

Why Being Itself and Not Just Being?

Ivo De Gennaro

Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy

I.

No doubt the dominant philosophical fact of the past thirty years has been and is the appearing – with a frequency of two volumes per year – of Martin Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe*. It has been rightly observed that, thanks to this edition, in the place of what has long appeared as an archipelago of scattered endeavors (roughly divided into, on the one hand, *Being and Time* and what belongs to it, and, on the other, the so-called late philosophy), a whole continent has begun to emerge. Of this continent, however, we are as yet hardly able to make out the shape – not to speak of the top to which it towers and the depth to which goes. Once all 102 volumes of the planned edition (which make only half of the existing handwritten material) will have been published, the whole of Heidegger’s attempt may finally, for a long moment, flash in its irreducible *weirdness*.¹

Meanwhile, the dominant role of the appearing of the *Gesamtausgabe* shows mainly in the marked reservation that is maintained vis-à-vis the *Seinsfrage* and the numerous critical questions it implies. Is *Da-sein* the element in which the stance of the *homo humanus* may finally be grounded – or is it not? Is *Ge-stell* a sufficient determination of that which *is* and thus of the universal trait of sense of our epoch – or is it not? Is *Lichtung*, as grounded in thinking, the dimension for the likely coming of a world (the mirror-play of earth and sky, divine and mortals) – or is it not? Is the form of interrogating by which our humanity has hitherto attempted to ground its dwelling, namely philosophy, at an end – or is it not? Is this end occupied by a mere dialectic of contingency that leaves our humanity in the incapacity of assuming its provenance and future – or is it not? Is, therefore, a preparatory thinking of the *sense* of this provenance and future, a thinking that cannot any more be philosophical, *the* urgency of our time – or is it

1. The sense that the word “weirdness” assumes in this context is illustrated below, at the end of section III.

not? Much of current Heidegger-scholarship seems not so much to have postponed these and other questions but indeed to *be* this very postponement.

In fact, any approach to the *Seinsfrage* that does not assume, in its own manner, the unique form of this *Frage*, redounds to historicizing it. Historicizing means: explicitly committing that which asks for interrogating *das Sein selbst* to the *past* of what is seemingly already known – seemingly, because what appears to be known is in truth merely seized and assured as an operative format.² One of the primary conceptual implements that sustain this effort of historicizing is the aforesaid partition of Heidegger’s *Denkweg* into, on the one hand, the earlier complex of *Being and Time* (with its “transcendentalistic,” “subjectivistic,” “phenomenological,” “hermeneutical,” “ontological,” “existentialistic,” “anthropological” and other influences and implications), and, on the other hand, the later, scarcely coherent *palette* of diverse recurrent themes (“poetry,” “technology,” “language,” etc.), which show, as a common trait, the somehow emphatic style of a supposed “post-turn thinking.”

However, the proven routine of historicizing the *Denkweg* was, so to speak, caught red-handed when, in 1989, the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* were published, followed in later years by *Besinnung* (1997) and, most recently, by *Über den Anfang* (2006). In fact, these writings – which constitute the first three of a complex of five treatises, the so-called “pentalogy” – show, in an unexpected manner, a grounding *tone* and *sense* (an attuned directionality), and thus nothing less than the *truth* of what up to that point had mostly been taken as a peasant-style image for a philosophical attempt in the age of the end of metaphysical systems, namely: the grounding tone and sense (and thus the truth) of the *Denkweg* as such and in the whole. Despite the aloofness of these texts – or rather: precisely because of the unswerving manner in which they keep near the wind of that which wants to be thought, a peculiar fact (one that a historical time would rather keep at bay) emerges with an uncanny likeliness, to wit: the fact that the talk of the “end of metaphysics” and the need for “another thinking” that thinks “being itself,” etc. has in view a very concrete, simple and

2. The words “past” and “format” indicate the same *sense of being*. “Format” is derived from *liber formatus*, “a book formed,” i.e., it is a truncated form of *formatus*, which, in turn, is the past participle of Latin *formare*, “to form.” In this truncation we should in fact hear the interruption of sense, i.e., as will become clear in section III, of the relation of the onset that has *already become* to the *being* of man. However, this interruption is itself constitutive for the kind of seizure whose truth is, precisely, an operative truth (a truth that *consists* in operative effectiveness and its enhancement). Hence, a format is not so much the grasping of something in an “operative sense,” but, strictly speaking, *the past of sense*. (“Epoch of formats” and “epoch of the past of sense” are concordant names for indicating our time in its constitutive trait.)

unique *issue*,³ and that *Denkweg* therefore means: approaching and seconding this issue, grounding it in a saying – and nothing else.⁴ In other words: the said treatises forthrightly witness that, in a manner of speaking, “*it*” has happened. What, however, is “*it*”? “*It*” is this: The gaping weirdness of the *only* undisclaimable issue (the issue we can turn away but never retreat from, Heraclitus would say) has *again*, but *otherwise*, taken its abode in the midst of our humanity – and it has done so in the only likely manner: by availing itself of a thinking.

This leads us by direct implication to what these treatises bring forward in the second place: Since the abode of the only issue and of its thinking is language (the saying of our mother languages as the homesteads of being), the *Denkweg* is neither a philosophical attempt that “uses” an unfamiliar and at times “awkward” language, nor, in some of its most significant parts, a “reflection on language;” rather, what announces itself in the *Denkweg* – and thus makes the “weirdness” of its manner of saying – is a necessary and fundamental transformation in our relation to language itself. This is why the thinking of the *Denkweg* is, in an unprecedented manner, essentially a work of translation, i.e., of a language translating *itself* into the word of that issue. And again: this is why, in turn, the effort of historicizing becomes, in a new sense, a matter of translation.

In fact, in idioms other than their own, the historical seizure of the treatises must occur – in the first place and critically – by way of translation. The reason for this is simple: whether or not there *is* an issue depends on whether or not the manner of speaking seconds the claimed transformation in the manner of dwelling in language. From the point of view of thinking, seconding this transformation is the same as letting the issue avail itself of the stance from which humanity – the being of *homo humanus* – may obtain its truth, i.e., *Da-sein*. Thus, in determining what is factually “there” as “Heidegger’s texts,” translation has already decided for sustaining the issue in *its* very own abode or, on the contrary, for impairing it. With two more treatises of the “pentology” and several important volumes of notes yet to be published, the coming decades will presumably stand under the either-or rule of translation: *either* a true translating – and thus a truly English thinking of the issue – accrues, *or* “translation” becomes a privi-

3. The word “issue” (from Latin *exire* “to go out, to exit”) is here to be taken literally: in fact, Heidegger’s thinking is nothing but an attempt to own, and thus to preserve and ground, that which shows itself as a *way out*. The first and in many ways decisive metaphysical figure of (philosophy as the striving for) the way out (from contingency) is, of course, the exit of the Platonic cave. In the “other onset of thinking,” the way out becomes much simpler, but also much harder to prepare and to follow.

4. Even in a historical time, however, there may be those, who, instead of joining in such keeping at bay, engage in a free dialogue with the thinker; one of these free men is no doubt the French philosopher Jean Beaufret, the addressee of the *Letter on Humanism*.

leged, and indeed the decisive venue for historicizing what not only can, but needs to be said in our languages.⁵ In other words: translation becomes the dimension for the either-or of *homo humanus*, on the one hand, and *homo animalis* or, which is the same, *homo historicus*, on the other.

If it is true that *Seinsfrage* means, in the illustrated sense, that “it” has happened and that “it” is a matter of language and our relation to it, it is not surprising that the appearing of *Beiträge zur Philosophie* and the publication of the *Gesamtausgabe* as a whole have brought to the fore an attunement that, in fact, underlies the dominant role we have been referring to. This attunement is precisely the *fear* that the *Denkweg* (*Da-sein – Lichtung – Ereignis*) could *actually* be what it does not cease to show and declare: a first, preparatory response to the claim for an unprecedented transformation of thinking – a response to another onset of thinking that has *already* become. This fear, however, cannot be the *product* of the thinking against which it comes to the surface. Indeed, it must necessarily be what already rules our humanity independently of any concrete endeavor of thinking, which can only be an occasion for this fear to become explicit. The fear that is already ruling our humanity, however, is the *fear vis-à-vis the anguish of thinking* – a fear paired with the most widely shared (because literally concerning each human being as such) and yet least owned awareness: the awareness of the enigmatic character of that which *is*. This awareness, however, is the same as that of the enigmatic character of the *only* issue.⁶ Thus, the dominant role of the *Denkweg*, as the latter takes shape with the proceeding of the *Gesamtausgabe*, is based on the ruling of this anguish and on the fear of it – in other words: it is based on the fact that the *Denkweg* appears more and more as a unique stance taken within this anguish and thus as the attempt to assume the unknown and that which, at its heart, wants to be borne in thinking. Since the fear of thinking is thus, more fundamentally, the fear vis-à-vis the anguish of thinking, that fear (the one of the *Denkweg* and thus of the *Seinsfrage*) marks not only the whole of philosophy (including its so-called analytic tradition) but equally today’s science (as the accomplishment of philosophy) and public opinion at large (insofar as its provenance, too, is philosophical). This fear is at the basis of the tacit and explicit refusal that is opposed to the *Seinsfrage* by that which the *Letter on Humanism* calls “the dictatorship of the public realm.”⁷

But what, precisely, does *Seinsfrage*⁸ mean? In fact, this title can legitimately

5. When language becomes the house of being, it wants to be borne in the dialogue of these different homesteads.

6. This awareness is, for the being of man, literally inescapable, i.e., it defines the likeliness of our humanity.

7. On the other hand, Socrates’ trial is emblematic of the fear vis-à-vis the anguish that is proper to the thinking that consists in sustaining the unknown beingness of beings (the öv[on]-Frage).

8. When the word *Seinsfrage* is written without an article, the word or title itself is in view; on the other hand, the expression “the *Seinsfrage*” refers to the matter that the same word indicates.

be taken to refer to the *Denkweg* as a whole – even if at some point *Sein* ceases to be the grounding word of this attempt. What follows is intended to give, on the one hand (sections II and III), a formal indication of the sense and scope of the *Seinsfrage* as it is first exposed in *Being and Time*; on the other hand (sections IV and V), it attempts to elucidate this sense with reference to *Möglichkeit* as a name of the only issue of the *Denkweg* – not merely in its later stations, but already in *Being and Time*. The sense of this elucidation is precisely that of showing how thinking not only includes but *consists in* a new relation to language as the word of being itself (and not any more – metaphysically – as the word of beings). A concise conclusion (section VI) will sum up the most significant points argued in this essay.

II.

Who can deny that *Seinsfrage* means: the question of being?⁹ However, the mere fact that we speak of something like a “question of being” only after and thanks to *Being and Time* should advise us to be more cautious in our understanding and in the translation of this title. In fact, *Seinsfrage* simultaneously says at least two intertwined things: In the *first* place, it says the irruption (the breaking) of *Sein* as a *Frage*, of the *Frage* “*Sein*” – the *enigma* of the ground of beings as such in the whole. This enigma not only concerns and claims “thinking” as “one of the big questions” or even “the biggest question” of “humanity:” it claims that which the enigma *itself* attunes *as* a thinking, and it does so as the *one* interrogative dimension in which, in the first place, the institution of the *world*, and thus of the humanity of man is at stake; again, it claims thinking in such a way that the breaking of this dimension already implies a hidden decision (an initial attunement) concerning the likely manner of grounding it in response to its (the dimension’s) own want for such a grounding. In the *second* place, then, the title *Seinsfrage* indicates the entirety of the thus claimed (and attuned) thinking insofar as it is, precisely, a *Fragen nach dem Sein*, i.e., an asking or interrogating that interrogates *nach*, i.e., after, being.¹⁰ Again, this interrogating “after” being has the

9. I will not discuss here the implications of the fact that, in English, the translation of *Sein*, i.e., “being,” is the same word as the translation of *Seiendes*, i.e., “a being” or “beings.” What does it imply that, in English, that which grammatically is called the (substantivized) infinitive of a verb, is formed in the same manner as the present participle? This implication must be an ontological one, i.e., it must be an implication concerning the manner in which the English language has *already* thought the element that is named in the Greek words ὄν (*on*) and εἶναι (*einai*) and, in a different manner, in the German words *Seiendes* and *Sein*. Hence, an attempt to initiate a dialogue with the *Seinsfrage* in English – a task that goes far beyond the scope not only of this essay but of the capacity of its author – would have to explicitly address this matter and settle it in such a way as to gain, in the first place, the truly English form of the *Frage*.

10. The preposition *nach* (after, to) is related to *nabe* (near, close) and *Nähe* (nearness, closeness, vicinity).

twofold sense that, on the one hand, it (the interrogating) comes second and, in coming second, *seconds* what it interrogates, and, on the other hand, in such seconding it maintains and grounds the nearness of being – the nearness that being itself is. Thus, a provisional determination of the *Seinsfrage* could sound: the breaking of the claim of all claims, the issue of all issues, named *Sein*, which, in remaining unknown, claims to be explicitly seconded and grounded in a thinking that interrogates in a manner attuned to the dimensional grounding tone of that breaking.

