’ act, but rather in its ability to found truth—to bring to the forth, or to illuminate, an open ‘place’ of possibility. Knowledge, here, is tantamount to ‘creating’ and ‘preserving’ this space (*techné*), in which the destiny of Being unfolds. Thus, Heidegger's understanding of knowledge is not simply a reversal of dialectical truth and creation; rather, it is a more complicated shift in the nature of philosophy that places knowing prior to the conceptual distinction between philosophic *theoria* and *poiesis* (*making*)—i.e. prior to any metaphysical presumptions. These presumptions for Heidegger are the result of “post-worldly” experiences, so to speak. (Polt 2005, 379) Their truth comes after a world of meaning has been established for Dasein. Truth, with Heidegger, is reinterpreted as that which reveals Dasein's existence. It is what constitutes the essence of art, of which

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poetry is the highest manifestation, as a historical truth. Heidegger calls this a “happening” of truth, “*a distinctive way in which truth comes into being.*” (Heidegger 2008b, 202) This, Heidegger goes on to say, is the “founding” of truth, which establishes the ground of being for a particular people.

Art, thus, is the cultural equivalent of Dasein coming to awareness of its own being in the form of given possibilities. The artwork is the *preserver* of the founding of a culture; it is the stable point of the reengagement with the founding of a ground (openness) which is the basis for the experience of truth. It is a disclosure of the essence of a historical existence. As ‘awareness’ of possibilities is for a particular person in *Being and Time*, so is art is the ‘awareness’ of possibilities for an entire people.

This awareness of a people of their historical existence constitutes the knowledge of the truth of Being as it manifests itself in a given epoch, which Heidegger calls preservation. He says: “[p]reserving the work means standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work. This ‘standing-within’ of preservation, however, is knowing[.]” (Heidegger 2008b, 192) Thus, in becoming *aware* of their being through their engagement with the work of art, a people experience the essence of truth in their culture. In that sense, Art is the avenue through which metaphysics is overcome, whereby truth is brought back to its origin, the relationship of a people with the earth, or Being.

Art, as we have pointed out, also has an *uncanny* side to it, in the sense of an extraordinary dimension. Whereas existential knowing provides us with the deepest

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understanding of Being—i.e. the *worldly* character of Being—the *pre-worldly* experience of art, the unfamiliar, provides us with the “deepest illumination” of Being (Polt 2005, 378). In this, art transcends the given possibilities, and thereby, transfigures Dasein’s nature. This takes place in Dasein’s encounter with the uncharted grounds that opened up as a result of its strife with the overwhelming power of *phusis*. The essence of art lies in revealing Dasein’s existence in terms of this struggle, between Dasein’s way of being and the uncanny, which Heidegger refers to as the struggle between the two poles of world and earth.

To summarise this chapter, according to Heidegger, it is through understanding the world of equipment that we are able to break into the circular reasoning in apprehending the essence of art. Since the essence of art is founding truth, then, this breaking-in is an overcoming of metaphysics. This constitutes a philosophical position that is able to speak of truth without having to succumb to the abstract notions of metaphysics: matter-form, object-subject, rational-irrational, etc.

Thus, Heidegger’s understanding of Being is not a mere reversal of Platonic metaphysics. It is an attempt to uproot the entire tradition of metaphysics, and thereby, overcome it. Here, the nature of philosophy itself is morphed. In order to understand this, we must come to terms with what Heidegger means by truth as unconcealment, *aletheia*. Art, here, plays a crucial role. It is the medium through which the original experience of the truth of Being takes place, whereby truth is the dynamic and persisting relationship between earth and world. In art, which takes up the form of a culture, this

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relationship is brought to bear in the form of the destiny of a people, a ground for the possibilities of a historical existence. It is the paradigmatic truth that happens in history.

Chapter 3: Historicism and Existentialism

In chapter 1 we saw how Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, locates the meaning of Being in Dasein's primordial relation *with* the world, i.e. in its mode of *everydayness*. Here, Dasein is *thrown* into the world, and therefore, its theoretical knowledge is always grounded in the background understanding it gains from its *familiarity* with its environment—we called this existential knowledge. This emphasis on existence, which provides a phenomenological account of Dasein, is the first step Heidegger takes towards the overcoming of Western Metaphysics. One thing we left out from our analysis in chapter 1, however, is the phenomenon of *Angst*, or *anxiety*. In *Being and time* the inquiry into Dasein's being turns out to be inseparable from Dasein's temporality, the "everydayness [, in which Being is rooted,] reveals itself as a mode of temporality. (Heidegger 2008a, 234) That is to say that the meaning of Dasein's being is explicated in terms of its ultimate possibility, *death*, from which the sense of time is derived. In *Being-towards-death* Dasein, at any given moment, exists as a futural projection (the present is constituted as a reaching into the past and an extending into the future). In this mode of Being Dasein experiences *anxiety*, which dissolves the comfortable world of the *they-self* and thrusts it onto an unfamiliar ground. Here, Dasein is its own—it is faced with its own possibilities, which gives it the potential to exist *authentically*. As such, the meaning of Being for a particular Dasein is determined by its way of being in the world, in which the determining possibility, death, is given to it in its relation to time. So Dasein's historicity seems to take priority over its phenomenological structure of

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existence. This, we have seen in Chapter 2, takes us into the direction of historical truth, of how the meaning of Being manifests itself through Dasein in the works of art. Just as the experience of *anxiety* opens up an individual Dasein to its own possibilities, an *authentic* way of Being, so does art for a historical people. Through great works of art a new ground for the meaning of Being is opened up. Authentic being, here, is associated with the event of happening (*Ereignis*) of truth in history, which brings about a new world for Dasein, or more precisely, a particular way of being for a people that is their own. *Authentic* being, thus, requires a leap in the twofold sense: of a backward leap into the original inception of Being, and more important, a forward projection of Dasein's future possibilities.

In this Chapter, I will look at the nature of this happening and its connection to modernity. I shall argue that this connection reflects the relation between truth and freedom. From the above we can see that Heidegger's language attempts to deconstruct two things: 1) traditional ontology and therewith modern subjectivity, and more important, 2) traditional metaphysics, specifically, Plato's. In so doing, however, Heidegger's language remains symptomatic of modern thinking, despite its effort to overcome it. It is in his attack on metaphysics that Heidegger articulates a thoroughly modern conception of Being that fends off the possibility of the Classical experience of *Eros*. For Plato, *Eros* is the fundamental experience of man through which the good is intimated harmoniously with reason. Platonic *Eros*, with Heidegger, however, is historicised by being linked to a particular understanding of Being that marked the beginning of a falling out of the originary inception of Being as *phusis*. For Heidegger

there can be no such an experience that we might call fundamental to human existence, not even *anxiety*; there is only the inceptionary experience, which is the historical happening, or in Heidegger's words "a fundamental happening" (Heidegger 2000, 153–4) that shapes man's understanding of his essence in relation to Being as such.

My approach in this chapter will be divided into two parts. First, I will examine Heidegger's historicism through his concept of *presencing*, which will aid us to understand how Being is grounded historically in a "fundamental happening". Second, I will explore the implication of such an understanding of Being to our sense of Reality, traditionally understood. Key, here, is his concept of *Ereignis*.

