Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's *Destruktion* of Metaphysics[*]

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Abstract

Heidegger's *Destruktion* of the metaphysical tradition leads him to the view that all Western metaphysical systems make foundational claims best understood as 'ontotheological'. Metaphysics establishes the conceptual parameters of intelligibility by ontologically grounding and theologically legitimating our changing historical sense of what is. By first elucidating and then problematizing Heidegger's claim that all Western metaphysics shares this ontotheological structure, I reconstruct the most important components of the original and provocative account of the history of metaphysics that Heidegger gives in support of his idiosyncratic understanding of metaphysics. Arguing that this historical narrative generates the critical force of Heidegger's larger philosophical project (namely, his attempt to find a path beyond our own nihilistic Nietzschean age), I conclude by briefly showing how Heidegger's return to the inception of Western metaphysics allows him to uncover two important aspects of Being's pre-metaphysical phenomenological self-manifestation, aspects which have long been buried beneath the metaphysical tradition but which are crucial to Heidegger's attempt to move beyond our late-modern, Nietzschean impasse.

Keywords: Heidegger; ontotheology; metaphysics; deconstruction; Nietzsche; nihilism

Upon hearing the expression 'ontotheology', many philosophers start looking for the door. Those who do not may know that it was under the title of this 'distasteful neologism' (for which we have Kant to thank)[1] that the later Heidegger elaborated his seemingly ruthless critique of Western metaphysics. The forcefulness of Heidegger's 'deconstruction' (*Destruktion*)[2] of the metaphysical tradition helped turn a generation of post-Heideggerian thinkers into anti-metaphysicians. But Heidegger's deconstruction is actually premised on his attribution to metaphysics of

an unparalleled pride of place in the historical construction and maintenance of intelligibility. Heidegger's deconstruction presupposes that metaphysics is not simply the esoteric concern of philosophers isolated in their ivory towers, but that, on the contrary, 'Metaphysics grounds an age' (*QCT* 115/*H* 75). To put the matter too quickly, but by way of anticipation, Heidegger's claim is that by giving shape to our historical understanding of 'what *is*', metaphysics determines the most basic presuppositions of what *anything* is, including ourselves.[3] 'Western humanity, in all its comportment toward beings, and even toward itself, is in every respect sustained and guided by metaphysics' (*N*4 205/*N*II 343).

By codifying and disseminating an understanding of what beings *are*, metaphysics provides each historical 'epoch' of intelligibility with its ontological bedrock. And by providing an account of the ultimate source from which beings issue, metaphysics supplies intelligibility with a kind of foundational justification which (for reasons which we will examine shortly) Heidegger characterizes as 'theological'. To assert that 'metaphysics grounds history', then, is to claim that metaphysics establishes both the most basic conceptual parameters and the ultimate standards of legitimacy for history's successive 'epochs' of unified intelligibility. Such epochal 'constellations of intelligibility' are thus neither contingent nor free-floating, but are grounded in and reflect a series of historical transformations in our metaphysical understanding of what beings *are*.[4] Straightforwardly enough, Heidegger calls this understanding of what it means for something to be an *understanding of Being*, and his famous *history of Being* is simply shorthand for designating the historical series of such epoch-grounding understandings of Being.

In what follows I will give a much more carefully nuanced exposition of Heidegger's account of the way in which the metaphysical tradition establishes the foundations for every epoch of intelligibility by ontologically grounding and theologically legitimating our changing historical sense of what is. If common sense has much of a grip on us, however, we are likely to shrink back before the claim that our understanding of what is changes with time. Nevertheless, Heidegger's doctrine of 'ontological historicity' does indeed entail that ontology is a temporally dynamic construct, and this central doctrine of the later Heidegger now forms a taken-for-granted point of philosophical departure for virtually every major practitioner of post-structuralism, post-modernism, and deconstruction.[5] Why then is it that nowhere in the immense philosophical literature elaborating or criticizing these otherwise diverse schools of thought do we find a careful reconstruction of the idiosyncratic understanding of metaphysics upon which Heideggerian historicity is based? (Even thinkers like Baudrillard and Irigaray who speak not just of metaphysics but of philosophy *tout court* as 'ontotheology' never unpack the meaning of the term.) This paper can be understood as a response to this

glaring exegetical lacuna. But beyond clarifying an unspoken presupposition of much recent continental philosophy (and so laying some necessary groundwork for those who would understand and challenge that work on its own terms), there is an even more important motivation for reconstructing the results of Heidegger's deconstruction, Heidegger's conception of the foundational role played historically by the metaphysical tradition provides much of the philosophical background for his mature critical philosophy, a background without which his later views can often seem arbitrary and indefensible. I thus take it that Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics as ontotheology is sufficiently important to merit careful elaboration in its own right, and this will be my primary task in this paper.

In the first section I unpack the meaning of Heidegger's initially strange claim that metaphysics has an ontotheological structure. In section II I situate Heidegger's understanding of ontotheology within the broader context of his thought, outlining the significance of his deconstruction of metaphysical foundationalism for his critique of nihilism. In section III I reconstruct the most important components of the original account of the history of metaphysics which Heidegger offers in support of his claim that metaphysics is ontotheology, investigating one of the deepest problems for this account. In the fourth and concluding section I show briefly that Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics has a positive dimension whereby it helps motivate the recovery of a non-metaphysical understanding of Being.

I Metaphysics as Ontotheology

Every question specifies [*grenzt*] as a question the breadth and nature of the answer it is looking for. At the same time, it circumscribes [*umgrenzt*] the range of possibilities for answering. In order for us to ponder the question of metaphysics adequately, it is necessary in the first place to consider it as a question, rather than considering the procession of answers descending from it in the history of metaphysics.

(*N*4 206/*N*II 344)

From the late 1920s through the mid 1940s, Heidegger worked to reduce the structural commonalities of the metaphysical tradition to a formal framework into which he could fit every 'fundamental metaphysical position' in the history of the Western tradition (*N*3 179/*N*II 25). In so doing, he continued to refine his understanding of metaphysics until, in 1940, he presented what he called 'The concept of the essence of metaphysics', which states that: 'Metaphysics is the truth of the totality of beings as

such' (*N*3 187/*N*II 257). What does this 'concept of the essence of meta-physics' tell us? Let us take Heidegger's advice and consider the way in which the question of metaphysics specifies and circumscribes its own possible answers.

As Heidegger understands the history of metaphysics, 'Western-European thinking is guided by the question: "What are beings?" [or "What is that which is?" – "*Was ist das Seiende?*"]. This is the form in which it asks about Being [*Sein*]' [KTB 10/*W* 448–9]. Metaphysics asks what it means for a being to *be* and understands the answer to this question as 'Being'. For Heidegger, however, the answer to the question of what beings *are*, which metaphysics takes as 'Being', really needs to be understood as 'the Being of beings [*das Sein des Seienden*]'.[6] This Heideggerian locution may sound odd initially, but really it is a fairly straightforward philosophical clarification. Asking what beings *are* (or what a being *is*) means asking about the *Being* of those beings. As Heidegger puts it: 'Whenever it is said of beings, the little word "is" names the *Being* of [those] beings' (*PR* 125/*GA*10 183). To establish an answer to the question 'What is a being?', metaphysics makes a claim about what (and how) beings *are*, and thus about the *Being* of those beings.

According to Heidegger, these metaphysical postulates about the Being of beings take the same form throughout the entire history of metaphysics: 'Metaphysics speaks of the totality of beings as such, thus of the *Being* of beings' (*N*4 151/*N*II 205). Metaphysics' most basic postulates – what Heidegger calls the 'fundamental metaphysical positions' – endeavour to establish 'a truth about the totality of beings as such' (*N*3 187/*N*II 258/*GA*50 4). Heidegger's formal analysis of this 'core content' (*Kerngehalt*) of metaphysics leads him to a surprising discovery: the meta-physical understanding of the *Being* of beings is essentially 'two-fold' (KTB 11/*W* 450). That is, metaphysics actually gives two subtly different but interrelated answers to this 'question of the *Being* of beings'. In its simplest form, Heidegger's claim is that each fundamental metaphysical position about the 'totality of beings as such' has two separable components: an understanding of beings 'as such' and an understanding of the 'totality' of beings.

Structurally, 'What *is* a being?' is a 'two-fold question', then, because in pursuing it metaphysical inquiry follows two paths at the same time, expecting of the question 'What *is* a being?' two very different kinds of answers (KTB 11/*W* 449).[7] As Heidegger explains, 'What *is* a being?' asks about the Being of beings by searching both for *what* makes a being a being (the essence or 'whatness' of beings) and for the *way* in which a being is a being (the existence or 'thatness' of beings). Given the ambiguous form of the question, both are legitimate and (as we will see) historically pervasive ways of understanding 'the Being of beings'. On Heidegger's analysis, the *Kerngehalt* of metaphysics (its understanding of

the Being of beings) turns out to be conceptually 'two-fold', ambiguous to the core, and out of this fractured kernel grow two historically intertwined stalks.