Why is, what has thus been roughly outlined, different from simply saying: *Seinsfrage* – i.e., the “question of being”? It is different, because it reminds us that it is not thinking *per se* or even a given humanity, endowed with reason, that may find itself in the situation of questioning (or even of having to question) something like “being.” A more careful understanding and translation of the title *Seinsfrage* makes sure that we pay attention, in the first place, to the primacy of that which, in breaking as an enigma, asks for a peculiar stance (a stance commensurate to it) in order to be sustained and sheltered, and that this stance is not at all taken “by man;” rather, this stance is what, originated by *Sein* itself as a stance of thinking, is taken on (or not) by a peculiar *who* that finds himself beheld by (or: caught in the claiming sight of) the wanting instant of such originating; as to this *who*, however, his *being* is decided precisely in whether or not – and how – he takes on the stance that suffers the *Frage* that *Sein* itself is.¹¹

11. The fact that thinking is not primarily an activity of man is already in some sense seen when it is said, in Greek thinking, that man is a ζῶον λόγον ἔχον (*zoon logon echon*), i.e., a living being that, insofar as it is, *holds itself within* the capacity of *logos*. However, this remains, in a decisive sense, a determination of a contingent living being named “man.” On the other hand, in *Being and Time* we do not at all have a new determination of the peculiar living being called “man” (as the historical format, according to which in *Being and Time* the “essence of man” is determined as *Dasein*, would have). Strange as it may seem, there is no such thing as a contingent human being, which, next to other things, could enact the thinking of *Being and Time*. Why? In the first place, *Being and Time* is precisely the instant of an onset that originates from and as being itself – that is: as being itself *with* its truth (*Da-*) and *with* the want of a steadiness (*-sein*) that bears this truth. This onset, however, instantly *interrupts* the contingency of man as a living being. “Those who interrogate,” then, are not contingent human beings that, for some reason, engage in the activity of “thinking being itself:” what “they” are is a *who* awoken to taking on, as a stance or bearing (ἔξις [*hexis*], the Greeks would say), that unique steadiness. Again, such interrogating is what “rational human life” is by its own constitution incapable of carrying out. This is why something like a new determination of the essence of “human life” (e.g., in terms of a new version of subjectivity) does not and cannot belong to the scope of the interrogation in *Being and Time*. The reason for this is not that *Being and Time* is “not interested” in “human life,” but that this book tries to take a stance in *having owned* – in response to the enigma “Sein selbst” in its broken *Da* – the enigmatic character of humanity in an unprecedented manner. Summarizing: The breaking of the *Seinsfrage* implies that the *zoon logon echon* (and its lineage from the *animal rationale* to the subject of the will for power) – and this means: the assurance given by the somehow supplemented contingency of human life – has already collapsed, so that there is no “human life” left to be determined in its “essence.”

Now, as we know, in *Being and Time* this peculiar, unique and unprecedented stance is called *Da-sein*, i.e., the manner of being that “we, those who interrogate” are (i.e., take on, bear), *insofar as* and *when* we interrogate *nach dem Sein* and its truth, thus offering our being to this stance and carrying it through – in one word: *insofar as* and *when* we ek-sist.¹² Thus, the enigmatic element that here is called *Sein initiates* the likely grounding being called *Da-sein* and asks for this being to be explicitly assumed by thinking man in an asking attuned to the claim of that initial enigma.

Having put the matter in these terms allows us to adequately appreciate the following point: If, on the one hand, *Sein* itself originates *Da-sein* as its likely grounding, on the other hand, the unknown, ever again aporetic element that the Greeks call ὄν (*on*) and οὐσία (*ousia*), and that breaks as the question τί τὸ ὄν; (*ti to on?*), i.e., τίς ἢ οὐσία; (*tis he ousia?*),¹³ does *not at all* originate, as the stance for its grounding, that which *Being and Time* calls *Da-sein*: in fact, the manner of being wanted in the Greek onset (i.e., in the onset *as φύσις* [*physis*] and ἀλήθεια [*aletheia*]) is the theoretical λόγος (*logos*) that a peculiar contingent being (ζῶον [*zoon*]), attuned to *ousia* – i.e., to pure being (ὄν ἀπλῶς [*on haplos*]) – in the attunement and temper of θαυμάζειν (*thaumazein*, “astoundment”), finds itself endowed with. In other words, when reading the initial quote from the *Sophist* that is meant to set the tone for the interrogation of *Being and Time*, we ought to let this quote attune us to the enigmatic element *Sein* that concerns *us* (those who are – or are on the verge of being – awoken to its claim); at the same time, however, we ought to withstand the temptation of taking this quote as a sign that, in what follows (i.e., in the attempt *Being and Time*), yet another and different effort is made to “answer” the – *historically* well-known – question *ti to on?* In fact, if, on the one hand, *ti to on?* is a likely question only within the scope of the *Seinsfrage*, on the other hand, the likeliness of that question (i.e., *ti to on?*) consists precisely in the *forgottenness* of that which eventually breaks as the *Seinsfrage*. The latter, says Heidegger, has never been attempted – which is the same as saying that the being that “we, those who interrogate, ourselves are,”¹⁴ namely *Da-sein*,¹⁵ has never emerged in the tradition of thinking.¹⁶ Thus, we may well speak of a sameness of the *Seinsfrage* and the *on-Frage* (or *ousia-Frage*); however, this same-

12. See *Being and Time*, § 2.

13. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1028 b 2-4. (*Ti to on?* – What is any being *as* a being, i.e., with regard to its beingness?)

14. See *Being and Time*, § 2. “Are,” here, means: (“transitively”) sustain, take on; the “are” in no case identifies a contingent being, or even the “we ourselves” of interrogation, with *Da-sein*.

15. Again: *Da* is the flashing of *Sein* itself, which (the flashing of *Sein*) is sustained in a steadiness or firmness of being (*-sein*) that is originated by and thus *ab initio* offered to *Sein* itself, i.e., so to speak, native *in* it. The being of man, then, is decided in the manner in which he takes on (or not) and opens himself (or not) to this native being.

16. “Was wir mit ‘Dasein’ bezeichnen, kommt in der bisherigen Geschichte der Philosophie nicht vor” (Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, [Pfullingen, 1989], 278): “That which we indicate as ‘Dasein’ has never emerged in the hitherto occurred *Geschichte* of philosophy.”

ness is both the element in which *Sein*, as intended in *Being and Time*, remains withdrawn and forgotten (thus giving rise to metaphysical thinking), and the element in which this forgottenness turns into the *Frage nach dem Sein* as the interrogation of precisely this sameness, which, being nothing but being itself, remains necessarily unaskable within the metaphysical *on-Frage* as *Frage* after that which is, in a primary sense, (a) being (πρώτως ὄν [*protos on*]).

Once it has become sufficiently clear how decisive it is that we do not, to begin with, on the quiet subsume the theme of *Being and Time* under the historical heading “*on-Frage*” (the *Frage* that encompasses the tradition of thinking from Parmenides to Nietzsche), we are more prepared to let ourselves be concerned by the sense of *Sein* as the theme of Heidegger’s path-breaking text. Before trying to shed some light on this matter, it may help our orientation if we indicate from the very beginning – thus in part anticipating what the following sections of this essay are meant to show – the different meanings that the word *Sein* assumes within the *Denkweg*. In fact, we can distinguish at least three such meanings:¹⁷

1. *Sein*, that is: *das Sein* (or *die Seiendheit*) *des Seienden*, i.e., being in its metaphysical sense as the being (or beingness) of beings, where the genitive “of beings” is a subjective genitive; this implies: being, here, is the *a priori* ground of beings, but in such a way that it is (*as* this *a priori* ground) already *a posteriori* with respect to the hidden contraction of the schism or cut (*Unterschied*),¹⁸ which (this contraction) decides in advance the abiding (*Anwesen*) of beings in the sense of an un-open and thus *excessive* nearness¹⁹ that Heidegger calls *Vorhandenheit* – we say: contingency.²⁰ According to this peculiar *a posteriori-a priori* structure, being as contingency is, as Heidegger says, merely an emanation or a supplement of

17. This distinction is suggested, in similar terms to the ones elaborated for the present illustration, in: Ivo De Gennaro and Gino Zaccaria, *Dasein: Da-sein. Tradurre la parola del pensiero* (Milano, 2007), 149.

18. We are indicating in the language of metaphysics a non-metaphysical insight into the hidden “*Bedingung der Möglichkeit*” (the “condition of possibility”) of metaphysical interrogation. The temporal sense of the *a posteriori-a priori* scheme is the following: *when* the beingness of beings flashes (e.g., in the form of the Platonic *idea*), the contraction (the refusing itself, the slipping away and thus the forgottenness) of the cut has *already* taken place. The temporality implied in this “when-already” is of a peculiar kind: in fact, there is not a succession (*first* the contraction, *then* the flashing), but a strict instantaneous simultaneity, according to which the flashing of beingness *consists* in the *hidden* breaking of the already become contraction of the cut (see below [section III] for a more comprehensive illustration of this original temporality).

19. “Excessive nearness” is that which holds sway where the dimension of nearness itself (the world) is contracted, so that time and space are reduced to operative implements for a domain of contingent beings-for-power and their contingent relations (– the beings and relations that modern science, and in the first place mathematical physics, grasps in its operative theories). In a context of sense, an excess of nearness is tantamount to the disruption of nearness itself, which is why a sphere of excessive nearness can be called nearness-less.

20. Neither the words “schism” and “cut,” as translations of Heidegger’s word *Unterschied*, nor the word “contingency,” as a rendition of *Vorhandenheit*, will be justified in this occasion.

beings, in the sense that it comes *after* and *for* their having already been established (by way of that hidden contraction) in a cut-less and nearness-less stability. The thus constituted dimension of sense, however, is the sphere of the “ontological difference,” which, in turn, entirely defines the scope of metaphysical interrogation (the *on-Frage*) as such; this difference, however, is merely a “difference,” for that which is supposed to differ (namely, being on the one hand and beings on the other) is, from the outset, enclosed in the cut-less participle *on*. We call this sense of the word *Sein* ‘(metaphysical) being’.²¹

2. *Sein*, that is: *das Sein (des Seienden) selbst*, i.e., again being in the sense of the being of beings, where, however, in what is called “being” is already heard the still unsaid cut of *Seyn*. That within which the cut is already heard, however, is precisely the breaking of *time* as the truth of being itself, so that this breaking is the onset not only of *Being and Time*, but of the entire *Seinsfrage* and its *Denkweg*. Being itself is thus cut *from* beings – not, however, as *something* that is cut off from something else, or even as an “emptiness” between something else, but as the initial cut (we may also say: the schismatic openness) *for* beings (including being “emptinesses,” etc.). We can in this sense speak of an ontological difference proper, whose sense implies that the subjective character of the genitive “of beings” is broken in favor of an “objective,” or even a “dative” genitive having the sense of the mentioned “*for* beings (as such in the whole);” “being” therefore means: (cut) being (as the discontingent provenance of the sense) *for* beings as such in the whole. Hence, we call this sense of the word *Sein* ‘being

The case for these translations (which in no way pretend to be sufficient, but rather try to indicate in English the dimension from which the German words speak) is made in two essays that are due to be published over the next couple of years. The following aspects should however be kept in mind: (1) “cut” is not intended as an *ontical* cut (a cut in the domain of contingency), but as the original, primal, discontingent, ab-grounding dimension whose breaking implies the collapsing of all contingency; this collapsing, however, is not the result of an *action* the cut would perform on contingency; rigorously speaking, we must therefore say: *in the very* instant in which the cut breaks, the domain of contingency has already collapsed; (2) “contingency,” in turn, is to be intended neither in opposition to (logical) necessity, nor in the common sense of “casual, unpredictable event that may occur” – in other words: it is not to be intended *according to its primary or derived metaphysical sense*; “contingent,” here, means strictly: that which – on the basis of a hidden contraction of the cut (as the original provenance of sense) – abides merely by its immediate impact, *i.e.*, without that an explicit decision concerning sense, and thus a decision involving the being of man (insofar as this being *belongs* to that provenance of sense), takes place, and which therefore admits – and offers to be thought – as its explicit “sense” only a sphere that will, *ex post*, ground this cut-less abiding; in other words, contingency only admits a “sense” *of* (i.e., functional to) such abiding-by-direct-impact. (This is, in the most succinct terms, the sense of Heidegger’s diagnosis of the “dominance of beings over being” in the domain and tradition of metaphysics: thus, what this tradition knows as “being” is, again, only an *ex post* or *a posteriori* – so to speak, a *post festum* grounding of contingent beings: an *a priori* being that, since it is, in a decisive sense, already *a posteriori*, is never that which, in the order of origination, comes first.)

21. The single inverted commas are not quotation marks but are meant to preserve the unity of the saying they delimitate.

(for the whole).⁷

3. *Sein*, that is: *das Sein (zum Seienden) als Seyn*, i.e., being (toward beings) now explicitly *as* the cut that agrees to letting things abide (*anwesen*) in agreement with the bidding (*wesend*)²² mirror-play of the world (earth and sky, divine and mortals): *things* agreeing to abide as the gathering that keeps and shelters that mirror-play; *world* as the original coming, in that play, of a sooth (tempered) measure inclined to bide in such abiding, thus constituting an abode for the dwelling of man. The ontological difference is now overcome, the form “toward beings” referring to the world-gathering abiding of things as agreed to and afforded in the weirdness of *Seyn*.²³ We call this sense of the word *Sein* ‘being (cut)’.²⁴

In this tripartition, ‘(metaphysical) being’ indicates that which is seen as “being” in the tradition of philosophy – a tradition that, within the *Denkweg*, is always already thought as resulting from the forgottenness of *Seyn* or be-ing.²⁵ Indeed, this constellation – ‘(metaphysical) being’ *in* the flashing of forgotten *Seyn* – defines the hermeneutic space for all of Heidegger’s interpretations of the classical positions of philosophy. On the other hand, ‘being (for the whole)’ characterizes the manner in which being is projected in *Being and Time* (and in the writings that remain in the sphere of the ontological difference in Heidegger’s sense, e.g., *Vom Wesen des Grundes*), namely, already in the light of time as the truth of being itself, which, in turn, is a first fore-name of the yet undisplayed *Seyn*. Finally, ‘being (cut)’ is the same as *Seyn*: the flashing of halting keeping-away,²⁶ in whose grounded bidding ‘(metaphysical) being’ is entirely overcome,

22. In this essay, the German words *anwesen* and *wesen* are translated, respectively, as “abiding” (“to abide”) and “biding” (“to bide”).