§1 Historicism and the Event of happening

We *ask* the question—How does it stand with Being? What is the meaning of Being? . . . The point is to restore the historical Dasein of human beings—and this also always means our ownmost future Dasein, in the whole of history that is allotted to us—back to the power of Being that is to be opened up originally; all this to be sure, only within the limits of philosophy's capability. (Heidegger 2000, 32)

With Heideggerian existentialism, then, we are pushed even further into the direction of historicism. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger asks a fundamental question that underlies all metaphysical inquires: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" (Heidegger 2000, 1–2) This question, as Heidegger tells us, must,

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however, be posed in the light of a prior—i.e. more primordial—question: “How does it stand with Being?” (Heidegger 2000, 25) Here, to stand refers to a ‘spatial’ orientation towards the ground of Being. Thus, it is an attempt to recover the ground upon which the seemingly elusive Being of beings is located. To *stand*, also means to stand within the disclosed space of Being, which denotes a sense of *awareness* of one’s existence in relation “to *beings as such and as a whole.*” (Heidegger 2000, 34) Here, the emphasis is on Dasein’s proximity, or distance, from the meaning of Being. So, the prior question acts as the access point through which two things are revealed: 1) the ground by which Being as such is to be defined, and 2) The relation Dasein has to this ground. The task then becomes an inquiry into how Being has been interpreted historically, because, the opening, the ground, as we have seen, means the unconcealed paradigmatic truth, in the sense of *aletheia*, in which a people are thrown into by their history. Accordingly, then, Heidegger asserts “that the fundamental question of metaphysics is a historical [question] through and through.” (Heidegger 2000, 33)

History, however, is not to be understood in terms of our linear understanding of time, which is divided into past, present and future. Here, time is taken as a successive sequence of fleeing moments of *nows* (the present). Consequently, history becomes a chronologically observed set of random events, or a progressively determined series of events that move towards an end, towards Man self-actualisation. Rather, History is where the happening of truth takes place—it is the realm in which a historical people understand themselves in terms of their future possibilities. That is to say that historical

happening, truth, is neither determined by the past, strictly speaking, nor the present, but it is always viewed in reference to the future. He says:

History is not equivalent to what is past; for this is precisely what is no longer happening. But much less is history what is merely contemporary which also never happens, but always just ‘passes,’ makes its entrance and goes by. History as happening is determined from the future, takes over what has been, and acts and endures its way through the present. It is precisely the present that vanishes in the happening. (Heidegger 2000, 33–4)

History, then, is equivalent to the notion of happening (*Ereignis*) that takes place when a horizon of possibilities, a new ground, is opened up for Dasein. But while this horizon orients Dasein towards the future, it flows from the wellspring of an original happening, an inception. Thus, when we seek the relation of beings to Being as a whole—i.e. how it stands with Being?—we are seeking the relation between historical beings to a conception of Being that binds their past, “what has been”, to their future. (Heidegger 2000, 34) Here is where the leap is necessary. In it the present vanishes, because it gives way to the manifestation of Being as it continually, and enduringly, manifests its original happening in relation to future possibilities in the immediate ‘now’. Moreover, in such a leap—which is at the heart of philosophical questioning—“Dasein is summoned to its history in the full sense of the word and it is called to make a decision in it.” (Heidegger 2000, 34)

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The question with which we are concerned is how in such an understanding of history, as happening, Being is revealed to Dasein. In other words, how does Being manifest itself to beings if not in the present—i.e. in the immediate experience? It is through language (*logos*). Language has its own memory, so to speak. In language concepts and words maintain their original meaning. While this meaning could become concealed or even distorted throughout the ages, perhaps necessarily, it is never completely lost. *Logos* can only be meaningless if humans lose their ontological connection to the meaning of Being, which is to say that when they cease to be historical beings by missing the intimate connection Being has with language. This is the situation we moderns find ourselves in. According to Heidegger, Being for us is grounded in something permanent that transcends both language and history, and, as such, whatever meaning that was retained in the word Being, has come to utter destruction. And when Being no longer means anything anymore, the ground on which we can stand in relation to Being is obliterated. The hallmark of modern nihilism is in this inability to anchor ourselves in a ground in relation to the meaning of Being.

With its nihilism, perpetuated by technological thinking, the West is staggering. That is to say that it has neither a ground nor an authentic world. Heidegger refers to the decline of the West by the term *verfallen*, meaning “to fall”. In *Being and Time*, we have seen that in its everyday existence Dasein is *verfallen*—it exists inauthentically. This inauthenticity, however, did not have a negative connotation; it is the mode of everyday existence in which Dasein is absorbed in its *being-in-the-world*. But in the later Heidegger *verfallen* entails a serious disjunction between Dasein and Being. Here, it not

only means that beings (Dasein) have fallen out of Being, but Being as such—the ambiguous self-emerging force that the Greeks first experienced as *phusis*—has withdrawn and concealed itself from Dasein. As Michael E. Zimmerman puts it: “the decline of the West stems not only from a lack of resoluteness on the part of Dasein but also from the impersonal withdrawal of Being from language [*logos*], earth [*phusis*], world, and Dasein.” (Zimmerman 2001, 187) This takes place in the narrowing down of Being to an enclosed possibility for Dasein’s existence. Here, lies the danger of forgetting the question of Being all together, sealing with it the spiritual fate of the West. (Heidegger 2000, 28–9)

Thus, by asking the fundamental question of metaphysics in such a manner, i.e. historically, Heidegger aims to exhume the original content of the word Being, and therewith, our relation to Being through grounding it in a “fundamental happening” (*Ereignis*). (Heidegger 2000, 153–4) This is done by bringing metaphysical concepts back to their truth, their original meaning. For so long in the philosophical tradition of the West the word Being has been taken for granted, and as such, it has become a vacuous vessel, to which nothing corresponds. (Heidegger 2000, 27) This is the case whether its existence is affirmed, as in the case of traditional theology, or rejected, as in the case of philosophical atheism (*viz.* Nietzsche). In both cases, according to Heidegger, we have fallen out of Being. Against this belief, Heidegger asserts that the word Being has come to name something very definite. This can be seen in the various historical ways Being has been thought of in terms of its opposite, its other: becoming, seeming, thinking and the ought (value). Thus, in order to ‘reclaim’ our place within Being, i.e. to

overcome the spiritual decline of the West, we must re-establish the connection between our ‘experience’ and language (in the broad sense of the term). The constitution of language, then, is central in addressing the question of Being; he says: “the fate of language is grounded in the particular *relation* of a people to *Being*, the question about *Being* will be most intimately intertwined with the question about *language*[.]” (Heidegger 2000, 39) Thus, Heideggerian historicism at its core is a serious engagement with language that aims to reconnect language to a fundamental happening, and thereby, reinvigorate its original meaning with the view to Dasein’s future possibilities.