By 1946, Heidegger has clearly identified these two stalks of the metaphysical question as 'ontology' and 'theology' respectively, and he begins to articulate what he will henceforth understand as 'the fundamentally ontotheological character of metaphysics' (*N*4 209/*N*II 348).[8] In 1961, with the advantage of hindsight, Heidegger gives us perhaps his clearest account of the ontotheological structure of the metaphysical question:

> If we recollect the history of Western-European thinking once more, then we will encounter the following: The question of Being, as the question of the Being of beings, is double in form. On the one hand, it asks: What is a being in general as a being? In the history of philosophy, reflections which fall within the domain of this question acquire the title ontology. The question 'What is a being?' [or 'What is that which is?'] simultaneously asks: Which being is the highest [or supreme] being, and in what sense is it the highest being? This is the question of God and of the divine. We call the domain of this question theology. This duality in the question of the Being of beings can be united under the title ontotheology.
>
> (KTB 10-11/*GA*9 449)

Here Heidegger succinctly outlines the formal ontotheological structure of the metaphysical question. It is a question folded over on itself so as to yield two distinct answers, one of which is then folded back on itself once more. Let us carefully explicate these 'folds'.

'What *is* a being?' asks, on the one hand: 'What is a being as a being?' Heidegger calls this the *ontological* question because it gives an account (*logos*) of the *on hēi on*, being *qua* being, or as Heidegger puts it, 'beings with regard to Being, that is, solely with regard to what makes a being the being it is: Being' (*MFL* 10/*GA*26 12). Heidegger's interpretation makes obvious appeal to the fact that in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle immediately glosses 'first philosophy', the study of the *on hēi on*, as *episkopei katholou peri tou ontos hēi on*, that is, the inquiry which investigates 'beings in so far as they are in Being'.[9] (Here 'Being' renders Aristotle's participle *to on*. While Aristotle does not use the infinitive or abstract noun *to einai*, 'Being', Heidegger's point is that he might as well have; Aristotle's first philosophy investigates beings in so far as they have being, which is precisely what Heidegger characterizes as the metaphysical question of 'the Being of beings'.)

Heidegger's main claim here is that as ontology, metaphysics searches for the most general ground of beings; it looks for what all beings share in common. Ontologists understand the *Being* of beings in terms of that

being beneath or beyond which no more basic being can be 'discovered' or 'fathomed' (*ergründet*). This 'exemplary being' (*EP* 20/*N*II 421) then comes to play the ontological role of 'giving the ground' (*ergründen*) to all other beings, in the sense that this basic ontological being designates that kind of being in whose being all other beings share and by which they are thus unified or composed. In Heidegger's words, metaphysics is ontology when it 'thinks of beings with an eye for the ground that is common to all beings as such' (*I & D* 70/139). Historically, different metaphysicians determine this universal ground according to different 'historical molds [*Prägung*]: *Phusis*, *Logos*, *Hen*, *Idea*, *Energeia*, Substantiality, Objectivity, Subjectivity, Will, Will to Power, Will to Will' (*I & D* 66/134), and, of course, '*Ousia*', the proto-substance, that onto-logical 'mold' of the Being of beings with which, as we will see, 'metaphysics proper begins' (*EP* 4/*N*II 403).

On the other hand, 'What *is* a being?' (or 'What is that which is?') simultaneously asks: 'Which being is the highest (or supreme) being, and in what sense is it the highest being?' Hence the question of metaphysics can be heard theologically as well as ontologically. As Heidegger's locu-tion suggests ('*Welches ist und wie ist* . . .'), the theological dimension of the metaphysical question itself has two aspects. In so far as metaphysics – as theology – is not satisfied with striving to identify the highest or supreme being (the question of God), but asks further about the mode of God's existence, metaphysics seeks to understand the being of God (that is, the sense in which God 'is', or the kind of being which God has). Metaphysics thereby finds itself asking questions about 'the divine', such as: What kind of being makes a being divine? What mode of existence constitutes *divinity*? Taken together, this 'question of God and of the divine' is the *theological* question, so-called because it inquires into and would give an account (*logos*) of the existence of the *theion*, 'the supreme cause and the highest ground of beings' (*N*4 209/*N*II 347).

Heidegger's main point here is that metaphysics thinks theologically when it 'thinks of the totality of beings as such . . . with regard to the supreme, all-founding being' (*I & D* 70-1/139). That is, metaphysics is theology whenever it determines the Being of beings as an 'all-founding being', whether as an 'unmoved mover' or 'self-caused cause' (that is, a '*causa sui*,' which Heidegger characterizes as 'the metaphysical concept of God'), or whether this 'all-founding being' is conceived with Aristotle as a 'first cause' or with Leibniz as the *ens realissimum* (the 'beingest of beings' (*Seiendsten des Seienden*), as Heidegger aptly renders Leibniz's highest being). Likewise, Kant thinks 'theologically' when he postulates 'the subject of subjectivity as the condition of the possibility of all objec-tivity', as does Hegel when he determines 'the highest being as the absolute in the sense of unconditioned subjectivity' (*I & D* 60/127; *N*4 208/*N*II 347). According to Heidegger, even Nietzsche 'thinks the *existentia* of the

totality of beings as such theologically as the eternal return of the same' (*N*4 210/*N*II 348).

Thus it is that when applied to the history of Western metaphysics, Heidegger's understanding of ontotheology as the frame according to which every metaphysical edifice is constructed allows him to unearth the sets of paired ontotheological distinctions shown in Table 1.[10]

II   Deconstructing Metaphysical Foundationalism

We will return to the contents of this table (and one of the deepest problems it harbours) in section III, but first let me emphasize what for our purposes is the single most important point in the foregoing explication of Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics as ontotheology. This is Heidegger's claim that the primary historical role of metaphysics is the *establishment* and – in the paradoxical continuity of 'an unbroken sequence of transformations' (*GA*15 395) – the *maintenance* of a '*ground*' for beings. As Heidegger writes: 'Since the early days of Western thought, Being has been interpreted as the ground or foundation [*Grund*] in which every being as a being is grounded' (*I & D* 32/96). (Here we need to recall that '"Being" means always and everywhere the Being *of beings*' (*I & D* 61/129).)

In Heidegger's assertion that the Being of beings 'grounds' beings, it is crucial to recognize that 'to ground' (*gründen*) is fortuitously ambiguous between the ontological and theological senses in which metaphysics 'grounds'. Ontologically, the basic being 'grounds' in the sense of 'giving the ground' (*ergründen*) to beings; ontology discovers and sets out the bedrock beneath which the metaphysician's investigations cannot

Table 1.   The ontotheological structure of metaphysics.

Ontological	Theological
beings as such	beings as a whole
Most basic being	Highest being
Whatness	Thatness
Koinotaton	*Katholon*
Essentia	*Existentia*
Idea as universal	*Idea* as paradigm
Deutera ousia	*Prōtē ousia*
Ultima ratio	*Causa prima*
Ens commune	*Summum ens*
Quidditas (essentiality)	*Quomodo* (modality)
Reality	The real
Subjectivity	The subject
Substantiality	Substance
The transcendental	The transcendent
Content	Form
Action	Organization
Will-to-power	Eternal return of the same

'penetrate'. (*Ergründen* means not just 'to fathom, penetrate, or discover', but also 'to get a matter upon its ground' or 'through searching to establish more precisely'.) Theologically the highest (or supreme) being 'grounds' in the sense of 'founding' [*begründen*] beings, 'establishing' the source from which beings issue and by which they are 'justified'. (*Begründen* means not only 'to give reasons for' or 'justify', but also 'to establish' or 'found', in the sense of 'to give for the ground'.)[11] As Heidegger explains:

> Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both [ontologically] in [terms of] the ground-giving [*ergründenden*] unity of what is most general, that is, of what is uniformly valid everywhere, and also [theologically] in [terms of] the founding [*begründenden*] unity of the all, that is, of the Most High above all others. The Being of beings is thus thought of in advance as the grounding ground [*der gründende Grund*].
>
> (*I & D* 58/125)

I interpret this strange-sounding claim to mean that within the metaphysical tradition, this ontotheological 'grounding ground' 'grounds' in *both* the ontological and theological senses. It is by simultaneously 'giving the ground' ontologically and 'founding' theologically that the ontotheologically conceived Being of beings accomplishes its distinctively *double* 'grounding'.

Heidegger's first law of phenomenology, 'the law of proximity', dictates that the obvious is most likely to escape our notice (*PAR* 135/*GA*54 201). In thinking about the preceding, let us not overlook the following. When metaphysics conceives of the Being of beings ontologically, as a being in whose being all other beings share, and theologically, as an all-founding being from which (or whom) all beings issue, what is thereby 'taken for granted' is that Being (although understood only as the Being of beings) plays the role of a 'ground of beings', that is, a foundational role. 'Because Being is understood by metaphysics as the ground of beings, metaphysics always drives toward ultimate grounds, the ultimate principles that account for everything else.'[12] Indeed, metaphysics reinforces its foundational claim about what beings *are* by coming at the problem from both ends simultaneously (as it were), effecting both a top-down (or outside-in) theological 'founding or justification' (from a highest being) and a bottom-up (or inside-out) 'ground-giving or establishing' (on a most basic being) (*I & D* 61/129; *I & D* 39/104). The most successful (epoch-grounding) metaphysical systems *combine* these two different forms of foundationalism.