23. The manner in which being as *Seyn* (*Unter-Schied*) is the being “of” beings, i.e., *for* or *toward* things, is indicated in the following quote from *Unterwegs zur Sprache*: “Der Unter-Schied für Welt und Ding ereignet Dinge in das Gebärden von Welt, ereignet Welt in das Gönnen von Dingen” (Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, GA Bd. 12 [Frankfurt, 1985], 22).

24. The distinction of the three significations of *Sein* is not meant to introduce ready-made formats that should henceforth be substituted, as needed, whenever we find the word *Sein* in Heidegger’s writings; what they should do, however, is to provide a rough measure of the degree of familiarity we need to acquire with the *Sache des Denkens* in learning to be students of the *Denkweg*.

25. This is of course an abbreviated manner of speaking: in a more detailed exposition we would, in the first place, have to distinguish the different fore-names of *Seyn* (e.g., to start with, original time).

26. The word “keeping-away” indicates the dimension of that which Heidegger, in *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, calls *Ab-Grund*: literally the ab-ground (as Parvis Emad and Kenneth Malay translate) in the sense of *das Wegbleiben des Grundes*, and this, in turn, as a trait of that which is, in some sense, the guiding phenomenon of the entire *Denkweg*, namely *Verbergung* (“hiding” or “concealment,” none of which, however, is a sufficient English translation of this word). In this context, the verb “to keep,” which, being presumably based on a root meaning “to look, to behold,” is close to the German *wahren*, appears most promising a word for an English thinking that engages in the *Seinsfrage*. It might indeed be worthwhile considering in what manner this verb could indicate (in a truly English and thus itself non-translatable manner) the same as that which the *Denkweg* thinks in the words *wahren* and *bergen*.

and this means: freed into the provenance of its having been and thus both genuinely *grounded in its futurity* and, as Heidegger says in *Beiträge zur Philosophie, unmöglich* (“impossible”).²⁷ In the thinking of *Sein* (as *Er-eignis*), the *only* thought of the *Denkweg* has found its proper site as a step toward the grounding of the other onset, which, having already begun, claims to be prepared in an attuned bethinking.²⁸

III.

How does Heidegger indicate the grounding theme of *Being and Time*? There are indeed many explicative names for this theme, all of which – unsurprisingly – imply the word *Sein* accompanied by an index marking the difference of this theme vis-à-vis the guiding theme of metaphysics. These names include the following: *der Sinn von Sein (überhaupt)*; *das Sein selbst*; *das Sein als solches*; *Sein überhaupt*; *das Sein als das transcendens schlechthin*. The common understanding of these expressions runs more or less as follows: “While, according to Heidegger, in traditional (‘metaphysical’) thinking being has always remained entangled with beings, and thus has taken different meanings, which, however, all show the common trait indicated as *Vorhandenheit* (or *Anwesenheit*), i.e., presence, now (i.e., in *Being and Time*) being is at last to be investigated independently from beings and in its very own character, so to speak in its purity and absoluteness, in such a way as to bring to the light its truly general or universal meaning (which, in the traditional meanings, remains concealed); however, this meaning turns out to be

27. The sense in which the way out from *our* cave implies that metaphysics becomes *unmöglich* should become clear from the discussion of *Möglichkeit* in the second part of this essay (sections IV and V).

28. What motivates the resistance to acknowledging the unity of the *Denkweg*, the unity given by its *only* thought? No doubt, what resists in this resistance – namely, what resists to the *Seinsfrage* as such – is the historical eye, i.e., the eye that does not think. Clinging to the historical eye, on the one hand, and recognizing the *Denkweg* as the *Weg* of that one and only thought, on the other, are mutually excluding stances. Therefore, what can indeed be said in favor of this unity does in no way intend to establish a particular historical image of Heidegger’s thinking; in other words: the unity of the only thought *is not a historical value*. Indeed, the effort of historical invasiveness will soon have forged a historical format for this very unity (if it has not already done so). The problem for thinking, on the other hand, is in the first place this: unless we jump into the unity not so much of Heidegger’s thinking, but of the (in its first onset, Greek) *issue* of thinking as such – *we simply never start to think*. However, once we do start to think, we will not want but to follow – for the sake of thinking itself and as well as we can – the numberless indications that Heidegger himself gives, all along the way, concerning the manner in which, what is still contracted in and for *Being and Time*, finds its way to itself in the attempts of the following decades. The manuscripts of the thirties and forties (as well as, among other things, two volumes of notes on *Being and Time* that are still to be published) give invaluable hints in this respect, thus also helping to better understand the indications that Heidegger gives in several famous but scarcely pondered texts that were published during his lifetime – from the *Letter on Humanism* to the *Letter to Richardson*.

a temporal one – hence the programmatic title *Being and* (as its proper and most general determination) *Time*.” According to this view, the scope of the *Seinsfrage* is to elaborate a new meaning of being, which is formally indicated through the expressions “*Sinn von*,” “*selbst*,” “*überhaupt*,” “*als solches*” and “*transcendens schlechthin*,” and eventually deformed – via the preparatory step of ecstatic temporality – as horizontal time (the phenomenological construction of horizontal time having finally not been worked out due to the interruption of the project of *Being and Time*).

However, in consideration of the question that constitutes the title of this essay, this (or any essentially analogous) understanding calls for the following critical question: *What exactly is meant when we say “a new meaning of being,” i.e., what is the sense of the word “being” in this phrase?* As long as we do not think and say the word “being” from a stance that has assumed the *Seinsfrage* (itself understood in the terms outlined above), the word “being” will, in fact, have *none* of the indicated three senses it can have within the *Denkweg*. What, then, will be its likely sense? This sense will be that of ‘(metaphysical) being,’ but *without* the awareness of what ‘(metaphysical) being’ implies (namely, in terms of the forgotten cut or *Unter-Schied*); in other words, it will be an *indeterminate metaphysical sense of being*, an unthought sense of *Vorhandenheit*. As a consequence, the indexes for that which is thematic in the *Seinsfrage* (i.e., again, “*Sinn von*,” “*selbst*,” “*überhaupt*,” “*als solches*” and “*transcendens schlechthin*”) will necessarily be taken as indicating a certain “new” grasp of (indeterminate metaphysical) being. However, this grasp – analogously to the metaphysical determinations of the being of beings – can and will never reach into anything else than an emanation or a supplement of the presupposed indeterminate metaphysical being – a variation, as it were, on the itself opaque metaphysical theme. In other words, if, on the one hand, the movement of metaphysical thinking is that of transcending beings in the direction of their beingness (the *a priori*, which, however, is *a posteriori* with regard to the hidden contraction of the cut), it will now appear that, on the other hand, in *Being and Time* a kind of doubling of this movement occurs, albeit this time with respect not to “beings,” but to “being.” In fact,

▶ (*der*) *Sinn von (Sein)* will be understood as the (finally unveiled ultimate) meaning of (indeterminate metaphysical) being;

▶ (*das Sein*) *selbst* will be taken to indicate (indeterminate metaphysical) being insofar as it is identical with itself, i.e., “being” in its absolute identity;

▶ (*Sein*) *überhaupt* will be interpreted as the elevation of (indeterminate metaphysical) being to a more (or possibly the most) general level and to the meaning that corresponds to that level;

▶ (*das Sein*) *als solches* will be opined to mean (indeterminate metaphysical) being independently of any relation to beings, that is: insofar as it maintains itself in an absolute difference vis-à-vis beings;

▶ (*das Sein als das*) *transcendens schlechthin* will be seen to name the pure and,

again, absolute form of the detachment of being with respect to beings (where such “transcendence,” in turn, is that which – in different manners – is precisely the point and the problem of *all* metaphysical determinations of being).

However, in this manner an understanding of *Being and Time* and of the *Seinsfrage* is barred from the outset. The reason for this is that, in the views that see in the *Seinsfrage* a “new chapter” (however innovative) within the history of a presumed “question of being,” *being* (in the sense of *Being and Time*) *remains forgotten throughout*. What justifies such a clear-cut statement? The justification indeed requires that the question posed with regard to the *communis opinio* on *Being and Time* be now repeated in different terms, namely: *What exactly is meant when we say “being remains forgotten,” i.e., what is the sense of the word “being” in this phrase?* Again, this sought-for sense is precisely what the named indexes are intended to indicate, but which they *cannot* indicate as long as our understanding is stuck with indeterminate metaphysical being.

The fundamental *trait* that the word “being” indicates in the *Seinsfrage* (as opposed to the “general meaning” of this word) is what the following dictum has in view: “Die Geschichte des Seins beginnt mit der Seinsvergessenheit”²⁹ – “The *Geschichte* of being begins with the forgottenness of being.” This trait, however, is said most clearly in the third meaning of the word *Sein*: ‘being (cut)’; in fact, it is the trait indicated as *Unterschied* or cut – where, as we recall, the cut is not a cut “of” or “between” *something*, but the discontingent original cut (the schism) *for* the abiding of beings in the whole. Again, it is being in this sense – which does not any more have the character of a supplementing ground *of* beings – that speaks in the following proposition placed in one of the opening pages of *Being and Time* (§ 2): “Wir wissen nicht, was ‘Sein’ besagt”³⁰ – “We do not *know* what ‘being’ indicates.” Finally, it is this *unknown* trait that is indicated by the title *Being and Time*, i.e., being *is* time in the sense that *time* is the element that *wants* to be grounded in thinking *for the sake of the biding of ‘being (cut)’* – i.e., *the unknown*.

How are we to understand this further? Heidegger himself gives us a pre-

29. Martin Heidegger, “Der Spruch des Anaximander,” in: *Holzwege*, GA Bd. 5 (Frankfurt, 1977), 364. The full sentence is: “Die Geschichte des Seins beginnt mit der Seinsvergessenheit, damit, dass das Sein mit seinem Wesen, mit dem Unterschied zum Seienden, an sich hält;” and the passage continues: “Der Unterschied entfällt. Er bleibt vergessen.” (“The cut slips away. It remains forgotten.”) In such passages it is more than ever decisive that we read what is actually written there: In fact, it is *not* said that “there exists a difference” “between” being and beings (which may be true only in a derived sense); instead, it is said that *das Wesen des Seins* – we say: the biding of being – *consists* in this: *der Unterschied zum Seienden*; in other words: the cut is not a predicate of being, but its constitutive (and therefore, as Aristotle teaches, its most hidden) trait, its *Wesen*: the word “is” has many senses, but what language itself says, when it says “is,” is this: *Unterschied*. On the basis of this understanding, it is clear that the preposition “zum,” as it speaks in the expression *Unterschied zum Seienden*, has a unique sense: being, *that is*: the cut (not simply “with respect to,” but) *toward* beings.

30. *Sein und Zeit*, 5.

cious hint in the following oral statement reported by Jean Beaufret, which refers to the period leading to the writing of *Being and Time*:

One day, on a walk in the Black Forest, I became aware of the fact that the Platonic and Aristotelian name of being, *ousia* – which, in common speech, also designates the belongings of a farmer [his possessions and estate] –, has, from this point of view, a direct correspondent in the German *Anwesen* [meaning precisely estate, property]; on the other hand, nothing is, for a German ear, closer to the neuter *Anwesen* than the female *Anwesenheit*, whose suffix *-heit* (which is heard in *beiter* [fair, bright, serene]) says explicitly, allowing it, so to speak, to shine, that which in *Anwesen* remains opaque. Thus *Anwesenheit* says the pure shining of *Anwesen*, in the very same sense in which *Wahrheit* [truth] says *der Glanz des Wahren* [the shine of the true]. On the other hand, *Anwesenheit* is a synonym for *Gegenwart*; as a consequence, *Anwesenheit* also says that that which shines when the name of being resounds has the distinctive trait of <*Gegenwart*, which we commonly translate as> presence. However, <*Gegenwart*, i.e.,> “presence” speaks the language of time.³¹

We need not be afraid that Beaufret’s report could be unfaithful: in fact, it merely states in a particularly telling manner what Heidegger himself writes concerning the guiding thought of *Being and Time* as a first elaboration of the *Seinsfrage*. Moreover, as we try to display what is said in this quote, we should from the outset be aware that we are not looking at something like cross-lingual semantic associations generating “chains of thought:” what is said is indeed entirely a *phenomenal* matter, i.e., a matter of an awareness breaking *within* a stance of *interrogation* – and doing so *in German*, namely, a German that thinks explicitly *otherwise* than Greek. This said, we must renounce, here, to unfold entirely the richness of this passage, and focus on what is decisive for our present purpose. What Heidegger is saying – namely, that the theme of *Being and Time* is time as the shine that in *ουσία* (*ousia*) remains opaque (read: contracted in contingency) –, elsewhere he also says in the following terms: *Seinsfrage* means interrogating the truth of being itself (and not of beings). What we learn from Beaufret’s report, is that, “when the name of being *resounds*,” that which (inconspicuously) *shines* is *Gegenwart*. Again: How are we to understand this?

