

Rewriting Heidegger

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ABSTRACT

Two traps currently ensnare Heideggerian scholarship: the “language trap” and the “being trap”. To avoid them, the text argues we should follow Heidegger’s important indication that movement (aka ex-sistential becoming or *Zeit*) determines all forms of meaning (aka the significance of things or *Sein*). This requires a radical rewriting of the terminology and the structure of *Zeitlichkeit* in § 65 of *Sein und Zeit*. The text also argues for moving beyond Heidegger’s early and late formulations of fundamental ontology and into a meta-ontological ethics that would apply to the economic, social, and political worlds in which we live our daily lives.

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Introduction

There is a double crisis threatening Heidegger scholarship today, one *ab extra*, the other *ab intra*. Symptomatic of the crisis *ab extra* are the works of Emmanuel Faye and Richard Wolin. Faye's work is so incompetent that it hardly passes the laugh test. Wolin, for his part, knows that Heidegger was an antisemite and a Nazi — and he's right: Heidegger certainly was. But that's all Wolin knows. In his role as village explainer, Wolin uses Wikipedia's potted version of Heidegger as a weapon to reduce the philosophy to crowd-shocking headlines in his thirty-year crusade to shut down job opportunities for younger philosophers who actually do understand the work.

But the crisis *ab intra* is far more troubling: the deepening uncertainty among Heidegger scholars themselves regarding what his work was about and why it should matter. I'd like to address the *ab intra* crisis by asking a "what" question and a "so what" question.

- What was the core of Heidegger's work?
- What difference does that make?

The crisis *ab intra* takes many forms. I'll begin by mentioning two snares that Anglophone Heidegger scholarship is caught in: the language trap and the being trap.

1. The Language Trap

Your experience of teaching Heidegger may be like mine. Students read the texts mostly in translation, and the first wall they crash into is Heidegger's language, where virtually every key term has a different meaning from either ordinary or even philosophical German. For example,

<i>Sein</i>	does not mean	being
<i>Zeit</i>	does not mean	time
<i>Wahrheit</i>	does not mean	truth
<i>Ereignis</i>	does not mean	event
<i>Verstehen</i>	does not mean	Understanding
<i>Sorge</i>	does not mean	care
<i>da</i>	does not mean	here or there

... and the list goes on.

Moreover, the translations themselves pose a host of problems. Either they leave his two key terms, *Dasein* and *Ereignis*, in the German because Heidegger claimed, improbably, that they could not be translated; or they flagrantly ignore his objections to translating *Dasein* as "being-here" or "being-there" and *Ereignis* as "event"; or they hew so closely to Heidegger's German that they produce calques and neologisms that are simply not English (e.g., de-severance, de-distancing) or that suffer from acute hyphenitis (ready-to-hand, present-to-hand, being-in-the-world, being-

towards-death) without adequately explaining what Heidegger means. All this, not to mention the way the English deals with complex German syntax, including compound sentences with long embedded modifying clauses. Consider, for example:

Apart from the fact that in the question just formulated, the “standpoint” — which is again not demonstrated phenomenally but is rather constructivist— makes its appearance...

which might remind one of Mark Twain’s parody in “The Awful German Language”:

But when he, upon the street the in-satin-and-silk-covered-now-very-unconstrainedly-after-the-newest-fashion-dressed government counsellor’s wife met....¹

In addition, the literalistic, word-for-word accuracy of the English translations can be a serious disadvantage insofar as Heidegger’s key terms often bring Aristotle’s Greek lexicon into German while giving it a phenomenological rather than a metaphysical sense. Translations that are ignorant of that can go wide of the mark, for example by rendering *Gestell* as “enframing” (missing its roots in μορφή) or *Riß* as “rift-design” (ditto regarding πέρας) or *Umschlag* as “overturning” (ditto regarding μεταβολή).²

The result is that Anglophone scholarship is hamstrung by its proprietary Pidgin, which is understood only by paid-up initiates. Heidegger had good reasons for crafting his own unique terminology, but its rhapsodic repetition by generations of disciples is getting a bit old. Even more bizarre is that this idiolect is not even Heidegger’s but instead the one invented by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson some sixty years ago. To be sure, Macquarrie and Robinson did yeoman’s service in quarrying out of the hard granite of *Sein und Zeit* their groundbreaking translation, *Being and Time*. But they did so in ignorance of the Greek that underlies the German and with a lapidary literalism that to this day remains only semi-understandable and has long since outlived its usefulness.

¹ M. Twain, “The Awful German Language,” In *A Tramp Abroad*, 603.39-604.2, translating “...wenn er aber auf der Straße der in Sammt und Seide gehüllten, jetzt [sehr] ungeniert nach der neuesten Mode gekleideten Regierungsrätin begegnet...,” E. Marlitt, *Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell*, 303.21 ff.

² See, respectively, GA 9: 273.8; GA 5: 71.16; and GA 26: 199.27. In these footnotes the number after the period indicates the line on the page.

1-1. The Being Trap

Worse yet, Heidegger scholars are caught in the “being” trap, convinced that *die Sache selbst*, the core of Heidegger’s thought, is *Sein* — this in spite of Heidegger’s insistence that it was not. It took him a while, but he finally got around to making that very clear.

- In 1951 he said that *Sein* was only a preliminary and provisional term (*das vorläufige Wort*), a mere formal indication of what he was after.¹
- In 1955, in his homage to Ernst Jünger, he took to crossing out the word (~~Sein~~).²
- In 1959 he acknowledged that his use of *Sein* had been the occasion of immense confusion (*Anlaß einer großen Verwirrung*).³
- In 1962 he declared that *Sein* is no longer the proper object of thought (*nicht mehr das eigens zu Denkende*).⁴
- And in 1962 he declared that, when it comes to *die Sache selbst* there is no longer room for even the word “being” (*ist sogar für den Namen Sein kein Raum mehr*).⁵

Most of these statements were still unpublished in 1962-1963 when William J. Richardson and Otto Pöggeler were moving Heidegger scholarship out of its post-war existentialist paradigm and into the classical “being” paradigm that has dominated Heidegger scholarship ever since. However, with Heidegger’s clarifications of *Ereignis* in *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (1989), the tectonic plates under the classical paradigm began to shift.⁶ It is now clear that Heidegger’s focal topic was not being (*Sein, Anwesen*) but what allows for or brings about or “gives” being (*das Anwesenlassen*).⁷ Now some thirty-five years later the question presses to the fore: If Heidegger’s focal topic was not being (and if *Ereignis* is not just another name for being), what was Heidegger’s central issue? And where do we start in order to find out?

A few years back, Gregory Fried and Richard Polt published the important collection *After Heidegger?* The question mark in the title is significant, signaling that in order to project an “after Heidegger,” one first has to know what Heidegger himself was after. Like Socrates, Heidegger held

¹ GA 7: 234.13f.

² GA 9: 385.6.

³ GA 12: 103.24f.

⁴ GA 14: 50.2f.

⁵ GA 15: 365.17f.

⁶ GA 65: 34.9, 239.5f., 252.23-25; 304.5-9, 322.6-9 (the last text to be compared with *Sein und Zeit*, 325.37); GA 9: 377 note d, etc.

⁷ GA 14: 45.29f., 46.6-12.

that questions are determined by the answers they are searching for.¹ So, if Heidegger was not searching for *Sein*, what was he after?