§1.2 The Phenomenon of Presencing

It is my belief that Heidegger’s interpretation of *presencing* (*An-wessen*) holds the key to understanding his historicism. *Presencing* is the thread that connects the fundamental happening in history with language (in the sense of poetry). Between history and language, the meaning of Being stands in the light and appears. In this appearance it endures in the present. Here, we have a reciprocal relation between Being and time, or to phrase it in a slightly different way, between truth and history. It is important to keep in mind that in this relation that authentic time—which manifests through the present—is to be understood as “making present,” (Heidegger 2008a, 326) where the emphasis falls on ‘creating’ the temporal dimension of the present.

Heidegger tells us that “[f]or the Greeks, ‘Being’ fundamentally means presence.” (Heidegger 2000, 46) The Greek term for *presence* is *ousia*, often translated as substance. At times Heidegger would refer to this strict meaning of *ousia* (substance) as *Beingness*,

in the sense of an essence with permanent presence. However, *ousia* understood in the more broad sense of *presence* or *presencing*—distinct from permanent presence—means *coming-to-presence*. (Heidegger 2000, 46) How does something come to presence? It is when it appears. He says: “Something comes to presence [when] [i]t stands in itself and thus puts itself forth.” (Heidegger 2000, 46)

The fundamental happening, when it is authentic—which is to say when it binds the past and the future, and thereby, endures through the present—is experienced in the phenomenon of *presencing*. Dasein’s existence in the world in the mode of everydayness, which is shaped through its engagement with equipment and others, at any given moment, is experienced in the *presencing* of Being, i.e. in the opening of particular historical paradigms of truths that is effected by an original happening in which entities (beings) stand and ‘appear’. But what is the nature of this *appearance*? And how can we come to understand truth in relation to *presencing*?

We alluded to the phenomenon of *presencing* throughout chapter 1 and 2. There, we have seen how our understanding of the Being of beings—existential knowledge—comes from our engagement in the world through our *dealing* with equipment. The being of equipment can manifest itself in the mode of *ready-to-hand*, that is, in its *reliability*—in the way it becomes transparent in its *utility*. Equipment can also be something representational, an object for consciousness. This happens when its being is taken as something *present-at-hand*. In both of these modes, reliability and representation, the Being of an equipment comes to *presence*, which is to say that its being is unconcealed

and brought to openness. (Heidegger 2002, 5) But with every unconcealment there is a covering over. Thus, intrinsic to the phenomenon of *presencing* is the notion of absence.

To illustrate this, let us take for our example a piece of familiar equipment—a hockey stick.⁸ For the hockey stick to function as a hockey stick, i.e. to do its job well, its physical presence must withdraw into its equipmental *utility*. The stick is used to maneuver the puck on the ice, and ultimately, has the purpose of driving it into the opponent's net. In order for this to happen, the stick must become transparent to the player. That is to say that when the player uses the stick in the game he must become virtually unaware of its physical 'presence', to the point which the stick would function as an extension of his arm, even more so, as an extension of his Being. Otherwise, it would stand in the way of his concern, which is to score a goal, and becomes a nuisance rather than a useful tool.

In this withdrawal (of the stick's substance) the Being of the stick is revealed, but only to the player, and in an intimately tacit way. This, however, does not suggest that the *readiness-to-hand* is known through a subjective experience. A piece of equipment cannot exist without the totality of equipment that gives it its purpose. (Heidegger 2008a, 68) In other words, there is no such thing as a separate entity called equipment that reveals its essence to a subject; the being of equipment makes sense only if the equipment is used in its environment. Behind this environment, is a history that shapes how each piece of equipment belongs to other equipment in a totality. In our case, the world to

⁸ This example was inspired by Kevin Winters' example of the Baseball bat. Winters, Kevin. 2006. "Presencing and Essencing." *Heideggerian Denken*. <http://heideggerian.blogspot.ca/2006/06/presencing-and-essencing.html>.

which the hockey stick belongs to, which includes the rules of the game that limit its usage (for example, the player may not use it to trip other players), is its environment. Since other players use equipment within the same context, i.e. the same environment, the *readiness-to-hand* of the hockey stick depends on a way of being that is formed and shared by others. In short, it is a hockey stick—and not a weapon for example—because it belongs to the world of hockey.

Now, suppose the same hockey stick belonged to a famous player. After his retirement, it is deemed valuable and thus placed in the NHL Hall of Fame Museum. Even though it is the same hockey stick (with the potential of being used as a piece of equipment), its Being manifests itself in a quite different way. While in the first instance the Being of the stick is revealed through its *readiness-to-hand*, here it is almost entirely *present-at-hand*. It is an object on display that represents a given meaning. Its physical appearance—ontic quality—rather than its reliability is what holds that meaning. That being said, the ontic representation of the stick, too, has a history, which is to say that, even as a *present-at-hand* object, it belongs to a world. That world as we have said is the culture of hockey. Notice, we added the word culture here to denote a particular way of being that has its roots in the being of equipment, i.e. in the pre-ontological understanding of its world—a piece of hockey paraphernalia being displayed is meaningless if it did not have that history.

In both cases, *presencing* takes place. The Being of the stick that is revealed in *presencing* lies in the assumed possibilities, which is limited by the world it belongs *in*. To assume one possibility ‘naturally’ means the exclusion of any other potentialities.

Thus, in every appearance there is an absence. In the moment of ‘use’, the being of the stick, as *ready-to-hand* equipment, comes forth and hides its potential for being other possibilities (especially its *present-at-hand*). So, when one possibility brought to openness, others are hidden. For example, when the stick is in the player’s hands it cannot be other than the *reliable* equipment that would function for its purpose. This is especially observable, but not easily noticeable, when an equipment manifests itself as something *present-at-hand*. Here, as an object its physical appearance predominates its *ready-to-hand* possibility. The problem with modern subjectivism, which is for Heidegger the heir of Platonic metaphysics, is rooted in a perspective of *presencing* that attributes coming-to-presence to physical appearance. Thus, essence taken from this understanding of *presencing* is the substance that makes up a thingly-matter.

‘Essence’ for Heidegger lies in the primordality of equipment. Here, *presencing* is synonymous with primordial existence. And primordality, understood originally, reveals itself as a temporal phenomenon. As such, it has nothing to do with physical appearance (thingness) which is tied to the metaphysical understanding of time—the strict division between past, present and future. Rather, appearance is coming-to-presence, in the sense of acquiring existential meaning. In other words, when entities are revealed through their *presencing*, they ‘appear’ as temporal phenomena. The emphasis is on their entering time by enduring through the ‘present’. This takes place within a historically cleared space (a happening). In our example, the stick whether as a piece of equipment or an object at display, comes to presence as such within the opening that is created to it by the history of the game.

Perhaps it was easier to demonstrate the phenomenon of *presencing* through the simple and familiar example of the hockey stick. But what if we are dealing with Being as such, that which Dasein is bound to for its understanding of its world? *Presencing* becomes more complicated. Nonetheless, here, too, *presencing* has the quality of concealing and unconcealing. But how are we to observe that? In what phenomenon can Being be located? Nature as we are consistently reminded by Heidegger would not suffice to explain the presence of an entity. In one sense, there seems to be no such a phenomenon that could give us the *whatness* of Being, but in another sense that *whatness* is grounded, and thereby is given meaning, in the way beings exist in the world. The world, on the other hand, is as such—made possible—because of an experience of Being that *appeared* in history as the self-emerging force that articulates itself through Dasein. Here, to understand how *presencing* brings about the essence of Being as such and of beings, we must return to Heidegger's interpretation of *phusis*.

