MARTIN

# HEIDEGGER

# INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS

REVISED AND EXPANDED
TRANSLATION BY
GREGORY FRIED AND RICHARD POLT

SECOND EDITION

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# Introduction to Metaphysics

*Second Edition*

Revised and expanded translation by
Gregory Fried and Richard Polt

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# Contents

# Translators' Introduction to the Second Edition

*Introduction to Metaphysics* is no textbook presentation of a traditional field of academic philosophy. Presupposing that his audience is acquainted with that tradition, Heidegger plunges into a radical interrogation of its central concepts—forcing us to ask what we mean when we say that something *is*, making us wonder how Being can mean anything to us at all, and challenging us to rethink our own existence as human beings. Exposing unsuspected roots of our language and thought, Heidegger brings a new urgency to ancient questions. The text also serves as an effective entry point to many of the distinctive questions and themes of his own philosophical project.

Heidegger had originally presented his *Introduction to Metaphysics* as a lecture course at the University of Freiburg in the summer semester of 1935. In 1953, in his preface to the seventh edition of his 1927 masterwork, *Being and Time*, he suggested that for an elucidation of the question of Being raised by this text, "the reader may refer to my *Einführung in die Metaphysik*,

which is appearing simultaneously with this reprinting."[1] It attests to the importance he attached to this work that Heidegger would choose this course, from among the dozens of manuscripts of lecture courses held over the decades of his teaching career, as the first to present for general publication, and that he would see fit to introduce this *Introduction* as a companion, indeed a rightful heir, to *Being and Time*, the book that established him as a preeminent philosopher of his age.

*Introduction to Metaphysics* deserves this status, for the range and depth of its thought as well as for its intricate and nuanced style. Although the volume consists of a series of classroom lectures, it is composed with great care. Nearly every paragraph contains a series of plays on words that exploit the sounds and senses of German, and often of Greek, in order to bring us closer to a genuine experience of primordial phenomena: beings, Being, and Dasein.

In order to orient readers who are new to Heidegger, it may be best to begin by commenting on these three words and our reasons for translating them as we do.

*Das Seiende*: beings; what is; that which is. Heidegger's expression *das Seiende* is broad enough to embrace anything that

1. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 17. The 1953 edition of *Einführung in die Metaphysik* was published by Max Niemeyer Verlag (Tübingen). Niemeyer has continued to publish the book, and it has also been published in the series of Heidegger's collected works as *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 40, ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983). The *Gesamtausgabe* edition includes the Niemeyer edition's pagination; our translation also includes this pagination for the reader's convenience. In citing *Introduction to Metaphysics* we will use the abbreviation "IM" followed by a page reference according to the Niemeyer edition, which will allow the reader to find the passage both in our translation and in the two German editions.

is something instead of nothing, any entity with which we may have dealings of any sort. One helpful passage in this text suggests the range of things that may count as beings, including vehicles, mountains, insects, the Japanese, and Bach's fugues (IM 58). *Das Seiende* (or the equivalent *Seiendes*) often refers to beings in general and as a whole, as in the opening question of the book, "Why are there beings [*Seiendes*] at all instead of nothing?" It should be noted that the German expression, unlike the English "beings," is not plural, and is translated most literally as "what is" or "that which is." (Occasionally, Heidegger describes something as *seiend*. We have translated this verbal adjective as "in being.") The term *Seiendheit*, "beingness," refers to the essential characteristics of beings as such, or that which characterizes beings as beings. According to Heidegger, the tradition of metaphysics has primarily focused on grasping this beingness through some scheme that categorizes beings and subordinates some to others: for instance, Platonism concentrates on the "forms" as the beings that most fully exemplify beingness and lend a derivative beingness to lesser beings. But there is a deeper, unasked question that the metaphysical tradition ignores: the question of what allows us to understand beingness in the first place.

*Das Sein*: Being. For Heidegger, Being is not any *thing*. It is not *a* being at all, but concerns the meaningful disclosure of beings as beings. Many passages in *Being and Time* and *Introduction to Metaphysics* use the word "Being" to refer to the distinctive way in which some sort of thing *is* (for instance, the Being of a school, IM 25–26). "Being" in general can mean beingness, the essential characteristics of beings as such, which have been investigated by traditional metaphysics. However, to move beyond metaphysics, Heidegger also asks how it is that beings in their beingness are *meaningfully available to us* at all. What allows us to go about interpreting things, or making sense of them—from

schools to trees to ourselves? In the 1930s, as we will explain below, he addresses this question in terms of a happening, an originary event thanks to which beings as such become accessible and understandable. This event may also be called "Being" in a deeper, nonmetaphysical sense. (In order to indicate this sense, Heidegger sometimes uses the locutions "Being as such" and "Being itself," as opposed to beingness or "the Being of beings": see his 1953 comments at IM 14–15 and 133.) In this sense, Being is essentially historical: it is the "fundamental happening" of history itself (IM 153). We should note that some prefer to translate *das Sein* as "being" with a lowercase "b," in order to fend off the impression that Heidegger means a Supreme Being that stands above or sustains all other beings. (In German, all nouns are capitalized, so there is no such implication.) Still, in our judgment, to render *das Sein* as "being" risks confusion, especially with "beings" as the translation for *das Seiende*, so we resort to the capitalized term "Being."

Finally, in the first draft of a portion of the lecture course, translated in this volume as Appendix II, Heidegger uses the obsolete German spelling *Seyn* for this word. This spelling fell out of use in the nineteenth century, and Heidegger's reasons for choosing it are complex, but one thing to say about it here is that he is attempting to alert his reader to a sense of the meaning of Being that has been lost or obscured in modernity. We have chosen to use the hyphenated "Be-ing" to render *das Seyn*. Some translators prefer "Beyng," which was an actual English spelling in the late Middle Ages; however, while *Seyn* would have been recognizable, if old-fashioned, to a German reader, "Beyng" strikes us as so outlandish as to be off-putting to the English reader. "Be-ing" invites the reader to reflect on the verbal, temporal meaning of Being without this jarring effect.

made available by the present, in the temporal sense. An insight into the broader dimensions of temporality would then make it possible for us to acknowledge and comprehend more ways of Being, including our own, in some unitary way.

Why did Heidegger break off *Being and Time* before establishing its main thesis? It seems that the book's approach was insufficiently historical, in his view, at least in its manner of presentation. Despite the fact that Heidegger describes us as profoundly historical beings, the thesis of *Being and Time* sounds rather ahistorical, as if a fixed and eternal essence of Dasein determined, once and for all, the range of meanings that beings can have. This way of thinking does not reflect our indebtedness to the movement of history, which can thrust new meanings upon us. In his later reflections on *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger accordingly speaks of a move "from the understanding of Being to the happening of Being" (see page 233 below).[2]

In 1933, Heidegger enthusiastically welcomed Hitler's rise to power and lent his hand to the new regime by serving for a year as the first Nazi rector of the University of Freiburg. In his inaugural speech, he condemns traditional academic freedom and calls on the university to perform "knowledge service" as a complement to labor service and military service.[3] During his year as rector he delivered a lecture course that at one point apparently endorses the "annihilation" of the internal enemies of the people

2. The precise nature of the "turn," or the shift from "early Heidegger" to "middle" or "later Heidegger," is a classic topic in the secondary literature. Some deny that there is any fundamental shift at all. Most interpreters, however, would agree that beginning around 1930, Heidegger emphasizes our indebtedness to Being as a happening or event.

3. "The Self-Assertion of the German University," trans. Lisa Harries, in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, ed. Günther Neske and Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

(*Volk*), and a seminar that argues that the state must be led by the absolute will of a supreme leader (*Führer*).[4]

Interpreters differ widely, and often acrimoniously, on whether Heidegger's Nazism was a passing aberration or a long-term commitment, and whether it was due to a character defect or a philosophical error.[5] We would argue that his politics are connected to some enduring elements in his philosophy. Heidegger believed that a moment of communal authenticity, such as he had suggested in section 74 of *Being and Time*, had arrived. Drawing on his understanding of historicity, he held that a movement based on a particular people's heritage was truer and deeper than any politics based on universal, abstract principles (such as liberal democracy or communism, as he saw them).[6] But

4. *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 73; *Nature, History, State*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), Session 7.

5. Heidegger's political involvement has generated great controversy in several cycles of discussion since the end of the war. For reliable biographies, readers may consult Hugo Ott, *Heidegger: A Political Life*, trans. Allen Blunden (New York: Basic Books, 1993), and Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). For further discussion, see Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993); Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis, eds., *The Heidegger Case: On Philosophy and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000). More recently, considerable debate has been sparked by Emmanuel Faye's *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009); for a correspondence with Faye about his work, see Gregory Fried, "A Letter to Emmanuel Faye," *Philosophy Today* 55:3 (Fall 2011): 219–52.

6. In the winter semester of 1933–34, Heidegger identifies Platonism as the root of the powers "against which we must struggle today" for the sake of "the *finitude, temporality*, and *historicity* of human beings": *Being and Truth*, 129.

this is not to say that his philosophical ideas can lead only to fascist politics, or that they are exhausted by such politics. Readers should also know that the textual evidence shows that Heidegger increasingly distanced himself from Nazism—or at least, from the actual practice and dominant mentality of the movement, as opposed to what *Introduction to Metaphysics* calls its "inner truth and greatness" (IM 152). By 1940, Heidegger had developed a metaphysical critique of standard Nazi ideology—without drawing any closer to liberal or leftist points of view.[7]

In 1936–38, Heidegger composed the first of a series of private texts that were to be published only after his death: *Contributions to Philosophy*.[8] The shift from traditional metaphysics to a new, historical understanding of Being is presented here as an epoch-making transition from "the first inception" to "the other inception." In the other inception, Being is to be grasped as a fundamental happening: *das Ereignis*, the appropriating event. This event can found Dasein by tearing open a "time-space" or "site of the moment" where Dasein is "appropriated." Then we can achieve genuine selfhood and learn to "shelter" truth in particular beings, such as works of art, but only if "truth" is understood as an openness to the meaningfulness of things, not as a set of correct propositions about the world that we somehow hide away and safeguard. It was clearly such an appropriating event that Heidegger had been hoping to find in the National Socialist revolution, but this text subjects the typical Nazi worldview to some strong criticism, insisting that a *Volk* is never an end in itself.[9] Heidegger begins to look less toward politics than

7. See Richard Polt, "Beyond Struggle and Power: Heidegger's Secret Resistance," *Interpretation* 35:1 (Fall 2007): 11–40.