2. 1971: Heidegger's advice

In the spring of 1971, through the good offices of my teacher, William J. Richardson, I spent the better part of an afternoon with Heidegger at his home in Freiburg-Zähringen. I was teaching in Rome at the time, and he wrote inviting me first to submit some questions and then to visit him on May 21. I was fresh out of graduate school, and admittedly the questions I forwarded were somewhat naïve. Heidegger saw that, and as he poured a glass of wine in his second-floor study, he cut to the chase. If you want to understand my work, he said, you first have to understand two things: the categorial intuition in *Logical Investigations* and Aristotle's doctrine of κίνησις in the *Physics*. The first text, he said, led him to revise his understanding of the second. Once he saw that Husserl's breakthrough regarding the categorial intuition had already been anticipated by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* IX 10, Heidegger had a new insight, one that launched him on his lifelong pursuit of "the thing itself." He saw that movement determines meaning.³

Aristotle said that a small error in the beginning gets multiplied ten-thousandfold down the road.⁴ In approaching Heidegger, it is important to get off on the right foot from the very start by understanding the presuppositions that underlie his work. One of the fundamental presuppositions is his understanding of κίνησις. Like any fundamental presupposition, this one operates in the background of everything he taught and wrote, and yet if κίνησις is the hidden presupposition of Heidegger's work, it is hiding in plain sight. It massively informs his early courses on Aristotle as well as his famous 1922 *Natorp Bericht*, his first major text on Aristotle, where the term *Bewegung* is mentioned fifty-two times in a 51-page manuscript.⁵ In a 1928 seminar he declared that human

¹ *Sein und Zeit*, 5.7f. (vorgängiges Geleit aus dem Gesuchten her); cf. Plato, *Meno* 80d-e.

² Cf. GA 21: 170-181.

³ At the heart of Aristotle's doctrine of κίνησις is the relation of ἐνέργεια and δύναμις, and the crux of that relation is what Aristotle takes to be obvious: that ἐνέργεια has ontological priority over δύναμις: φανερόν ὅτι πρότερον ἐνέργεια δυνάμειός ἐστιν (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX 9, 1051a 2f.). To *actually be* has more ontological clout than just *being able to be*. Heidegger, however, upends Aristotle's hierarchy. Ability, he says, is higher than actuality (Höher als die Wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit: *Sein und Zeit*, 38.29f.). Applied to ex-sistence, this means we are always beyond whatever actuality we may have achieved, which is what Heidegger means by saying that ex-sistence is ekstatic.

⁴ Aristotle, *De caelo et mundo* I 5, 271b8f.: τὸ μικρὸν παραβῆναι τῆς ἀληθείας ἀφισταμένοις γίνεται πόρρω μωριοπλάσιον; cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 436d2-4: τοῦ πρώτου μικροῦ καὶ ἀδήλου ψεύδους γενομένου, τὰ λοιπὰ πάμπολλα; and Aquinas, "parvus error in principio magnus est in fine," *De ente et essentia*, Proemium.

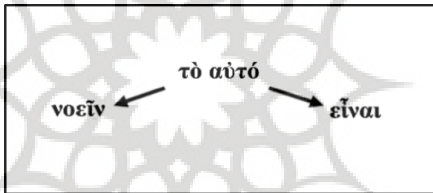
⁵ GA 62: 343-400. Originally H. Lipps, (ed.), *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften*, VI (1989), 235-274.

beings are the *Urbewegung*¹ and, as such, can understand the being of things only as a form of movement. To state this in terms of SZ: insofar as we are existential κίνησις (*Zeitlichkeit*), we necessarily understand being in terms of κίνησις (*Zeit*). Indeed, the bond between human being as κίνησις and *Sein* as κίνησις is itself kinetic.² This is the fundamental fact underlying Heidegger's discussions of *Ereignis* throughout the last forty years of his career.³

The story I tell in what follows takes Heidegger's 1971 suggestion seriously. It is focused on movement and meaning and especially on the "and" that binds them together.

3. The Phenomenological Correlation

Hölderlin famously said that where you begin is where you remain, and T.S. Eliot wrote that the end of all exploring is to arrive back where you started and know the place for the first time.⁴ True to both maxims, Heidegger remained when he began and kept coming back to where he started, and that place was the phenomenological correlation. His first course as a Privatdozent (winter semester, 1915) was dedicated to Parmenides' formulation of the correlation: νοεῖν and εἶναι, minding and being, are correlative and inseparable.



Heidegger took that as the bedrock of human being and of all Western philosophy, and for the next sixty years he did all his work within the correlation of the *Vollzug* and the *Gehalt*, the enacting of an understanding of *Sein* and the meaning of the *Sein* that gets enacted.

¹ GA 83: 256.23

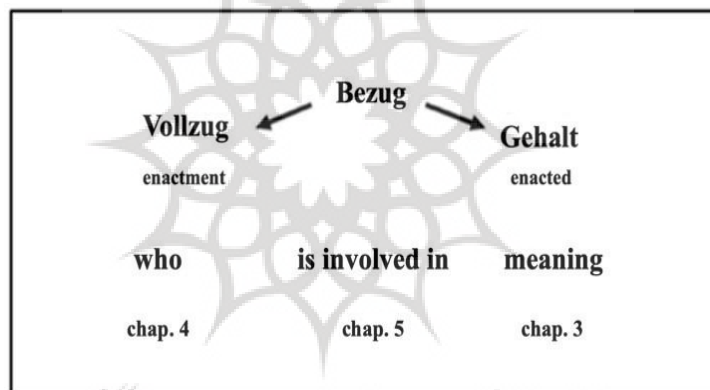
² GA 83: 20.2f. (transzendental-kinetisch).

³ Both Aristotle and Heidegger acknowledge that κίνησις is difficult to understand. (Cf. Aristotle. *Physics* III 2, 201b33-202a3: χαλεπόν, and GA 9: 283.23-27: das Schwierigste). Aristotle says that if one does not understand κίνησις, one will never understand φύσις (*Physics* III 1, 200 b 12-15) to which Heidegger would add: and if you don't understand κίνησις, you certainly will never understand ex-sistence. Heidegger agrees formally with Aristotle's reading of movement as ἡ τοῦ δυνατοῦ, ἢ δυνατὸν, ἐντελέχεια. Movement is ability enacted, but enacted only insofar as the ability is still ability and has not yet achieved the goal and been transformed into a further actuality.

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Another presupposition that Heidegger brings to his work (and it is a fundamental one insofar as denying it only instantiates it)¹ is that human beings are embedded a priori in meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*). He holds that we are less *in possession* of λόγος (as per Aristotle’s τὸ ζῷον λόγον ἔχον) than we are *possessed by* λόγος (as in Heidegger’s rewrite: λόγος ἄνθρωπον ἔχων).² He reads λόγος as referring primarily to “gathering into meaning” rather than to the consequences of that: the ability to interpret, speak, and reason.³

Before it is anything else, phenomenology *is* the correlation, if only because that correlation is our fate. Lacking a God-like point of view, we are locked into the relation between enactment and enacted. We cannot experience anything without experiencing it; we cannot understand being without understanding it. As Heidegger puts it, “the philosophizing person [...] belongs together with the matters being treated.”⁴ Everything else in phenomenology — whether intentionality, the things themselves, the reductions, and even hermeneutics itself — is located within and is secondary to the correlation. The correlation is what structures the first Division of SZ:



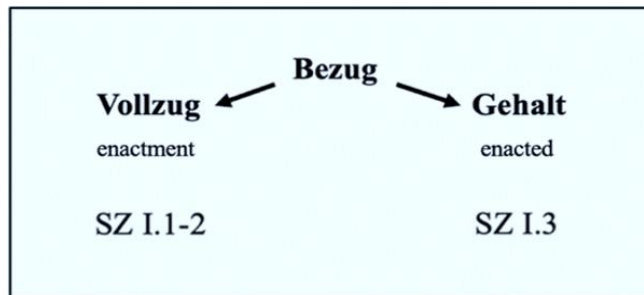
It likewise structures all of Part One of SZ as originally projected, though SZ as published completed only the *Vollzug* side.