After painstakingly reconstructing this conception of how metaphysics grounds history, Heidegger asks the question which pulls the rug out from under the entire history of foundationalist metaphysics: What kind of a ground is this *really*? If metaphysics' ontotheological postulates of the Being of beings doubly 'ground' those beings, then *what in turn grounds*

the Being of beings? Only two kinds of answers can halt the regress. Either there must be something beyond the Being of beings in or by which the Being of beings can itself be grounded, or else the Being of beings must be self-grounding. Heidegger develops a variation of the former answer himself. ('Being as such' will be Heidegger's problematic name for that which makes possible – but does not ontotheologically 'ground' – metaphysics' various epochal postulates of the Being of beings.) But Heidegger is clear that the metaphysical tradition chooses the latter option: 'The Being of beings reveals itself as that ground which [ontologically] gives itself the ground and [theologically] founds itself' (*I & D* 57/124).

We have seen that the peculiar 'double grounding' attempted by all metaphysics would have beings ontologically anchored in a basic being and theologically derived from (and justified by appeal to) a supreme being. As I will show in the following section, however, Heidegger's deconstructive analysis of metaphysics reveals that these 'fundamental metaphysical positions' constitute neither an unimpeachable ontological *Ur-grund*, a 'primal foundation' for beings, nor merely an *Ab-grund*, a groundless 'abyss' beneath beings. Rather these fundamental metaphysical positions provide beings with what Heidegger characterizes as an *Un-grund*, that is, the 'perhaps necessary appearance of ground' within each epochal constellation of intelligibility (*IM* 3/*EM* 2). The peculiar 'double grounding' attempted by metaphysics always leaves beings 'suspended' precariously between foundation and abyss. This helps explain why the history of metaphysics looks like a *succession* of relatively durable accounts of what is rather than either a single unbroken epoch or a continuous flux. When Heidegger reminds us that 'to hold back is, in Greek, *epochē*' (*T & B* 9), his point is that each ontotheologically structured metaphysical postulate about the Being of beings effectively 'holds back' the flood-waters of ontological historicity for a time – the time of an 'epoch'.[13] These metaphysical suspensions endure for an 'epoch', doubly grounding the succession of historical 'constellations of intelligibility', only to be replaced by the next ontotheologically grounded epoch.

And so it continues, down through the history of Being, until – on Heidegger's reading – Nietzsche cuts the philosophical strings of the very project of metaphysical grounding, first by dislodging the ontological anchoring (when in 'The History of an Error' he contends that no unbroken epistemic chain can be constructed which could anchor this world in a 'true world' beyond or within it), and second by abolishing as cognitively unsatisfying the appeal to a highest being (when his 'madman' brings the news that 'God is dead . . . And we have killed him' to the marketplace).[14] On this latter point we should remember that Nietzsche stages his 'madman' as a messenger who would have us face up to the profound significance of an 'event' which has already occurred. For Nietzsche it is Kant who 'killed God' in this sense (by demonstrating

the limits of metaphysical knowledge and the fallaciousness of the three traditional 'proofs' for God's existence).

By unearthing the 'unthought' ontotheological *unity* of Nietzsche's metaphysical doctrines of will-to-power and eternal recurrence, Heidegger argues that Nietzsche's own fundamental metaphysical position anticipates the nihilism (or meaninglessness) which Nietzsche himself, in so far as he accepts his own metaphysical presuppositions, is helpless to combat. Taken together, Nietzsche's doctrines of will-to-power and eternal recurrence embody the final fulfilment and collapse of metaphysics understood as the project of providing beings with a double ontotheological foundation. But this does not stop the Nietzschean metaphysics of the 'atomic age' from taking the groundless free-fall of eternally recurring will-to-power as its own metaphysical starting point. For Nietzsche, beings *are* only concatenations of forces in the service of human will, a will which aims ultimately only at its own unlimited self-aggrandizing increase and thus becomes nothing but 'the will to insure the overpowering of everything', that is, sheer 'will to will' (*EP* 64/*N*II 468; *I & D* 66/134).

Before Nietzsche, the metaphysical tradition had refused to give up the foundationalist project of securely 'grounding' beings in an ontotheological Being of beings, despite the fact that its own history, as an unbroken succession of epochal overturnings (in which each metaphysically grounded epoch rose from the ashes of the metaphysics which preceded it), shows that time and again metaphysics has proven incapable of providing itself with the unimpeachable ontotheological foundation it sought. Ironically, the epoch of the metaphysical tradition which Nietzsche himself inaugurates now effectively deprives itself, and thus us, of any ground whatsoever. The groundless Nietzschean metaphysics of eternally recurring will-to-power pre-conceptualizes 'the totality of beings as such' as concatenations of energy in the service of human will; and all beings, ourselves included, are thereby conceived of ultimately only as 'raw materials' (*Bestand*), resources merely to be optimally ordered and efficiently disposed of in a dangerous spiral of 'constant overcoming'. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's legacy is our nihilistic epoch of 'cybernetics' which, in its pursuit of 'truth' (a notion already understood in modernity only in terms of security and predictability), comes progressively to embody its own groundless metaphysical presuppositions, levelling down all attempts to justify human meaning to empty optimization imperatives like 'Get the most out of your potential', and reducing all intelligibility to that which can be stockpiled as bivalent, programmable 'information' (TTL 139-41). Consequentialist modes of abstract resource distribution may flourish against such a background, but this technological understanding of the Being of beings is no longer actually in the service of any person or goal; rather, accelerated by the proliferating technologies of cyberspace, beings increasingly enter into 'a state of pure circulation'.[15]

We need not further elaborate this dystopian Heideggerian vision of late modernity (according to which we seem to be *stuck* historically, playing out a kind of cybernetic endgame to the atomic age), nor need we take up the controversies this picture has understandably engendered.[16] All we need recognize for now is that the continuing failure of metaphysics to secure its own ontotheological ground prompts Heidegger to ask: *Why* is the Being of beings historically 'thought in advance' as ground? How did Being get cast in such a mould? How did it happen that, as Heidegger puts it, 'Being is pre-stamped as ground' (*I & D* 57/124)? Let us be very clear from the start about the aims of this question by recognizing, with Dreyfus, that 'there is no sense in looking for a cause of such profound "events" that determine what counts as being and intelligibility; one can only try to free oneself from them by recounting their history'.[17]

It is in this spirit of a genealogical deconstruction of the form that metaphysical foundationalism has taken historically (a deconstruction in which we recount its history in order to call its necessity into question, as a first step toward understanding things differently), rather than as yet another metaphysical attempt to secure an unbroken causal chain between our present understanding of Being and its historical origins, that we turn now to examine Heidegger's own response to one of the deepest problems inherent in his understanding of metaphysics as ontotheology.

III 'One of the Deepest Problems'

Heidegger's extremely ambitious description of the historical structure of metaphysics may initially strike students of the history of philosophy as a massive oversimplification.[18] For although Heidegger certainly acknowledges the fact that as this two-fold metaphysical question is pursued historically, different metaphysicians formulate the ontotheological duality in different terms, he nevertheless maintains that all the major historical 'fundamental metaphysical positions' remain within the ontotheological framework. As he puts it: 'All great thinkers think the same' (*N*1 36/*N*I 46). Heidegger recognized that such a blanket statement calls forth an immediate objection. As he writes in *What is Philosophy*? (1955):

> [I]t will be pointed out with ease that philosophy itself and the way in which it conceives its own nature have transformed frequently in . . . two thousand years. Who would deny this? At the same time, however, we ought not to overlook the fact that philosophy from Aristotle to Nietzsche, precisely on the basis of these transformations throughout its course, has remained the same. For the transformations vouch for the kinship of the same.
>
> (*WIP* 61/60)

Here Heidegger puts the point provocatively: all fundamental metaphysical positions think 'the same' (*das Selbe*). Certainly metaphysics' self-conception has been frequently transformed throughout the long history of the tradition, but 'these transformations vouch for the kinship of the same'. How are we to understand such apparently paradoxical assertions?

Like most provocations, Heidegger's are misleading *prima facie*; their point depends on our being *provoked* to think the matter through rather than turning away from seemingly obvious falsehoods. Heidegger is actually making three important points here. First, as we might by now expect, he is claiming that all the different metaphysical systems have the following in common: they are all attempts to 'lay the ground' for beings. As Heidegger had already recognized in 1929:

> An explicit ground-laying of metaphysics never happens *ex nihilo*, but rather arises from the strengths and weaknesses of a tradition which designates in advance its possible points of departure. With reference to these this tradition is self-enclosed, for every ground-laying is, in its relation to what came before, a transformation of the same task.
>
> (*KPM* 2/*GA*3 2)

Heidegger's claim is that *within* the tradition of Western metaphysics (we will ask where this begins in a minute), all metaphysical systems attempt a 'ground-laying', and, as we have seen, one which takes the form of a 'double grounding' of beings in a fundamentally ontotheological duality. Nevertheless, each 'fundamental metaphysical position' determines this ontotheological duality *differently*, whether in terms of whatness and thatness (*EP* 2/*N*II 401); *koinotaton* and *katholon* (*GA*9 450); *the idea* as universal and as paradigm (*EP* 13/*N*II 413);[19] *prōtē* and *deutera ousia* (*EP* 6-8/*N*II 405-6); *quidditas* and *quomodo* (*WIT* 236-8/*GA*41 238-40); *ultima ratio* and *causa prima* (*I & D* 60/127); *ens commune* and *summum ens* (*WIT* 118/*GA*41 119); essence and existence (*EP* 82/*N*II 489);[20] content and form (*PLT* 27/*H* 12); the real and the reality of the real (*WIT* 212-20/*GA*41 214-18); subjectivity and the subject (*I & D* 60/127, 66/134); substantiality and substance (*ibid.*); the transcendental and the transcendent (*N*4 211/*N*II 349); organization and action (*EP* 66/*N*II 471);[21] or even, as we have seen, will-to-power and eternal return of the same (*EP* 70/*N*II 476).