Just like the word Being, *phusis* has a narrow and a broad meaning.⁹ The latter meaning is what Heidegger attributes to the early Greeks' understanding of Being as *phusis*. (Heidegger 2000, 11) It is that originary meaning which names something ambiguous, all encompassing, and self-emerging. It is through this self-emergence of *phusis* that "beings first become and remain observable." (Heidegger 2000, 11) This means that the experience of *phusis*, as the process that holds sway, comes prior to

⁹ For a detailed account of Heidegger's notion of *phusis* see Schoenbohm, Susan. 2001. "Heidegger's Interpretation of Phusis in Introduction to Metaphysics." In *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed. Richard F. H. Polt and Gregory Fried, 143–160. New Haven: Yale University Press.

intellection. In other words, its coming-to-presence, its appearance, is what makes all other appearances possible. He says of *phusis*:

Phusis means the emergent self-uprising, the self-unfolding that abides itself. In this sway, rest and movement are closed and opened up from an originary unity. This sway is the overwhelming coming-to-present that has not yet been surmounted in thinking, and within which *that which* comes to presence essentially unfolds as beings. (Heidegger 2000, 47)

Moreover, Heidegger adds that “this sway first steps forth from concealment—that is, in Greek, *aletheia* (unconcealment) happens—insofar as the sway struggles itself forth as a world [,and] [t]hrough world, beings first come into being.” (Heidegger 2000, 47) Here is where art comes in. As I have argued, for Heidegger in art, especially linguistic poetry, unconcealment *happens*, in which a *world* is erected and the *earth* (*phusis*) is set forth. With this emergence of both *phusis* and world the struggle between these poles is maintained in the *repose* created by the work of art. This is how the early Greeks first experienced this originary sense of *phusis*. It appeared to them not in nature, but rather “on the basis of a fundamental experience of Being in poetry and thought.” (Heidegger 2000, 11)

So there is a connection between *phusis* and *logos* (which includes poetry). *Logos* is an aspect of *phusis* (Heidegger 2000, 100). It is where *phusis* appears out of concealment and sets itself forth as that force which resists our attempts to penetrate it and to reveal it explicitly. *Logos*, interpreted as *gathering* (Heidegger 2000, 100), holds

within it the ambiguity found in *phusis*. Much like *phusis*, *logos* is scattered. In such a state it remains hidden, or concealed. He says: “The whole of beings in its Being always thrown from one opposite to the other, thrown over here and over there—Being is the *gatherdness* of this conflicting unrest.” (Heidegger 2000, 102) Gathering, here, for Heidegger, is “belonging-together”; that is, bringing two opposites, of Being (*phusis*) and becoming (world), into a state of incessant conflict and tension—a unity in which *aletheia* can take place. Thus, *logos* in its original meaning is indistinguishable from the essence of high poetry. What both share in common is the ability to discern between two opposites and bring them into confrontation. So in one sense, the strife (*polemos*), created by this confrontation, separates and at the same time unifies. The unity lies in the gathering of what is scattered by the separation—the gathering of the “un-heard, the hitherto unsaid and un-thought.” (Heidegger 2000, 47) In such a gathering (*logos*) of these pre-ontological phenomena (i.e. not yet worldly) a “world comes to be.” (Heidegger 2000, 47)

§1.3 Language as Poetry

Our language in contrast has been impoverished by the strict structure of our grammar, which reflects the metaphysical thinking that obscured the ambiguity found in the original Greek terms through which Being expressed itself originally in *logos*. It must be noted, here, that what Heidegger refers to as the decline in language has little to do with how meaning in everyday spoken language has been degenerated, and even less to do with the inept concepts found in philosophical works. Both of these corrupt forms

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of language reflect a more serious decline in the higher, more general and more profound form of language, which is poetry. Thus, the decline of the west can be described as a decline in the ability of modern consciousness to *think* Being poetically as the early Greeks did. (Heidegger 2008b, 198–9)

How is language understood in the sense of poetry essential to the unfolding of the question of Being? To give an answer, let us return to *The Origin of the Work of Art*, and re-examine what is said there about language in connection to poetry. We are told: “Language alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time. Where there is no language, as in the Being of stone, plant, animal, there is no openness of beings, and consequently no openness of nonbeing and of the empty.” (Heidegger 2008b, 198) Without language, then, the possibility for Being as such and for human existence has no *thereness*. One would even be hesitant to say that without language there is *nothing*, for that would constitute a naming, and there is an implication of meaning intrinsic to every naming. Suffice it to say that in language beings come to presence—they stand in the openness of Being which unconceals their essence, and as such they appear for the first time. Here again, language is synonymous with the essence of high poetry, as we have discussed in the above and in chapter 2, in the sense of *founding* (that which bestows, grounds and begins new paradigmatic truth). (Heidegger 2008b, 199)

In its inception, Being happened—i.e. appeared—in the saying of the early Greek poets, namely Homer, Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Sophocles. That is to say, certain words, such as *logos* and *phusis*, made their appearance for the first time, and by virtue of such an appearance Being as a whole is experienced. When it comes to understanding

Being through thought, the Greeks thought poetically, meaning that they did not distinguish between *presencing* in poetry and the experience of Being. That is not to say that Being, experienced in poetry, is an anthropomorphic projection, as Nietzsche thought, but rather that being could only be revealed, and thereby experienced, in Poetic saying. *Techné* as knowing is tied to this form of poetising. The difference, here, is between creation, in the strict sense of mastery, and creation in the sense of revelation. In revelation, Being rather than man is the one who speaks through the poetic projection.

One might ask, where is the experience of Being to be located? Whence comes the revelatory insight? Is it rooted in a fundamental experiential structure, i.e. a Reality? The response Heidegger gives is the one we have been alluding to. The experience of Being is the happening (revelation) that takes place in poetry; for before that there is no *phusis* (either in the original sense or in the sense of nature), let alone the concept of Reality. What we take as a fundamental structure comes to us from an originary experience that is historically revealed in poetry.

§1.4 Language, Poetry and Presencing

Thus, as we are told, “Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and appearance.” (Heidegger 2008b, 198) Here, we see the connection between language and the phenomenon of *presencing*, or to come-to-presence. *Presencing* is how we still understand Being, in terms of the appearance of a thing (matter) and its correspondent essence (form). But for Heidegger, *presencing* has its roots in language, or more precisely, in early Greek poetry, which is to say that authentic

appearance first takes *form* in language rather than in nature. In other words, temporal phenomena, i.e. historicity, take precedence over, not only the physical presence of things, but also over their phenomenological structure. This means that without the opened space created by poetic projection, which allows entities to come forth and assume their possibilities, there is no appearing.