What has been said concerning the sense of the *Seinsfrage* should preserve us from assuming straight away that we are assisting to the discovery of some “time”-character of “being” – where “being” is implicitly understood as indeterminate metaphysical being and “time” as indeterminate metaphysical time, that is: a sense of time, which, as all time-concepts of our tradition – both philosophical and, of course, scientific – is in some way derived from and has its basis in the *ὄν-Frage*, i.e., in *ουσία*; rather, we are witnessing the breaking of

31. Jean Beaufret, *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, “En chemin avec Heidegger,” Paris 1985, 116 (see also 90); the explanatory notes in square brackets as well as the additions in acute brackets <. . .> are mine.

that which in German is called *Gegenwart* as the first flashing of an original, not any more $\ddot{o}v$ -based time. This flashing *implies* that which, on the other hand, the mere fact of “realizing” that “presence” – taken as one of the characters of the traditional understanding of time based on the $\ddot{o}v$ -Frage – is an implicit trait of $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ or *Anwesen* could *never* imply, namely: it (that flashing) implies the emerging of the outlined *threefold* sense of “being,” and thus *in the first place* (as the *most* implied) of ‘being (cut)’. In other words: *Anwesen(heit)* now *translates* $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ into ‘(metaphysical) being,’ while it becomes itself entirely a matter of *Gegenwart*, or, as the quote puts it, it explicitly “speaks the language of time:” *Anwesen*, being, the “is,” is now *transformed*, in that it is constituted within the shine of *Gegenwart* in a manner that does not involve beings (i.e., the “[being] of beings” ceases to be a subjective genitive): henceforth, a being can be called such (i.e., something that consists in being) *insofar* as it shelters, in its appearing, the “is” as the shine of *Gegenwart*. Again, this says that, from the very beginning, $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ – now seen as ‘(metaphysical) being’ – and thus the $\ddot{o}v$ -Frage *disappear* in this shine that belongs *only* to the *Seinsfrage*; hence, nothing of what is said in *Being and Time* has any relation whatsoever to the $\ddot{o}v$ -Frage and its tradition, except for the fact that this tradition now shows – and is to be explicitly addressed (namely, in that which Heidegger calls “phenomenological destruction”) – in the light of the initial *opaqueness* of original time in it. The phenomenon of the *logos* of *Being and Time* is the cut of the “is” in the flashing of its “timely” (i.e., having the character of a newly understood time) openness or truth.

At this point, the question becomes: How are we to interpret what has been rather obscurely called “the shine of *Gegenwart* (for all abiding)” as a first name of the future phenomenon of thinking? To start with, we should note the following: in the reported passage, that which flashes as *Gegenwart* does not simply indicate what, in *Being and Time*, is explicated under that name in terms of ecstatic temporality, and not even that which would have been further elaborated as horizontal time, had the project of the treatise been carried through. Rather, what announces itself in *Gegenwart*, i.e., what is already heard in it, is the *entire* phenomenon of original time and thus the *entire* phenomenon of original space and time – in short: that which *Beiträge zur Philosophie* eventually calls *Zeit-Spiel-Raum*: the time-play-space as the breaking of being itself *toward* that which, *thanks to this breaking*, may be called: a being. In fact, we ought to hear the word *Gegenwart* not as the German equivalent for the “well-known” phenomenon of “presence” (i.e., again, as an indeterminate time character based on indeterminate metaphysical being); indeed, if *Gegenwart* is the word in which the original time flashes, we ought to hear this word in the manner in which it speaks within the *Seinsfrage*, and this means: for an interrogating that stands in the *other* breaking of the initially broken enigma *Sein*, or again: according to the manner in which *Gegenwart* speaks within and from *Da-sein*. On the other hand, it is clear that, as long as we content ourselves with taking note of the fact that, for Hei-

degger, “*ousia* means presence,” we are not only disregarding the scope of the *Seinsfrage*; we are at the same time attributing to this thinking what is strictly speaking a fallacy, namely that of determining as a *constitutive* trait of *ousia* a concept of time that is itself based on – and therefore a *consequence* – of this sense of being.

How can we understand *Gegenwart* in such a manner that it becomes plausible that, to a thinking of the *Seinsfrage*, it could suddenly appear that the sought-for *sense* of being is “a matter of time” – how can we understand it, knowing that the word “time,” in this very appearing, *instantly* assumes an unprecedented sense (a “cut-sense”)? Provided we are guided by this question, a closer look at the word *Gegenwart* may help.³²

The word *Gegenwart* is formed by the preposition *gegen*, meaning “against,” and the component *wart*, meaning “(turned) toward.”³³ Thus, a literal translation of *Gegenwart* sounds: “against-(turned-)toward,” where, however, neither the “against” nor the “(turned-)toward” are to be related to “us,” namely, to “man” as a positioned and positioning (representing) subject. In fact, in *Gegen-wart* Heidegger hears the (etymologically akin) verb *warten*, “to wait, to bide,”³⁴ so that *Gegenwart* says: “that which bides-against,” i.e., that which bides in want of a thinking that already belongs to *its word* and thus as a claim that ever comes against the “we ourselves” of *interrogation*. At this point, having in view the unknown *Sein*, we can, albeit in still insufficient (because grammatically biased) terms,³⁵ say the following: *Gegenwart* (the word) indicates the broken coming (the advent) of become becomingness – the towardness³⁶ of pure broken becoming. We shall indicate the unitary phenomenon of the *coming of become becomingness* with the formulaic word “becom(e)ingness.”³⁷ As the word of bidding becom(e)ingness, *Gegenwart* indicates the original discontingent onset (*Anfang*) of all sense, i.e., being itself *as* the onset. *Gegenwart* is thus a name of being itself as

32. On what follows it is useful to see Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA Bd. 79 (Frankfurt, 1994), 83-84.

33. Cf. Latin *versus*; the root is the same as that of German *werden*, to become. Incidentally, this is also the root of the English word “weird.”

34. See the above quoted passage from *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*.

35. Our grammar – and thus the manner in which, on the basis of a certain understanding of being, we think time – is an *öV-Frage*-grammar (a grammar entangled and entangling in contingency), in which, moreover, the original attunement of the *Frage* has faded.

36. The trait of towardness (from “toward” in the sense of “propitious”) will return in our discussion of *Möglichkeit*. On the sense of this towardness in the context of the discussion of ontological difference see Martin Heidegger, “Die onto-theologische Verfassung der Metaphysik,” *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen, 1957).

37. Why do we say: the coming of *become becomingness*? Because this is what the sight of the only becoming instant beholds (and hears): the coming of the only becoming instant shows this instant as the instant of the *already become* becomingness. This form of temporality is what is most familiar to Greek thinking (cf. the Aristotelian *to ti en einai*), albeit in the sphere of *ousia* and therefore of *physis* (with all the consequences that this restriction bears).

open becom(e)ingness *against* the “we ourselves” of interrogation and *toward* the comely abiding of things: *Anwesenheit*. *Das Sein selbst* is pure becom(e)ingness, and nothing else.^{38 39}

Once again, it is decisive to recognize that, as soon the phenomenon that here is named *Anwesenheit* and *Gegenwart* flashes, the opaqueness of οὐσία is itself broken, i.e., *Anwesen (Sein)* never again speaks in the time-blind manner of οὐσία, viz., as ‘(metaphysical) being’ (*Seiendheit*, beingness). What henceforth speaks in *Anwesen* (in the “is”) is the cut whose flashing (or truth, or sooth) is the time-play-space *toward* the abiding of beings, which, in turn, are now seen as longing for such coming towardness.⁴⁰ As long as we fail to see this, we will necessarily misunderstand the title that indicates the scope of *Being and Time*, namely, “fundamental ontology.” The misunderstanding consists in taking the latter to be an attempt to determine the ground and thus the “being” of “being” (read: the beingness of beingness) in terms of some fundamental time-structure that supposedly is implied in “being itself;” however, in this manner we will misinterpret *Being and Time* – the relief from metaphysics in response to a phenomenon that metaphysics does not know, i.e., being itself as *Gegenwart* – according to a scheme that is itself *derived* from metaphysical thinking.

Now that a provisional clarity regarding the theme of *Being and Time* is gained, we can go back to the expressions that indicate this theme and try to read them in a non-metaphysical manner:

► (*der*) *Sinn von (Sein)* now indicates the sense, i.e., the truth and openness, the flashing (*Lichtung*) as the there (*Da*) of *Gegenwart*, which, in turn, is the open becom(e)ingness of ‘being (for the whole):’⁴¹ *Being and Time* speaks of “*Sinn von Sein*” (and not just of *Sein*) only because *Sein* itself has already flashed as *Gegen-*

38. This is tantamount to saying that in the thinking of *Being and Time* is already heard the character of that which Heidegger later calls *seinsgeschichtliches Denken* – *Geschichte* being precisely the name of *Gegenwart* as pure becom(e)ingness. In fact, what else could be the meaning of the famous passage of the letter to Richardson in which it is said that “[Heidegger] I <i.e., the thinking of *Being and Time*>“ is *möglich* (“possible”) only if it is “already contained in [Heidegger] II <i.e., the thinking called *seinsgeschichtlich*>”?

39. On the basis of this interpretation, it appears questionable whether the word “presence” (with all its derivations) is suitable for translating *Gegenwart* and *Anwesenheit* when these words speak as words of the *Denkweg*.

40. This longingness is the temporal sense of beings as such in the foreboding of the “is” and its coming.

41. The genitive “of being,” here, could be called a “genitive of sameness;” in fact, it means: (the becoming) *in which* (being) *consists*. This kind of genitive, which is common in German, is found throughout Heidegger’s writings. On the existential-ontological, and therefore phenomenological meaning of “sense” see *Being and Time*, § 32.

wart, i.e., as the *truth* and *openness* (the in itself firm flashing) of the “is” (cut);⁴²

► (*das Sein*) *selbst* now implies selfness as the element of discontingent *selving* (to borrow a verb from Gerald Manley Hopkins),⁴³ so that being *itself* indicates in-itself-swaying⁴⁴ ‘being (for the whole)’ insofar as it inwardly bides in its own truth, dealing itself out as wanting becom(e)ingness: *Being and Time* speaks of “*das Sein selbst*” (and not just of *Sein*) only because *Sein* itself has already flashed as the in itself swaying schism of becom(e)ingness – as the *selving cut*;

► (*Sein*) *überhaupt* now says the uniqueness of the ungrounded ground for beings as such and in the whole, insofar as it (this ground) is the broken onset

42. Translating “*der Sinn von Sein*” as “the meaning of being” would require a justification in terms of that which is indicated in the word “meaning.” In fact, in its ordinary sense, the expression “the meaning of . . .” implies the semantic content of a given thing – which, however, with regard to the locution “*der Sinn von Sein*,” is misleading. In fact, *Seinsfrage* as “*Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein*” does not mean that a peculiar meaning of being is sought for. In naming the theme of *Being and Time*, *Sinn* refers to the *phenomenon* of horizontal time as the openness or truth of ‘being (for the whole)’. Thus, in the word *Sinn* we need to hear the original sense of “way, direction,” and the latter, in turn, as *broken* path, as *blazed* trail. In fact, *Sinn* comes from a root *sent- “to go, to fare, to travel,” whose original meaning is precisely “to take a direction, to keep track of something;” hence, *Sinn* means the direction along which something is *already* on the way, the element that, so to speak, *already* hosts its bidding. In the case of *der Sinn von Sein (überhaupt)* as the theme of *Being and Time*, it is being itself that *has already* blazed its own “trail,” i.e., its hosting element, its truth (its *there*), but in such a way that, *simultaneously*, a steadiness of being (*-sein*) is claimed for sustaining this element, and thus being itself in its bidding. This is why *Being and Time* starts, in its first part, with an analysis of *Da-sein*, and this is also why, in existential analytic, “sense” – be it the sense of being or the sense of beings – is necessarily constituted as a relation of *Da-sein*. In § 32 of *Being and Time*, which discusses the existential of understanding, Heidegger writes: “*Sinn* [the Stambaugh-translation says: meaning] is that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself (...) *Sinn* is an existential of *Da-sein*, not [as, on the contrary, is the case of meaning (IDG)] a property which is attached to beings, which lies ‘behind’ them or floats somewhere as a ‘realm between’” (*Sein und Zeit*, 151; *Being and Time* [transl. Stambaugh], 142).

43. See his sonnet “As Kingfishers Catch Fire”: “(. . .) Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells, / Crying *What I do is me: for that I came* (. . .).” Incidentally, as to Hopkins’ poetological keywords “inscape” and “instress,” it may be suggested that the former (“inscape”) refers precisely to the flashing of the unique abiding of things, which (the unique abiding), in turn, is *itself* – i.e., insofar as it *selves* – the “instress.” As a matter of fact, for *das Sein selbst* we could say, with Hopkins: “the instress ‘being’” or “selving being,” and similarly: *der Tisch selbst* – “the instress ‘table’” or “the selving table,” *der Mensch selbst* – “the instress ‘man’” or “selving man,” etc. These formulations do not at all merely vary the metaphysical locutions “the essence of the table” (or “the table itself”), “the essence of man” (or “man himself”), etc., in that neither the instress nor the selving rely (as the – now matter how absolute and pure – *a posteriori-a priori* being or essence does) on the contingency of beings.