Second, despite the fact that he includes the eternal return of the same as Nietzsche's theological contribution to this list, Heidegger's claim that these different ontotheological conceptions of the Being of beings all think 'the same' should not to lead us to imagine the 'monotonous' recurrence of something 'merely identical'. To recognize that Heidegger is not committing such a massive oversimplification, we need to know that:

'Sameness implies a relation of "with", that is, a mediation, a connection, a synthesis: the unification into a unity. . . . But that unity is by no means the stale emptiness of that which, in itself without relation, persists in monotony' (*I & D* 25/87). The worry disappears when we recognize that for two things to be the same *requires* that they be different. As Heidegger puts it: 'The same [*das Selbe*] is not the merely identical [*das Gleich*]. In the merely identical, the difference disappears' (*I & D* 45/111). Heidegger credits German Idealism with getting us to pay attention to 'the mediation that prevails in unity' (*I & D* 25/87-8), but it is Derrida who, true to form, gives this claim about 'the non-self-identity' of the same its most succinct and provocative rendering: 'The other is in the same.'[22] Such assertions sound paradoxical, but the intended distinction is clear enough: sameness requires likeness in some significant respect (a shared ontotheological structure, for example); identity requires likeness in every respect. Heidegger's provocations thus draw attention to the seemingly paradoxical fact that there will always be some *difference* between two things that are 'the same'.

Finally, Heidegger's assertions that 'all great thinkers think the same' and that metaphysics' 'transformations vouch for the kinship of the same' are also intended to make a third and even subtler claim. These assertions point toward the phenomenological fact that, as Schürmann recognized, 'beneath the epochal differences something shows forth that remains the same'.[23] 'This same', Heidegger tells us, 'is so essential and rich that no single thinker exhausts it' (*N*1 36/*N*I 46). Indeed: 'Only with difficulty do we bring this same into view in its proper character, and seldom in its full richness' (*PR* 91/*SVG* 153/*GA*10 135). This notion of the 'same' is recognizable as one of Heidegger's names for 'Being as such' (that is, Being in its difference from the metaphysically conceived Being of beings). Hence Heidegger also refers to the same as: 'It, Being, [*that which is*] *given to thinking/to be thought* [*Daß Es, das Sein, zu denken gibt*]' (*N*4 228/*N*II 372). The same designates a matter that Heidegger associates with Parmenides (for whom 'thinking and Being are *the same*'). It names a pre-differentiated phenomenological givenness and an extra-conceptual phenomenological excess that Heidegger finds mysterious and compelling enough to give the Nietzschean title, 'the *enigma*'.[24] Despite the difficulties involved, this attempt to gain access to this original phenomenological 'showing-forth' which all metaphysicians name but none 'exhausts' is the ultimate motivation of Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysical foundationalism. In fact, we touch here on the idea at the very core of *Heideggerian hope*, for it is Heidegger's philosophical contention that a non-nihilistic futural understanding of Being will come, if it comes at all, only from a phenomenological experience and articulation of the continuing epiphanies of that which remains 'the same' beneath all change.[25] This mysterious 'same' is thus part of Heidegger's own attempt

to elaborate an alternative to thinking of Being metaphysically as the ontotheological ground of beings.[26]

As we will now see, there is a sense in which, despite his own later criticism of its pre-critical status, the later Heidegger successfully carried out to the letter (if not the spirit) the deconstructive project famously called for in *Being and Time*: 'taking *the question of Being as our clue*, we are to *deconstruct* the traditional content of ancient ontology until we reach into and recover those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being – the ways that have guided us ever since' (*B & T* 44/*S & Z* 22). For as we will see, Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics both grants us access to the phenomenological record of those primordial Western experiences of Being and, moreover, allows us to understand the sense in which these original experiences turned out to be historically *determinative* without being *necessary*. In order to follow Heidegger's approach toward this original phenom-enological showing-forth, let us investigate the difficulty of bringing this 'same' into view by expanding on the previous objection.

After considering Heidegger's claim that all metaphysics has an ontotheological structure, the philosopher who has been disabused of a certain *naïveté* by the post-structuralist revolution will have an obvious question to ask of Heidegger: Why think that all metaphysics has this deep ontotheological structure? If Heidegger is not simply legislating an indefensible claim about the *a priori* structure of metaphysics, then he owes us an account of *how* it happened that these two ways of asking about the 'ground' of beings – and hence of postulating the ontotheological 'Being of beings' to fill the role of that ground – became so inextricably linked. Only such an account can tell us whether this entanglement of ontology and theology at the heart of metaphysics is a necessary connection (which we had better learn to live with), or merely a fateful historical contingency (to which alternatives can be envisioned).

As I will now show, Heidegger does in fact countenance this 'deepest problem' himself, although for the most part only obliquely, under the obscure rubric of 'the still *unthought* unity of the essence of metaphysics' (*I & D* 55/121).[27]

> Where does the essentially ontotheological constitution of metaphysics come from? To take-up the question thus posed means, at the same time, to carry out the step back.
>
> In this step we now contemplate the essential ancestry of the ontotheological structure of all metaphysics.
>
> (*I & D* 56/123)

According to Heidegger, investigating this question requires that we take 'the step back', meaning that we step back from our unquestioning

adoption of a particular metaphysical doctrine and consider the entire history of Being within which we are immersed, asking, in this case, about the genealogical 'ancestry' of 'the ontotheological structure of all metaphysics'. Like so much of his account, Heidegger's answer to this question must be drawn from what are for the most part only more or less elaborate 'sketches' of the 'in-ception' (*An-fang*) of Western philosophy.[28] Taking this post-structuralist skepticism as our point of departure, we will now move beyond the formal account of the metaphysical question by following Heidegger's 'step back' and thereby approaching his understanding of what it is that shows-forth as 'the same' beneath the successive epochal permutations of metaphysics as ontotheology.

To be as clear as possible, this 'deepest problem' can be restated as follows. *How did the metaphysical project of 'grounding' beings come to have this ontotheological structure?* We will have answered this question once we understand the answers to the three sub-questions which constitute it: (Q_1) *Whence* – and (Q_2) *With what necessity* – did the first ontotheological fissure in the kernel of metaphysics develop? (Q_3) *How* did this fissure become incorporated into the structure of metaphysics so as to be decisively perpetuated throughout its entire history?

In his 1957 lecture on 'The Ontotheological Constitution of Metaphysics', Heidegger situates his account of metaphysics as ontotheology within the context of ancient Western philosophy in such a way as to answer question Q_1, the question of *whence*. As the first Western metaphysicians investigated the 'primordial matter [*ursprüngliche Sache*] of thinking', what Heidegger calls 'the primal matter' (*die Ur-sache*), they attempted to put this *prōtē archē* into language (*I & D* 60/127).[29] Heidegger translates *prōtē archē* as 'the first ground', and argues that it was as a result of this quest for such a first ground that the earliest Western metaphysicians postulated two different kinds of beings as the *prōtē archē*: an ontological 'universal and first being' and a theological 'supreme and ultimate being' (*I & D* 61/128). In other words, the first Western metaphysicians pursued the *prōtē archē* in terms of two different kinds of grounding beings, attempting both a bottom-up ontological 'ground-giving' based on an 'universal and first being' and a top-down theological 'founding' from a 'supreme and ultimate being'. Here, then, Heidegger provides a historical analysis in support of his thesis that 'since the earliest days of Western thought, Being has been interpreted as the ground in which every being as a being is grounded' (*I & D* 32/96). But of whom is Heidegger thinking?

Several years before *Being and Time* (in his 1924-5 lectures on Plato's *Sophist*), Heidegger told his students that: 'The Greeks asked how the *on* is there in *logos*, or, more precisely: how a *koinonia* in *onta* is possible' (*S* 354/*GA*19 512). Here Heidegger is recalling the fact that the ancient Greek attempt to put Being (*on*) into language (*logos*) was carried out

as a search for a *koinōnia* amidst *onta*, a unity (or 'community') within beings. This is Heidegger's reading of the famous Presocratic search for the *hen* within the *polla*, the One within the Many. We might initially think that this was solely a proto-ontological endeavour. But in 1941, Heidegger writes: 'The *hen* to the *polla* . . . is the One as *koinon*, as [both] the whence [*Woher*] and as the common-to [*Gemeinsame*] the Many' (*EP* 2/*N*II 400-1). His point is that originally *koinon* is ambiguous between 'whence' and 'in-common', that is, the One is both *that from where* the Many (beings) emerge and *what* the Many (beings) hold *in common*. Such considerations allow us to surmise that when Heidegger recounts the archaic split of the *prōtē archē* into a proto-ontological 'universal and first being' and a proto-theological 'supreme and ultimate being', he is thinking of Thales and his student Anaximander (who, in the course of their pursuit of a *prōtē archē*, could be understood as having first articulated what would later become the ontotheological division).