Metaphysical time, which emphasises the present as a distinct temporal dimension, is seen from Heidegger's perspective as an attempt to circumvent language, which essentially means circumventing 'reality'. *Presencing*, if one could speak of such a phenomenon in this case, is synonymous with what is encountered in the immediate experience, which is mediated by the *look* of a thing. With such an understanding of time permanent presence is made possible. What can stand and appear in the immediate experience is as such by virtue of it acquiring substance (*ousia*) that persists through time. Ipso facto, essence in terms of metaphysical time transcends both history and language. Notice how such a conception of time prevails only when *phusis* is taken as that which names something permanent, i.e. nature, and *logos* as that which explicates the order in the nature of things through a set of coherent and non-contradictory *assertions*, i.e. logic.

With the identification of *phusis* with nature and *logos* with assertion a stark distinction between Being and seeming arises. Being becomes the source of essence that underlies the physical appearance of matters. For Heidegger, however, "The essence of seeming lies in appearing. It is self-showing, self-setting-forth, standing by, and lying-at-hand." (Heidegger 2000, 76) Appearance, for Heidegger, as I have argued is only

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possible by the emergence of the ambiguous experience of *Phusis* as Being in language. Thus, with metaphysical time temporal phenomena are shrouded because the meaning of Being has fallen out of the originary meaning which saw no distinction between Being and seeming. Authentic *presencing*, seeming, or appearance is a fundamental phenomenon that takes place in the interconnection between *phusis* and *logos*.

What we see, here, is the emphasis on what is *given* in the phenomenon of *presencing*. In “Time and Being” Heidegger says that “presencing shows itself as letting-presence...[and] To let presence means: to unconceal, to bring into openness. In unconcealment prevails a giving, the giving that gives *presencing*, that is, Being, in letting-presence.” (Heidegger 2002, 5) Being as such appears and “makes presence”. That is, it founds the present. The present is a temporal ‘space’ through which a realm of possibility for Dasein is brought out of concealment. Understood from this notion of the present—making presence as opposed to the present as the now—time becomes a dimension of Being: it depends on Being. But since appearance is a historical phenomenon, the relation Dasein has with Being is mediated through language, poetry, and culture; in a word, history. Here, Being seems to depend on time. Thus, in the *giving* of presencing “Being and time determine each other reciprocally.” (Heidegger 2002, 3) What vanishes in this reciprocal relation is the fixity that informs what is experienced in the present (as the now) and with it every objective experience that persists through epochs; simply put, Reality as such vanishes.

An objection to this formulation might be raised, here, by posing the following question: Does not the being of equipment, when observed phenomenologically, reveal to

us a universal structure, i.e. Reality? To return to our hockey stick example, is it not the case that we were able to discern its *readiness-to-hand* from its *present-at-hand* by explicating its phenomenological structure? In other words, sense perception (or as we have called it circumspective knowing), which is experienced in the immediate present, seems to reveal the essence of entities which is rooted in an objective Reality rather than their mythopoetic projection. What is being asked here is essentially the following: which comes first, appearance in nature (appearance of objects in a physical reality) or appearance in language?

To answer this, it is helpful to remember that Heidegger's preoccupation with the meaning of Being started as an opposition to the Cartesian subject-object imposition. It is this ontological relation through which Man's existence in the world is explained that Heidegger sought to unpack and refute, for it gave rise to the supremacy of theoretical knowledge over existence. And as such, it has demystified the original experience of Being. The way out, as he saw it, is to abandon the traditional presupposition of the thing-concept which attributes *thingness* to Being itself, and which tries to understand Being through the relation between a knowing subject interacting with a thingly object. As Richard Polt puts it: "By puzzling over the relationship between subject and object—a thinking thing and an extended thing, as Descartes puts it—we lose sight of the non-thing, the world, within which all things are given and in which we are engaged. As in all his subsequent work, Heidegger wants to avoid both subjectivism (retreat to an 'inner' self) and objectivism (the restriction of truth to 'external,' theoretically established facts)." (Polt 2005, 377)

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The being of equipment is a non-thing; even more, it is ineffable, in the sense that we cannot capture it through theoretical explanation. Yet, poetically articulated, it gives us an insight into temporal phenomena that are elusive but equally fundamental. Just as with the being of equipment, temporal phenomena are non-thingly matters. What we did in our example was to try to give an account of such a phenomenon, but only an account. The only way we can come close to its essence is when we are able to poetise its existence. In accordance to what is said in “The Origin of the Work of Art”, just as in the case of “architecture, paint, sculpture, and music,” sport is a form of *poesy*, which means that it is one “mode of the clearing projection of truth, i.e. of poetic composition[.]” (Heidegger 2008b, 198) As such, using the stick in the context of the sport of Hockey is to poetise its being; it is to let it come to presence in the created space given to it. Higher forms of poetry, namely language, brings to entities—in the same manner sport did to the stick—their essence. In short, without poetising, not only external truth is impossible, but the primordial experience itself remains hidden.

This is what it means to say that language is the house of Being—it is where Being discloses its meaning to Dasein, and thereby, a relation to Dasein is established. In this relation both Being and Dasein are given their essence. This takes place in the *saying* of great poetry. As Heidegger tells us, “Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of beings[, and] actual language at any given moment is the happening of this saying, in which a people’s world historically arise for it and the earth [*phusis*] is preserved as that which remains closed.” (Heidegger 2008b, 198) Once more, we must caution against the understanding that takes language as the reflection of human consciousness, which in

turn, reflects a representational reality. Language as poetry does not represent either consciousness or an objective reality. Rather, it is the “primal poesy”—the first creation—the first happening when beings are given their essence, i.e. given their appearance. Consciousness, for Heidegger, always comes second to this happening.

§2 *Ereignis* and the *Givenness* of Being

What I would like to do in this section is to explore Heidegger’s thoughts on *Ereignis*, which is a term that we have been alluding to all along. Translated in English, *Ereignis* means the “Event of Appropriation” or simply “Appropriation”. (Heidegger 2002, 21) In apprehending the experience of Being as *Ereignis* Heidegger’s thought, as it seems to me, perpetuates, though in a different and more profound way, a modern desire to tie the question of Being with the question of freedom.

Ereignis is perhaps the most puzzling concept in Heidegger’s thought. Thinking it as a concept, however, would barely allow us to grasp its essence, for it remains hidden from us. (Heidegger 2002, 23) But its withdrawal persists even if we try to understand it as a temporal phenomenon. We are told that “Appropriation neither *is*, nor is Appropriation *there*.” (Heidegger 2002, 24) What can be said of *Ereignis* is: “Appropriation appropriates.” (Heidegger 2002, 24) Thomas Sheehan, drawing from “What Calls for thinking?”, points to how Heidegger uses *Ereignis* in the sense of “the withdrawal that opens up openness.” (Sheehan 2001, 11) Thus, its essence is always a mystery because withdrawal is intrinsic to its appearance. The early Greeks experienced this mysterious force that gives the *givenness* in Being as *phusis*.