8. *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

9. Ibid., 78, 109, 252, 316.

toward poetry—specifically, the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, which suggests new ways for the Germans to seek themselves. Heidegger's later writings move ever farther from the domains of willful action and power, emphasizing the need to wait.[10]

In the context of these broader developments, *Introduction to Metaphysics* comes into view as a transitional text where Heidegger is exploring a number of key issues. Its initial question—"Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"—was raised by Leibniz, one of the "greatest" German thinkers (IM 92).[11] But whereas Leibniz answers the question by identifying God as the first cause and develops a rationalist metaphysics, Heidegger denies us any answer, and instead uses the question to raise a still deeper one: "How does it stand with Being?" (IM 25). That is, what is the sense of beingness for us, and how is it that we have any such understanding of what it means to be? Heidegger's investigations take him back to the language, philosophy, and tragic poetry of the Greeks. He claims that in the course of Western history, and particularly under the influence of Platonism, Being has been restricted: it has been opposed to becoming, to seeming, to thinking, and to the ought. But as Heidegger points out in the final hour of his lecture course, this restricted sense of Being must be insufficient: after all, becoming, seeming, thinking, and the ought are not nothing, but have their own ways of Being (IM 155). Metaphysics can come alive again philosophically only if we trace the genealogy of the four restrictions and recapture the primal sense of "physics": the Greek experience of Being as *phusis*, or emerging

10. See especially *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

11. For Heidegger's interpretation of Leibniz, see his 1928 lecture course *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

and enduring power and presence. This original experience of presence lies at the root of the Western interpretation of Being. Yet presence itself may prove to be inadequate to grasp Being in its full breadth and depth. The entire question of Being thus needs to be rethought, and Heidegger suggests that in order to challenge Being as presence, we must rethink the question of Being and time (IM 157).

This conclusion makes it clear why Heidegger would later recommend *Introduction to Metaphysics* as a companion to *Being and Time*, and it points the way to Heidegger's later work. Without subscribing to *Being and Time*'s specific claims or adopting all its terminology, *Introduction to Metaphysics* vividly drives home the need to reflect on what it means to be, and on the surprising fact that Being means anything to us at all. The more historical approach of *Introduction to Metaphysics* is typical of Heidegger's cast of thinking after 1930, where the question of Being is not a search for transhistorical absolutes but a way of leaping into our own historicity, as Heidegger understands it. In alluding to "a completely different domain of questioning" (IM 157, cf. 15) that would inaugurate "the other inception" (IM 29), the text anticipates the transformative ambitions of the *Contributions to Philosophy*.

Along the way, *Introduction to Metaphysics* touches on a host of difficult issues, such as the meaning of "metaphysics" itself. While metaphysics is presented here as a profound and genuine impulse, Heidegger's investigations of the history of metaphysics and its roots in *phusis* ultimately imply that a new beginning of thought must be other than metaphysical (cf. IM 15). Other challenging topics that are raised in the text include the ontological implications of grammar and logic, the relation between Being and Nothing (*das Nichts*), and the nature of truth and language. For detailed investigations of such topics, we refer

the contemporaneous "The Origin of the Work of Art," where he presents great artworks as embodying the never-ending strife between world (a realm of shared meaning) and earth (the uninterpreted basis of meaning). Throughout the mid-thirties, Heidegger appears to celebrate creative conflict; he seems to believe that National Socialism may find an appropriate way to spur such creativity and to revive an ancient understanding of *technē* as a forceful and disclosive struggle. But with his turn away from power and will, and his developing critique of modern technology, Heidegger develops a less violent understanding of what constitutes human greatness, as is evident when he returns to *Antigone* in a lecture course of 1942.[15]

The question of technology brings us back to the most controversial and oft-quoted line in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (IM 152): "In particular, what is peddled about nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism, but which has not the least to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely, the encounter between global technology and modern humanity), is fishing in these troubled waters of 'values' and 'totalities.'" Particularly problematic has been the status of the phrase within parentheses, which appeared that way in the 1953 edition so as to indicate, by Heidegger's own convention, that he had written it in 1935 (as opposed to brackets, which he used to indicate material added later on). When the book was published, the young Jürgen Habermas wrote a letter to the editors of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, declaring his outrage that Heidegger could

15. See Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pt. 2; Clare Pearson Geiman, "Heidegger's *Antigones*," in Polt and Fried, *A Companion to Heidegger's "Introduction to Metaphysics."* On Heidegger's turn away from the will, see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

publish in 1953, without comment or retraction, his words of 1935 hailing Nazism.[16] In the ensuing controversy, Christian Lewalter argued in *Die Zeit* that the passage in question means that "the Nazi movement is a symptom for the tragic collision of man and technology, and as such a symptom it has its 'greatness,' because it affects the entirety of the West and threatens to pull it into destruction." Heidegger himself then wrote to *Die Zeit* to confirm that Lewalter's "interpretation of the sentence . . . is accurate in every respect" (for the text of Heidegger's letter, see the editor's afterword in this volume). In brief, a concerted attempt was made to characterize this passage as a *condemnation* of the hubristic aspirations of movements such as National Socialism that sought a monstrous "greatness" on the basis of a total control of humanity and nature through conquest and technology; the "inner truth" of the movement could then be taken as the historical importance of a phenomenon whose profound, if unsettling, significance defines the nihilism of the times.[17]

The trouble with this explanation is that Heidegger did not add the parenthetical remark in 1935 or soon thereafter. In his prefatory note to *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger claims

16. Jürgen Habermas, letter to *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 25, 1953, translated in Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, 190–97. See also Wolin's introduction to the Habermas letter for an overview of the history of the passage in question. The reference to the "inner truth" of Nazism is not unique in Heidegger's work: in his 1934–35 course on Hölderlin he also uses the phrase. The printed version of that text unfortunately misreads Heidegger's abbreviation for "National Socialism" as "natural science": *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein,"* Gesamtausgabe, vol. 39, rev. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989), 195. See Julia Ireland, "Naming *Physis* and the 'Inner Truth of National Socialism': A New Archival Discovery," *Research in Phenomenology* 44:3 (2014).

17. On Lewalter's and Heidegger's contributions to the discussion, see Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, 187–88.

that material in parentheses was written at the time of the lectures and that material in brackets was added during later reworking of the text; in his 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel*, he explicitly asserted that the parenthetical remark "was written in my manuscript," but that he did not read it aloud for fear of Party informers.[18] Nevertheless, subsequent scholarship has shown that many of the passages in parentheses should have been in brackets, and the insertion about "the encounter between global technology and modern humanity" is one of these.[19] The reader must judge the meaning of this passage in consideration of the fact that Heidegger did not, at least in 1935 when the lectures were originally delivered, explain the significance of National Socialism in terms of the parenthetical remark.

We leave it to readers to judge the political implications of *Introduction to Metaphysics*, with the caution that Heidegger's

18. "*Der Spiegel* Interview with Martin Heidegger," in *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. Günter Figal, trans. Jerome Veith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 324.

19. Otto Pöggeler attests that the parenthetical remark was very deliberately added in 1953 as the lectures were being prepared for publication: *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1987), 278; see also Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, 188. The three student assistants who worked on the page proofs of *Introduction to Metaphysics* upon its publication have all asserted that this insertion was not part of the original text, and furthermore that Heidegger changed the phrase "greatness of N. S." to "greatness of this movement": see Hartmut Buchner, "Fragmentarisches," in *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger*, ed. Günther Neske (Pfullingen: Neske, 1977), 47–51, esp. 49. For further discussion of the textual history and its significance, see editor Petra Jaeger's afterword, in this volume; Dominique Janicaud, "The Purloined Letter," in Rockmore and Margolis, *The Heidegger Case*; and Theodore Kisiel, "Heidegger's Philosophical Geopolitics in the Third Reich," in Polt and Fried, *A Companion to Heidegger's "Introduction to Metaphysics."*

contemporary references and allusions need to be researched with some care. For example, when he makes approving use of Knut Hamsun for an example of talk about Nothing (IM 20), or when he criticizes Theodor Haecker's *What is the Human Being?* (IM 109), his original audience might well know that Hamsun, a Nobel Prize–winning writer, was a Nazi sympathizer, whereas Haecker, a Catholic theologian, advanced a clearly anti-Nazi argument.

Regardless of its political entanglements, *Introduction to Metaphysics* remains, first and foremost, a powerful and provocative work of philosophy. Heidegger's impassioned lectures resonate with each other and with us, leaving us with a wealth of questions. What is the difference between beings and nothing? What is the relation between Being and Nothing? How does Being come to have any meaning for us? Does our ordinary disregard for such issues blind us to our history and condemn us to a superficial relation to the world? Do our ordinary science and logic separate us from the truth? What is truth in the first place? What is language? What is thinking? What is it to be human at all?