Heidegger does not directly name these thinkers of the Milesian school as responsible for this proto-ontotheological division of the *koinon* into a *what* and a *from where*. If, however, we remember his explanation that metaphysics operates in an ontological mode when, surveying the totality of beings, the metaphysician tries to isolate their universal ground, the ground which all beings share in common, then it seems clear enough that Thales – with his understanding of water as the paradigmatic being ('the one element') – is best thought of as Heidegger's proto-ontologist.[30] For metaphysics is *ontology* when it 'thinks of beings with an eye for the ground that is common to all beings as such' (*I & D* 70/139), and certainly water plays such a role for Thales. Further, if we recall that metaphysics operates in a *theological* mode when it searches for a 'supreme or highest' being, a being from whom all beings issue or by which all beings are justified, then Anaximander – with his doctrine that 'the *archē* is *apeiron*' – is the best candidate for the role of proto-theological thinker.[31] For it is theology '[w]hen metaphysics thinks of the totality of beings as such . . . in regard to the supreme, all-founding being', the being from which all beings issue, even if that being is Anaximander's *to apeiron*, 'the limitless' (*I & D* 70-1/13).

Thus, in answer to question Q_1 above – namely, *Whence* arose the first ontotheological fissure in the kernel of metaphysics? – we can say that this fissure first emerged at the end of the seventh century BC in Miletus (on the west coast of modern Turkey), where the ancient Milesian school of Presocratic thinkers' quest for the *prōtē archē* turned up both Thales' proto-ontological 'universal and first being' and Anaximander's proto-theological 'supreme and ultimate being'. Postponing question Q_2, let us return to question Q_3, namely: How did this fissure become incorporated into the structure of metaphysics, so as to be decisively perpetuated down through the history of metaphysics as the ontotheological division?

On Heidegger's reading, metaphysics is not explicitly formalized as a single, unified ontotheological doctrine until Aristotle.[32] In the *Metaphysics*, when Aristotle explicates his own *prōtē philosophia*, he formalizes the proto-ontotheological ambiguity inherent in the Presocratic conception of the *koinon* (as both the theological 'where-from' and the ontological 'in-common' of beings). Aristotle explicitly divides this *koinon* into an ontological '*koinotaton*', a universal being 'shared in common', and a theological '*katholon (theion)*', a being 'on the whole, [or] in general (the *theion*)' (*GA*9 450, note a). In assigning Aristotle credit for the inauguration of metaphysics as ontotheology, Heidegger does not overlook Plato's distinctive contribution to its earlier development. On the contrary, he asserts that Aristotle's inaugural act could only have been accomplished on the ground previously laid by Plato. As he writes (in 1941):

> The distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* was established in the light of history by Aristotle, who – after Plato's thinking had responded to the appeal of Being in a way which prepared that distinction by provoking its establishment – first conceptualized the distinction, thereby bringing it onto its essential ground.
>
> (*EP* 4/*N*II 403)

It is Aristotle who formally articulates the metaphysical distinction between what 'later came to be called' *essentia* and *existentia*, and who thereby transforms and 'establishes in the light of history' the prior distinction between 'whatness' and 'thatness'. For although Plato took over the ambiguity inherent in the Presocratic *koinon*, the distinction remained only implicit in his thinking (*EP* 8/*N*II 407-8). We will say more about this Aristotelian inauguration of ontotheology after briefly characterizing the sense in which Plato himself 'provoked' or 'invited' this metaphysical distinction *par excellence*.

In 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' (1940), Heidegger claims that the ontotheological distinction had already been brought together implicitly in Plato's doctrine of the *ideas*. 'Since the interpretation of Being as *idea*, thinking about the Being of beings is metaphysical, and metaphysics is theological' (PDT 268/*GA*9 235-6). Heidegger seems to be thinking of the middle Plato's doctrine of *ideas*, in which the *ideas* are conceived of both (theologically) as the paradigms that beings only imperfectly instantiate and (ontologically) as the universals common to the many instances of each being.[33] Here the *ideas* explain both the 'thatness' and the 'whatness' of beings (*EP* 2-3/*N*II 401). Heidegger points out (in a particularly murky passage) that within this implicit ontotheological ambiguity, thatness is subordinated to whatness: 'The *idea* accomplishes presence, namely, the presence of every being as what it is. Every being becomes present in its whatness. . . . For Plato, then, Being has its proper essence in whatness'

(PDT 262/*GA*9 225). Plato subordinates thatness to whatness, for he holds that without their respective *ideas*, beings could not exist. A being's existence is dependent on its *idea*, for it is this *idea* that the being (more or less imperfectly) instantiates, whereas its *idea* is independent of the existence of any of the particular beings that instantiate it. As Aristotle's famous empiricist objection to Platonic rationalism contends, however, Plato cannot say, consistently, that the existence of an *idea* is independent of the entire 'class' of beings which instantiate that *idea*.

Nevertheless, it is Plato's implicit distinction between whatness and thatness which Aristotle explicitly formalizes – even as he reverses Plato's privileging of whatness over thatness (or essence over existence) – when Aristotle asserts in the *Posterior Analytics* that 'our capacity for discovering *what* a thing is [*ti estin*] depends upon our awareness *that* it is [or *that* it exists, *hoti estin*]'.[34] On Heidegger's reading, Aristotle carves the ontotheological distinction into the heart of metaphysics when, in order to differentiate explicitly 'whatness' from 'thatness', he distinguishes between *prōtē* and *deutera ousia*.[35] The *prōtē ousia* is Aristotle's answer to 'the *hoti estin*', the metaphysical question of 'whether something is'. Aristotle contends that the *prōtē ousia* is 'the This, the singular', the fact 'that something is [or exists]'. In accordance with Heidegger's understanding of 'presence' as the basic characteristic of Western metaphysics here inaugurated, he characterizes Aristotle's description of this 'persisting of something which lingers of itself' as 'presence in the eminent and primal sense' (*EP* 7/*N*II 406-7). On the other hand, the *deutera ousia* answers Aristotle's question *ti estin*; it describes '*what* something is', which Heidegger renders as 'presence in the secondary sense' (*EP* 7-8/*N*II 407). For Aristotle, on Heidegger's reading, to be is to be present.[36]

Heidegger claims, plausibly, that Aristotle's distinction between *prōtē* and *deutera ousia* constitutes a decisive juncture in the history whereby Western metaphysics becomes ontotheology. For it was this very distinction that the medieval Scholastics would treat as the self-evident difference between *existentia* and *essentia*, 'existence' and 'essence'. Hence Heidegger's answer to question Q_3 – namely, How did the ontotheological fissure come to be built into the very structure of the metaphysical question, and thus decisively perpetuated? – is that when Aristotle formalizes the difference between thatness and whatness in his distinction between *prōtē* and *deutera ousia*, the ontotheological fissure first opened up by the Milesian Presocratics and then implicitly taken up into Plato's doctrine of the *ideas* is made decisive for the ensuing history of Western metaphysics – 'with the help of the subsequent conceptual formulation [of *essentia* and *existentia*] common to the metaphysics of the schoolmen', the tradition of medieval Scholasticism upon which Aristotle's metaphysics would exert such a profound influence (*EP* 4/*N*II 402).

Yet, even as Heidegger answers question Q_3 by recounting the inauguration of 'metaphysics proper', he cannot help but pose question Q_2, namely: *With what necessity* did the first fissure in the kernel of metaphysics develop?

> *Essentia* answers the question *ti estin*: what is (a being)? *Existentia* says of a being *hoti estin*: that it is. In this distinction a different *estin* is named. Herein *einai* (Being) manifests itself in a distinction. How can Being be divided in this distinction? Which essence [*Wesen*] of Being shows itself in this distinction, as if putting this essence out in the open?
>
> (*EP* 4/*N*II 403)

As we have seen, the *ti estin* and the *hoti estin* refer to two different kinds of *estin*, two different ways of understanding what beings *are*; that is, of understanding the *Being* of those beings. But how is this possible? It is crucial to grasp that again Heidegger is asking a *phenomenological* question, and thus is looking for a phenomenological rather than a causal explanation. His question should be heard accordingly as: What is it about the original Western manifestation of Being that lends itself to being understood in terms of this distinction between two different kinds of *estin*? How can phenomenological givenness yield two such different ways of understanding the ground of beings, ways which, as we have seen, will *both* be handed down by the metaphysical tradition, maintained as the 'unified ontotheological ambiguity' at its heart?

Heidegger still needs an answer to this question (question Q_2, the question of the *necessity* of the original ontotheological fissure), because his answer to question Q_3 (which showed how Aristotle's distinction between *prōtē* and *deutera ousia* decisively unified and formalized the ontotheological structure of metaphysics) not only leaves question Q_2 unanswered, but seems to lead to the kind of regress which makes us despair of *ever* finding an answer. Heidegger's claim that in formalizing the ontotheological structure of metaphysics Aristotle was 'thinking the unthought' of Plato (or further, that Plato himself was thinking that which went 'unthought' in the Milesian Presocratics) does not answer the question of whether and in what sense this original fracture was itself *necessary*; it only pushes back the question another step further in time. The missing phenomenological explanation of the original ontotheological distinction thus remains perhaps *the* 'deepest problem' inherent in Heidegger's understanding of the metaphysical tradition as ontotheology; the very possibility of answering it seems to recede into the mists surrounding the beginnings of Western history.[37] Can we safely conclude, then, that this ontotheological fracture in the core of metaphysics was merely a fateful historical happenstance, an ultimately *arbitrary* – albeit historically determinative – effect of chance?