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In chapter 2 we pointed out that there has been a shift in Heidegger's concern from a fundamental ontology (from a phenomenological structure through which Dasein's existence is explained) towards Dasein's historical understanding of itself (towards Dasein's historicity). In his essay called "Ereignis" Richard Polt observes that "Heidegger's writings seem to swing back and forth between two poles: unique happening and universal structures." (Polt 2005, 389) He, therefore, maintains that Heidegger's works seems to oscillate between these two poles rather than making a clear transition from one to the other. While that may be the case, one cannot ignore the fact that, generally speaking, after *Being and Time*, Heidegger's main preoccupation was to understand Being as it appropriates itself independently from beings—hence, his emphasis on the *givenness* in Being. This is explicitly expressed in the opening statement of his lecture "Time and Being" where he says:

We want to say something about the attempt to think Being without regard to its being grounded in terms of beings. The attempt to think Being without beings becomes necessary because otherwise, it seems to me, there is no longer any possibility of explicitly bringing into view the Being of what is today all over the earth, let alone of adequately determining the relation of man to what has been called 'Being' up to now. (Heidegger 2002, 2)

For Heidegger, this very attempt "to think Being without beings means: to think Being without regard to metaphysics." The problem, of course, as Heidegger himself points out, is that even in such an attempt a regard to metaphysics prevails (Heidegger 2002, 24), because it will essentially lead to an understanding of the appropriation of Being, i.e.

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Ereignis, as an *a priori* structure by which everything being is *given* its essence. Polt's argument aims to address this perplexity presented in the lecture by reconciling Heidegger's earlier works with his later thoughts on *Ereignis*.

Polt argues that the term *Ereignis* first appeared in Heidegger's earlier work in 1919 and virtually disappeared throughout the middle period, especially in *Being and Time*, "but makes a triumphant though secret comeback as the 'essential' title of the massive and cryptic *Contribution to Philosophy (Of Ereignis)*." (Polt 2005, 375) Throughout these various stages *Ereignis* picks up different meanings. He says:

In 1919 it means, roughly, a kind of experience in which I find myself intimately involved, as opposed to an experience in which I am nothing but an objective viewer. In 1936-8 it means, roughly, the possible happening in which a new dwelling may be founded—a place and age in which a people could cultivate significance. In 1962 it means, roughly, neither an experience nor a happening but an ultimate source that has always already granted us time and being. (Polt 2005, 376)

For Polt, in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of what Heidegger means by Being, a close attention must be paid not only to these various "avatars" of *Ereignis* but also to the connection they have with one another. While such a task is difficult and perhaps even unresolvable, Polt's essay, nonetheless, invites us to reflect on these meanings of *Ereignis*, and on what they might "hold for our own future thinking." (Polt 2005, 376) For Polt, the connecting thread that binds Heidegger's early works with his later ones is

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provided in the 1919 lecture where the meaning of *Ereignis* still denotes an existential significance. Without such a dimension, Being becomes an abstract thing that is disconnected from beings, and as such “it becomes very difficult to connect it to our own experience.” (Polt 2005, 390)

In our discussion we tried to understand what essence, and ultimately Reality, means for Heidegger. In so doing we have unavoidably alluded to the aforementioned meanings of *Ereignis*. In fact, the outline of the three chapters reflects these three meanings. In chapter 1 the existential knowledge Dasein acquires from the background understanding of its environment is the Being it appropriates for itself. In chapter 2, we indirectly spoke of *Ereignis* in terms of the happening of truth that manifests itself in the form of paradigmatic truths which ground Dasein and Being as such. Finally, in chapter 3, through our discussion of the phenomenon of *presencing* we are led to what is *given* historically through *Ereignis*.

Unlike Polt, however, I believe that the real perplexity is not in which meaning of *Ereignis* we are supposed to relate ourselves to, but rather it is in the very fact that Being is interpreted as Appropriation, especially when it means that which *gives* both Being and time their essence. Here, an inevitable disjunction between Being and our own experiences occurs. Though I agree that Heidegger’s early emphasis on Dasein’s existential awareness must be taken into account when trying to understand his later thoughts on *Ereignis*, it is very difficult to see how Heidegger’s understanding of *Ereignis* can be explicated on the basis of his fundamental ontology without regard to his historicism, for the former seems to depend on the latter and *vice versa*. It is my

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contention that while these meanings are intertwined, there seems to be a progression in Heidegger's thought concerning *Ereignis* that is driven by the desire to liberate thinking from metaphysical determinations. This desire, as it seems to me, culminates in apprehending Being as Appropriation, which focuses on the *givenness* in Being as it unfolds historically.

Earlier, we asserted that Reality vanishes in the *givenness* of Being in which both time and Being exists in a reciprocal relation, where one determines the essence of the other. This is so because the immediate experience itself is historicised by making it a dimension of a poetic *presencing*, which, for Heidegger, is where reality appears and sustain itself as that which holds sway (*phusis*). When nothing persists in the immediate experience, when there is no connection between what we experience in the present moment and an objective Reality, *Eros*, too, vanishes, because the permanent, the unchanging, i.e. the Beautiful, which we long for not only becomes a historically given object (possibility), but the very experience of alienation which draws us to it—and which is traditionally understood as that which defines us as human beings regardless of age, culture and epoch—becomes groundless in the immediate present. In short, the permanent vanishes because there is nothing in our worldly experiences that could intimate the existence of a transcendent truth.

In Plato's Symposium, *Eros* in its base form is bodily love, (Plato, 210B-C) which means our bodies are the access point through which the love of the Beautiful is attained. (Plato, 210B-211C) The relation between our bodies and our spiritual longing is an important one. Through it, we come to grasp—though not in an absolute manner—the

Beautiful. This is to say that by virtue of this relation what we encounter in the immediate present, be it through our body or mind, is profoundly tied with the experience of permanence. In other words, an intimation of the just, the beautiful, and the good is possible only on the basis of a rich experiential dimension of human existence. With all his emphasis on Dasein's existential knowing, Heidegger, especially in his later works, strips Dasein from this experiential dimension. To put it crudely, Dasein is an entity that lacks a body.

Moreover, *Anxiety*, too, in *presencing* is no longer the central experience of human existence. It is effected by the Appropriation in *presencing*. Anxiety takes place when Dasein is pressed up against a new determination of Being that detaches it from its familiarity.¹⁰ In such a state Dasein becomes *apolis*, for it finds itself amidst a *pre-worldly* experience brought about by yet a more fundamental experience, which is the “fundamental happening”, i.e. *Ereignis*, that takes place in the clearing of *presencing*. In *Anxiety* Dasein is presented with, i.e. *given*, the potentiality to live authentically by standing in the new unconcealed ground. Consequently, there is no fundamental experience to human existence other than what has been given to it historically in the form of a happening, and the truth of this happening is revealed, in its primordially, in poetry.¹¹

¹⁰ As Michael Gelven puts it, “We are thrown in the world. Dread [, anxiety,] brings us face to face with this thrownness.” Elaborating further, he adds: “But dread does not merely presents us with our Being-in-the-world. Because the world is, in the moment of dread, alien to us—we no longer feel at-home in the world—dread focuses upon us as unique individuals. Dread according to Heidegger, *individualizes*.” (Gelven 1989, 117)

¹¹ In anxiety the question of Being becomes an issue for Dasein. That is to say that Dasein becomes aware of its existence, i.e. reflects on it *Self*, in the uneasiness it feels in the face of the possibility of living

Human nature, for Heidegger, is the potentiality—a way of being—that resonates with the manifestation of Being, and which itself is also a possibility of Being appropriating itself through history. In residing in what is readily available to it, the familiar world, Dasein *stands* with Being. Being as such is apprehended through this spatial orientation. But for Dasein to exist authentically, which to say to *stand* in a closer proximity to Being, it must be open to receive what is given in Being.