In the English-speaking world, the importance of *Introduction to Metaphysics* was in part established by the fact that, in 1959, it became the first book-length work by Heidegger to be translated into English, three years before a translation of *Being and Time* itself appeared.[20] In effect, the *Introduction to Metaphysics* introduced Heidegger to the English-speaking world. Ralph Manheim had undertaken the daunting task of translating

20. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959).

Heidegger's highly idiosyncratic prose, and if we judge the results in consideration of the fact that he had few models to work with, Manheim's effort stands as a landmark.

Our own translation, while approximating the fluency of Manheim's work when possible, hews to a stricter standard of accuracy and uses terminology that has become generally accepted in Heidegger translations. We have also tried to maintain a high degree of consistency in conveying key concepts. The point of this procedure is to let readers form their own interpretations of Heidegger's words, based on their knowledge of all the contexts in which they appear. A common objection against so-called literal translations is that a single word can have many meanings. This is true, but the best way to suggest the shifting pattern of the meanings of a German word is to use one word in English that is amenable to undergoing a similar series of uses. For example, when we consistently use "fittingness" to translate *Fug*, we do not mean to imply that the word should always be understood according to some single formula, such as a dictionary definition. The various meanings of "fittingness" in this text must be gathered from its successive contexts, just as one would understand the senses of *Fug* if one were reading the German text. The German-English Glossary in this volume provides a starting point for readers who wish to investigate Heidegger's vocabulary further and to discover linguistic kinships among his words. Such relationships can be imitated only imperfectly in English. There are no solutions to genuine problems of translation, only temporarily satisfactory placeholders for what thoughtful readers should themselves take up as a question about language. The only thing left is to learn German.

We have made selective editorial interventions for the sake of a full understanding of this book and its context. First, consulting the more recent German editions of Heidegger's text,

# Selected Bibliography

This bibliography is intended only as a starting point for research. It includes major texts by Heidegger that are closely related to *Introduction to Metaphysics* or are discussed in our introduction, as well as some secondary literature that focuses on *Introduction to Metaphysics* and its immediate context.

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*Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic."* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. This 1937–38 lecture course presents some ideas from the *Contributions to Philosophy* in a more accessible form.

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*Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012. Composed in 1936–38.

*Country Path Conversations*. Trans. Bret W. Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

*The Heidegger Reader*. Ed. Günter Figal. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. An interesting sampler of Heidegger's writings, including some less familiar ones such as "On the Origin of the Work of Art: First Version."

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*Off the Beaten Track*. Trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. A collection of major essays, including the revised version of "The Origin of the Work of Art."

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# Translators' Outline

This is one possible outline of the text that the reader may find useful in following Heidegger's lectures. Page numbers refer to the Niemeyer pagination, followed by the pagination of this translation.

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      e. The genuine essence of spirit: the empowering of the powers of beings

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# Introduction to Metaphysics

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# Prefatory Note <1953>

This publication contains the text of the fully elaborated[1] lecture course that was held under the same title in the summer semester of 1935 at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau.

What was spoken no longer speaks in what is printed.

As an aid to the reader, *without any change in content*, longer sentences have been broken up, the continuous text has been more fully articulated into sections, repetitions have been deleted, oversights eliminated, and imprecisions clarified.

Whatever stands between parentheses was written during the elaboration of the lectures. Whatever is set within brackets consists of remarks inserted in subsequent years.[2]

1. By *vollständig ausgearbeitete*, Heidegger probably means that he finished writing the text in 1935, with the exception of the changes he notes below. (All footnotes are by the translators, with the exception of two notes by Heidegger that we will mark as such.)

2. The 1953 edition often did not follow the conventions Heidegger describes here: later insertions of several sentences were usually printed in

of things grows dark, the question looms. Perhaps it strikes only once, like the muffled tolling of a bell that resounds into Dasein[1] and gradually fades away. The question is there in heartfelt joy, for then all things are transformed and surround us as if for the first time, as if it were easier to grasp that they were not, rather than that they are, and are as they are. The question is there in a spell of boredom, when we are equally distant from despair and joy, but when the stubborn ordinariness of beings lays open a wasteland in which it makes no difference to us whether beings are or are not—and then, in a distinctive form, the question resonates once again: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?

But whether this question is asked explicitly, or whether it merely passes through our Dasein like a fleeting gust of wind, unrecognized as a question, whether it becomes more oppressive
{2} or is thrust away by us again and suppressed under some pretext, it certainly is never the first question that we ask.

But it is the first question in another sense—namely, in rank. We will explain three ways in which this is so. The question, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" is first in rank for us as the broadest, as the deepest, and finally as the most originary question.

The question is the broadest in scope. It comes to a halt at no being of any kind whatsoever. The question embraces all that is, and that means not only what is now present at hand in the broadest sense, but also what has previously been and what will be in the future. The domain of this question is limited only by what simply is not and never is: by Nothing. All that is not Nothing comes into the question, and in the end even Nothing itself—not, as it were, because it is something, a being (for

1. See the discussion of Dasein in our introduction.

after all, we are talking about it), but because it "is" Nothing. The scope of our question is *so* broad that we can never exceed it. We are not interrogating this being or that being, nor all beings, each in turn; instead, we are asking from the start about the whole of what is, or as we say for reasons to be discussed later: beings as a whole and as such.

Just as it is the broadest question, the question is also the deepest: Why are there beings at all . . . ? Why—that is, what is the ground? From what ground do beings come? On what ground do beings stand? To what ground do beings go?[2] The question does not ask this or that about beings—what they are in each case, here and there, how they are put together, how they can be changed, what they can be used for, and so on. The questioning seeks the ground for what is, insofar as it is in being.[3] To seek the ground: this means to get to the bottom <*ergründen*>. What is put into question comes into relation with a ground. But, because we are questioning, it remains an open question whether the ground is a truly grounding, foundation-effecting, originary ground; whether the ground refuses to provide a foundation, and so is an abyss; or whether the ground is neither one nor the other, but merely offers the perhaps necessary illusion of a foundation and is thus an un-ground.[4] However this may be, the question seeks a decision with respect to the ground that grounds the fact that what is, is in being *as* the being that it

2. *Grund*, like the English "ground," can mean a foundation, earth, or soil, or a reason, cause, or explanation. *Zu Grunde gehen* (literally, "go to the ground") is an idiom meaning "to be ruined."

3. See *seiend* in German-English Glossary.

4. "Allein, weil gefragt wird, bleibt offen, ob der Grund ein wahrhaft gründender, Gründung erwirkender, Ur-grund ist; ob der Grund eine Gründung versagt, Ab-grund ist; ob der Grund weder das Eine noch das Andere ist, sondern nur einen vielleicht notwendigen Schein von Gründung vorgibt und so ein Un-grund ist."

is.[5] This why-question does not seek causes for beings, causes which are of the same kind and drawn from the same level as beings themselves. This why-question does not just skim the surface, but presses into the domains that lie "at the ground," even pressing into the ultimate, to the limit; the question is
{3} turned away from all surface and shallowness, striving for depth; as the broadest, it is at the same time the deepest of the deep questions.

Finally, as the broadest and deepest question, it is also the most originary. What do we mean by that? If we consider our question in the whole breadth of what it puts into question, beings as such and as a whole, then it strikes us right away that in the question, we keep ourselves completely removed from every particular, individual being as precisely this or that being. We do mean beings as a whole, but without any particular preference. Still, it is remarkable that *one* being always keeps coming to the fore in this questioning: the human beings who pose this question. And yet, the question should not be about some particular, individual being. Given the unrestricted range of the question, every being counts as much as any other. Some elephant in some jungle in India is in being just as much as some chemical oxidation process on the planet Mars, and whatever else you please.

Thus, if we properly pursue the question, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" in its sense as a question, we must avoid emphasizing any particular, individual being, not even focusing on the human being. For what is this being, after all! Let us consider the earth within the dark immensity of space in the universe. We can compare it to a tiny grain of sand; more than a kilometer of emptiness extends between it and the next grain of its size; on the surface of this tiny grain of sand lives a stupefied

5. ". . . daß das Seiende seiend ist *als* ein solches, das es ist."

swarm of supposedly clever animals, crawling all over each other, who for a brief moment have invented knowledge [cf. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense," 1873, published posthumously].[6] And what is a human lifespan amid millions of years? Barely a move of the second hand, a breath. Within beings as a whole there is no justification to be found for emphasizing precisely *this* being that is called the human being and among which we ourselves happen to belong.

But if beings as a whole are ever brought into our question, then the questioning does come into a distinctive relation with them—distinctive because it is unique—and beings do come into a distinctive relation with this questioning. For through this questioning, beings as a whole are first opened up *as such* and with regard to their possible ground, and they are kept open in the questioning. The asking of this question is not, in relation to beings as such and as a whole, some arbitrary occurrence amid beings, such as the falling of raindrops. The why-question stands against beings as a whole, so to speak, stands back from them them, though never completely. But this is precisely how {4}
the questioning gains its distinction. What is asked in this question rebounds upon the questioning itself, for the questioning stands against beings as a whole, but does not after all wrest itself free from them. Why the Why? What is the ground of this

6. In parentheses in the 1953 edition. Nietzsche's essay begins: "'In some remote corner of the universe, glimmering diffusely into countless solar systems, there was once a planet upon which clever animals invented knowledge. It was the proudest and most mendacious minute in "world history"; but it was only a minute. After nature had taken a few breaths, the planet grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.' Someone could invent a fable like that, and he still would not have adequately illustrated how wretched, how shadowlike and fleeting, how pointless and arbitrary the human intellect appears within nature." Cf. *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), 42.

why-question itself, a question that presumes to establish the ground of beings as a whole? Is this Why, too, just asking about the ground as a foreground, so that it is still always a *being* that is sought as what does the grounding? Is this "first" question not the first in rank after all, as measured by the intrinsic rank of the question of Being and its transformations?