¹ That is, via argument by retorsion (περιτροπή τοῦ λόγου). See Sextus Empiricus, Πυρρονείων ὑποτυπώσεων in *Sexti Empirici Opera*, II, 128.

² Heidegger’s rewrite: GA 40: 184.11. Re τὸ λόγον ἔχον: Aristotle. *De Anima* III 9, 432a31; *Nicomachean Ethics* II 13, 1102b15 and 1103a2; V 15, 1138b9; VI 1, 1139a4; etc.

³ On λόγος as gathering into meaning, cf. GA 9: 279.1-7.

⁴ GA 9: 42.25f. (zu den Sachen der Philosophie der Philosophierende selbst... mitgehört). Also *ibid.*, 103.19 (der Fragende – als ein solcher – in der Frage mit da). Cf. A. Zeilinger, “Nothing can exist without the possibility of saying something about it” in M. Ansele, “Anton Zeilinger, Nobel de Física: No puedes demostrar que la Luna está ahí cuando nadie mira,” *El País*, June 14, 2023.



Parmenides may have been the first to articulate the correlation of $\nu\omicron\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu$ and $\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu$, but according to Heidegger, the reason why the correlation is ineluctable eluded not only Parmenides but also everyone else in Western philosophy until Heidegger himself. Philosophers failed to probe the *Bezug* that unites the minding-of-being and being-as-the-minded. But as Heidegger said in his Kant book, that *Bezug* — the “and” between enactment and enacted — is what he was finally after.¹

Given the centrality of the correlation, it’s amazing that books on Heidegger’s phenomenology can still be published today without so much as mentioning the correlation.² Even more amazing is the widespread claim that Heidegger gave up phenomenology in the 1930s. We know he surrendered the *title* “phenomenology” just as he surrendered the titles “fundamental ontology” and “hermeneutics,” but without ever surrendering what those titles refer to. Heidegger never gave up phenomenology — and couldn’t without ceasing to be Heidegger.³

4. Not “Being”

If phenomenology is first and foremost about the correlation, it is first and foremost about meaning, intelligibility, and significance, and not at all about “being” as that word is understood both in everyday speech and in philosophy. And as noted above, Heidegger’s final topic was not being but what *allows for* being. The word *Sein* is catnip for Heideggerians, sending them into paroxysms of ecstasy; nonetheless, in none of its forms — $\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu$, $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\tilde{\iota}\alpha$, *esse*, *entitas*, and even Heidegger’s *Sein* — was it ever *die Sache selbst*. *Sein* is the first of those technical terms in Heidegger that do not have their usual philosophical meanings. Here we reach the *pons asinorum* of Heidegger scholarship, with the attendant difficulties the scholarship has had in spurring Balaam’s ass over that bridge.

¹ GA 3: 242.28f. (das “und” das zentrale Problem in sich birgt).

² See W. McNeill, *The Fate of Phenomenology*.

³ Heidegger’s polemics against “phenomenology” in GA 82 (e.g., 37f., 43, 45, 82, 146, 189, etc.) are directed against a certain way of doing phenomenology, not against Heidegger’s own hermeneutical phenomenology.

Ever since (as he said) “Husserl put phenomenological eyes in my head,”¹ Heidegger saw that phenomenology was about an immediate first-person engagement with *what* is given in experience (*das Was*) in terms of *the way* it is given (*das Wie*). To use ontological terms, phenomenological experiences are of beings (*das Seiende*) in their being (*das Sein*). Such a formulation can be misleading if, as Heideggerians often do, one was to take “being/*Sein*” as referring to the intrinsic essence and/or existence of a thing apart from the person relating to the thing. That would be in-itself-ness in Aristotle’s metaphysical sense, where what one encounters is considered as ἔξω ὄν καὶ χωριστόν, independent of and apart from thinking.²

Since, short of death, there is no escape from *Bedeutsamkeit*, Heidegger understands the in-itself-ness (the being/*Sein*) of a thing phenomenologically as

- the meaningful presence (ἡ παρουσία, *das Anwesen*)
- of the thing (τὸ παρόν, *das Anwesende*)
- to the person or persons relating to that thing (παρὰ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ)
- within a meaning-giving context or “world of meaning” shaped by the reason why the person or persons is relating to that thing (τὸ τέλος, τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα).

Sein means “presence” but not in the physical or chronological sense. Instead, it means presence-to-mind, just as Parmenides’ νοεῖν means having εἶναι present to mind.³ However, “mind” refers to *mind*ing, whether that consists in caring *about* something (as in “Do you mind if I smoke?”) or caring *for* a person or thing (“Mind your little brother while I’m out”) or being attentive to a situation (as in “Mind the gap” in the London Tube). In short, *Sein* is Heidegger’s stand-in for the significance of something to someone within a correlation that structures the specific meaning-giving context. *Sein* is about how things *matter* to us; it stands for such “mattering.”

When Heidegger speaks of *Sein*, he means *Anwesen*/presence as the *Bedeutsamkeit* of what one encounters. That’s why Heideggerians should bite the bullet, take the pledge, and swear off the *Sein*-sauce once and for all, the way Heidegger himself finally did.⁴ It’s time to follow his good example and hit the pause button on what he called *Seinsgerede*⁵— all that banging on about “being” — if for no other reason than that such being-babble is the greatest obstacle to understanding Heidegger’s work and to making any progress beyond it. Nonetheless, since it’s the

¹ GA 63: 5.22f. (die Augen hat mir Husserl eingesetzt). Cf. GA 14: 147.31f. (mit dem inzwischen [in the 1920s] eingeübten phänomenologischen Blick).

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XI 8, 1065a24. Cf. ἔξω [τῆς διανοίας]: “outside” [i.e., independent] of thinking: *Metaphysics*, VI 4, 1028a2, taken with 1027b34–1028a1. See GA 6.2: 380.2–13.

³ Cf. Aquinas, “praesens intelligibile,” *Scriptum super sententias*, lib. 1, d. 3 q. 4 a. 5, corp.

⁴ GA 15: 20.8f. (Obwohl ich dieses Wort nicht mehr gern gebrauche).

⁵ GA 5: 335.17.

term Heideggerians continue to employ, I will (reluctantly) use “being” and “significance” interchangeably in what follows.

I call these remarks “Rewriting Heidegger,” but the final goal is to move *beyond* Heidegger to an “after Heidegger” that gets to the tasks he left undone. The Ariadne’s thread guiding this text’s trajectory will be Heidegger’s 1971 remarks on movement and meaning.