Despite his interest in thinking Being otherwise than as the 'ground' of beings, Heidegger rejects this response as phenomenologically unsatisfying, for it fails to allow us to understand the presumed logic of the phenomenon under investigation.[38] Heidegger's interpretation of the 'inception' of Western metaphysics relies instead upon the phenomenologically *consistent* presupposition that the ontotheological split at the core of metaphysics must have resulted from the way in which Being showed itself in the beginning of Western history. As he writes (in 1961):

> Obviously, the two-foldness of the [metaphysical] question about being must result from the way the Being of beings manifests itself. Being manifests itself in the character of that which we name ground: being in general is the ground in the sense of the basis upon which any further consideration of beings takes place; being, as the highest being, is the ground in the sense of what allows all beings to come into Being.

> (KTB 11/*W* 449-50)[39]

Here Heidegger postulates that Being originally must have 'manifested itself' *as* 'ground', and this – as we saw when we explicated Heidegger's interpretation of the Milesian school of Presocratics – in two distinct senses: the proto-ontological bottom-up 'grounding' on the *ground-giving* 'basis' (*Boden*) of a basic being (like Thales' water), and the 'grounding' of a proto-theological top-down *founding* from a highest being (like Anaximander's *apeiron*).

The problem is that if, having uncovered this Milesian bifurcation of the *prōtē archē* into a proto-ontological 'universal and first being' and a proto-theological 'supreme and ultimate being', we try to take another step back in time by reposing the question of the necessity of this split, asking what it was about the original phenomenological manifestation of Being that lent itself to being interpreted as the ontotheological ground of beings, we find ourselves running up against the limits of philosophical self-knowledge as it is preserved within the Western tradition. Nevertheless, at one point (*circa* 1941) Heidegger speculates about *how* the original phenomenological manifestation might have lent itself to being understood in terms of the ontotheological 'distinction between whatness and thatness'. His contention is this: conceived phenomenologically as an 'emergence to visibility, presencing has in itself the distinction between the pure proximity of that which lasts and the gradations of [its] remaining' (*EP* 8/*N*II 407).

Unfortunately, Heidegger abruptly breaks off and does not explain this contention at all. But the basic idea seems to be that if we examine the emergence of beings into phenomenological visibility, there is an implicit difference between the dynamic *showing* and the more passive *lasting* of

those beings – a difference Heidegger will later formalize as that between 'presencing' (*anwesen*) and 'presence' (*Anwesenheit*). In other words, in the process whereby beings come into being, linger, and pass away, we can distinguish between their dynamic emerging and disappearing, on the one hand, and the more static aspect of that which lasts, on the other. To take a very un-Heideggerian example, we could think of a time-lapse film showing the life-cycle of a flower. In the stark drama of this 'insurrection against nothingness' (*EP* 1/*N*II 399), we watch the young plant burst forth into the light, see its stem grow and unfurl, then the flower itself open, linger in its openness, partially closing and reopening (as the quick exchange of light and darkness in the background conveys the succession of days), and finally, ineluctably, we watch the flower die and wither away.

Here it might seem difficult to distinguish anything truly lasting in what the time-lapse recording reveals to be a thoroughly dynamic process. But without the aid of such technological supplements to our own vision, the exact opposite is much more likely to be the case. We generally have difficulty noticing anything passing in and out of what seems to be a very static existence; what Heidegger calls the '*presencing* of presence' is very difficult to detect. Indeed, when we are faced with the immediacy of a being's existence, be it a flower, a loved one, or ourselves, it is quite easy to forget that that being is caught up in a process of coming-into and passing-out-of existence. Our phenomenological numbness to the immediate makes it seem natural to arrest a being's dynamic phenomenological manifestation, freezing it into a pre-conceived permanent presence. (Heidegger later advocates a phenomenological comportment he calls 'releasement' [*Gelassenheit*] in part to help break the hold of such preconceptions.) Once this dynamic emergence is mistaken as a permanent presence, the path is open for conceiving it as a ground in both the ontological and theological senses. Heidegger suggests, moreover, that the 'awe' felt by ancient humanity before the 'overwhelming' primordial phenomena of the *earth* and the *heavens* may have disposed them to these particular foundationalisms (*MFL* 11/*GA*26 13), but for reasons which we will conclude by investigating, he also contends that this *mythos* preserves an understanding of Being as 'what shows itself in advance and in everything as that which [actively] presences in all [so-called] "presence"' (PAR 60/GA54 89).

IV   Conclusions

The conclusion to which Heidegger's painstaking deconstruction of Western metaphysics leads him is this: while we must suppose that the project of ontotheological 'grounding' is in fact rooted phenomenologically in some basic aspects of Being's original self-manifestation, we can

nevertheless conclude that this ontotheological project is not historically *necessary*. Why? Because the project of metaphysical 'grounding' is *underdetermined*, even by those aspects of Being's original self-manifestation from which this project derives. For as we will now see, these Milesian aspects of the original Western manifestation of Being do not themselves exhaust that inceptive self-showing – even in the fragmentary form in which it has been preserved for us by the tradition.

It is at precisely this juncture – his deconstruction of metaphysical foundationalism having taken him back to the beginnings of Western metaphysics – that the later Heidegger, rather than trying to take another (diachronic) step back in time (as though back behind the 'inception' itself), instead makes a lateral (or synchronic) historical move, turning to other Presocratic thinkers in an attempt to illuminate further aspects of the original self-manifestation of Being in the West. In this way, Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics clears the way for an anamnetic recovery of what remains of any original understandings of Being which preserve this pre- and extra-conceptual phenomenological givenness otherwise than as an ontotheological *ground* of beings.[40] It is for this reason that, as Schürmann has shown, the later Heidegger is concerned to elaborate a synchronic analysis of the multi-faceted 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) of Being at the 'inception of its history'. About this multi-faceted clearing, Heidegger will conclude that:

> In the inception of its history, Being clears itself as emerging (*physis*) and disclosure (*alētheia*). From there it acquires the cast of presence [*Awesenheit*] and permanence [*Beständigkeit*] in the sense of enduring (*ousia*). Thus begins metaphysics proper.
>
> (*EP* 4/*N*II 403)[41]

In other words, before Being became interpreted in terms of the permanent presence of *ousia* it was thought and named as emergence and disclosure, *physis* and *alētheia*. *Physis* and *alētheia*, names given by Heraclitus and Parmenides (respectively) to the self-manifestation of Being, manage to safeguard two apparently pre-metaphysical aspects of this clearing, so Heidegger calls this *physis–alētheia* couple 'the inceptive essence of Being' (*EP*10/*N*II 409).[42]

Heidegger thus traces the fractured ontotheological core of metaphysics back into the mists surrounding the inception of Western thought. Since *different* aspects of Being's self-showing are named and preserved within the Presocratic textual ruins, Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics not only uncovers what comes to stand out as the single monolithic ontotheological beginning effected by Thales and Anaximander, but also reveals a historically intervening but soon forgotten alternative: the multi-aspectical self-showing of Being preserved in the writings of Parmenides

and Heraclitus. On Heidegger's account of the Parmenidean and Heraclitean aspects of the inception of Western philosophy, Being shows up phenomenologically – and is named by these 'basic words' and so caught in the 'fangs' of time – not as a 'ground' but rather simply *as showing up*. That is, 'Being' is expressed in pre-metaphysical, temporally dynamic, non-foundational terms by the Heraclitean understanding of *physis*, the 'self-opening unfolding' or 'self-blossoming emergence' of phenomenological intelligibility, as well as by the conception of truth as an active historical 'clearing' which Heidegger argues is inherent in the 'unconcealment' or 'disclosure' of Parmenidean *alētheia* (*IM* 14/*EM* 11). Within two generations of thought, however, as the history of Being took its first formative steps, our earliest metaphysicians made the first fateful 'historical decisions' we have recounted, and this other Presocratic under-standing of Being as *physis* and *alētheia* was 'forgotten', ossified into the 'permanent presence' of *ousia* and thus swallowed up into the metaphysics of substance whose self-reifying entrenchment so profoundly shapes the history of Being. The temporal dynamism inherent in the manifestation of Being and preserved by Heraclitus and Parmenides was thereby obscured and subsequently forgotten through a kind of 'double-forgetting' – against which Heidegger mobilizes the anamnetic forces of the deconstruction we have recounted.[43]

It is thus that, his genealogical deconstruction of metaphysics having established that the ontotheological split accomplished by Thales and Anaximander was not historically necessary, the later Heidegger struggles to bring into focus other aspects of Being's 'inceptive' self-showing, not out of some antiquarian 'nostalgia' (*pace* Derrida), but rather in an anamnetic attempt to recover ways of understanding Being otherwise than as the ontotheological 'ground' of beings. Heidegger's hope is that careful philosophical study of such roads not taken might help us envision alter-natives to our own metaphysical epoch of 'enframing'. This it might do not only negatively, by contesting the necessity of the Nietzschean meta-physics underlying our increasingly homogenized 'age of technologically-leveled world-civilization' (*D* 187), and thereby clearing the conceptual space for understandings of Being other than the metaphysics of the atomic age (now fulfilling itself in the almost uncontested spread of the cybernetic paradigm), but also positively, by recovering concrete (if fragmentary) his-torical examples of a non-metaphysical understanding of Being, elements of which (such as the temporal dynamism of Heraclitean *physis* and the active conception of truth as a historical clearing inherent in Parmenidean *alētheia*) we might draw on in order to elaborate heretofore unthought-of historical paths leading beyond our own late-modern, Nietzschean impasse. Here we touch again upon the later Heidegger's central philosophical pro-ject, the vision behind his enigmatic call for 'an other beginning', a begin-ning which he always insisted could only emerge out of a renewed and

sustained hermeneutic altercation with the first beginnings of Western thought.