To be sure—whether the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" is posed or not makes no difference whatsoever to beings themselves. The planets move in their orbits without this question. The vigor of life flows through plant and animal without this question.

But *if* this question is posed, and provided that it is actually carried out, then this questioning necessarily recoils back from what is asked and what is interrogated, back upon itself. Therefore this questioning in itself is not some arbitrary process, but rather a distinctive occurrence that we call a *happening*.

This question and all the questions immediately rooted in it, in which this one question unfolds—this why-question cannot be compared to any other. It runs up against the search for its own Why. The question, "Why the Why?" looks externally and at first like a frivolous repetition of the same interrogative that could go on endlessly; it looks like an eccentric and empty rumination about insubstantial meanings of words. Certainly, that is how it looks. The only question is whether we are willing to fall victim to this cheap look of things and thus take the whole matter as settled, or whether we are capable of experiencing a provocative happening in this recoil of the why-question back upon itself.

But if we do not let ourselves be deceived by the look of things, it will become clear that this why-question, as a question about beings as such and as a whole, immediately leads us away from mere toying with words, provided that we still possess enough

Christian experience, that is, the world of faith. That is then theology. Only ages that really no longer believe in the true greatness of the task of theology arrive at the pernicious opinion that, through a supposed refurbishment with the help of philosophy, a theology can be gained or even replaced, and can be made more palatable to the need of the age. Philosophy, for originally Christian faith, is foolishness. Philosophizing means asking: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" Actually asking this means venturing to exhaust, to question thoroughly, what is inexhaustible and belongs to this question by unveiling what the question demands that we ask. Wherever such a venture takes place, there is philosophy.

If we now wanted to talk about philosophy, giving a report, in order to say what it is in more detail, this beginning would be fruitless. But whoever engages in philosophy must know one thing. It can be stated briefly.

All essential questioning in philosophy necessarily remains untimely, and this is because philosophy either projects far beyond its own time, or else binds its time back to this time's earlier and *inceptive* past. Philosophizing always remains a kind of knowing that not only does not allow itself to be made timely, but, on the contrary, imposes its measure on the times.[7]

Philosophy is essentially untimely because it is one of those few things whose fate it remains never to be able to find an immediate resonance in their own time, and never to be permitted to find such a resonance. Whenever this seemingly does take place, whenever a philosophy becomes fashion, either there is no actual philosophy or else philosophy is misinterpreted and, according to some intentions alien to it, misused for the needs of the day.

7. Heidegger puns on *zeitgemäß* ("timely"), meaning literally "in measure with the times."

{7} Philosophy, then, is not a kind of knowledge that one could acquire directly, like vocational and technical expertise, and which, like economic and professional knowledge in general, one could apply directly and evaluate according to its usefulness in each case.

But what is useless can nevertheless be a power—a power in the rightful sense. That which has no immediate resonance <*Widerklang*> in everydayness can stand in innermost harmony <*Einklang*> with the authentic happening in the history of a people. It can even be its prelude <*Vorklang*>. What is untimely will have its own times. This holds for philosophy. Therefore, we cannot determine what the task of philosophy in itself and in general is, and what must accordingly be demanded of philosophy. Every stage and every inception of its unfolding carries within it its own law. One can only say what philosophy cannot be and what it cannot achieve.

A question has been posed: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" We have claimed that this question is the first. We have explained in what sense it is meant as the first.

Thus we have not yet asked this question; right away we turned aside into a discussion of it. This procedure is necessary, for the asking of this question cannot be compared with what is customary. There is no gradual transition from the customary by which the question could slowly become more familiar. This is why it must be posed in advance, pro-posed <*vor-gestellt*>, as it were. On the other hand, in this pro-posal of and talk about the question, we must not defer, or even forget, the questioning.

We therefore conclude the preliminary remarks with this session's discussions.

Every essential form of spirit is open to ambiguity. The more this form resists comparison with others, the more it is misinterpreted.

Philosophy is one of the few autonomous, creative possibilities, and occasional necessities, of human-historical Dasein. The current misinterpretations of philosophy, which all have something to them despite their misunderstandings, are innumerable. Here we will mention only two, which are important for clarifying the situation of philosophy today and in the future.

One misinterpretation consists in demanding too much of the essence of philosophy. The other involves a distortion of the sense of what philosophy can achieve.

Roughly speaking, philosophy always aims at the first and last {8}
grounds of beings, and it does so in such a way that human beings themselves, with respect to their way of Being, are emphatically interpreted and given an aim. This readily gives the impression that philosophy can and must provide a foundation for the current and future historical Dasein of a people in every age, a foundation for building culture. But such expectations and requirements demand too much of the capability and essence of philosophy. Usually, this excessive demand takes the form of finding fault with philosophy. One says, for example, that since metaphysics did not contribute to preparing the revolution, it must be rejected. That is just as clever as saying that, since one cannot fly with a carpenter's bench, it should be thrown away. Philosophy can never *directly* supply the forces and create the mechanisms and opportunities that bring about a historical state of affairs, if only because philosophy is always the direct concern of the few. Which few? The ones who transform creatively, who unsettle things. It spreads only indirectly, on back roads that can never be charted in advance, and then finally—sometime, when it has long since been forgotten as originary philosophy—it sinks away in the form of one of Dasein's truisms.

Against this first misinterpretation, what philosophy can and must be according to its essence, is this: a thoughtful opening of

the avenues and vistas of a knowing that establishes measure and rank, a knowing in which and from which a people conceives its Dasein in the historical-spiritual world and brings it to fulfillment—that knowing which ignites and threatens and compels all questioning and appraising.

The second misinterpretation that we mention is a distortion of the sense of what philosophy can achieve. Granted that philosophy is unable to lay the foundation of a culture, one says, philosophy nevertheless makes it easier to build culture up. According to this distortion, philosophy orders the whole of beings into overviews and systems, and readies a world picture for our use—a map of the world, as it were—a picture of the various possible things and domains of things, thereby granting us a universal and uniform orientation. Or, more specifically, philosophy relieves the sciences of their labor by meditating on the presuppositions of the sciences, their basic concepts and principles. One expects philosophy to promote, and even to accelerate, the practical and technical business of culture by alleviating it, making it easier.

{9} But—according to its essence, philosophy never makes things easier, but only more difficult. And it does so not just incidentally, not just because its manner of communication seems strange or even deranged to everyday understanding. The burdening of historical Dasein, and thereby at bottom of Being itself, is rather the genuine sense of what philosophy can achieve. Burdening gives back to things, to beings, their weight (Being). And why? Because burdening is one of the essential and fundamental conditions for the genesis of everything great, among which we include above all else the fate of a historical people and its works. But fate is there only where a true knowing about things rules over Dasein. And the avenues and views of such a knowing are opened up by philosophy.

The misinterpretations by which philosophy remains constantly besieged are mainly promoted by what people like us do, that is, by professors of philosophy. Their customary, and also legitimate and even useful business is to transmit a certain educationally appropriate acquaintance with philosophy as it has presented itself so far. This then looks as though it itself were philosophy, whereas at most it is scholarship about philosophy.

When we mention and correct both of these misinterpretations, we cannot intend that you should now come at one stroke into a clear relation with philosophy. But you should be mindful and on your guard, precisely when you are attacked unawares by the most standard judgments and even by purported experiences. This often happens in a way that seems entirely innocuous and is quickly convincing. One believes that one has had the experience oneself, and readily hears it confirmed: "nothing comes" of philosophy; "you can't do anything with it." These two turns of phrase, which are especially current among teachers and researchers in the sciences, express observations that have their indisputable correctness. When one attempts to prove that, to the contrary, something does after all "come" of philosophy, one merely intensifies and secures the prevailing misinterpretation, which consists in the prejudice that one can evaluate philosophy according to everyday standards that one would otherwise employ to judge the utility of bicycles or the effectiveness of mineral baths.

It is entirely correct and completely in order to say, "You can't do anything with philosophy." The only mistake is to believe that with this, the judgment concerning philosophy is at an end. For a little epilogue arises in the form of a counter-question: even if *we* can't do anything with it, may not philosophy in the end do something *with us*, provided that we engage ourselves with {10}

short, the emerging-abiding sway.[10] According to the dictionary, *phuein* means to grow, to make grow.[11] But what does growing mean? Does it just mean to increase by acquiring bulk, to become more numerous and bigger?

*Phusis* as emergence can be experienced everywhere: for example, in processes in the heavens (the rising of the sun), in the surging of the sea, in the growth of plants, in the coming forth of animals and human beings from the womb. But *phusis*, the emerging sway, is not synonymous with these processes, which still today we count as part of "nature." This emerging and standing-out-in-itself-from-itself may not be taken as just one process among others that we observe in beings. *Phusis* is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable.

It was not in natural processes that the Greeks first experienced what *phusis* is, but the other way around: on the basis of a fundamental experience of Being in poetry and thought, what they had to call *phusis* disclosed itself to them. Only on the basis of this disclosure could they then take a look at nature in the narrower sense. Thus, *phusis* originally means both heaven and earth, both the stone and the plant, both the animal and the human, and human history as the work of humans and gods; and finally and first of all, it means the gods who themselves
{12} stand under destiny. *Phusis* means the emerging sway, and the endurance over which it thoroughly holds sway. This emerging, abiding sway includes both "becoming" as well as "Being" in the narrower sense of fixed continuity. *Phusis* is the event of *standing forth*, arising from the concealed and thus enabling the concealed to take its stand for the first time.[12]

10. See the discussion of *Walten* in our introduction.

11. The noun *phusis* corresponds to the verb *phuein*.

12. "*Phusis* ist das *Ent-stehen*, aus dem Verborgenen sich heraus- und dieses so erst in den Stand bringen." Heidegger is playing on the etymo-

But if one understands *phusis*, as one usually does, not in the original sense of the emerging and abiding sway, but in its later and current meaning, as nature, and if one also posits the motions of material things, of atoms and electrons—what modern physics investigates as *phusis*—as the fundamental manifestation of nature, then the inceptive philosophy of the Greeks turns into a philosophy of nature, a representation of all things according to which they are really of a material nature. Then the inception of Greek philosophy, in accordance with our everyday understanding of an inception, gives the impression of being, as we say once again in Latin, primitive. Thus the Greeks become in principle a better kind of Hottentot, in comparison to whom modern science has progressed infinitely far. Disregarding all the particular absurdities involved in conceiving of the inception of Western philosophy as primitive, it must be said that this interpretation forgets that what is at issue is philosophy—one of humanity's few great things. But whatever is great can only begin great. In fact, its inception is always what is greatest. Only the small begins small—the small, whose dubious greatness consists in diminishing everything; what is small is the inception of decline, which can then also become great in the sense of the enormity of total annihilation.