5. *Der Sinn von Sein*

The first issue is *der Sinn von Sein*, a phrase that has two distinct meanings, one enactive and the other semantic. The *Vollzug*-sense is about how we are structured so as to be able to enact an understanding of being (the material covered in *SZ* I.1-2), whereas the *Gehaltssinn* concerns the semantic sense, the meaning of being, i.e., what we understand being *as* (the material that was to be covered in *SZ* I.3). In 1962 Heidegger twice renamed the enactment of the understanding of being. In his April letter to William J. Richardson, he called it what *brings about* (*erbringt*) *Anwesen*. And in a private seminar in September of that year he referred to it as what *allows for* meaningful presence, *das Anwesen-lassen*. Here *lassen* does not refer to what puts presence “out there” in the world as something we might or might not run across. *Sein* occurs only in the enactment of *Sein*. So, the question *Was erbringt/läßt Sein?* asks about what we do to make significance happen at all.

Heidegger identified the *Sinn von Sein* with *die Lichtung* and in turn identified *die Lichtung* with *Existenz*, the being of human beings. (Some contest the identification, but I think the textual evidence is clear).¹ Therefore, it is we ourselves qua ex-sistent who *erbringen das Anwesen*. Existence is the “es” that gives or dispenses *Anwesen*. It is *died Sache selbst* of all Heidegger’s work both early and late.

But then what about the enacted-semantic side of *der Sinn von Sein*? What do we understand being *as*? *SZ*-as-published dealt only with the *Vollzugssinn*, whereas the unpublished third division (*SZ* I.3) was to work out the *Gehaltssinn* regarding what being *means*. Even though the book remained a torso, Heidegger nonetheless said that enactive side in Divisions 1 and 2 foreshadows

¹ A far from exhaustive list would include *Sein und Zeit*, 64.22-24, 133.5, 380.28-30 (etc.); GA 3: 229.10f.; GA 6.2: 323.14f.; GA 9: 325.20f.; GA 14: 35.23f.; GA 15: 380.11f., 415.10-13; GA 45:213.1-4; GA 66: 129.5, 321.12, 328.1f.; GA 69: 101.12f.; GA 70: 125.12; GA 73.1: 450.13, 642.27f.; *Zollikoner Seminare*, 351.14-17; etc. In a private communication (June 26, 2018) Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann clarified a passage in *Zollikoner Seminare* (223.13-15) that reads: “Er [= Dasein] ist nicht die Lichtung selber, ist nicht identisch mit der ganze Lichtung, ist nicht identisch mit der ganzen Lichtung als solcher.” Von Herrmann wrote: “Wenn also das Sein selbst, die Wahrheit des Seyns, sich in einer geschichtlichen Lichtungs- oder Entbergungsweise bekundet und verbirgt, gewährt und entzieht, dann ‘erschöpft sich’ das Sein selbst, die Wahrheit oder Lichtung des Seyns, nicht in der jeweiligen Gelichtetheitsweise des Da, sondern bleibt seinem Wesen nach das Unerschöpfliche für alle endlichen Lichtungs- oder Entbergungsweisen. Auf derselben Ebene des Denkens hält sich die von Ihnen angezogene Textstelle aus GA 97: 175.12-19.”

what Division 3 *would* have worked out.¹ Therefore, to discover the semantic content of “being,” we have to work with what we’ve got: *Existenz* as the *Vollzugssinn*. The fundamental structure of that is laid out in SZ § 65, entitled *Die Zeitlichkeit des Daseins*, which brings us to the second issue, in fact the key issue.

6. The Vollzugssinn: Zeitlichkeit and Its Problems

SZ § 65 is one of the least understood sections of the entire treatise and the worst translated. What I’ll call the “received interpretation” of § 65 has two problems, the first regarding the structure of *Zeitlichkeit* and the other regarding the terminology for it. Underlying both problems is the issue that was mentioned earlier: Heidegger’s retrieval of an ex-sistential-phenomenological meaning from one of Aristotle’s Greek metaphysical terms.

6.1 The Terminology for *Zeitlichkeit*

The traditional metaphysical model sees time as composed of three moments: past, present, and future. The received interpretation holds that the same applies to *Zeitlichkeit*, so that those three *chronological* moments give their names to the very different *ex-sistential* moments of *Zeitlichkeit*. Thus, in the received interpretation, *Gewesen*, *Gegenwart*, and *Zukunft* get translated as, respectively,

- “The past” or “what is as having been”
- “The present”
- “The future.”

But that is egregiously wrong. For starters, *Zeit* does not mean “time,” and *Zeitlichkeit* does not mean “temporality” in either the everyday or the philosophical sense of measuring the length of events. Heidegger frequently said that *Zeit* was only a *Vorname* for *Existenz*, and specifically for *Existenz* as *die Lichtung*, and Heidegger finally shelved the term *Zeit* in favor of *Lichtung*.² Here we meet the full impact of Heidegger’s 1971 remarks about κίνησις.

¹ GA 66: 414.9-13 (im Mitgeteilten oft gesagt ist, was es [=SZ I.3] will).

² GA 9: 159 note “a” (Zeitigung der Temporalität als Vorname der Wahrheit des Seyns); *ibid.*, 376.11 (die “Zeit” als Vorname für die Wahrheit des Seins); GA 11: 147.16-20 (der überlieferte Zeitbegriff nach keiner Hinsicht zureicht); GA 54: 113.32 (Vorname); GA 65: 74.10-12 (die Anweisung und der Anklang auf jenes, was als Wahrheit der Wesung des Seyns geschieht); GA 66: 145.25 (Lichtung [“Zeit”]); *ibid.*, 146.8 (Wahrheit [“Zeit”]); *ibid.*, 300.13-15 (geklärt... durch die Frage nach der Lichtung des Seyns); *ibid.*, 310.18f. (die entrückend-lichtende “Zeit” als die “Wahrheit” (Entwurfsoffenheit) des Seins); GA 73.1: 758.2 (“Zeit” hier als Zeit-Raum im Sinne der Gegend); GA 74: 9.6 (Die Wahrheit des Seins, dafür die “Zeit” der Vorname ist); and so on. On shelving *Zeit* in favor of *Lichtung*, see GA 11: 151.26-28. At the very least the words “temporality” and “time” should be put in scare quotes and modified by the adjective “ex-sistential.” But that is only a stop-gap measure that merely signals, negatively, “not chronological past-present-future,” leaving open what these two terms do mean.

Heidegger lifted the issue of time out of Aristotle's chronological model and relocated it (provisionally) in Plotinus' model of διάστασις ζωῆς, which Augustine interpreted as *distentio animi* and which Heidegger reread as *die Erstreckung des Daseins*, ex-sistence as stretched out ahead of itself.¹ Ex-sistential *Zukunft* does not refer to a human being's "future," all those experiences that are yet to come. Rather, it is Heidegger's name for *becoming yourself*, asymptotically and mortally, as in his term *das Auf-sich-Zukommen*.²

Then what about *Gewesen*? We know it doesn't refer to *das Vergangene*, the by-gone past; but the received interpretation insists it means "what-is-as-having-been," in the present perfect tense — which it emphatically does not. Rather, it is Heidegger's retrieval of an unsaid possibility in Aristotle's phrase for "essence," τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, which Heidegger interprets as *das Gewesen* and uses in reference to the essence of human being. However, there's a problem here. The Greek phrase uses the imperfect verb form ἦν, "it was"; and if we translate the Greek *literally* (and in this case incorrectly) the human essence (τὸ τί ἦν ἀνθρώπου εἶναι) would be defined in terms of "what it *was* to be human," as in the medieval mistranslation, *quod quid erat esse*. This reduces ontology to chronology and locates our essence somewhere in the past imperfect.