Given Heidegger's insistence on the *givenness* of Being, in which neither human nature nor Being itself has a fixed essence, his historicism draws our attention to the kinship between the question of Being and the question of human freedom. In the "On the Essence of Truth" Heidegger tells us that "*the essence of truth is freedom.*" (Heidegger 2008b, 123) As is the case with every phrase Heidegger utters, one must be cautious not to move too hastily by making inferences based on the conventional understanding of the terms he uses. When we think of freedom we tend to associate it with that which affects individual behaviour or actions. Here, freedom is understood in terms of human freedom, i.e. political freedom. For Heidegger, freedom, while still is human freedom, has its origin in a more primordial understanding of the essence of human beings. As such, it comes prior to the "common sense" understanding of freedom that branches it into the two poles of negative and positive freedom. (Heidegger 2008b, 126) This dichotomy has its roots in the language of metaphysics, and therefore, is

authentically, apart from the *they-self*. Contrary to what Strauss thought, however, anxiety is not the fundamental experience that defines human beings. (Strauss 1989, 32) It is specific to modern existence. What Strauss is right about is that this experience is expressed in the feeling of uneasiness that dislodges one's Dasein from its world. While this experience of uneasiness is retained in the form of the *pre-worldly* experience in art, the later Heidegger, as argued, abandons the inquiry into a fundamental ontology in favor of grounding Being in a fundamental happening (*Ereignis*).

incompatible with Heidegger's thought. What Heidegger means by freedom is "letting beings be." (Heidegger 2008b, 125) "To let be" we are told "means to engage oneself with the open region [*aletheia*] and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself." (Heidegger 2008b, 125)

Evidently, this understanding of freedom is almost, if not entirely, interchangeable with what Heidegger says about *presencing*. The relation between Being and Dasein is one of between a sender and a receiver. In the given of Being there is a sending that requires Dasein for it to take place. This, however, does not mean that Human beings determine Being, but rather that through art they receive and extend the open region, allowing the concealed to withdraw and draws them in with it. (Sheehan 2001, 11) Here, the possibility to experience Being anew authentically presents itself. This is what freedom entails, it is the engagement with that which gives the givenness in Being in order to extend beyond what has determined and ossified the mystery of Being (metaphysics).

Being, here, must be grasped in the ordinary sense of *phusis*—the mysterious force that engages us in its withdrawal from Dasein. Stanley Rosen says of *phusis*, as an event (*Ereignis*), it is "the way of Being itself." (Rosen 2001, xvi). Which means that "*Phusis* is a way rather than the nature of the way; it is free or unpredictable happening, not a standard to which we may appeal but the mysterious presentation of standards, and hence it is the process of the changing of standards, of "giving" now of the one standard, now of another." (Rosen 2001, xvi) In Rosen's formulation, Heidegger's existentialism teaches us to return to an original interpretation of *phusis* as the emerging sway that

liberates us from any ground for fundamental standards. Here, metaphysical truth is not refuted, but rather that truth itself is set free from its determinations. Hence, truth as the happening that emerges, unconcealed, out of the struggle we have with physis. It is the openness within history that grounds our understanding of reality and our relation to it. Thus, in standing in this historical site, we must open ourselves to what is given in it.

The implication of such an interpretation of Being leaves us even more perplexed, as Stanley Rosen puts it “The happening of the E-vent [*Ereignis*] is thus understood as the freedom of beings; there are no principles, no foundations, and so no standards other than those we freely accept. But why we should accept them, other than because they are given, is unclear.” (Rosen 2001, xviii)

To conclude this chapter, the question of “how it stands with Being?” points to how entities and ultimately Being as such *appear*. Appearance is a temporal phenomenon that has to do with essence coming-to-presence, i.e. *presencing*. This takes place, i.e. happens, historically in language. Essence understood in this historical sense is not substance, but rather is the assumed possibility that endures in the present by virtue of a poetic articulation. The present, here, is reinterpreted as a temporal dimension that goes beyond the immediate experience—it is the historically given realm of possibilities for Dasein.

In *Presencing* there is unconcealment, *aletheia*. When something comes to presence its Being is revealed, and thus, it stands in the openness in which it shines and appears. The various determination of Being (i.e. becoming, seeming, thinking and the

ought) all have roots in this understanding of *aletheia* as appearance that endures through the present; that is to say that “all at the bottom say the same: *constant presence, on as ousia*.” (Heidegger 2000, 154) The problem, of course, is when *ousia* in reference to *presencing* is taken as substance. Here, essence becomes a thingly matter. We know from our earlier discussion in chapter 2 that *aletheia*—now as a function of *presencing*—is only possible under the understanding of Being as *phusis*. Understood in this sense, truth cannot be thought of in terms of a thing. Heidegger’s language aims to ‘liberate’ thinking from the metaphysical determinations that made it impossible to think Being beyond the thing-matter concept. Hence, his emphasis on poetic thinking, which restores the ambiguity and the free-flowing meaning found in the original happening of Being, which took place in language (*logos*). With such an emphasis, Heidegger is urging ‘us’ to turn our backs on metaphysics and its rigid language which shrouded Being by introducing a circularity into thought through which Being as such is rendered impossible to comprehend and define.

As the house of Being, language is where Being dwells, so to speak, but also it is where Being hides and retreats. Without the historical understanding of Being, which reopens us to language as the medium through which we encounter the ground of Being as such and our own essence, our Dasein is at risks of surrendering its spiritual fate to the metaphysical determinations that have limited the possibility of Being since its inception, and which ultimately led us to a groundless and meaningless existence.

Indeed, Heidegger does provide a way out of the circular, not to mention the contradictory, thinking of modern philosophy whose understanding of Being is borrowed

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from yet a more limited understanding, that is, scientific reasoning. But as argued in chapter 1, there is a difference between scientific reasoning, i.e. modern rationality, and classical reasoning. Failing to make this distinction comes at the dire cost of losing the essence of Platonic teaching that articulated an account of reason that speaks to our erotic longing for the good. To put it simply, what we lose is the ability to experience Reality.

There is no doubt that Heidegger's restoration of the ambiguity found in the Greek language is an attempt to re-mystify Being. Being, taken in the strict sense of *ousia*, according to Heidegger, has ossified the meaning of Being, and therewith, has severed our relation to the original inception. But what is more important to note in this is that with such a re-mystification malleability is brought back to language. The implication, here, is that since human essence is revealed in language, it, too, becomes fundamentally malleable—Dasein as we argued is characterised by the condition of pure possibility. Accordingly, Reality itself, traditionally understood, crumbles, because we lack a fixed nature by which we can judge its existence. Other than what is *given* to us historically, there is no vantage point by which we can gauge Reality. Every ground is given to us by the malleability intrinsic to language, which in turn comes from the way Being appropriates itself through the various epochs. This ground, when it is established, is the happening of Being in history that brings about a new dwelling space for Dasein. Heidegger refers to this event that *gives* the grounding of Being as *Ereignis*.