The great begins great, sustains itself only through the free recurrence of greatness, and if it is great, also comes to an end in greatness. So it is with the philosophy of the Greeks. It came to an end in greatness with Aristotle. Only the everyday understanding and the small man imagine that the great must endure forever, a duration which he then goes on to equate with the eternal.

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logical connection between *Entstehen* (genesis, growth) and *Stand* (a stand, state, situation, condition). The phrase *in den Stand bringen* ordinarily means to enable.

What is, as such and as a whole, the Greeks call *phusis*. Let it be mentioned just in passing that already within Greek philosophy, a narrowing of the word set in right away, although its original meaning did not disappear from the experience, the knowledge, and the attitude of Greek philosophy. An echo of knowledge about the original meaning still survives in Aristotle, when he speaks of the grounds of beings as such (cf. *Metaphysics* Γ 1, 1003a27).[13]

{13} But this narrowing of *phusis* in the direction of the "physical" did not happen in the way we picture it today. We oppose to the physical the "psychical," the mind or soul, what is ensouled, what is alive. But all this, for the Greeks, continues even later to belong to *phusis*. As a counterphenomenon there arose what the Greeks call *thesis*, positing, ordinance, or *nomos*, law, rule in the sense of mores. But this is not what is moral, but instead what concerns mores, that which rests on the commitment of freedom and the allotment of tradition; it is that which concerns a free comportment and attitude, the shaping of the historical Being of humanity, *ēthos*, which under the influence of morality was then degraded to the ethical.

*Phusis* gets narrowed down by contrast to *technē*—which means neither art nor technology but a kind of *knowledge*, the knowing disposal over the free planning and arranging and controlling of arrangements (cf. Plato's *Phaedrus*).[14] *Technē* is gen-

13. "Now since we are seeking the principles and the highest causes [or grounds], it is clear that these must belong to some *phusis* in virtue of itself. If, then, those who were seeking the elements of beings [*tōn ontōn*] were also seeking these principles, these elements too must be elements of being [*tou ontos*], not accidentally, but as being. Accordingly, it is of being as being that we, too, must find the first causes."—*Metaphysics* Γ 1, 1003a26–32.

14. *Phaedrus* 260d–274b is devoted to determining how rhetoric can become a proper *technē* and to what is required in general of a proper *technē*.

erating, building, as a knowing pro-ducing. (It would require a special study to clarify what is essentially the same in *phusis* and *technē*.)[15] But for all that, the counter-concept to the physical is the historical, a domain of beings that is also understood by the Greeks in the originally broader sense of *phusis*. This, however, does not have the least to do with a naturalistic interpretation of history. Beings, as such and as a whole, are *phusis*—that is, they have as their essence and character the emerging-abiding sway. This is then experienced, above all, in what tends to impose itself on us most immediately in a certain way, and which is later denoted by *phusis* in the narrower sense: *ta phusei onta, ta phusika*, what naturally is. When one asks about *phusis* in general, that is, what beings as such are, then it is above all *ta phusei onta* that provide the foothold, although in such a way that from the start, the questioning is not allowed to dwell on this or that domain of nature—inanimate bodies, plants, animals—but must go on beyond *ta phusika*.

In Greek, "away over something," "over beyond," is *meta*. Philosophical questioning about beings as such is *meta ta phusika*; it questions on beyond beings, it is metaphysics. At this point we do not need to trace the history of the genesis and meaning of this term in detail.

The question we have identified as first in rank—"Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"—is thus the fundamental question of metaphysics. Metaphysics stands as the name for the center and core that determines all philosophy.

[For this introduction, we have intentionally presented all this in a cursory and thus basically ambiguous way. According to {14}

15. Cf. Heidegger's 1939 essay "On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, 1," trans. Thomas Sheehan, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

our explanation of *phusis*, this word means the Being of beings. If one is asking *peri phuseōs*, about the Being of beings, then the discussion of *phusis*, "physics" in the ancient sense, is in itself already beyond *ta phusika*, on beyond beings, and is concerned with Being. "Physics" determines the essence and the history of metaphysics from the inception onward. Even in the doctrine of Being as *actus purus* (Thomas Aquinas), as absolute concept (Hegel), as eternal recurrence of the same will to power (Nietzsche), metaphysics steadfastly remains "physics."

The question about Being as such, however, has a different essence and a different provenance.

To be sure, within the purview of metaphysics, and if one continues to think in its manner, one can regard the question about Being as such merely as a mechanical repetition of the question about beings as such. The question about Being as such is then just another transcendental question, albeit one of a higher order. This misconstrual of the question about Being as such blocks the way to unfolding it in a manner befitting the matter.

However, this misconstrual is all too easy, especially because *Being and Time* spoke of a "transcendental horizon."[16] But the "transcendental" meant there does not pertain to subjective consciousness; instead, it is determined by the existential-ecstatic temporality of Being-here. Nevertheless, the question about Being as such is misconstrued as coinciding with the question about beings as such; this misconstrual thrusts itself upon us above all because the essential provenance of the question about beings as such, and with it the essence of metaphysics, lies in obscurity. This drags into indeterminacy all questioning that concerns Being in any way.

16. *Being and Time*, 39 (according to the pagination of the later German editions).

"Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" That is the question. To pronounce the interrogative sentence, even in a questioning tone, is not yet to question. We can already see this in the fact that even if we repeat the interrogative sentence several times over and over, this does not necessarily make the questioning attitude any livelier; on the contrary, reciting the sentence repeatedly may well blunt the questioning. {16}

Thus, although the interrogative sentence is not the question and is not questioning, neither should it be taken as a mere linguistic form of communication, as if the sentence were only a statement "about" a question. If I say to you, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" then the intent of my asking and saying is not to communicate to you that a process of questioning is now going on inside me. Certainly the spoken interrogative sentence can also be taken this way, but then one is precisely not hearing the questioning. The questioning does not result in any shared questioning and self-questioning. It awakens nothing in the way of a questioning attitude, or even a questioning disposition. For this consists in a *willing*-to-know. Willing—this is not just wishing and trying. Whoever wishes to know also seems to question; but he does not get beyond saying the question, he stops short precisely where the question begins. Questioning is willing-to-know. Whoever wills, whoever puts his whole Dasein into a will, *is* resolute. Resoluteness delays nothing, does not shirk, but acts from the moment and without fail. Open resoluteness is no mere resolution to act; it is the decisive inception of action that reaches ahead of and through all action. To will is to be resolute. [The essence of willing is traced back here to open resoluteness. But the essence of open resoluteness <*Ent-schlossenheit*> lies in the de-concealment <*Ent-borgenheit*> of human Dasein *for* the clearing of Being and by no means in

an accumulation of energy for "activity." Cf. *Being and Time*, §44 and §60. But the relation to Being is letting. That all willing should be grounded in letting strikes the understanding as strange. See the lecture "On the Essence of Truth," 1930.][19]

But to know means to be able to stand in the truth. Truth is the openness of beings. To know is accordingly to be able to stand in the openness of beings, to stand up to it. Merely to have information, however wide-ranging it may be, is not to know. Even if this information is focused on what is practically most important through courses of study and examination requirements, it is not knowledge. Even if this information, cut back to the most compelling needs, is "close to life," its possession is not knowledge. One who carries such information around with him and has added a few practical tricks to it will still be at a loss and
{17} will necessarily bungle in the face of real reality, which is always different from what the philistine understands by closeness to life and closeness to reality. Why? Because he has no knowledge, since to know means *to be able to learn*.

Of course, everyday understanding believes that one has knowledge when one needs to learn nothing more, because one has finished learning. No. The only one who knows is the one who understands that he must always learn again, and who above all, on the basis of this understanding, has brought himself to the point where he continually *can learn*. This is far harder than possessing information.

Being able to learn presupposes being able to question. Questioning is the willing-to-know that we discussed earlier: the open resoluteness to be able to stand in the openness of beings. Because we are concerned with asking the question which is first in rank, clearly the willing as well as the knowing are in a class all

19. This essay is available in *Pathmarks*.

their own. All the less will the *interrogative sentence* exhaustively reproduce the question, even if it is genuinely said in a questioning way and heard in a partnership of questioning. The question that does indeed resonate in the interrogative sentence, but nevertheless remains closed off and enveloped there, must first be developed. In this way the questioning attitude must clarify and secure itself, establish itself through exercise.