Here things get a bit complicated, and we will take it in two steps. First: What τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι *does not* mean. Only in the last year of his life, did Heidegger clarify the issue. In 1976 someone asked him about the ἦν, and Heidegger wrote out a note that he inserted in the copy of *SZ* that he kept in his Todtnauberg cabin. That handwritten note eventually become the marginal gloss that appears in the *Gesamtausgabe* edition of *SZ* at page 114, note "a." The note explains that the Greek verb εἶναι does not have a grammatical form for the present perfect; hence, to express that tense, Aristotle resorted to a work-around and invented the phrase ἦν εἶναι, which can be translated into English as is-as-having-been. (Jones, *having been* born some thirty years ago, *still is* the child of her parents.) But that hardly solves the problem. Translated literally (and again incorrectly), it would ascribe the essence of a human being to what *has been* (Latin: *quod quid fuit esse*), thereby still reducing ontology to chronology, while simply switching from the imperfect to the present perfect tense.

Second: What τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι *does* mean. The Todtnauberg note further explains that τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι (and implicitly Heidegger's *das Gewesen*) refers not to chronology and the present perfect tense but to ontology and what Heidegger calls the *apriorisches Perfekt* and *ontologisches Perfekt*. He uses these two terms in the etymological sense of the Latin *perfectum*: what is "done unto"

¹ Respectively: Plotinus, *Enneads* III 7: 11.42 (Henry-Schwyzler edition); Augustine, *Confessions* XI 26, 331; and *Sein und Zeit*, 371.32.

² *Sein und Zeit*, 330.18.

human beings (*factum*) and done “thoroughly,” i.e., a priori and determinatively (*per-*) — or as Heidegger puts it in the note: “*das jeweils schon voraus Wesende*,” what is

- a priori (= *schon voraus*)
- ontologically operative in and determinate of... (= *das Wesende*)
- each one of us at each moment of time (= *jeweils*).

In other words, these terms refer to the dynamic ontological structure that makes us what we are and cannot not be if we are to be human at all. And that dynamic structure is ex-sistential κίνησις, ontological becoming, the fact that, as long as you are living, you are asymptotically and mortally becoming yourself. Your self is not what and how you are in the isolated present moment; rather, it is you as *ever becoming* yourself.¹ Ex-sistence is never just “presence” but always *pres-abs-ence*, ahead of itself and thus beyond and relatively absent from whatever actuality it may have achieved. We are entities of distance: “*Der Mensch ist ein Wesen der Ferne*.”²

Therefore, *das Gewesen* and *die Zukunft* are not two “time zones,” one in the past or present perfect and the other in the future. Rather, *Gewesen* functions grammatically and ex-sistentially as an adjectival modification of *Zukunft*. *Zukunft* is ex-sistential becoming, and the adjective *gewesen* expresses the kind of becoming that you are: one that, far from being your chronological future (next year, the year after that, and so on), is the on-going, ever-operative κίνησις that you cannot not be. This fleshes out what Heidegger means by *Seinkönnen* as *Zu-sein*, and what he means by *Möglichkeit* when used in the singular for *Existenz*. It is your ontological δύναμις as the ability to keep on keeping on, what Heidegger elsewhere calls *das Entheben in das Mögliche*.³

Thus, *die gewesene Zukunft*, while not itself chronological, operates as the ontological structure underlying and making possible all chronological moments, whether past, present, or future. Heidegger was searching for something deeper than time in the chronological sense. He was after the ex-sistential condition that makes such time possible, and he found that in what Augustine called *vivere moriendo*: our mortal becoming.⁴ Following Augustine, Heidegger introduced a new, non-chronological “tense” into ex-sistential κίνησις: the present future, the *praesens de futuris*.⁵ There are not three “tenses” to ex-sistential becoming. Rather, the past is already folded into the

¹ Heidegger finds this in Heraclitus’ *hapax legomenon* from the *Suda*: ἀγγιβασίη (Heraclitus, fragment 122; cf. T. Gaisford, *Sudae lexicon*, I, 84.8f.): approaching without having arrived. See Stephan Dedalus’ “almosting it,” *Ulysses*. 39.360.

² GA 26: 284.18.

³ GA 29/30: 528.4; see *ibid.*, 321.26-30 (Möglichkeit-Haben... nicht anderes ist als dieses); *ibid.*, 343.22- 24 (Fähigkeit gehört zum Wirklichsein).

⁴ Augustine, *Epistula* 95, no 2.

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* XI 20, 26.

present (as Faulkner's Temple Stevens puts it, "The past is never dead. It's not even past"),¹ and the present is not even just "present" but always stretched into the future. Thus Heidegger can even say that one's past, as folded into a present that is ever becoming, *geht ihm [= Dasein] je schon vorweg*.²

6.2 The structure of *Zeitlichkeit*

We move from the terminology for ex-sistential "temporality" to the question of its structure. Recall that *Sorge* is a preliminary and provisional formulation of the structure of ex-sistence, whereas *Zeitlichkeit* is the fundamental formulation; hence the two structures should map onto to one another. The received interpretation carries out such mapping by claiming that both *Sorge* and *Zeitlichkeit* have a *trivalent* structure — each is allegedly composed of *three* moments — whereas in fact they are *bivalent*, composed of only *two* moments. With *Sorge* the two moments are:

1. *Sich-vorweg-schon-sein-in (einer Welt)*³
2. *Sein-bei (innerweltlich belegendem Seienden)*.

The *first* moment (*Sich-vorweg-schon-sein-in*) indicates that the human being is

- a priori (= *schon*)
- thrown ahead of itself (= *sich vorweg*)
- as the world of meaning (= *die Welt*), which embraces specific worlds of meaning.⁴

That makes possible the *second* moment (*Sein-bei*), so that

- we are a priori thrown ahead as the sphere of intelligibility
- and thereby make sense of whatever we encounter.

The two moments that structure *Sorge* cannot be artificially stretched to fit *Zeitlichkeit*'s supposed three moments of past, present and future. However, they *do* fit *Zeitlichkeit* when we see that ex-sistential "temporality" is itself composed of only two moments:

1. *gewesene Zukunft*: we are a priori becoming ourselves asymptotically and mortally
2. *Gegenwärtigung*: we thereby make sense of ourselves and of all we encounter.

Gewesen says that ex-sistential becoming is our a priori fate, what we cannot not be. When Heidegger, in his full definition of *Zeitlichkeit*, replaces *gewesen* with the invented participle *gewesend*,⁵ he is emphasizing that our ex-sistential becoming ever is, was, and will be operative as long as we live.

¹ Faulkner, W., *Requiem for a Nun*, 85.15.

² *Sein und Zeit*, 20.17.

³ Note that the hyphens hold *Sich-vorweg-sein* and *schon-sein-in* together as a single moment.

⁴ *Re Welt* as *Lichtung*, cf. GA 9: 326.15-16 (*Die Lichtung des Seins, und nur sie, ist Welt*).

⁵ *Sein und Zeit*, 326.19.

6.3 Excursus: “Coming Back to Yourself”

What to make of a phrase in § 65 that describes a person as *zukünftig auf sich zurückkommend*?¹ The English translations make a hash of it, rendering the phrase as “[*Dasein*,] coming back to itself futurally” (Macquarrie-Robinson) or even worse “[*Dasein*,] coming back to itself from the future” (Stambaugh-Schmidt). Who can make any sense of the English or, for that matter, of Heidegger’s German? — Unless one sees Aristotle’s τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι hovering in the background.