To give an interpretation of *Ereignis* in Heidegger is not an easy feat indeed. From what we were able to show in this short work, *Ereignis* as the Appropriation that gives both time and Being their essence pushes us even further into the direction of

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historicism, in which the question of Being is no longer fundamentally tied with *Eros* but rather with the question of freedom. While Heidegger's understanding of freedom radically differs from the modern conception, it, nonetheless, perpetuates its desire to liberate essence from metaphysical determinations. Here, *Eros*, as the dimension of human existence through which the experience of the transcendent good (Reality) is intimated, all the while, harmoniously reflected in the immediate experience, becomes unattainable outside of an understanding of Being as a historical manifestation.

Chapter 4: Final Thoughts

As I have mentioned above, my aim in this thesis was not to reject Heidegger, but rather to engage with his thought. It is my belief that Heideggerian existentialism, owing to its origin in German idealism, has had a tremendous effect on the way we think and speak (i.e. understand) Reality. In this respect, the very way in which we experience reality has come under the influence of such a historicism.

My own position, contrary to Heidegger's, distinguishes between classical thought and modern thinking. The latter is not the heir of the former, but rather emerges out of a break with the experiential dimension of man which Greek philosophy—namely, Plato's—held close to the theoretical understanding of Being. This dimension is what connected man's existence with the mysterious pole of the transcendent. Through this connection, Reality is stabilised for us, and reflection made possible. The soul-body duality expressed the unity between these two dimensions of human nature. Modern subjectivism radicalised this duality by 'rearticulating' it in terms of the division between subject and object. Here, the break with the Platonic tradition occurs, and the understanding of man as Self arises.

Heidegger's concern with Being started as an inquiry into this subjective Self. His fundamental ontology was a direct response to modern epistemological thinking. Gradually, however, Heidegger moved away from this ontology and towards the direction of Dasein's historicity, in which he sought the meaning of Being through the

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opening created by the fundamental happening in history (*Ereignis*). Being, here, is grounded in the paradigmatic truth of a particular people in history. Art, as founding, not only brings a people closer to the understanding of their Being but also, in rare instances, ‘creates’ the possibility for the articulation of Being. This twofold dimension of awareness intrinsic to art—of *worldly* and *pre-worldly* understandings of existence—is characterised by Heidegger through the world-earth metaphor.

As I have argued, Heideggerian existentialism is fundamentally a profound expression of German historicism. His historicism, however, while prevalent in all his writings, must be grasped in relation to his thought on *Ereignis*. I referred to the phenomenon of *presencing* in the hope that it would bring out some of the subtleties in his thought to help in understanding what *Ereignis* entails. For Heidegger Being is *presencing*, which is to say that Being is appearing. As he himself puts it: “Being means appearing. Appearing does not mean something derivative, which from time to time meets up with Being. Being essentially unfolds as appearing.” (Heidegger 2000, 77) We have seen that appearance in Heidegger has little to do with physical appearance. Appearance occurs in language, or more precisely, in poetry. His historicism prioritises the meaning of poetic projection over theoretical reflection, for the latter is a *post-worldly* phenomenon, and as such, always comes secondary.

With *presencing*, the essence of both time and Being become interdependent. A reciprocal relation between the two can be seen in the *givenness* of *presencing*. Here, *Ereignis* starts to come to the fore as the Appropriation that appropriates. His existentialism, which at this point is interchangeable with his historicism, is brought

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together in the concept of *Ereignis*. As Polt argues, throughout Heidegger's writings *Ereignis* picks up different meanings. In his earlier writings, *Ereignis* is tied to Dasein's awareness of itself through its mode of everydayness. Then, it comes to mean the actual *givenness* of Being, the fundamental happening. And, finally, it means neither, but rather that which gives the *givenness* in Being. While trying to sort out which of these meanings reflects Heidegger's ultimate intention is not a simple matter, I believe that one could, at the very least, assert that there is a progression in Heidegger's thought that leads to apprehending *Ereignis* as the enigmatic and inaccessible force from which a historical understanding of Being flows.

The problem with such an understanding of Being as Appropriation is that our relation to Being itself is severed. Polt is right in saying that if *Ereignis* is so rare and elusive—not to mention, beyond our apprehension—it would be impossible to relate it to our experience. The only way we come to experience it is through its manifestation in history. That is to say, through the fundamental happening. But, here, too, and perhaps in a more profound way, we are disconnected from Being. What we come to know of Being is a paradigmatic truth that changes from epoch to epoch. While the possibility to understand other periods remains, in no way can it point to a fixity by which we can ground our understanding of Being. As we have seen, in the *givenness* of *presencing*, the present, the immediate experience, vanishes, and therewith, Reality, as traditionally understood, vanishes too.

Indeed language is essential in moulding and shaping our consciousness. But consciousness is but one dimension of human existence. In the Platonic understanding,

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reason along with the passions and desires constitute the whole of a human being. The soul-body metaphor is an allegorical account of man that gives him an insight into the relation man has to the two poles of Being and becoming. In other words, man's essence, here, is interpreted in terms of the relation between the experiential and spiritual dimensions of existence. As I have argued, in Heidegger, especially in his later works, the experiential dimension of our existence is surprisingly dislodged from its ground.

Now I would like to turn to Heidegger's own language. It does indeed provide us with a deep insight into modernity, but at what cost? Perhaps we could say that it is at the cost of our ability to experience the Real. It restores malleability to language, which in itself is not a bad thing. However, the issue is in tying essence, including human nature, to a *coming to presence* in language. Here, we must tread carefully. To borrow a quote from Voegelin, "coining a new language, either by giving new meanings to familiar terms or by inventing new technical terms, is one of the most effective devices for eclipsing reality." (Voegelin 1970, 191) Whether Heidegger's teaching is true or not, is a question that I did not try to address in this work. My aim was to show how close his existentialism lies to our own understanding of Being as moderns.

Throughout this thesis I was struggling. I struggled with Heidegger, with his language and concepts, with his understanding of Being, and with his truth. But what I struggled with the most was that I could not find anything in Heidegger that accounts for our longing for completion. What I am referring to is the longing that, no matter how we may try to address, expresses itself as an aching void in the depth of our souls.

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One final remark, while there is a great deal of literature written on Heidegger's involvement with the National Socialist movement, given the fact that I, too, am writing on Heidegger, I feel that I should say something about this matter. Whether his involvement was the direct result of his philosophy or a lapse of character, I leave for the experts to decide. One thing I will say, however, is that his philosophy for the most part implicitly leaves room for such dangerous political stands, and in specific parts, it outright endorses them. What I find interesting in Heidegger is his historicism, which, when examined closely, tells us something about ourselves and our capability to distort our sense of reality. The political implications, here, are without a doubt grave. But unless we are prepared to engage Heidegger on the question of Being from a metaphysical perspective—i.e. to point to the existence of the good as the source of our being, and not to the necessity of its existence for political reason (order)—we would be speaking the same modern language.

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