Our next task consists in *unfolding* the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" In what direction can we unfold it? To begin with, the question is accessible in the interrogative sentence. The sentence takes a stab, as it were, at the question. Hence its linguistic formulation must be correspondingly broad and loose. Let us consider our interrogative sentence in this respect. "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" The sentence contains a break. "Why are there beings at all?" With this, the question really has been posed. The posing of the question includes: 1) the definite indication of what is put *into* question, what is *interrogated*; 2) the indication of that with regard to which what is interrogated is interrogated—what is asked about. For what is interrogated is indicated unequivocally: namely, beings. What is asked about, what is *asked*, is the Why, that is, the ground. What follows in the interrogative sentence—"instead of nothing?"—is an embellishing flourish; it is just an appendix that inserts itself, as if on its own, for the sake of an initially loose and introductory way of speaking, as an additional turn of phrase that says nothing more about what is interrogated and what is asked about. In fact, the question is far more unequivocal and decisive *without* the appended turn of phrase, which just comes from the superfluity of imprecise talk. "Why are there beings at all?" But the addition "instead of nothing?" is invalidated not just because we are striving for a precise formulation of the question, but even more because it says nothing {18}

at all. For what more are we supposed to ask about Nothing? Nothing is simply nothing. Questioning has nothing more to seek here. Above all, by bringing up Nothing we do not gain the slightest thing for the knowledge of beings.[20]

Whoever talks about Nothing does not know what he is doing. In speaking about Nothing, he makes it into a something. By speaking this way, he speaks against what he means. He contra-dicts himself. But self-contradictory speech is an offense against the fundamental rule of speech (*logos*), against "logic." Talking about Nothing is illogical. Whoever talks and thinks illogically is an unscientific person. Now, whoever goes so far as to talk about Nothing within philosophy, which after all is the home of logic, deserves all the more to be accused of offending against the fundamental rule of all thinking. Such talk about Nothing consists in utterly senseless propositions. Moreover, whoever takes Nothing seriously takes the side of nullity. He obviously promotes the spirit of negation and serves disintegration. Talk-

20. Compare Heinrich Rickert, *Die Logik des Prädikats und das Problem der Ontologie*, <Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung> 1930, p. 205. <Heidegger's note; present only in the *Gesamtausgabe* edition. On p. 205 Rickert, Heidegger's former teacher, writes: "With the help of the relative Nothing, we at best reach a distinctive alternative to the world, whose epistemic meaning does not seem to be essential for the Being of the world. On the one side of this alternative we have, then, the world that is, in its totality; on the other side, in contrast, we have only Nothing as the not-Being of the world. What does this alternative tell us as regards *knowledge of the world?* One will want to answer simply: nothing, and nothing *other* than just nothing! The world remains exactly what it was, and what it is, if we oppose Nothing to it as not-the-world." Rickert goes on to argue that there are, however, important logical points to be explored regarding the concept of Nothing. He concludes his book (pp. 226–36) with an analysis of Heidegger's "What Is Metaphysics?" in which he identifies Heidegger's "Nothing" with "*the Other of the knowable world*" (p. 229). In Rickert's reading of Heidegger, "the Nothing is the something *for which we have no predicates*" (p. 231).>

ing about Nothing not only is completely contrary to thought, it undermines all culture and all faith. Whatever both disregards the fundamental law of thinking and also destroys faith and the will to construct is pure nihilism.

Given such considerations, we will do well to strike from our interrogative sentence the superfluous turn of phrase "instead of nothing?" and restrict the sentence to the simple and precise form: "Why are there beings at all?"

Nothing would stand in the way of this, if . . . if in the formulation of our question, if in the asking of this question altogether, we had as much license as it may have seemed up to now. But in asking the question we stand within a tradition. For philosophy has constantly and always asked about the ground of beings. With this question philosophy had its inception, in this question it will find its end, provided that it comes to an end in greatness and not in a impotent decline. Since the inception of the question of what is, the question of what is not and of Nothing has gone side by side with it. But it does not do so superficially, as an accompanying phenomenon; instead, the question about Nothing takes shape in accordance with the breadth, depth, and originality with which the question about beings is asked on each occasion, and conversely. The manner of asking about Nothing can serve as a gauge and a criterion for the manner of asking about beings.

If we think about this, then the interrogative sentence pronounced at the start, "Why are there beings at all *instead* of nothing?" appears far more suitable to express the question about beings than the abbreviated version after all. Our introduction of talk about Nothing here is not a careless and overly enthusiastic manner of speaking, nor our own invention, but merely strict respect for the originary tradition regarding the sense of the fundamental question. {19}

*The Road Leads On*, 1934 translation, p. 464. The work belongs together with *The Wayfarer* and *August*.[21] *The Road Leads On* depicts the last years and the end of this man August, who embodies the uprooted, universal know-how of today's humanity, but in the form of a Dasein that cannot lose its ties to the unfamiliar, because in its despairing powerlessness it remains genuine and superior. In his last days, this August is alone in the high mountains. The poet says: "He sits here between his ears and
{21} hears true emptiness. Quite amusing, a fancy. On the ocean (earlier, August often went to sea)[22] something stirred (at least), and there, there was a sound, something audible, a water chorus. Here—nothing meets nothing and is not there, there is not even a hole. One can only shake one's head in resignation."

So there is, after all, something peculiar about Nothing. Thus we want to take up our interrogative sentence again and question through it, and see whether this "instead of nothing?" simply represents a turn of phrase that says nothing and is arbitrarily

21. Heidegger refers to these novels by the titles of their German translations. Hamsun's "August" trilogy begins with *Landstrykere* (1927), translated into German as *Landstreicher* by J. Sandmeier and S. Ungermann (Munich: Albert Langen, 1928); Heidegger incorrectly calls the novel *Der Landstreicher*, in the singular. The most recent English translation is *Wayfarers*, by J. W. McFarlane (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969). The second novel is *August* (1930), translated as *August Weltumsegler* by J. Sandmeier and S. Ungermann (Munich: Albert Langen, 1930) and as *August* by Eugene Gay-Tifft (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931). The conclusion of the trilogy, *Men Livet Lever* (1933), was translated as *Nach Jahr und Tag* by J. Sandmeier and S. Ungermann (Munich: Albert Langen Georg Müller, 1934) and as *The Road Leads On* by Eugene Gay-Tifft (New York: Coward-McCann, 1934); the passage in question appears on p. 508 of the Gay-Tifft translation. We have translated it here from the German.

22. This and the following parenthetical interpolation are by Heidegger. He also inserts the dash after "here" at the beginning of the next sentence.

appended, or whether even in the preliminary expression of the question it has an essential sense.

To this end, let us stick at first to the abbreviated, apparently simpler, and supposedly more rigorous question: "Why are there beings at all?" If we ask in this way, we start out from beings. They *are*. They are given to us, they are in front of us and can thus be found before us at any time, and are also known to us within certain domains. Now, the beings given to us in this way are immediately interrogated as to their ground. The questioning advances directly toward a ground. Such a method just broadens and enlarges, as it were, a procedure that is practiced every day. Somewhere in the vineyard, for example, an infestation turns up, something indisputably present at hand. One asks: where does this come from, where and what is its ground? Similarly, as a whole, beings are present at hand. One asks: where and what is the ground? This kind of questioning is represented in the simple formula: Why are there beings? Where and what is their ground? Tacitly one is asking after another, higher being. But here the question does not pertain at all to beings as a whole and as such.

But now if we ask the question in the form of our initial interrogative sentence—"Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"—then the addition prevents us, in our questioning, from beginning directly with beings as unquestionably given, and having hardly begun, already moving on to the ground we are seeking, which is also in being. Instead, these beings are held out in a questioning manner into the possibility of not-Being. In this way, the Why gains a completely different power and urgency of questioning. Why are beings torn from the possibility of not-Being? Why do they not fall back into it constantly with no further ado? Beings are now no longer what just happens to

be present at hand; they begin to waver, regardless of whether we know beings with all certainty, regardless of whether we grasp
{22} them in their full scope or not. From now on, beings as such waver, insofar as we put them into question. The oscillation of this wavering reaches out into the most extreme and sharpest counterpossibility of beings, into not-Being and Nothing. The search for the Why now transforms itself accordingly. It does not just try to provide a present-at-hand ground for explaining what is present at hand—instead, we are now searching for a ground that is supposed to ground the dominance of beings as an overcoming of Nothing. The ground in question is now questioned as the ground of the decision for beings over against Nothing—more precisely, as the ground for the wavering of the beings that sustain us and unbind us, half in being, half not in being, which is also why we cannot wholly belong to any thing, not even to ourselves; yet Dasein is in each case mine.

[The qualification "in each case mine" signifies: Dasein is thrown to me so that my self may be Dasein. But Dasein means: care of the Being of beings as such that is ecstatically disclosed in care, not only of human Being. Dasein is "in each case mine"; this means neither that it is posited by me, nor that it is confined to an isolated ego. Dasein is *itself* by virtue of its essential *connection to* Being as such. This is what the oft-repeated sentence in *Being and Time* means: the understanding of Being belongs to Dasein.]

Thus, it is already becoming clearer that this "instead of nothing?" is no superfluous addition to the real question. Instead, this turn of phrase is an essential component of the whole interrogative sentence, which as a whole expresses a completely different question from what is meant by the question: Why are there beings? With our question we establish ourselves among beings in such a way that they forfeit their self-evidence *as beings*.

Insofar as beings come to waver within the broadest and harshest possibility of oscillation, the "either beings—or nothing," the questioning itself loses every secure foothold. Our Dasein, too, as it questions, comes into suspense, and nevertheless maintains itself, by itself, in this suspense.

But beings are not changed by our questioning. They remain what they are and as they are. After all, our questioning is just a psychospiritual process in us that, however it may play itself out, cannot concern beings themselves. Certainly, beings remain as they are manifest to us. And yet beings are not able to shrug off what is worthy of questioning: they, as what they are and how they are, could also *not* be. By no means do we experience this possibility as something that is just added on by our own thought, but beings themselves declare this possibility, they declare themselves as beings in this possibility. Our questioning {23}
just opens up the domain, so that beings can break open in such questionworthiness.