44. The word “sway” (“swaying,” “essential sway,” etc.) was first introduced by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly for translating the word-complex of *Wesen* in Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (see: *Contributions to Philosophy [From Enowning]* [Bloomington, 2000]).

that shares its bidding only with the nought (*Nichts*). The nought is the same as this ground, namely, it is this same ground *insofar* as the ground refuses itself to all contingency:⁴⁵ *Being and Time* speaks of “das Sein überhaupt” (and not just of *Sein*) only because *Sein itself* has already and primarily flashed as the unsettling cut in which all contingency has *already* collapsed, and which therefore never again bides as a highest being for beings (*ens perfectissimum, summum ens*), but only and primarily as that which wants to be thought as the original nought (*Abgrund*);

▶ (*das Sein*) *als solches* now adverts to the fact that the discontingent element for the constitution of sense requires a thinking that has *ab initio* renounced the support of any reference to beings: in fact, this element sways in itself (and thus withholds in itself *its own* thinking) as the pure be-tiding – the *tidiness*⁴⁶ (biding-in-withdrawal and thus ever coming) *toward* all appearing of things themselves: *Being and Time* speaks of “das Sein als solches” (and not just of *Sein*) only because *Sein itself* has already flashed as the *schism* that wants to be thought in its own truth (the tidiness of the strife of clearing and absconding);

▶ (*das Sein als das*) *transcendens schlechthin* now refers to that which plainly and firstly breaks *beyond* – not, though, beyond *something* or even *everything* (i.e., in a sense of “beyond” that is based on *that beyond which* this beyond lies, in which case the beyond inevitably shares with the beyond-which its manner of being, i.e., *is* itself a being), but in the sense of the sheer *other* – *against* thinking and *toward* beings; this sheer other is the neighing nearness itself, thanks to which all things obtain the proper time and space for their selfsame abiding: *Being and Time* speaks of “das Sein als das *transcendens schlechthin*” (and not just of *Sein* as transcendence vis-à-vis and on the basis of beings) only because *Sein itself* has

45. *Überhaupt* (literally “overhead”) originally refers to a manner of establishing the price of cattle one intends to buy or to sell: Instead of counting the single pieces of cattle (i.e., each single “head”) again and multiplying the total number by a unit price, one indicates a total price for the envisaged group of cattle “over the heads” of the single animals – literally, an over-all(-heads) price. This price is clearly not a price “in general,” i.e., it is not established through a process of generalization. Rather – and this is precisely the phenomenological trait we need to retain – buying or selling “overhead” implies that the reference to contingency (the countable heads in their serving as a basis for establishing the price, i.e., in this context, the truth of the being of these beings) is instantly given up: this giving up consists in a leap that, interrupting the reference to contingency, seconds an original, contingency-free dimension of sense – namely, the whole in its constitutive trait – and thus being itself as the origin of all measure.

46. Here the word “tidiness” (from “tide” = “time”) speaks in its original sense as the suitable time or occasion, the original opportunity for all coming to be. The sense of “opportunity, favorable occasion, proper time” is also the sense both of the Latin *spatium* and *tempus* and of the Greek τόπος (*topos*) and χρόνος (*chronos*), all of which originally indicate a dimension of openness (a break, a scope) capable of gathering and hosting a sense.

already flashed as the *weirdness*,⁴⁷ whose flashing wants to be borne in a unique being (the being of *Da-sein*), on which, in turn, the humanity of man may be grounded.

IV.

After having thus outlined the scope of the *Seinsfrage* according to the manner in which this scope is indicated from the very beginning of the *Denkweg*, we may now turn to considering a word that from the outset speaks in the *sense* of being itself and soon becomes one of its names, namely *Möglichkeit*. As anticipated in the introduction, this consideration should show the manner in which, after *Being and Time*, the *Seinsfrage* becomes a matter of unrestrainedly letting language “speak being” independently of beings – in German just as in all our mother languages: in fact, these languages necessarily consist in a (yet undisplayed) “tune of being,” i.e., they are *already* attuned (each one of them according to a unique tone) to the initial claim of grounding being itself in its weirdness and *thus* a human world on the earth.⁴⁸ Indeed, if, on the one hand, speaking of a “turn” in “Heidegger’s thinking” after *Being and Time* remains a misleading historical format, and is thus not only insufficient but impairing with regard to an understanding of the *Denkweg*, we may well say, on the other hand, that from the early thirties onward, and explicitly with *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, the *Denkweg* “comes home,” in that henceforth it consists in nothing but the translation of the German mother language into its *selving* as the word of being itself.

What does *Möglichkeit* mean? In current philosophical language, the word translates the Latin *potestas*, *potentia* and *possibilitas*.⁴⁹ No wonder, therefore, that in our modern languages we find *Möglichkeit*, in turn, translated as *possibility*, *possibilità*, *possibilit *, *posibilidad*, etc. However, the word *M glichkeit* speaks differently than *possibilitas*. Again, this difference might or might not become relevant according to that which is said and how it is said – to wit: as long as *M glichkeit* is

47. In this context, “weird” does not indicate that which is ordinarily odd and strange within the domain of the ordinary, but the plainly uncanny and unusual. In fact, the “weird” is the extra-ordinary that breaks *into*, flashes *within* and beholds *from out of* the canny, ordinary and familiar – namely, the breaking uncanniness as which being itself deals itself out as the time-play-space toward the abiding of things. Since any “is” consists in the discontingent uncanny *there* of being itself, whenever something appears as itself (whenever a thing shows in its *selving*), it “looks weird” (e.g., in a work of art). In rigorous terms, however, only being itself is weird and *weirdness* is a name of the openness for beings as such in the whole. Paraphrasing Heraclitus (fragment 119 Diels-Kranz) we could say: “The *ethos* for man is the scope of the weird.” In a forthcoming essay, it will be shown how “weird” (O.E. *wyrd*) can provide a basis in view of the translation of one of the grounding words of Heidegger’s thinking.

48. Our languages are, in a manner of speaking, the biding hope for such a grounding.

49. *Possibilitas* is not a word of classical Latin but a keyword of later Latin speaking philosophy – notably, at the beginning of modernity, of Baumgarten’s metaphysics.

(explicitly or implicitly) said in the sense of *possibilitas*, the difference is of no or only of limited relevance; if, on the other hand, *Möglichkeit* is said according to its own manner of speaking, the difference may become critical. As a consequence, when translating *Möglichkeit* into another language, e.g., into English, we cannot mechanically substitute *Möglichkeit* with a word that is derived from *possibilitas*: in fact, we will first have to pay attention to the manner in which *Möglichkeit* is said. Moreover, the translation will have to take into account how the word that, in the respective language, is derived from *possibilitas*, e.g., the English word “possibility,” speaks within its own manner of saying.

An instructive instance of this issue is provided by the manner in which the word *Möglichkeit* speaks in Kant’s transcendental philosophy. Even though we cannot, here, give a sufficient treatment to this question, we may observe that it is indeed questionable whether Kant’s *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* can be translated as “condition of possibility.”⁵⁰ What is Kant envisaging in his determination of the *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* of natural beings and of synthetic judgments *a priori*? He is envisaging that which makes it that this kind of beings and these particular judgments, respectively, *hold* as such, i.e., for Kant, that they are *sayable* according to that which the positing of being (i.e., that which being *as* position) and the saying of these judgments implies – namely (and ultimately) *freedom*: the word *möglich*, here, indicates this *autonomous* capacity for holding (for maintaining itself) of that which is said.

However, precisely this trait – the autonomous capacity for holding – traces back to the original sense of *möglich*: in fact, the verb *mögen*, from which *möglich* and *Möglichkeit* are derived, originally means “I have grown big and strong; I am of an adult strength and capacity (including, in the first place, the capacity for procreation).” This sense was later transferred to the verb *vermögen*, whereas simple *mögen* came to mean mainly “(I have the capacity and therefore) I like, want, desire.” As a consequence, *möglich* indicates that which is in itself and from out of itself able, capable to be, apt, fitted, suited for being, and precisely in the manner in which an *adult* is capable of being, and this means: *in accordance with* being itself; this, in turn, implies, in a more comprehensive sense, *true* capacity, namely, a being capable on the basis of understood and seconded *being*, of the aptitude for *letting be* according to a seconded sense. Asking for the *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* of natural beings or of synthetic judgments *a priori* therefore means: asking for the freely bidding element *thanks to which* these beings and these judgments are capable of being what and how they are – that which makes them

50. In what follows we leave aside the question whether or not “condition” is, in turn, an adequate translation of *Bedingung*. It is interesting to note, however, that *Möglichkeit* is itself a translation of Latin *condicio*, namely, in the sense of the conditions or circumstances that – we would say – make something possible (*condicio pacis* = the possibility of peace). As a consequence, the expression “condition of possibility” appears to be somehow redundant – which, on the other hand, is not the case of *Bedingung der Möglichkeit*.

suited, fitted, apt for being precisely natural *beings* or synthetic *judgments a priori*. Kant's answer to this question – that is: his answer to the unique form in which the *on-Frage* came to him – shows clearly that it is this sense of *Möglichkeit* that is in view.

In a derived sense, however, *mögen* (and later *vermögen*) also indicates a capacity derived from external circumstances, e.g., by way of a permission or the conferral of an authority: *mögen* then has the sense of the Latin *licere*, “having the right, being allowed” (“I can” not in the sense of “I have the capacity for sustaining the sense,” but – independently of this capacity – in the sense of “I am allowed to,” “I have the power,” “I may”). Finally, the sense of the capacity can be reduced to that of the mere capacity for being or becoming real in a purely contingent sense, that is: the capacity for *enacting contingency*, which yields the sense of “mere possibility” that is also indicated by the English “may” (*mag sein*: “may be”).

For our purposes, the crucial question is therefore the following: Does the original sense of *mögen* find a correspondent in the Latin *posse*, from which *possibilis* and *possibilitas* are derived? The answer to this question is clearly negative. In fact, *posse* is a contraction of *potis esse*, which means “to be the one who dominates, to dominate, to exert mastery, to possess,” which, in turn, is to be heard in its characteristic Roman sense. Hence, *posse* indicates a capacity that is unrelated to the aptness, suitedness, etc. determined with respect to the being or sense of that which is dominated, and that (namely, this capacity) is rather only referred to contingent domination – in short: *posse* indicates a *contingent* capacity, i.e., *power*. Thus, when the Latin language says *posse, potis esse*, it refers primarily to a capacity for effecting contingency, whereas the word itself does not imply an accordance with or a seconding of being (a letting be): the latter *may or may not* be intended (since it *can* indeed be intended), however, not only does the word as such not indicate this trait, but again it primarily says a trait of being (namely, power) that *surrogates* letting be with the mere control exerted over contingency and thus explicitly excludes that which was shown as the primary trait of *mögen*. For our phenomenological analysis this implies the following: if, on the one hand, *mögen* and *posse may* speak in such a manner that they can translate each other (namely, when that which is said is contingent capacity), on the other hand, when *mögen* speaks according to its original trait, *posse* ceases to be an adequate rendition.

In the case of Kant's *Bedingung der Möglichkeit*, it is clear that, on the one hand, *Möglichkeit* does indeed speak in a sense that is *not* indicated by the words derived from *posse*; on the other hand, however, the consequences of the inadequate translation of *Möglichkeit* with “possibility” are limited by the fact that, in Kant's thinking, *Möglichkeit* speaks as a word of ‘(metaphysical) being’. In fact, this implies that the scope of that which *Möglichkeit* says in Kant remains *ab initio* constrained in the same sphere of *posse* (*potentia – possibilitas*), i.e., in the sphere of contingency: as a consequence, the original trait of being that speaks in

Möglichkeit is in Kant not heard in a *primary* sense and can therefore only *modulate* – as an unsaid and unthought “presupposition”⁵¹ – ‘(metaphysical) being’. In conclusion, understanding and translating Kant’s *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* as “condition of possibility” is insufficient in the sense that what is *unsaid* in his thinking is, as it were, cut off, which causes the genuine metaphysical status (and thus the futurity) of this thinking to be corrupted; however, this corruption does not imply that a name of being itself is (mis)translated into a name of metaphysical being.

This is, on the other hand, precisely what occurs when it comes to *Möglichkeit* as a word of the *Denkweg*. In fact, when *Möglichkeit* is said, in accordance with its primary trait, as a word of the *Denkweg*, it is not “contingent on” (and therefore decided in advance in the sense of) contingency, i.e., ‘(metaphysical) being’ as the forgottenness of being itself. Therefore, the translation of *Möglichkeit* requires a word that can speak in a non-metaphysical manner. As suggested earlier, however, the word “possibility” does not seem to have this capacity.