Recall that § 65 is defining *Zeitlichkeit* not as just a neutral ex-sistential structure but rather as *authentic Zeitlichkeit*, the mode of *Zeitlichkeit* that you personally enact when you take over your own personal mortality in an act of resolve. In doing so, you do not “return to yourself from the future” or “return futurally to yourself,” whatever those phrases would mean. Instead, you return to yourself (if I may invent a word) “zukünftigly.” Here “*zukünftig*” has an ex-sistential (personal) rather than an ex-sistential (structural) sense. It is still about becoming, but now it is about how you *personally become* your structural becoming by taking over your mortality as your own (*zu eigen machen*), making yourself responsible for it (*eigentlich*).

In taking over my essence, I do not take over some generic human species-being. Existence is always mine (*jemeinig*) and mine to become. In an act of resolve I take over *my very own* mortal becoming — not yours or hers, and certainly not “human being in general.” I recognize and embrace the hard personal fact that inhabits all I have been, am, and will be, including the legacies I have inherited, namely that I am dying.² This is what SZ calls “taking over your thrownness” (*Übernahme der Geworfenheit*), which *Beiträge* will rewrite as “taking over your appropriation” (*Übernahme der Er-eignung*).³ It’s a matter of becoming your becoming, which is precisely what Heidegger was referring to in SZ § 31 when he channeled Pindar’s γένου’ οἴος ἐσσί as *Werde, was du bist*.⁴

6.4 Excursus: “Making Sense of”

A brief note on the phrase “making sense of,” since I use it to paraphrase both *Sein bei* in *Sorge* and *Gegenwärtigen* in *Zeitlichkeit*. Etymologically it comes from the Latin *sentire*, which has two distinct connotations: kinetic-directional and epistemic-semantic. When you are driving in Paris and the sign says *sens unique*, or in Rome and it says *senso unico*, that sign is indicating a one-way street, employing the kinetic-directional meaning of *sentire*. On the other hand, when you speak of making sense of something, you’re employing the epistemic-semantic sense. The two senses are

¹ Ibid. 326.17.

² Re legacies: *Sein und Zeit*, 383.73.

³ *Sein und Zeit*, 325.37 and GA 65: 322.6-9.

⁴ Respectively Pindar, “Pythian Odes,” II, 72; *ibid.*, III, 56; and *Sein und Zeit*, 145.41. See also GA 56/57: 5.35.

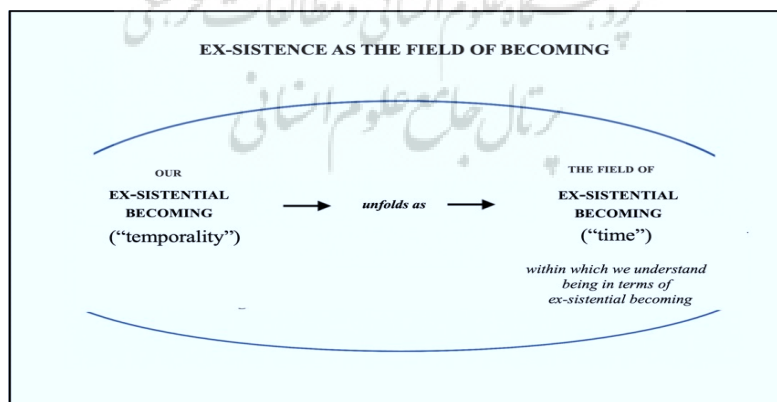
intimately related. For Heidegger the kinetic-directional sense underlies the semantic-epistemic one: movement makes for meaning. In making your way ex-sistentially, you open up a sphere of meaning within which you can understand things as this or that.¹

7. The *Gehaltssinn*

I am arguing that *SZ* § 65 cashes out Heidegger’s 1971 suggestion about *Bewegtheit* and *Bedeutung*. In *Sorge*, the movement-moment of being thrown ahead as the sphere of intelligibility allows for the meaning-moment of making sense of things. So too in *Zeitlichkeit*, the movement-moment of a priori becoming accounts for the meaning-moment of rendering things meaningfully present. In making-our-way (*bewegen*), we make sense of things (*bedeuten*). Our mortal movement (*Zeitlichkeit*) makes for meaning (*Sein*).

Die Temporalität des Seins is Heidegger’s term for the fact that and the way in which ex-sistential κίνησις is responsible for the understanding of being. But how exactly does ex-sistential κίνησις determine the meaning of being? § 65 works out two distinct modes of ex-sistential “time,” *Zeitlichkeit* and *Zeit*, both of which are the same thing: ex-sistence.² The sameness and the distinction are important, and the mediating term that Heidegger uses is *sich zeitigen*, that is: *Zeitlichkeit* unfolds into and as *Zeit*. *Sich zeitigen* is Heidegger’s translation of φύειν (cf. φύσις), something the English translations destroy by rendering the phrase as “temporality temporalizes itself as time,” a sentence that says nothing and obscures everything.

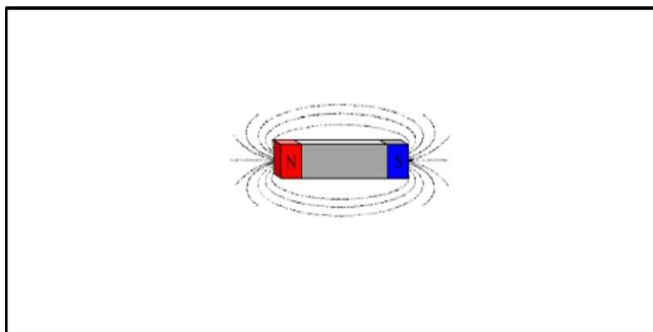
From the get-go, Heidegger has a *field-theory* of *Existenz*. To express that, he often uses the image of a horizon, which doesn’t really capture what he means. A horizon is an imaginary line that lies up ahead where earth and sky seem to meet, whereas Heidegger is referring to what lies *on this side* of the horizon, namely *Existenz* as the sphere of meaningfulness. That field, formed by ex-sistential becoming, is what Heidegger calls “the clearing.”



¹ GA 9: 291.24f. ([E]in Weg führt durch einen Bereich, öffnet sich selbst und eröffnet diesen.)

² See among other examples, GA 24: 388.26 (die Zeit als Zeitlichkeit).

That sphere is not static. It's a *Kraftfeld*, a charged field of force that determines whatever appears within it. Think of a magnetic field exerting a directional force on the metal filings that fall within its realm.



Analogously *Zeit*, as the “field of force” into which and as which ex-sistence unfolds, is what determines the “directionality” (aka significance) of whatever falls within its scope.