What we know about how such questioning happens is all too little and all too crude. In this questioning, we seem to belong completely to ourselves. Yet it is *this* questioning that pushes us into the open, provided that it itself, as a questioning, transforms itself (as does every genuine questioning), and casts a new space over and through everything.

It is simply a matter of not being seduced by overhasty theories, but instead experiencing things as they are in whatever may be nearest. This piece of chalk here is an extended, relatively stable, definitely formed, grayish-white thing, and, furthermore, a thing for writing. As certainly as it belongs precisely to this thing to lie here, the capacity not to be here and not to be so big also belongs to it. The possibility of being drawn along the blackboard and used up is not something that we merely add onto the thing with our thought. The chalk itself, as this being,

*is* in this possibility; otherwise it would not be chalk as a writing implement. Every being, in turn, has possibility in it, in a different way in each case. Possibility belongs to the chalk. It itself has in itself a definite appropriateness for a definite use. Of course, when we look for possibility in the chalk, we are accustomed and inclined to say that we do not see it and do not grasp it. But that is a prejudice. The elimination of this prejudice is part of the unfolding of our question. For now, this question should just open up beings, in their wavering between not-Being and Being. Insofar as beings stand up against the extreme possibility of not-Being, they themselves stand in Being, and yet they have never thereby overtaken and overcome the possibility of not-Being.

Suddenly we are speaking here about the not-Being and Being of beings, without saying how what we call Being is related to beings themselves. Are they the same? The being and its Being? The distinction! What, for example, is the being <*das Seiende*> in this piece of chalk? Already this question is ambiguous, because the word "being" can be understood in two ways, as can the Greek *to on*. On the one hand, being means *what* at any time is in being, in particular this grayish-white, light, breakable mass, formed in such and such a way. On the other hand, "being" means that which, as it were, "makes" this be a being instead of nonbeing <*nichtseiend*>, that which makes up the Being in the being, if it is a being. In accordance with this twofold meaning of the word "being," the Greek *to on* often designates the second meaning, that is, not the being itself, *what* is in being, but rather
{24} "the in-being," beingness, to be in being, Being.[23] In contrast, the first meaning of "being" names the things themselves that

23. ". . . also nicht das Seiende selbst, *was* seiend ist, sondern 'das Seiend,' die Seiendheit, das Seiendsein, das Sein."

and that puts us in danger of falling victim to mere word-idolatry in our further questioning. So it is all the more necessary for us to get clear from the outset about how it stands for us at present with Being and with our understanding of Being. Here, it is important above all to impress on our experience again and again the fact that we are not able to lay hold of the *Being of* beings directly and expressly, neither by way of beings, nor in beings—nor anywhere else at all.

A few examples should help. Over there, on the other side of the street, stands the high school building. A being. We can scour every side of the building from the outside, roam through the inside from basement to attic, and note everything that can be found there: hallways, stairs, classrooms, and their furnishings. Everywhere we find beings, and in a very definite order. Where now is the Being of this high school? It *is*, after all. The building *is*. The Being of this being belongs to it if anything does, and nevertheless we do not find this Being within the being.

Moreover, Being does not consist in our observing beings. The building stands there even if we do not observe it. We can come across it only because it already *is*. In addition, the Being of this building does not at all seem to be identical for everybody. For us, as observers or passersby, it is not what it is for the students who sit inside, not just because they see it only from the inside, but because for them, this building really is what it is and how it is. One can, as it were, smell the Being of such buildings, and often after decades one still has the scent in one's nose. The {26}
scent provides the Being of this being much more directly and truly than it could be communicated by any description or inspection. On the other hand, the subsistence of the building does not depend on this scent that is hovering around somewhere.

How does it stand with Being? Can we see Being? We see beings—the chalk here. But do we see Being as we see color and

light and dark? Or do we hear, smell, taste, or touch Being? We hear the motorcycle roaring along the street. We hear the grouse flying off through the mountain forest in its gliding flight. Yet really we are only hearing the noise of the motor's rattling, the noise that the grouse causes. Furthermore, it is hard and unusual for us to describe the pure noise, because it is precisely *not* what we generally hear. We always hear *more* [than the mere noise]. We hear the flying bird, although strictly speaking we have to say: a grouse is nothing we can hear, it is not a tone that could be registered on a scale. And so it is with the other senses. We touch velvet, silk; we see them without further ado as such and such a being, and the one is in being distinctly from the other. Where does Being lie and in what does it consist?

Yet we must look around us still more thoroughly and contemplate the narrower and wider sphere within which we dwell, daily and hourly, knowing and unknowing, a sphere that constantly shifts its boundaries and suddenly is broken through.

A heavy thunderstorm gathering in the mountains "is," or—it makes no difference here—"was" in the night. What does its Being consist in?

A distant mountain range under a vast sky—such a thing "is." What does its Being consist in? When and to whom does it reveal itself? To the hiker who enjoys the landscape, or to the peasant who makes his daily living from it and in it, or to the meteorologist who has to give a weather report? Who among them lays hold of Being? All and none. Or do these people only lay hold of particular aspects of the mountain range under the vast sky, not the mountain range itself as it "is," not what its real Being consists in? Who can lay hold of this? Or is it nonsensical, against the sense of Being in the first place, to ask about what is in itself, behind those aspects? Does Being lie in the aspects?

The portal of an early Romanesque church is a being. How and to whom does Being reveal itself? To the art historian who visits and photographs it on an excursion, or to the abbot who {27} passes through the portal with his monks for a religious celebration, or to the children who play in its shadow on a summer's day? How does it stand with the Being of this being?

A state—it *is*. What does its Being consist in? In the fact that the state police arrest a suspect, or that in a ministry of the Reich so and so many typewriters clatter away and record the dictation of state secretaries and ministers? Or "is" the state in the discussion between the Führer and the English foreign minister? The state *is*. But where is Being to be found? Is it located anywhere at all?

A painting by Van Gogh: a pair of sturdy peasant shoes, nothing else. The picture really represents nothing. Yet you are alone at once with what *is* there, as if you yourself were heading homeward from the field on a late autumn evening, tired, with your hoe, as the last potato fires smolder out. What is in being here? The canvas? The brushstrokes? The patches of color?

In everything we have mentioned, what is the Being of beings? Really, how is it that we can run around and stand about in the world with our stupid pretensions and our so-called cleverness?

Everything we have mentioned *is*, after all, and nevertheless—if we want to lay hold of Being it is always as if we were reaching into a void. The Being that we are asking about is almost like Nothing, and yet we are always trying to arm and guard ourselves against the presumption of saying that all beings *are not*.

But Being remains undiscoverable, almost like Nothing, or in the end *entirely* so. The word "Being" is then finally just an empty word. It means nothing actual, tangible, real. Its meaning

is an unreal vapor. So in the end Nietzsche is entirely right when he calls the "highest concepts" such as Being "the final wisp of evaporating reality" (*Twilight of the Idols* VIII, 78).[26] Who would want to chase after such a vapor, the term for which is just the name for a huge error! "In fact, nothing up to now has been more naively persuasive than the error of Being . . ." (VIII, 80).[27]

"Being"—a vapor and an error? What Nietzsche says here about Being is no casual remark, jotted down during the frenzy of labor in preparation for his authentic and never completed work. Instead, it is his guiding conception of Being since the earliest days of his philosophical labor. It supports and determines his philosophy from the ground up. But this philosophy remains, even now, well guarded against all the clumsy and trifling impor-
{28} tunities of the horde of scribblers that is becoming ever more numerous around him today. It seems that his work hardly has the worst of this misuse behind it. In speaking of Nietzsche here, we want nothing to do with all this—nor with a blind hero worship. The task is much too decisive and, at the same time, too sober for such worship. It consists first and foremost in fully unfolding that which was realized through Nietzsche by means of a truly engaged attack on him. Being—a vapor, an error! If this is so, then the only possible conclusion is that we should also give up the question, "Why are there beings as such and as a whole instead of nothing?" For what is the point of the question anymore, if what it puts into question is just a vapor and an error?

Does Nietzsche speak the truth? Or is he himself only the final victim of a long-standing errancy and neglect, but *as* this victim the unrecognized witness to a new necessity?

26. §4 of "'Reason' in Philosophy," in *Twilight of the Idols*.
27. Ibid., §5.

Is it Being's fault that Being is so confused, and is it the fault of the word that it remains so empty, or is it our fault, because in all our bustling and chasing after beings, we have nevertheless fallen out of Being? What if the fault is not our own, we of today, nor that of our immediate or most distant forebears, but rather is based in a happening that runs through Western history from the inception onwards, a happening that the eyes of all historians will never reach, but which nevertheless happens—formerly, today, and in the future? What if it were possible that human beings, that peoples in their greatest machinations and exploits, have a connection to beings but have long since fallen out of Being, without knowing it, and what if this were the innermost and most powerful ground of their decline? [Cf. *Being and Time* §38, especially pp. 179ff.][28]

These are not questions that we pose here casually, nor do we pose them on account of some predisposition or worldview. Instead, they are questions to which we are forced by that prior question, which springs necessarily from the main question: "How does it stand with Being?"—a sober question perhaps, but certainly a very useless question, too. And yet a *question*, *the question*: "Is 'Being' a mere word and its meaning a vapor, or is it the spiritual fate of the West?"

This Europe, in its unholy blindness always on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in the great pincers between Russia on the one side and America on the other. Russia and America, seen metaphysically, are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man. When the farthest corner of the globe {29}
has been conquered technically and can be exploited economically; when any incident you like, in any place you like, at any

28. In parentheses in the 1953 edition.

in fact so. But we don't want to evade this fact. To the contrary, we must try to get clear about its factuality in order to survey its full scope.