As a matter of fact, *Möglichkeit* speaks in a contingency-free manner already in *Being and Time*. The following passage, which belongs to the discussion of the existential of understanding in § 31, is sufficiently clear in this regard:⁵²

Da-sein is not something objectively present (*ein Vorhandenes*) which then has in addition the ability to do something, but is rather primarily being-possible (*Möglichsein*). Da-sein is always what it can be (*sein kann*) and how it is its possibility (*Möglichkeit*). The essential possibility (*Möglichkeit*) of Da-sein concerns the ways of taking care of the “world” which we characterized, of concern for others and, always already present in all of this, the potentiality (*Seinkönnen*) of being itself, for its own sake. The being-possible (*Möglichsein*), which Da-sein always is existentially, is also distinguished from empty, logical possibility (*Möglichkeit*) and from the contingency [in the original: *Kontingenzz*; IDG] of something objectively present (*eines Vorhandenen*), where this or that can “happen” to it. As a modal category of objective presence (*Vorhandenheit*), possibility (*Möglichkeit*) means what is *not yet* real and *not always* [recte: not ever, never; IDG] necessary. It characterizes what is *only* possible (*möglich*). Onto-

51. See *Being and Time*, § 31, which contains the discussion of *Möglichkeit* that is referred to below. Here Heidegger suggests explicitly that, when Kant interrogates the *being* of nature in terms of its *Bedingung der Möglichkeit*, this (namely the very use of this word) indicates the reference to an unthought presupposition in terms of *Da-sein*. In other words: *Möglichkeit* is already a *Da-sein*-word (a word in which the German mother language says being itself), but this trait does not, as such, become explicit in Kant.

52. What follows is the Stambaugh translation (*Being and Time*, Albany, 1996, 134-5; see *Sein und Zeit*, 143-4), where the words *möglich*/*Möglichkeit*, *können*/*Seinkönnen* and *Vorhandenes*/*Vorhandenheit* are added in brackets. N.B.: Translating *das Können* as “potentiality” presents analogous problems to those of rendering *Möglichkeit* as “possibility:” in fact, *können* (*ich kann* = I can) is and implies, in the first place, *kennen* (to know); thus, in this case the capacity and ability is sustained by knowledge (the knowledge *of* being) – a reference that, again, has no correspondence in *potentia* and its derivations.

logically, it is less than reality and necessity. In contrast, possibility (*Möglichkeit*) as an existential is the most primordial and the ultimate positive ontological determination of *Da-sein*; as is the case with existentiality, it can initially be prepared for solely as a problem. Understanding as a potentiality of being disclosive (*erschließendes Seinkönnen*) offers the phenomenal ground to see it at all.⁵³

We cannot, here, further specify the sense in which understanding “offers the phenomenal ground to see [*Möglichkeit*] at all” by referring it to the ultimate *Möglichkeit*, i.e., death (see *Being and Time*, §§ 53 and 58), and thus to the phenomenon of phenomena, namely *Verbergung*.⁵⁴ Also, we cannot show in what manner *Möglichkeit* as an existential modifies the sense in which beings that are not grounded on (having to bear out) *Da-sein* are, in turn, *möglich* or *unmöglich*. For our immediate purpose, it is sufficient that we observe the following: Within a metaphysical thinking, the German word *möglich* speaks in the metaphysical sense of possibility, i.e., it indicates a form of ‘(metaphysical) being’ that is neither actually contingent (“not yet real”) nor necessarily contingent (“never necessary”), and which therefore we may call “weak contingency” (“only possible”). However, as a word of existential analytic *möglich* already speaks differently, namely as a word of being itself, and thus in a manner that can, of course, be heard only within a non-metaphysical stance. As anticipated, the critical question for the understanding and translation of *Möglichkeit* in another language is therefore whether or not the word that translates *Möglichkeit* when it speaks metaphysically can *still* do so when this word *ceases* to speak in that sense and *instead* speaks according to its original, non-metaphysical trait. In plain terms: does (the grounding tone of) English *as a language of being itself* recognize “possibility” as one of its words, i.e., as a “cut-word” – or does it not?

The difference between *Möglichkeit* as mere possibility and the discontingent sense of *Möglichkeit* as a word of being itself becomes clear in the following elementary consideration: mere possibility (not-yet-actual contingency) *turns* into reality (actual contingency), i.e., it disappears in favor of the latter; on the other hand, *Möglichkeit* proper not only does not disappear in favor of actuality, but is indeed entirely unaffected by contingency;⁵⁵ precisely *as* such dis-contingency it

53. The Macquarrie-Robinson version of the same passage (*Being and Time* [New York, 1962], 183) does not show significant differences with regard to that which is thematic in the present analysis; the translation of *Vorhandenheit* is, in this case, presence-at-hand.

54. *Verbergung* (*das Sichverbergen*) is one of the traits of *Ereignis*.

55. This does not mean that *Möglichkeit* is “absolute:” in fact, it is neither (in the metaphysical sense of the word) contingent nor absolute, but rather *finite*, in that it needs to be sustained, in its truth, by the form of being that *Being and Time* calls *Existenz*. Thus, contingency (now in the sense in which the word is used in this text) does not directly affect *Möglichkeit*; however, what holds true for the indicated relation of the cut, on the one hand, and contingency, on the other (“*in the very instant* in which the cut breaks, the domain of contingency has *already* collapsed;” see above, footnote 20), remains true, albeit in different terms, when the relation is reversed – to wit: *as soon as* contingency holds sway, *Möglichkeit* has *already* left.

allows all concrete being (all concreteness, *Wirklichkeit*) to hold in its fittedness or unfittedness, suitedness or unsuitedness, abiding or unabiding, appearing or disappearing; thus, any concreteness abides, in the manner in which it abides, thanks to the *Möglichkeit* that this same concreteness shelters and keeps – it (the concrete being) abides *by* the keeping of *Möglichkeit*.⁵⁶ Since there can, in this sense, be no concrete reality without *Möglichkeit*, for *Möglichkeit* is in fact the provenance and future and thus the *sense* of all concrete reality, *Being and Time* (§ 7 C) declares: “Higher than *Wirklichkeit* stands *Möglichkeit*.”⁵⁷ In this sentence, the comparative degree “higher” does not suggest a mere reversal of the traditional hierarchy of actual contingency and not-yet-actual contingency: in fact, *Möglichkeit* now indicates the constitutive trait of the “is” of any true, discontinuous concreteness, i.e., a concreteness having as its time-play-space the openness of being itself.

The manner in which *Möglichkeit* is heard as not only speaking *in the sense* of being itself, but *as a name* of being itself becomes explicit in a passage from the *Letter on Humanism*,⁵⁸ in which Heidegger shows how ‘being (cut)’ is the element of thinking. In order for us to have, in turn, a chance to hear what is said, we will need to consider this passage with a perhaps unusual attention.

Being, Heidegger says, is the element of thinking insofar as it is that whence thinking *vermag*, i.e., (as we may provisionally translate) is able, to be a thinking. However, what is thus determined as the provenance of a *Vermögen*, a being able (i.e., being itself) is subsequently itself called *das Vermögende* (that which is able or capable) and *das Vermögen* (the being capable, the ability). This is what the relevant passage says in German:

Das Element ist das, aus dem her das Denken vermag, ein Denken zu sein. Das Element ist das *eigentlich* (my emphasis; IDG) Vermögende: das Vermögen.

56. For instance, all football teams of the NFL are possible winners of the Super Bowl, but only some of them are (in the original sense of the word and in a more or less visible manner) *möglich* as winners; moreover, the winning team may or may not be one of those that are *möglich* as winners; again, none of the latter will cease to be *möglich* as a winner for contingent reasons: neither if it does not actually win the Super Bowl, nor if it does actually win it, etc. (We may note in passing that our epoch is marked by the confusion between what is *möglich* and what is “only possible:” the element that attunes the peculiar form of doing, which, being blind for that which is *möglich*, consists entirely in the implementation of the will for power by means of the increasing exploitation of potentials and the measureless enhancement of possibilities – the element of such “doing” [*machen*] is that which Heidegger calls *Machenschaft*.)

57. Stambaugh translates: “Higher than actuality stands *possibility*” (34; *Möglichkeit* is in italics in the German text).

58. Martin Heidegger, *Brief über den Humanismus*, Frankfurt, ⁸1981, 7-8; trans. “Letter on Humanism,” *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell [New York, ²1992], 220.

And this is the English translation suggested by Krell:

The element is what enables thinking to be a thinking. The element is what properly enables: it is the enabling.

The German version shows what appears to be a shift in where the *Vermögen* (the being able, the ability) is, so to speak, located: If we say that thinking *vermag* (is able) to be a thinking, we should expect that the *Vermögen* (the ability) belongs to thinking. However, the text says: that which originally *vermag* is not thinking, but the element, i.e., being. In other words, it appears that when we say: thinking “is able” to be a thinking, i.e., to be itself, the “is able” consists in something that is not thinking itself, but being as the element of thinking. In the German version, this shift is sustained by the changing manner in which the verb *vermögen* speaks. In fact, on the one hand, *ich vermag* (“I am able, I can”) can be formed with *zu* + infinitive (just like “I am able to” + infinitive); on the other hand, it may be used transitively with an object in the accusative case (*etwas vermögen*: to be capable of something, to bring it about, to accomplish, effect it). Thus, it seems that, from a grammatical point of view, the mentioned shift goes along with a shift from *vermögen* as “being able,” to *vermögen* as “bringing about:” the element is capable of thinking not in the sense that it “does the thinking,” but in the sense that it somehow brings about thinking as such. It is presumably on the basis of this understanding that the English translation chooses to anticipate the shift by turning the first sentence in such a way that, from the outset, the element as that which brings about (“enables”) is in view. However, in this manner the translation fails to render a relation which indeed defines the “quality” of non-metaphysical thinking – a relation that, despite the formal correctness of the preceding remarks, can in fact never be grasped grammatically.⁵⁹

What this scarcely conspicuous passage shows is indeed an instance of a non-metaphysical thinking *saying itself*.⁶⁰ In formal terms, what is indicated is a non-contingent relation (namely, between being on the one hand and thinking on the other) – in other words: a relation that does not have the structure of causation (cause-effect; provenance as effectuation) between contingencies; the

59. A few paragraphs before the quoted passage, the text speaks of the task that consists in the “liberation of language from <the grip of> grammar into a more original bidance-jointing.” That which from the point of view of grammatical contingency (i.e., the substitution of representing for thinking) must look like an arbitrary “deregulation,” is in fact the translation of language into the rigor of its original word.

60. It still strikes us as somehow awkward when we hear sentences like “a thinking says itself.” In order to overcome, so to speak, the stiffness of our hearing, spoiled by contingency, it might be helpful – especially for an ear of the English mother language – to read E. E. Cummings’ *i – six nonlectures*, where we read sentences such as the following: “after the passage I am about to read you had written itself” (cf. the beginning of nonlecture five) or “consider a question which asked itself at the beginning of nonlecture one” (cf. the beginning of nonlecture six), etc.

latter is, however, the *universal* structure of metaphysical relations (*both* ontical and ontological).⁶¹ If, provisionally, we retain the word “capacity” for *Vermögen*, the indicated non-metaphysical relation has the following form: thinking is capable of being a thinking (i.e., thinking is itself) when and insofar as it seconds, *as thinking*, the capacity *for* thinking that, on the other hand, being itself is. What does this mean? Heidegger’s own formula (see *ibid.*) helps to clarify the point: thinking as such, he says, is the thinking *of* being, where the “of being” is articulated thus: on the one hand, the “of” indicates a belonging (*gebören*) to being, while, on the other hand, it says a listening (*hören*) to being.⁶² That thinking “belongs to being” means: it is, by being’s own original want, in the ownership of being (i.e., it *is* insofar as it *is called upon* and *bears itself called* by being), whereas “listening to being” means: thinking consists in owning (in the sense of “acknowledging as claimed”) this ownership by seconding its word. Thus, the manner in which being itself is the “capacity for thinking” is that it originates thinking by initially attuning – in the form of *Da-sein* – the thinking belongingness to itself (i.e., to being), into which belongingness it claims thinking *as* a listening (an owning seconding). This is the sense in which it can indeed be said that being (as *das eigentlich Vermögende*, i.e., *Er-ignis*) *ermöglicht* (“makes possible,” the English translation says) thinking.⁶³

The fundamental trait of being as *Vermögen* that *ermöglicht* – and therefore the grounding trait of ‘being (cut)’ – is now indicated as *mögen*. The latter – whose dictionary translation is “liking, caring for” – is further elucidated as “loving,” in the sense, however, of: *das Wesen schenken* – to “bestow essence as a gift” (as the published translation goes), i.e., to let something be in its provenance, to deal out, toward it, the time and space for its coming-to-bide as itself, for its selving. It is thanks to the *Vermögen* consisting in this *Mögen* (this liking as letting be) that something, in turn, *vermag* to be in a discontingent sense of the word. The *Vermögen*, the “capacity” that consists in such *Mögen* is – now in the sense of ‘being (cut)’ – ‘*das Mögliche*.’ Thus, being itself as *das Vermögend-Mögende* is “*das Mögliche*” – that which, by virtue of such *Mögen* as letting be, *vermag* thinking,

61. The claim that, in the domain of metaphysical thinking, even ontological relations are causative, is in fact based on the contingent nature of ‘(metaphysical) being’ as a ground of beings.

62. The twofold “of” is not graspable by saying that the genitive is both subjective and objective. In fact, listening (*hören*), as an instance of *Da-sein*, consists in assuming and bearing, in response to a claim, the belonging (*gebören*) to being that *Da-sein* itself is. The “of being” is neither a subjective nor an objective genitive, but a genitive of *Ereignis*.