In the end, then, while I do not expect that my interpretive reconstruction of ontotheology will have purged the notion of all of its strangeness, or made it entirely convincing as a reading of metaphysics, I do hope to have made clear the significance of Heidegger's claim that metaphysics is ontotheology, to have demonstrated convincingly the centrality of this long-overlooked notion to Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics, and at least to have conveyed plausibly something of the importance of this deconstruction for Heidegger's larger project. If so, then it is my hope that those who might once have found themselves heading for the door at the mention of ontotheology, having made it this far, will find themselves moved to respond a bit more philosophically instead.

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Abbreviations for Heidegger's Texts (Translations Frequently Modified):

B & T   *Being and Time*. Trans. Macquarrie and Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

BPP   *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Trans. Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.

BQ   *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected 'Problems' of 'Logic'*. Trans. Rojcewicz and Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

D   *Denkerfahrungen*. Ed. H. Heidegger. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983.

EM   *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1953.

EP   *The End of Philosophy*. Trans. Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

FCM   *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Trans. McBride and Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

GA3   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 3: *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*. Ed. F.-W. von Herrmann. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1991.

GA9   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 9: *Wegmarken*. Ed. F.-W. von Herrmann. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1996.

GA10   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 10: *Der Satz vom Grund*. Ed. P. Jaeger. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1997.

GA15   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 15: *Seminare*. Ed. C. Edwald. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1986.

GA19   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 19: *Platon: Sophistes*. Ed. I. Schüssler. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1992.

GA24   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 24: *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*. Ed. F.-W. von Herrmann. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1975.

GA26   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 26: *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*. Ed. K. Held. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1978.

GA29-30 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vols 29-30: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit*. Ed. F.-W. von Herrmann. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983.

GA41   *Gesamstausgabe*, Vol. 41: *Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentaler Grundsätzen*. Ed. P. Jaeger. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1984.

GA45   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 45: *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewälte 'Probleme' der 'Logik'*. Ed. F.-W. von Herrmann. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1984.

GA50   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 50: *Nietzsches Metaphysik*. Ed. P. Jaeger. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1990.

GA54   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 54: *Parmenides*. Ed. M. S. Frings. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1982.

GA79   *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 79: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*. Ed. P. Jaeger. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1994.

H   *Holzwege*. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1994.

HCE   *Hegel's Concept of Experience*. Trans. Gray. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

I & D   *Identity and Difference*. Trans. Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

IM   *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

KPM   *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Trans. Taft. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

KTB   'Kant's Thesis about Being'. Trans. Klein and Pohl. *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 4(3) (1973), pp. 7–33.

MFL   *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. Trans. Heim. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

N1   *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*. Ed. and trans. D. F. Krell. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

N3   *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*. Ed. D. F. Krell, trans. Stambaugh, Krell, and Capuzzi. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

N4   *Nietzsche: Nihilism*. Ed. D. F. Krell, trans. Capuzzi. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.

*N*I   *Nietzsche*, Vol. I. Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1961.

*N*II   *Nietzsche*, Vol. II. Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1961.

OWL   *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Hertz. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

PAR	*Parmenides*. Trans. Schuwer and Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
PDT	Plato's 'Doctrine of Truth'. Trans. Barlow. In *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. Barrett and H. Aiken. New York: Random House, 1962, Vol. 3, pp. 251–70.
PLT	*Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
PR	*The Principle of Reason*. Trans. Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
QCT	*The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
S	*Plato's Sophist*. Trans. Rojcewicz and Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
S & Z	*Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1993.
SVG	*Der Satz vom Grund*. Pfullige: G. Neske, 1957.
T&B	*On Time and Being*. Trans. Starmlaigh. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
TTL	'Traditional Language and Technological Language'. Trans. Gregory. *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 23 (1998), pp. 129–45.
U25	*Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Stuttgart: G. Neske, 1959.
W	*Wegmarken*. Ed. F.-W. von Herrmann. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1996.
WBGM	'The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics'. Trans. Kaufmann. In *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. W. Kaufmann. New York: New American Library, 1975, pp. 265–79.
WCT	*What is Called Thinking?* Trans. Gray. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
WHD	*Was Heißt Denken?* Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1984.
WIP	*What is Philosophy?* Trans. Kluback and Wilde. New York: Twayne, 1958.
WIT	*What is a Thing?* Trans. Barton and Deutsch. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967.

NOTES

1   'It is not as easy to invent new words as one thinks, because they are contrary to taste, and in this way taste is a hindrance to philosophy' (Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. K. Ameriks and S. Naragon

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 120). Kant coined 'ontotheology' and 'cosmotheology' in order to distinguish between two opposing kinds of 'transcendental theology'. 'Ontotheology' is Kant's name for that kind of transcendental theology which (like Anselm's famous 'onto-logical argument' for the existence of God) 'believes it can know the existence of an [original being, *Urwesen*] through mere concepts, without the help of any experience whatsoever' (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's, 1929)/*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. R. Schmidt (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1926), A632/B660).

2   In an erudite genealogy of *Destruktion*, Moran traces a family of similar philosophical concepts back through medieval thought to Plato's *Euthydemus*. (See Dermot Moran, 'The Destruction of the Destruction: Heidegger's Versions of the History of Philosophy', in K. Harries and C. Jamme (eds), *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1994), pp. 176–96.) Moran translates Heidegger's *Destruktion* as 'destruction', in part to stress its difference from what has come to be known as 'deconstruction'. My riskier rendition of *Destruktion* as 'deconstruction' throughout is arguably justified by the fact that, although the word 'deconstruction' has taken on a life of its own, Derrida originally coined the term as a translation of Heidegger's *Abbau* ('quarrying', 'dismantling', or 'decomposing'), a synonym for *Destruktion* which Heidegger later hyphen-ated and employed in order to emphasize that *Destruktion* is not merely a negative act, a *Zerstörung*, but rather 'must be understood strictly as *de-struere* [the Latin *struere* means "to lay, pile, or build"], "*ab-bauen*" [quite literally, "un-building or de-construction"]' (*GA*15 337, 395). (See Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, ed. C. V. McDonald, trans. Kamuf and Ronell (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), pp. 86–7.) As I will show, Heidegger's decon-struction of Western metaphysics does not destroy or even destructure metaphysics; on the contrary, it decomposes or decompiles metaphysics' sedi-mented historical layers, reconstructing their hidden ontotheological structure and seeking to uncover the 'decisive experiences' responsible for this shared structure (experiences which Heidegger hopes will help us to envision a path beyond ontotheology). I am, however, in complete agreement with Moran's concluding claim that: 'The concept of destruction as used by Heidegger is … bound to a certain view of history … that has not been clarified' (op cit., p. 192). Indeed, it is precisely this gap in the literature that this paper attempts to fill.

3   As Dreyfus puts it: 'The practices containing an understanding of what it is to be a human being, those containing an interpretation of what it is to be a thing, and those defining society fit together. Social practices thus transmit not only an implicit understanding of what it is to be a human being, an animal, an object, but, finally, what it is for anything to be at all' (Hubert L. Dreyfus, 'Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics', in Charles Guignon (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 295).

4   I get this nicely descriptive phrase by combining those of Dreyfus and Schürmann (see Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time, *Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); and Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, trans. Gros and Schürmann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990)). On Heidegger's account, Western history presents us with five different ways of understanding what beings *are*, and hence five overlapping epochs in this history of Being: the Presocratic, ancient, medieval, modern, and late modern.

5 For a Hegelian criticism of 'historicity' and the 'left Heideggerians' who espouse such a doctrine, see Robert B. Pippin, 'Heideggerian Postmodernism and Metaphysical Politics'. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 4(1) (1996), pp. 17–37.

6 During the early 1940s, Heidegger recognized that 'Being' and the 'Being of beings' are in fact crucially different (see esp. *N*4 210/*N*II 349/*GA*50 6, but cf. OWL 20/UZS 109).

7 The metaphysical question *par excellence*, the Socratic *to dia ti*, was formulated 'by Aristotle as the enduring question of thinking' (*N*4 206/*N*II 344; see, e.g., Aristotle, *Physics* II.I, 192b38).