Through our questioning, we are entering a landscape; to be in this landscape is the fundamental prerequisite for restoring rootedness to historical Dasein. We will have to ask why this fact, the fact that "Being" remains a vaporous word for us, stands out precisely today; we will have to ask whether and why it has persisted for a long time. We should learn to know that this fact is not as innocuous as it seems at first sight. For ultimately what matters is not that the word "Being" remains just a noise for us and its meaning just a vapor, but that we have fallen out of what this word is saying, and for now cannot find our way back; it is on *these* grounds and on no others that the word "Being" no longer applies to anything, that everything, if we merely want to take hold of it, dissolves like a shred of cloud in the sun. Because this is so, we *ask* about Being. And we *ask* because we know that truths have never yet fallen into a people's lap. The fact that even now one still cannot understand this question, and does not want to understand it, even if it is asked in a still *more* originary way, takes from this question none of its inevitability.

Of course, one can show oneself to be very clever and superior, and once again trot out the well-known reflection: "Being" is simply the most universal concept. Its range extends to any and every thing, even to Nothing, which, as something thought and said, "is" also something. So there is, in the strict sense of the
{31} word, nothing above and beyond the range of this most universal concept "Being" in terms of which it could be further defined. One must be satisfied with this highest generality. The concept of Being is an ultimate. And it also corresponds to a law of logic that says: the more comprehensive a concept is in its scope—and

what could be more comprehensive than the concept "Being"?—the more indeterminate and empty is its content.

For every normally thinking human being—and we all want to be normal—such trains of thought are immediately and entirely convincing. But now the question is whether the assessment of Being as the most universal concept reaches the essence of Being, or whether it so misinterprets Being from the start that questioning becomes hopeless. The question is whether Being can count only as the most universal concept that is unavoidably involved in all particular concepts, or whether Being has a completely different essence, and thus is anything but the object of an "ontology," if one takes this word in its established meaning.

The term "ontology" was first coined in the seventeenth century. It designates the development of the traditional doctrine of beings into a philosophical discipline and a branch of the philosophical system. But the traditional doctrine is the academic analysis and ordering of what for Plato and Aristotle, and again for Kant, was a *question*, though to be sure a question that was no longer originary. The word "ontology" is still used this way even today. Under this title, philosophy busies itself with the composition and exposition of a branch within its system. But one can also take the word "ontology" "in the broadest sense," "without reference to ontological directions and tendencies" (cf. *Being and Time*, 1927, p. 11 top). In this case "ontology" means the effort to put Being into words, and to do so by passing through the question of how it stands with Being [not just with beings as such].[31] But because until now this question has found neither an accord nor even a resonance, but instead it is explicitly

31. In parentheses in the 1953 edition.

rejected by the various circles of academic philosophical scholarship, which pursues an "ontology" in the traditional sense, it may be good in the future to forgo the use of the terms "ontology" and "ontological." Two modes of questioning which, as is only now becoming clearer, are worlds apart should not bear the
{32} same name.

We *ask* the question—How does it stand with Being? What is the meaning of Being?—*not* in order to compose an ontology in the traditional style, much less to reckon up critically the mistakes of earlier attempts at ontology. We are concerned with something completely different. The point is to restore the historical Dasein of human beings—and this also always means our ownmost future Dasein, in the whole of the 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.

From the fundamental question of metaphysics, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" we have extracted the *prior question* <Vor-frage>: How does it stand with Being? The relationship between these questions needs to be elucidated, for it is in a class of its own. Usually, a preliminary question <*Vorfrage*> is settled in advance and outside the main question, although with a view to it. But philosophical questions are in principle never settled as if some day one could set them aside. Here, the preliminary question does not stand outside the fundamental question at all, but is, as it were, the hearth-fire that glows in the asking of the fundamental question, the hearth at the heart of all questioning. That is to say: when we first ask the fundamental question, everything depends on our taking up the decisive fundamental position in asking its *prior question*, and winning and securing the attitude that is essential here. This is why we brought the question about Being into connection with the fate

of Europe, where the fate of the earth is being decided, while for Europe itself our historical Dasein proves to be the center.

The question ran:

Is Being a mere word and its meaning a vapor, or does what is named with the word "Being" harbor the spiritual fate of the West?

To many ears the question may sound violent and exaggerated. For if pressed, one could indeed imagine that discussing the question of Being might ultimately, at a very great remove and in a very indirect manner, have some relation to the decisive historical question of the earth, but by no means in such a way that from out of the history of the earth's spirit, the fundamental position and attitude of our questioning could directly be determined. And yet there is such a connection. Since our aim is to get the asking of the prior question going, we now must show how, and to what extent, the asking of this prior question moves directly, and from the ground up, along with the decisive historical question. To demonstrate this, it is necessary at first to anticipate an essential insight in the form of an assertion.

We assert that the asking of this prior question, and thereby {33}
the asking of the fundamental question of metaphysics, is a historical questioning through and through. But does not metaphysics, and philosophy in general, thereby become a historical science? After all, historical science investigates the temporal, while philosophy, in contrast, investigates the supratemporal. Philosophy is historical only insofar as it, like every work of the spirit, realizes itself in the course of time. But in this sense, the designation of metaphysical questioning as historical cannot characterize metaphysics, but can only propose something obvious. Thus, either the assertion says nothing and is superfluous, or it is impossible, because it mixes up fundamentally different kinds of science: philosophy and the science of history.

In reply to this it must be said:

1. Metaphysics and philosophy are not science at all, and furthermore, the fact that their questioning is at bottom historical cannot make them so.

2. For its part, the science of history does not at all determine, as science, the originary relation to history; instead, it always already presupposes such a relation. This is why the science of history can either deform the relation to history, a relation that is itself always historical, misinterpret it, and reduce it to mere antiquarian expertise, or else prepare essential domains of vision for the already grounded relation to history and let us experience history in its binding force. A historical relation of our historical Dasein to history can become an object of knowledge and a developed state of knowledge; but it need not. Besides, not all relations to history can be scientifically objectified and become scientific, and in fact it is precisely the essential relations that cannot. The science of history can *never institute* the historical relation to history. It can only illuminate a relation once it is instituted, ground it informatively, which to be sure is an essential necessity for the historical Dasein of a knowing people, and thus neither merely an "advantage" nor a "disadvantage."[32] It is only in philosophy—*in distinction from every science*—that essential relations to beings always take shape; and therefore this relation *can*, indeed *must* be an originally historical one for us today.

But in order to understand our assertion that the "metaphysical" asking of the prior question is historical through and through, one must consider one thing above all: in this asser-
{34} tion, history is not equivalent to what is past; for this is precisely

32. With the terms "antiquarian," "advantage," and "disadvantage," Heidegger alludes to Nietzsche's "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life." Cf. *Being and Time*, §76. In the winter semester of 1938–39 Heidegger gave a lecture course on this essay by Nietzsche.

this all intensified until it turned into the measureless so-on-and-so-forth of the ever identical and the indifferent, until finally this quantitative temper became a quality of its own. By now in those countries the predominance of a cross section of the indifferent is no longer something inconsequential and merely barren, but is the onslaught of that which aggressively destroys all rank and all that is world-spiritual, and portrays these as a lie. This is the onslaught of what we call the demonic [in the sense of the destructively evil].[34] There are many omens of the rise of this demonism, in unison with the growing perplexity and uncertainty of Europe against it and within itself. One such omen is the disempowering of the spirit in the sense of its misinterpretation—a happening in the middle of which we still stand today. Let us briefly describe four aspects of this misinterpretation of the spirit.

1. One decisive aspect is the reinterpretation of spirit as *intelligence*, and this as mere cleverness in the examination, calculation, and observation of given things, their possible modification, and their additional elaboration. This cleverness is a matter of mere talent and practice and mass distribution. This cleverness is itself subject to the possibility of organization, none of which ever applies to the spirit. The whole phenomenon of literati and aesthetes is just a late consequence and mutation of the spirit falsified as intelligence. *Mere* ingenuity is the semblance of spirit and veils its absence.

2. Spirit, thus falsified as intelligence, is thereby reduced to the role of a tool in the service of something else, a tool whose handling can be taught and learned. Whether this service of intelligence now relates to the regulation and mastery of the material relations of production (as in Marxism) or in general to the {36}

34. In parentheses in the 1953 edition.

clever ordering and clarification of everything that lies before us and is already posited (as in positivism), or whether it fulfills itself in organizing and directing the vital resources and race of a people—be this as it may, the spirit as intelligence becomes the powerless superstructure to something else, which, because it is spirit-less or even hostile to spirit, counts as authentic reality. If one understands spirit as intelligence, as Marxism in its most extreme form has done, then it is completely correct to say in response that the spirit, that is, intelligence, in the ordering of the effective energies of human Dasein, must always be subordinated to healthy bodily fitness and to character. But this ordering becomes untrue as soon as one grasps the essence of spirit in its truth. For all true energy and beauty of the body, all sureness and boldness of the sword, but also all genuineness and ingenuity of the understanding, are grounded in the spirit, and they rise or fall only according to the current power or powerlessness of the spirit. Spirit is what sustains and rules, the first and the last, not a merely indispensable third element.

3. As soon as this instrumental misinterpretation of the spirit sets in, the powers of spiritual happening—poetry and fine arts, state-creation and religion—shift to a sphere where they can be *consciously* cultivated and planned. At the same time, they get divided up into regions. The world of spirit becomes culture, and in the creation and conservation of culture the individual seeks to fulfill himself. These regions become fields of a free endeavor that sets its own standards for itself, according to the meaning of "standards" that it can still attain. These standards of validity for production and use are called values. Cultural values secure meaning for themselves in the whole of a culture only by restricting themselves to their self-validity: poetry for poetry's sake, art for art's sake, science for science's sake.