63. This relation, in which thinking as such consists, is in fact an *Ereignis*-relation: again, thinking is not an activity of man, it *is Ereignis*. We could name this relation of *Ermöglichung*, in which thinking consists, “en-owning” – which is in fact how Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly say *Er-ignis* in their translation of *Beiträge zur Philosophie*.

i.e., preserves it in its bidding.⁶⁴

At this point, we are better prepared to understand the following passage of the *Letter*, in which, by way of a conclusion to his discussion of *Möglichkeit*, Heidegger marks off *das Mögliche* in the sense of being itself from the metaphysical concept of *Möglichkeit*.⁶⁵

As the element, being is the “quiet force” of *das mögende Vermögen*, i.e., of *das Mögliche*. Of course, our words *möglich* and *Möglichkeit*, under the dominance of “logic” and “metaphysics,” are thought solely in contrast to “actuality;” that is, they are thought on the basis of a definite – the metaphysical – interpretation of being as *actus* and *potentia*, a distinction identified with the one between *existentia* and *essentia*. When I speak of the “quiet force of *das Mögliche*” I do not mean the *possibile* of a merely represented *possibilitas*, nor *potentia* as the *essentia* of an *actus* of *existentia*; rather, I mean being itself, which, in its *Mögen*, *vermag über*, i.e., holds the capacity over thinking <, whose bidding as a listening belongingness it originally attunes> and hence over the bidding of man <who, in turn, is insofar as he thinks being itself, which is why we can add:>, and that means over its (of the bidding of man) relation to being. To *vermögen*, to be capable of something, to hold the capacity over something, here means: to preserve it in its bidding, to maintain it in its element.

V.

We have by now heard often enough that, as a word of the *Denkweg*, *Möglichkeit* not only does not have the metaphysical sense of “possibility;” indeed, if we understand *Möglichkeit* in this sense, thus failing to hear it, according to its fundamental trait of *Mögen*, as a name of being itself, the *Denkweg* as a whole is reduced to a late variant of the long history of ‘(metaphysical) being’ as *possibilitas* and *potentia* (a variant that, after Nietzsche’s conclusive metaphysics of

64. We may understand that the guiding trait of *mögen* (liking, loving) is elucidated as: bestowing the bidding, letting something be in its provenance. However, what justifies the fact that this loving is seen as that which, in turn, constitutes the primary trait of *vermögen*, of being capable? We mentioned above that the verb *vermögen* took over the sense that originally belonged to *mögen*, whereas the latter maintained only a so-called secondary sense, namely that of “(being capable and therefore) liking, favoring.” Thus, it seems that Heidegger arbitrarily elects a derived sense to be the guiding trait of the word. This would indeed be the case if phenomenology were about letting etymologies do the thinking, instead of – as is actually the case – about seeing (and hearing) traits of sense. Therefore, what Heidegger does is not to pick a given meaning out of a given set of (“literal” or “figurative”) significations. Rather, the phenomenological eye beholds that *any genuine capacity* (in the critical sense outlined above) *is fundamentally a letting be, a letting something bide in its provenance, and, in this sense, a willing that it be, a loving*. We can retain this insight in the following formula: “You shall never be capable of anything, unless you love it.”

65. *Ibid.* (translation modified; the inserts in acute brackets are mine; the Latin words are in the original text).

the will for power, one would have hardly felt the need of), and thus entirely misconceived.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, we may still want to argue that the word “possibility” is capable of speaking in a manner that – though neither equal nor even properly analogous to that of *das Mögliche* – is still sufficient to indicate, in English, what the thinking of being itself says in German. It is true, one may argue, that “possible” does not have, as a word, any reference to the preservation of the biding of something or to keeping it in its element: on the contrary, it says the assurance of contingency by virtue of the power of domination; however, the semantic spectrum of “possible” includes meanings such as “what can or may be according to (the) nature (of something)” or “what is acceptable, fitting,” etc., which do in fact imply some reference to a constitutive trait. Thus, it appears that “possibility” too can speak in a non-metaphysical manner. Is it not sufficient then that we simply hear this word in the “right” way, that we, so to speak, learn to re-hear it, instead of embarking upon an unlikely search for a replacement of this long-established philosophical term?

In order to examine this argument, let us turn to the most genuine manner of speaking, i.e., the speaking of poetry as the saying that, precisely, “comes purely from the source” and therefore preserves this source in its purity. Perhaps, where words resound as a pure echo of a language’s most original sense-building, en-owning saying, we can find a corroboration of the *other* tone in which the word “possibility” speaks. In fact, the following poem by Emily Dickinson (Johnson #657) contains what to my knowledge is one of the most significant occurrences of this word in the English language:

I dwell in Possibility—
 A fairer House than Prose—
 More numerous of Windows—
 Superior—for Doors—

 Of Chambers as the Cedars—
 Impregnable of Eye—
 And for an Everlasting Roof
 The Gambrels of the Sky—

 Of Visitors—the fairest—
 For Occupation—This—
 The spreading wide my narrow Hands
 To gather Paradise—

66. In fact, most (mis)interpretations of *Being and Time*, in the first place the so-called post-modern ones, conceive of *Dasein* as a form of contingent existence (“human life”), whose manner of being is that of being thrown into having to project itself in (contingent) “possibilities” – some of which are “authentic,” and others that are “inauthentic.”

Given the overflowing richness of this poem, we are forced to select only the most immediately relevant traits.⁶⁷ In the first place, possibility is here called a house, a dwelling or abode – not, though, for man “in general,” but for the poet, *i.e.*, for man’s dwelling (his bidding) *insofar* as it is essentially *dichterisch*.⁶⁸ In turn, the house that possibility is appears in its openness – the openness *for* beings as such in the whole. This same openness, attuned by possibility, is again said, in the second and third stanza, as the fourfold play of sky and earth, divine

67. A still superficial analysis shows the following: The first stanza indicates fairness and openness as the fundamental traits of the primary element for all abiding, at the same time anticipating that which, being initiated by it, is in fact the same as this element, namely, the fourfold play of mortals (those who indwell possibility) and divine (the fair visitors of the fair element, see third stanza), sky (that which comes through the windows) and earth (that which comes through the doors). The second stanza displays the dyad of earth and sky in the open in-between: the earth as that which stretches toward the sky, almost sustaining it, just as it inwardly bides in impenetrable and sheltering shutness; the sky as that which towers in light and open celestial elevation, but only *insofar* as, overarching it, it reaches down the earth. Finally, the third stanza unfolds the mutual relation of divine and mortals: the former as those who, being the celestial announcers (the angels) of the fair element itself, do not dwell with the mortals, but may come into play, as visitors, from the fairness of the fair; the latter as those who, differently from the divine, are occupied, in their being, in a task, their first and fundamental occupation being that of grounding the dwelling of man, and who therefore may in their midst foster a poet – *einen Dichter* (see following footnote), *i.e.*, one who suffers the nearness of the divine and stands alone in preparing the fairness for their coming into play, so that his being, en-owned as the essential smallness of man, selves in being offered to ground and guard, in his unique saying, the sphere sound and whole, *i.e.*, paradise, that, being allowed by it, hosts the fourfold play of earth and sky, divine and mortals. *Only insofar as he dwells in possibility, can the poet gather paradise.* “Paradise,” here, is not intended as heaven in opposition to earth, but as “earthly paradise,” *i.e.*, as that which is neither (only) earth nor (only) heaven, for it is the sound and sheltering sphere attuned by fair possibility – the sphere of selving things, in which the four are gathered and held apart in their mirror-play. Thus, “paradise” is Emily Dickinson’s name for that which is to be said in *Dichtung* as such (*das zu Dichtende*): it is the fair element in the sense of the originally soothing, in itself whole and thus holy dimension – in German: *das Heilige*. As to “possibility,” however, this word is Dickinson’s name for the mother language as the homestead of being, *i.e.*, for language *insofar* as it is essentially *Dichtung*. In fact, at first sight it appears strange that possibility (a word of being – usually opposed to actuality and necessity) be opposed to prose (a word of language – usually opposed to poetry). However, “possibility” and “prose,” here, *both* name wises of language *in* its constitutive reference to being: possibility is language (be it “poetical” or “prosaic”) *as* the house of being itself and thus as the original abode of man (*insofar* as he “dwells *dichterisch*” [Hölderlin]); prose, on the other hand, is language (be it “poetical” or “prosaic”) as abandoned by being and thus as the unfair regime of contingency, in which man’s dwelling fails, thus leaving him to a planetary being. The poem shows Emily Dickinson not only as *Dichterin* (*i.e.*, as one who gathers paradise) but as *Dichterin des Dichters und der Dichtung*.

68. The word “poetic” is, in fact, not a sufficient translation of the German *dichterisch*, especially when this word, in turn, speaks as a word of the *Denkweg*.

and mortals.

The decisive hint for our present consideration can be found in the second verse of the first stanza, where the poetess names the grounding trait of possibility: “I dwell in Possibility— / A *fairer* House than Prose—.” What the poetic ear hears in possibility – as opposed to prose, i.e., the sphere of contingency – is thus the trait of fairness.⁶⁹ What does “fairness” mean? The primary trait of “fair” (which belongs to the same I.E. root as German *fügen*, “to fit together, to joint”) is that of “fit,” “fitting,” “well-jointed,” “harmonic” (in the sense of the Greek ἁρμονία [*harmonia*]). The fair is, in the first place, that which “brings into a fit,” the element that brings the fittingness itself and in this sense brings about the fit; as a consequence, it is also that which is itself fair in the sense of “beautiful, pleasant, clean, unbiased, gentle, plain,” etc. Thus, this bringing fairness, the fair, is – more originally than any harmony, both shinningly conspicuous (φανερή [*phanerē*]) and withdrawn and inconspicuous (ἀφανής [*aphanēs*]) –⁷⁰ an element of (i.e., consisting in) pure clearing, lightening,⁷¹ opening, original disencumbering. “Fair” means “clear, light, open, free from obstacles” (namely, *toward* the harmonic selving of longing things): it thus shows the same traits as one of the grounding words of the *Denkweg*, i.e., *Lichtung*. But “fair” also means “(originally unbiased and therefore) favorable, promising, likely to succeed,” in a sense that recalls the original *mögen*. Finally, “fair” means “light, bright, shining” in the sense of the original, obstacle-free and yet impenetrable, freeing and preserving, favorable and soothing clarity that is said in the German *heiter*, so that we can now say: *what speaks in the -heit of Anwesen-heit is precisely the fair, as which flashes the truth of being itself (the cut)*. The fact that in “fair” we need to hear primarily the trait of bringing openness and clearing (namely, again, *toward* the fit and comely abiding of things) is what the poem itself seems to suggest: “A fairer House than Prose— / More numerous of Windows— / Superior—for Doors—.”

However, if the English word “possibility” can be heard in the sense of the fair element that frees *into* and preserves *within* comely abiding (selving), what should prevent us from seeing in “possibility” a fully sufficient translation of *Möglichkeit*, and in “the possible” an English word for *das Mögliche*, and thus for being itself? Is it not so that, analogously to *möglich*, the English word “possible” simply needs to be freed – in a manner for which Emily Dickinson’s poem can be paradigmatic – from “the dominance of ‘logic’ and ‘metaphysics’”? Again, the answer to this question is presumably: no. The main reason for this resides in the manner of speaking that belongs to thinking (and thinking only) when it

69. It is arguable that the comparative degree “*fairer*” does not merely indicate a quantitative difference in fairness between prose and possibility, but, as suggested above, names the constitutive trait of possibility itself, of which prose, on the other hand, is an original distortion or “un-biding.”

70. See Heraclitus, fragment 54 Diels-Kranz.

71. Here in the sense of “making light (as opposed to heavy).”

is truly a thinking of being; in other words, it resides in the unique manner of dwelling in the mother language that the thinking of being is. This unique manner of speaking implies that that which may show as an entirely sufficient and even unsurpassably fitting word in poetical saying may, on the other hand, not be a “possible” word for the peculiar task of thinking.

Thinking is “thinking of being.” While poetry, in its singing, gathers paradise, i.e., *das Heilige*, thinking only owns being: *das Sein selbst*. The gathering that is proper to thinking has its peculiarity in this: it is a stance that consists entirely in offering a discontingent steadiness to the truth of the cut, in such a way that the cut itself – and always nothing but the cut – may say itself.⁷² In other words: the stance of thinking is to herd *the mother language* itself *as* the homestead of the word of being – and never of beings, where “of beings” refers to the threat of the taking over of contingency, which (this threat), in turn pertains to being itself, and therefore also to language. This implies: all genuine words of thinking are cut-words, strictly speaking: names *of* the cut, and therefore not only *not* words of contingency, but also *not* words of *beings in the whole* or of the whole/holy itself – *heilige Namen* (holy names), Hölderlin would say. This character of the manner of speaking is meant when we say that thinking says *traits*, whereas poetry indicates *figures* (*Bilder*): traits are traits *of the cut*, while figures are figures *of the holy*. Incidentally, we may note that it is in having in view such traits – and only then – that the so-called etymology of words may become telling within an attempt of thinking.

This brief elucidation of two neighborly, but fundamentally distinct manners of dwelling in the mother language allows us to formulate the following rule, which also contains a provisional answer to the question concerning the aptness of “possibility” as a word of thinking: *no matter how holy a word may sound and shine, it cannot become a word of thinking unless it indicates a trait of being itself*. Now, as it seems the word “possibility” not only does not indicate such a trait (the trait said in *möglich* or another one that is equally original), but – as the language of metaphysics shows and has, in turn, contributed to fix in a long tradition – it is a word *of* contingency (power). On the other hand, the recalled meanings such as “acceptable, fitting,” etc. are clearly not original traits of this word – traits that the word itself indicates. This is why “possibility” cannot be a grounding word of the thinking of being – that is to say: it *can* be a word of the diagnosis of our tradition as a tradition of ‘(metaphysical) being,’ but *not* a name for the preparatory saying of that which is kept back and announces itself in the unthought onset of this same tradition, namely, ‘being (cut)’ as, in turn, a provisional name for the most hidden (and “loving”) trait of the *world*.