§ 65 is the culmination of *SZ* in its published form. It establishes the thesis that constitutes the core of Divisions 1 and 2 and that was to be further spelled out in Division 3, namely that we understand “being” in terms of “time.” In § 65 the picture that *SZ* had been drawing for some 350 pages finally begins to become clear, and as it does, we see the *utter radicalness* of what Heidegger was driving at. At this point in the book — not even a third of the way through *SZ* as originally projected and long before Part II, which was to take on the history of being — Heidegger has already destroyed traditional ontology. He has dismantled being as it was imagined at the origins of Western philosophy: static, solidly grounded, identical to itself — all the characteristics (other than its correlation with solidly grounded, identical to itself — all the characteristics (other than its correlation with minding) that Parmenides had established.¹ He has shown that we understand — and cannot not understand — everything in terms of our groundless, asymptotic becoming. There is no reason that grounds this fact. We are simply thrown into doing it. In a way that is analogous (but only analogous) to Nietzsche, Heidegger has stamped being with the characteristics of becoming. He has done Nietzsche’s homework for him.²

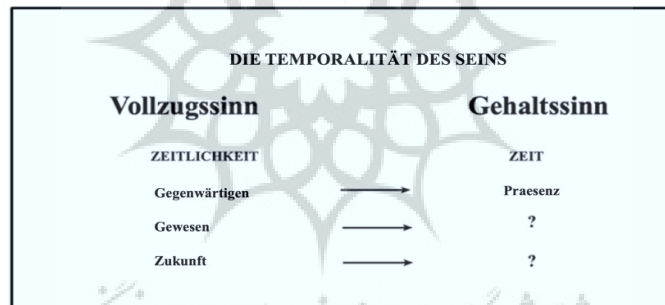
¹ Parmenides, Fragment 8: motionless (ἀτρεμέζ), unending (ἀτέλεστον), ungenerated (ἀγένητον), indestructible (ἀνώλεθρον), now-entire-whole-one-and-continuous (νῦν, ὁμοῦ πᾶν, ἓν, συνεχές). Instead of the everlasting (αἰώνιος), Heidegger leaves us with the sudden (ἐξαίφνης); in place of a beatific vision of being, we are left with the rare moment of insight (καιρός). Parmenides’ well- rounded circle (cf. εὐκυκλος) has been broken. All that is solid has melted into air.

² Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht*, 617 (Dem Werden den Charakter des Seins aufzuprägen).

Heraclitus famously said that you cannot step into the same river twice.¹ Some fifty years later Cratylus did him one better by saying that you can't step into the same river *once*.² Heidegger agrees, and he tells us why Cratylus is right. You can't step into the same river once because there's no bank from which to step into the river. You *are* the river.

To speak of Heidegger's work as a "topology" is to use a term that is far too static.³ It would be more accurate to call it a *potamology*. (Only kidding.) The same goes for *die Lichtung* as a cleared space in a wood: that is far too static an image for what Heidegger has in mind. He himself saw that problem and later pointed out that the verb *lichten* has a *dynamic* sense.⁴ It can mean "clearing the way," which he expressed by the verb *wegen*, a Swabian dialect word for "to make one's way." By ex-sistentially making our way, we open up and clear a space that makes meaning possible.⁵

Nonetheless, it's extraordinary that once Heidegger had arrived at this utterly radical thesis, he showed little interest in cashing out the details of the *Gehalt* side of the phenomenological correlation, i.e., showing what *Anwesen* is understood *as*. It's true that three months after publishing *SZ*, during the very last hour of the last meeting of his course on *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Saturday, July 16, 1927), Heidegger did make a stab at working out the *Gehaltssinn* of being, in at least one of its modalities.⁶



That glancing blow would be his sole attempt to work out *die Temporalität des Seins*, at least until the equally unsatisfying effort thirty-five years later in his lecture *Zeit und Sein* (January 31, 1962). Moreover, in the seminar that he gave on that lecture a few months later in Todtnauberg (September 11-13, 1962), he was less interested in the *Gehaltssinn von Sein* than in further elaborating the *Vollzugssinn* under the rubric of *Es gibt Sein*, i.e., how there is an understanding of being at all. In the end, he seemed satisfied with clarifying the *Es* of *Es gibt Sein* by simply saying

¹ Heraclitus, Fragment 91: ποταμῷ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμβῆναι δις τῷ αὐτῷ. Cf. Plato. *Cratylus*, 402a 8-10.

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV 5, 1010a 15: αὐτὸς ᾤετο οὐδ' ἀπαξ.

³ As in J. Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*.

⁴ GA 14: 80.16 (etwas frei und offen machen).

⁵ Bewegen: GA 12: 249-250 passim and GA 74: 46.6 et seq. On "clearing a space," see note 50 above.

⁶ For details see GA 24: 431-445, and T. Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger*, 201-206.

that the *Lichtung* (aka *Zeit*) *erbringt Anwesen*: ex-sistential becoming accounts for all forms of significance...period.¹

8. And the *Kehre*?

But didn't all that change with the so-called *Kehre* in the 1930s? The short answer is: No. The later work confirms that *Existenz* is what "gives" or "dispenses" all forms of being.

In 1929 Heidegger said that the key issue of all his work lay hidden in the *Bezug* correlating $\text{vo\varepsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu}$ and $\text{\varepsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota}$, the "and" that holds together time and being.² The *Bezug* is the *Lassen* of *Anwesen*, and that *Lassen* comes down to *Existenz*. A couple years before drafting the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger wrote a note on what he called the *Wahrheit des Seyns*, perhaps the "revealed-ness" of *Seyn* as the clearing, which he said is the most important thing we are given to contemplate (*das H\u00f6chste dessen, was den Menschen zu denken gegeben*). Within that issue, the richest mystery (*das Geheimnisreichste*) is the relation of *das Seyn* to human being (*der Bezug des Seyns zum Menschen*). He goes on:

Der Bezug ist jedoch nicht zwischen das Seyn und den Menschen eingespannt als seien beide vordem bezuglos Seyn und Mensch. Der Bezug ist das Seyn selbst, und das Menschenwesen ist der selbe Bezug: der entgegennende zum Gegenden des Seyns.³

However, the relation is not something stretched between human being and *Seyn* as if, beforehand, *Seyn* and human being were two elements unrelated to each other. Instead, the relation *is Seyn selbst*, and the essence of human being is that very relation: the replying to the presence of being.⁴

So yes, we can see how Heidegger could use *Seyn* as a cipher for *die Sache selbst*; however, it is *only a formal indication* of the thing itself. Once we work out the content of that formal indication, it becomes clear that *Seyn* is *Existenz*, the asymptotic and mortal ex-sistential $\kappa\acute{\iota}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ that we a priori are and cannot not be. Because we are ever teetering at the edge of death (*Sein-zum-Tode*), we *can* make sense of everything we encounter; in fact, we *have to* make sense of it.

¹ GA 11: 26-28.

² GA 3: 242.28f. (das "und" das zentrale Problem in sich birgt).

³ GA 73.1: 790.2-8.

⁴ The last phrase (*der entgegennende zum Gegenden des Seyns*) bespeaks what SZ 8.18f. calls the "merkw\u00fcrdige R\u00fcck- oder Vorbezogenheit", the remarkable back-and-forth relation (cf. reci- proci-tas) between being and human being. Here *das Gegende des Seyns* (= *das Seyn als gegendend*) bespeaks that same a priori reciprocity of significance/presence and human being. Human being serves as the site of all significance, a site that ex-sists for the sake of and as making possible (= *der entgegennende zum*) such significance and presence. The reci-proci-ty of human being and significance is the proper meaning of *die Kehre*.

And because as soon as we are born, we are old enough to die,¹ we are always at the point of death, living at the chiaroscuro border where existence shades off into nothingness and utter meaninglessness.