The very considerations that have led us to exclude “possibility” as a trans-

72. Again, in *Being and Time* this discontingent steadiness offered to the cut in order for it to say itself in its own truth is called *Existenz*.

lation of *Möglichkeit* can now sustain the argument in favor of another word, which promises to offer, if not a translation, at least important hints in view of a rendition of that German name of being.

The *Letter on Humanism* indicates as the fundamental trait of *möglich* the *mögen* itself in the sense of *das Wesen schenken*. Such letting be and preserving something in its element (such allowing to selve) is what constitutes any genuine capacity as such. Thus, *etwas ist möglich* means: a thing abides (is) by the original *Mögen* as that which attunes and preserves the bidding within which it (the thing) may selve; *das Mögliche* is, literally, that which *likes* something in that it ever lies in wait for it (to wait = to watch, to guard) and thus attends it in its bidding. As a consequence, to abide by *Möglichkeit* implies a fitness and suitedness, a likeliness of being: what is *möglich*, is promising and *keeps* the promise of being (the promise in which being itself consists) in a manner that never relies on contingency (the bidding promise is the constitutive trait of the “is,” and not merely an unaccomplished actuality); as a consequence, the *Möglichkeit* of something is that which we can truly trust in and rely on. Is there an English word that can, according to its own manner of saying, indicate these traits?

In fact, the verb “to like” seems to satisfy, to some extent, what is required for translating *Möglichkeit* (as a word of the *Denkweg*) into English. The dictionary explains that originally one would not say “I like it,” but rather “it likes me.” Again, “to like” means: to be like, where “like” is a shortening of O.E. *gelic* (alike, German *gleich*); this, in turn, is a compound of **ga-* “with, together” and **likan* “form, body;” thus, “to like” means: to have the same form or appearance. Hence, what I like is what is like me, what likes me and thus agrees, pleases, suits, befits me. But why should that which is like me be what agrees me and what I, in turn, like? Why should “being like” imply “liking”?

We can answer as follows: Liking indicates an agreement (a conformity) in time and space *as an echo of* (i.e., in which is heard) *the original agreeing to time and space in their agreement* (their jointing) toward *the selving of things*.⁷³ In other words, that which “is like me,” is such not by effect of a contingent similarity (which, in itself, has nothing “likely”), but *insofar* as such liking implies the flashing of that *same* that initially likes, i.e., frees and gathers into clear-cut, measured selving. This is the sense in which that which *is like* me, *likes* me; and this original liking is, in turn, what I *recognize* and thus like in that which is like me. Again, liking does not have, as its original trait of sense, a merely exterior, contingent resemblance, equality or identity: “like” and “liking” indicate, literally, the gathering of

73. We thus have to distinguish between, on the one hand, an “agreeing to” as the original and originating “yes” to time and space, and, on the other, a mutual “agreeing of” time and space thanks to and within that first “agreeing to.” The unitary phenomenon of the agreeing to time and space in their *mutual* agreement is the original fairness *for*, i.e., *toward* beings as such in the whole.

the same and *into* the same as the element of the original *aliveness* for the fairest, clear-cut selving of that which is alike.⁷⁴ However, that which, in this sense, originally gathers, and thus originally likes and pleases, is ‘being (cut)’ as the broken time-play-space; that which initially likes – and therefore that which we, as human beings, must initially like in our bidding: our original *likeliness* – is the *favor* of the original “please” that frees and soothes into comely abiding.⁷⁵ Insofar as man, in his being, explicitly assumes his original likeliness, i.e., herds ‘being (cut)’, he grounds the openness for the likely abiding of things.

On the basis of this understanding of “like” and “liking,” we may be better prepared to appreciate the richness of meanings that the adjective “likely” shows in its current use. These meanings include: “having an appearance of truth or fact” (and thus: being reliable, credible); “apparently suitable, able, fitted;” “strong or capable looking;” “giving promise of success or excellence;” “comely, handsome;” “seemly, appropriate.”⁷⁶ It is not surprising that, “under the dominance of ‘logic’ and ‘metaphysics,’” and particularly under the form that this dominance has taken in our epoch, “likely” and its derivations (“likelihood,” “likeliness”) have come to indicate, in the first place, a kind of actuality, namely, the not yet actual, which, however, has a high probability of turning into actuality. In the numerical science of contingency, i.e., statistics, “likelihood” (as well as, albeit less frequently used, “likeliness”) is therefore a synonym for “probability.” Nonetheless, in the case of the word “likely” we do indeed find what is true for *möglich* and what, on the contrary, does not apply to “possible,” namely, that a thinking delivered from the metaphysical bias toward contingency can hear in this word another and more original tone that says the sway of being itself – in other words: it can recognize it as a word in which the English language *has already said* being itself. This more original tone of the word “likely” resides precisely in the trait of the liking that soothes into a likely “form” – in the

74. This liking is at work when, for instance, two human beings recognize each other as kinsmen. To recognize a kinsman implies that we are *freed* into our relation to the element of kin as that which *preserves* us in our *unique* bidding (and this is what pleases us in such recognizing). What flashes in the flashing of kinship is that which originally likes the kinsmen and which, insofar as they, in turn, like it, is the source of their “liking each other.” The kinship of men implies not their contingent equality, but their aliveness as uniquely selving beings.

75. In the first (i.e., Greek) metaphysical thinking, the favor of the original “please” is experienced as the *eros* of the idea: being is that which is originally agreeable and agreeing, whereas thinking (*voein* [*noein*] and *legein* [*lekein*]) consists in agreeing on and with this initial agreement (*homologein* [*homologein*]). The *Greek* understanding of how the original “please” (the granting of time and space for the abiding of beings) falls prey of contingency is reflected, for instance, in the ancient discussion of pleasure as a principle of being (i.e., as the good). However, Greek thinking – and metaphysical thinking thereafter – remains blind for the fact that the *eros* of ‘(metaphysical) being’ is itself already forgetful of the original discontingent (ab-grounding) “please.”

76. These meanings are taken from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

original agreeing to and pleasing, of which mere pleasure is only a contingent distortion; thus, in “likely” we need to hear, in the first place, the *original liking of ‘being (cut)’* as the favor of the fairness toward all likely abiding.⁷⁷

As words of an English speaking *Denkweg*, “likely” and “likeliness” say the bidding becom(e)ingness that initially likes anything to abide in its fair and comely uniqueness. That which is likely (a likely house, a likely mountain, a likely mortal, a likely god, etc.) thus appears in the fair measure of the initial favor – the “please” of ‘being (cut)’ breaking as the time-play-space toward all soothful abiding, *but also* – in the forgottenness of the cut – toward the soothless abiding in the unleashed dominance of contingency (possibility – potentiality – power). We can thus conclude our preparatory discussion of the English translation of *Möglichkeit* as follows: while “possible” is only a possible translation of *möglich* – one that, however, in the light of the peculiarity of the saying of being itself turns out to be unlikely –, “likely,” on the other hand, shows as a likely rendition of this word – namely, as a word in which ‘being (cut)’ *likes* to say itself in English.

VI.

Heidegger’s *Denkweg* begins with *Being and Time*. The beginning, however, is not the same as the onset. In fact, *Being and Time* is, as a beginning, the outset for a homecoming – a coming back to that onset whose first name is “being (itself),” and to its abode, i.e., language. In *Being and Time*, language is already *on the verge* of becoming the selving abode of being just as being is *on the verge* of selving as the onset itself. This onset, Heidegger says in a letter to Hannah Arendt, is “the first and only onset” of thinking, but “in another wise”⁷⁸ – namely, another wise than that of the Greek onset, which begins with the forgottenness of being and thus with the *on-Frage* and, so to speak, never comes home. The other *wise* of the onset is the *sense* that shapes the *Denkweg*.

It has been said above (footnote 28) that the unity of the *Denkweg* is not a historical value. This unity is in fact but a consequence of the oneness of the only onset to which thinking belongs and that, in turn, wants its own thinking. This is why it seemed appropriate to fasten the guiding thread of our attempt onto that onset, i.e., onto that which Heidegger calls *Unterschied*. That which must, for a historical eye, look like a dubious “blending” and a “superimposi-

77. It also implies that, when the current definitions of “likely” say “having an appearance of . . .,” “apparently. . .,” “. . . looking,” etc., this refers neither to an ontical visibility, nor to an eidetic aspect or sight of beingness: rather, it indicates the shining and showing *within* the flashing of being itself as the time-spacing cut.

78. “Der andere Anfang ist nicht ein zweiter, sondern der erste und einzige, in anderer Weise” – “The “other onset’ is not a second one, but the first and only, in another wise” (Hannah Arendt – Martin Heidegger, *Briefe 1925-1975* [Frankfurt, 1997], 234).

tion” of different “phases” of “Heidegger’s thinking” is in fact but a manner of observing the most basic hermeneutic principle: that of delivering that which is said to its – no matter how unknown – sense.

We have argued that it is necessary to distinguish between the *Seinsfrage*, on the one hand, and the *on-Frage*, on the other. But again, these are not historical categories. We could just as well say: *Within* the *Seinsfrage* – as a title for the one and only issue of thinking from Parmenides to Heidegger – we ought to distinguish between, on the one hand, the *on-Frage* and, on the other, the *Frage* that seconds being itself. The title “being itself” is in fact – along with others that were mentioned – a manner of distinguishing the theme of *Being and Time* from the theme of metaphysics. However, none of these titles indicates what is at issue in *Being and Time* as long as we hold on to the unquestioned format of “being” that was characterized as “indeterminate metaphysical being,” and pretend, on this basis, that the addition of “itself” etc. bring some clarification: in fact, the “itself” can only speak if being has already flashed as the *Frage* of the other onset. Had this onset not been what *already* claims the thinking of *Being and Time*, why (i.e., on the basis of what) would it have appeared necessary to abandon this attempt?

In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger says that this abandoning was due to the fact that “the language of metaphysics” would not allow to say what *then* – namely, in the third section of the first part of *Being and Time* – had to be said. “Language of metaphysics,” however, does not indicate a certain (replaceable) terminology: it means language itself *in the domain of contingency* and *as the word of contingency*. That which *then* wanted to be said did therefore not merely require a “different language” (“less conceptual,” maybe “a bit more poetical,” etc.): it required a new relation to language *as the word and abode of being itself*. It belongs to the scope of this transformation that its sense cannot be merely determined and displayed, so to speak, “from this side,” i.e., from the side of contingency; the transformation implies that we already think – and this means: that our interrogating dwells – in that *of which* language is the word and abode, so as to let it *say itself*. In fact, thinking that which in *Being and Time* wants to be thought is the same as *leaping* into language as the abode of being, thus grounding our mother languages as its homestead. *Being and Time* is already *Language and Being*. This is what *Contributions to Philosophy*, in which the leap required by the onset of *Being and Time* is attempted, are there to witness.

The second part of the essay was intended to exemplify precisely this: there is no manner of thinking and saying the issue indicated as “being itself” “from the side” of language as contingency, i.e., as long as we stick to this manner of speaking. The indications that have been given as to the suitability of “likeliness” as a translation of *Möglichkeit* therefore do not have as their primary objective that of establishing a new term in replacement of “possibility.” The matter of this replacement is, in fact, of no importance at all. What these considera-

tions are primarily about is to show, albeit from afar (and in the only manner in which it can be shown, namely, by *enacting* it), some traits of a *discontingent* saying. This kind of saying does not merely designate a given being envisaged and assured in representational thinking; it rather *originates* (and keeps in their bidding) as *thought* the traits of being that thinking, in turn, *originates* (and sustains in their coming) as *said*. Again, this manner of saying implies, as one of its laws, that the said is not sayable as long as it is not gathered in a thinking, while the thought is not thinkable as long as it is not indicated in a saying. In a passage of the conference “Die Gefahr” (1949) where the word *Verwahrlosung* is found as a word of the *Denkweg*, Heidegger writes:

The word *Verwahrlosung* is here taken by its word, i.e., it is said from out of an afore thought issue; for in fact <the following holds true>: fairly thought is soundly said, and fairly said is soundly thought.⁷⁹

Taking a word by its word means: saying it according to its *said* trait, which a *thinking* has gathered. This means – according to the above formulated rule – that if a word does not indicate a trait, and therefore cannot be taken by its word, the trait or issue remains not only unsaid but unthought. This is the case of the word “possibility:” since in this word the fairness of being – no matter how much we may *mean* it – is not fairly said, as long as we say “possibility” being itself is not soundly *thought*, i.e., originated and grounded in thinking. There is no likely thinking of the other onset that has already become, if not by the words of its own fairness: the words in which it has already said – as that which wants to be thought – its likely becoming.

79. “Das Wort ‘Verwahrlosung’ wird hier beim Wort genommen und d. h.: Es wird aus einer zuvor gedachten Sache gesagt; denn: echt gedacht, ist recht gesagt und echt gesagt, ist recht gedacht” (Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA Bd. 79 (Frankfurt, 1994) 47.