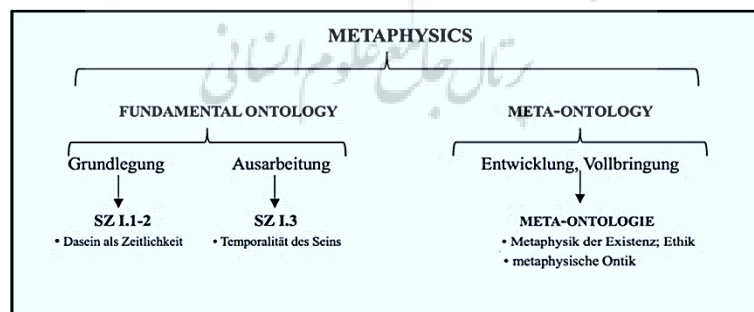
Because we are mortal, all mattering-to-us is suffused with nothingness, both with relative nothingness (because we are finite) and finally with absolute nothingness (because we are ever at the point of death). All mattering is thus suffused with meaninglessness, both relative meaninglessness (some things just don't make sense, even though they once may have, and still might in the future) and *absolute* meaninglessness: the fact that my existence is absurd, that is, deaf (*surdus*) to all attempts to find an ultimate explanation for why I exist. (I spend most of my time ignoring the absolute absurdity of my existence, but sometimes it catches up with me in moments of dread).²

Even without Division 3 we see the radical outcome Heidegger was driving at. He pulled every vestige of ground out from under our feet and left only the *nunc fluens* of becoming, human being as a question to which there is no answer.

9. Beyond Heidegger

Heidegger did not want more Heideggerians. He thought *one* Heideggerian was quite enough, thank you. What he wanted were people who would learn from him and then think beyond him. In fact, Heidegger himself wanted to think beyond Heidegger. What do I mean by that?

At first blush it might seem that Heidegger's program in the late 1920s was twofold: fundamental ontology and the dismantling of metaphysics, the two Parts of *SZ* as projected. However, on July 12, 1928, as he was leaving Marburg to assume Husserl's chair at Freiburg, he laid out a different plan that included a post-*SZ* project. In the 1920s the word "metaphysics" still had a positive sense for Heidegger (properly understood, it described his own project), and Heidegger sketched out what he saw as its full structure.³



¹ *Sein und Zeit*, 245.29f.

² Cf. E. Montale, "Forse un mattino," *Ossi di seppia in Tutte le poesie*, I, 42.

³ GA 26: 196-202.

With meta-ontology, he said, fundamental ontology becomes radical;¹ it returns to its roots in the existential and the ontic. Ariadne's thread guides us back out of the dark cave of the *Temporalität des Seins*, back to ourselves where, as Heidegger famously said, the question of ex-sistence is clarified only by how you ex-sist.² The analyses in SZ are not an end in themselves. They issue in a protreptic to self-transformation, a *Verwandlung des Menschseins*,³ a call not only to personal authenticity but to social authenticity as well. Didn't Heidegger tell Richard Wisser in a 1969 interview that metaphysics had only interpreted the world, whereas the point is to change it?⁴

Meta-ontology was to be a step in that direction. It would make the transition from a fundamental ontology of becoming to the concrete metaphysics of human being, including an ethics, and to regional ontologies of non-ex-sistential entities — all in the name of fulfilling what he said philosophy is ultimately about: the concretion of what it means to be human.⁵ Meta-ontology brings us back from the depths of fundamental ontology and lands us in the economic, social, and political worlds where we live our daily lives.

10. Non-Concluding, Very Unscientific Postscript

To return to where we started, the two questions of “what” and “so what.” It should be safe to assume that after a century of scholarship and after thousands of articles, books, and conferences, Heideggerians *do* know what Heidegger was ultimately after. Surely Heideggerians have mastered the “what” question and can now ask the “so what” question. What difference does it all make?

You no doubt remember the nineteenth-century parable about a famous German professor who wanted to save people from drowning. He was convinced that people sank beneath the waves because they had the idea of gravity in their heads. Therefore, he dedicated his whole career to driving the idea of gravity out of people's minds and replacing it with the idea of levity. But he died in despair because, his best efforts notwithstanding, people continued to drown.⁶

Surely none of us wants to repeat that feckless gesture, hoping to save Western civilization (or at least Western philosophy) by driving the idea of metaphysics out of people's minds and replacing it with the idea of *Ereignis*. Nor do we want to reenact the *trahison des clercs* of the German philosophers in the 1930s who never looked up from their copies of Diel's *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* as the world was going to hell in a handbasket. Nonetheless I wonder what Heideggerians will be discussing some twenty years from now — or even just three years from

¹ GA 26: 197.34 and 199.2 (Radikalität), and 199.20 (radikal).

² *Sein und Zeit*, 12.30f. (nur durch das Existieren selbst).

³ GA 45: 241.18.

⁴ Not exactly, although he should have. GA 16: 703.12-14.

⁵ GA 26: 196-202.9f. (Philosophie ist die zentrale und totale Konkretion des metaphysischen Wesens der Existenz).

⁶ *MEGA I*, 5, 3.27-34.

now at the one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of *SZ*. Will they still be picking over the bones, parsing out paragraphs in the 102 volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, and training up scores of graduate students to continue the grind after they're gone? Will they be embalming Heidegger or weaponizing him?

Whatever one thinks of his efforts, Heidegger wanted to be transformational, even revolutionary. He shook the congealed tradition of ontology down to its foundations in hopes of retrieving its explosive potential, only to have his would-be revolution end up as its own congealed tradition, comfortably ensconced behind the walls of the academy, predictably self-replicating as it is meticulously curated by *bien-pensants* professors dedicated to filling the minds of the young with the ideas of *Sein*-with-a-y and Ἀλήθεια- with-a-capital-alpha. One might be reminded of Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes's remark in 1908 that "the philosophers are hired by the comfortable class to prove that everything is all right."¹

The word *Verwandlung* is a constant drumbeat throughout Heidegger's work, a call to personal and social transformation. A step in the direction might be to work out the ethics Heidegger projected in 1928.² But that would require first working out the social ontology that lies buried in *SZ*, especially in chapter four, where Heidegger makes such radical statements as that all existence is for the sake of social ex-sistence.³ Heidegger's meta-ontology was to investigate the "concretization" of ex-sistence-qua-ability. In the worlds in which we actually live, ability gets concretized in forms of *power*. In the economic order, for example, it takes the form of money as power, which develops into social power, which in turn becomes the political power to make sure that the established economic and social hierarchies are not disturbed. Could Heidegger's philosophy offer any insights on that? Finding out would require pushing past his analyses of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and into the *Politics* with its analyses of χρησις μεταβλητική and its strong interest in τὸ κοινῆ συμφέρον.⁴

* * *

In 1971 Heidegger directed a young scholar's attention to κίνησις, what *SZ* calls ex-sistential "time." Some fifty years earlier, in 1924, he ended a lecture on time with a set of questions that still hangs over our heads if we want to take Heidegger beyond Heidegger. He asked:

¹ H. W. Holmes, *Holmes-Pollock Letters*, letter of June 7, 1908, I, 139.16f.

² GA 26: 199.3.

³ *Sein und Zeit*, 123.21f. (Das Dasein ist wesenhaft umwillen Anderen). Cf. GA 9: 117.20 (die Herbe des Entbehrens).

⁴ See Aristotle. *Politics* I 9, 1257a 9f. and III 7, 1282b 17f. (and *Nicomachean Ethics* IX 2, 1160a11f.). Heidegger's neuralgia towards anything like a democratic polity is reflected in his cathexis on the words Homer places in Odysseus' mouth: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη· εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, / εἷς βασιλεύς: *Iliad* II, 204f. (Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII 10, 1076a4). Apparently in the 1930s Heidegger got his wish.

- What is time?
- Or better: Who is time?
- Or better yet: Are we, *our* time?

With that last question, he said, ex-sistence begins to become interesting.

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