8 Of course, Heidegger had been making important strides toward his mature conception of ontotheology since the late 1920s. Perhaps most notable in this respect is his fascinating but deeply confused 'Appendix' to *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (*MFL* 154-9/*GA*26 196-202). Reading this Appendix in the light of Heidegger's mature understanding of metaphysics as ontotheology suggests that the short-lived project of 'metontology' he advocates here – 'a special problematic which has for its proper theme beings as a whole' (*MFL* 157/*GA*26 199) – is best understood as Heidegger's attempt to jump from the sinking ship of 'fundamental ontology' to its metaphysical complement, a kind of 'fundamental theology' or 'theiology' (cf. *HCE* 135/*H* 195). In 1928 Heidegger still regards metaphysics as a positive 'task', indeed as 'the one basic problem of philosophy itself' (a task which Heidegger thinks that he will be able to accomplish). Nevertheless, Heidegger comes very close to his later recognition of metaphysics as ontotheology when he writes: 'In their unity, fundamental ontology and metontology constitute the concept of metaphysics' (*MFL* 158/*GA*26 202). What this shows, I take it, is that Heidegger had to recognize the untenability of his own ontotheological endeavours ('fundamental ontology' and 'metontology' respectively) before decisively rejecting metaphysics as ontotheology.

9 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), IV.I, 1003a.

10 This table is not meant to be exhaustive (nor does it imply that all the pairs named here succeeded in metaphysically grounding an historical epoch), and there is no 'master pair' which can be employed to explain all the others. But nor do the pairs merely bear a 'family resemblance' to one another; rather, they are best understood as a series of different instantiations of the same ontotheological structure (in the sense explained above). I must thus part company with the kind of orthodox Heideggerianism which would dismiss 'the impulse to multiply lists of terms, order them, fix them in some set structural pattern' as 'academic pedantry' which, unconsciously betraying its 'Christian concern with true (correct) doctrine', treats 'the slippering [*sic*], resonating, evocative primal words of thinking as if they were beings to be manipulated' (Gail Stenstad, 'The Turning in *Ereignis* and Transformation of Thinking', *Heidegger Studies*, 12 (1996), pp. 92-3).

11 See HarperCollins' *German Dictionary*, unabridged edition (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), Unabridged Edition, pp. 220, 98, and Wahrig's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Lexikon, 1994), pp. 519, 289.

12 Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 227.

13 All the different metaphysically grounded epochs in the history of Being suspend historicity by 'holding back' (i.e. leaving out of account) 'Being as such', the phenomenological source of their own intelligibility. Like 'the same' (see below), 'Being as such' is one of Heidegger's later names for that pre-conceptual phenomenological givenness and extra-conceptual phenomenological excess which, by both eliciting and defying conceptual circumscription, makes ontological historicity possible. Since metaphysics

leaves 'Being as such' out of account when it codifies and disseminates the fundamental conceptual parameters for each constellation of intelligibility, its purview is not total; thought is never entirely imprisoned within its epoch. But Heidegger thinks that, under the influence of metaphysics, we tend to forget this. Indeed, for Heidegger 'the greatest danger' is that the Nietzschean understanding of the Being of beings as eternally recurring will-to-power could succeed in pre-emptively delegitimating the very notion of 'Being as such', a phenomenon which appears as 'nothing' (*N*4 203/*N*II 340), as 'the last wisp of an evaporating reality' (*IM* 40/*EM* 30), from within the perspective of Nietzsche's metaphysics of 'constant becoming'. Heidegger characterizes this reduction of 'Being as such' to 'nothing' as 'nihilism proper' (*N*4 202/*N*II 339), because it elides the phenomenon underwriting Heidegger's hope for a non- nihilistic, post-epochal age.

14 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 50–2; *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), #125, p. 181. (For the account that follows, see Heidegger, 'Nietzsche's Metaphysics' (*N*3 185-251/*N*II 257-333).)

15 Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. Benedict (London: Verso, 1993)*,* p. 4. Indeed, we come to treat even ourselves in the terms underlying our technological refashioning of the world: as resources to be optimized, ordered, and enhanced with maximal efficiency (whether cosmetically, psychopharmacologically, or – increasingly – geneti- cally and even cybernetically).

16 Such controversies include, most recently, the Sokal-led scientific backlash. See Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1998). On a closely related front, see my 'From the Question Concerning Technology to the Quest for a Democratic Technology: Heidegger, Marcuse, Feenberg', *Inquiry* 43(2) (2000) pp. 203–16.

17 Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, p. 127. See also *BQ* 144-9/*GA*45 166–72.

18 Derrida explicitly raises this objection (see Derrida, 'Interpreting Signatures (*Nietzsche/Heidegger*): Two Questions', in D. P. Michelfelder and R. E. Palmer (eds and trans.), *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer–Derrida Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 69–71). On Derrida's critique of Heidegger, see my 'Can I Die? Derrida on Heidegger on Death', *Philosophy Today*, 43(1) (1999), pp. 31–44.

19 See also PDT 268/*GA*9 234.

20 'The distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* underlies all metaphysics.'

21 With this distinction, Heidegger attributes an ontotheologically structured metaphysics to American 'pragmatism'.

22 See Derrida, 'Ellipsis', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), esp. pp. 295–7.

23 Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, p. 118 (see also *I & D* 25/87).

24 See also *I & D* 23-41/85-106 and *GA*15 410–7.

25 See esp. 'The Turning' (*QCT* 36-49/*GA*79 68–77).

26 I cannot here take up the question of whether the later Heidegger's under- standing of the explanatory role played by 'Being' in the history of intelligibility escapes his own charge of ontotheology. It should be clear, however, that the answer will turn on whether or not he understands 'Being' metaphysically, that is, as an ontological or (more plausibly) a theological 'ground' of beings.

27 Cf.: 'For it still remains unthought by what unity ontologic and theologic belong together' (*I & D* 60/128). In 1930 Heidegger had already posed an early version of this question: 'Why precisely this doubling of whatness

and thatness belongs to the original essence of Being is one of the deepest problems [*der tiefsten Probleme*] ... that indeed has hitherto never yet been a problem at all, but something self-evident. This can be seen, for example, in traditional metaphysics and ontology, where one distinguishes between *essentia* and *existentia*, the whatness and thatness of beings. This distinction is employed as self-evidently as that between night and day' (*FCM* 357/*GA*29-30 519-20).

28 Heidegger's hyphenated use of *An-fang* connotes that the 'in-ception' of history takes place as a grasping of Being 'in the fangs' of time (see *N*4 199/*N*II 335).

29 With this notion of a 'primal matter', Heidegger draws our attention to the sememes constituting the ordinary word for 'cause' (*Ursache*).

30 'The much discussed four substances – of which we say the chief is water, making it as it were the one element – by combination and solidification and coagulation of the substances in the universe mingle with one another' (Thales, in K. Freeman (ed.) *Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 19).

31 'The Non-limited [*apeiron*] is the original material of existing things; further, the source from which existing things derive their existence is also that to which they return at their destruction, according to necessity; for they give justice and make reparation to one another for their injustice, according to the arrangement of Time' (Anaximander, in *Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 19). For an analysis supporting this reading of Thales' and Anaximander's pursuit of the *archē*, see G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield (eds) *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 88–90, 98–9, 108–17.

32 '[M]etaphysics represents the beingness [*Seiendheit*] of beings in a twofold manner: in the first place, the totality of beings as such with an eye to their most universal traits (*on katholou*, *koinon*); but at the same time also the totality of beings as such in the sense of the highest and therefore divine being (*on katholou*, *akrotaton*, *theion*). In the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, the unconcealedness of beings as such has specifically developed in this twofold manner (cf. Met. Bk. 3, 5, 10)' (WBGM 217/*GA*9 378).

33 See esp. Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 73a–77. In an analysis that confirms Heidegger's, David Bostock writes: 'the forms are both perfect paradigms and universals. This ambivalent conception is found in all the middle dialogues' (T. Honderich (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 684).

34 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 93a28–9 (my *italic*).

35 Aristotle, *Categories*, trans. Cooke (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 2a11ff.

36 Thus we get the claim, implicit in Heidegger but made explicit by Derrida, that Aristotle here inaugurates a 'metaphysics of presence' in which for the next twenty-five hundred years, whatever else changes, the Being of beings will be characterized in terms of 'permanent presence' (*Anwesenheit*). See Derrida, 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 16–27, esp. p. 22.

37 Thus Heidegger writes that 'the *unthought* unity of the essence of metaphysics . . . remains what is most thought-worthy for thinking, so long as thinking does not arbitrarily break off its fateful dialogue with the tradition' (*I & D* 55/121-2). See also Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 37–41.

38 Schürmann should be credited for recognizing that Being is a 'plural' phenom-
    enon (see Schürmann's 'How to Read Heidegger', *Graduate Faculty
    Philosophy Journal*, 19(2)–20(1), (1997) pp. 4–6).
39 Heidegger repeats this crucial claim in various registers, e.g. in WBGM
    218/*GA*9 (1999) 379: 'This ontotheological nature of philosophy proper (*prōtē
    philosophia*) must be grounded in the way in which the *on* brings itself into
    the open, namely as *on*. . . [I]t is due to the way in which beings have from
    the very beginning revealed themselves as beings.'
40 See Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, pp. 168–81.
41 On the temporal dynamism of *Anwesen*, see the crucial remarks at *WHD* 143
    (unfortunately elided in the translation: see *WCT* 237).
42 In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), Heidegger already spoke of 'the
    unique and essential relationship between *physis* and *alētheia*' (*IM* 102/*EM*
    78). See also *BQ* 153/*GA*45 178.
43 On this 'double-forgetting' and its relation to Heideggerian 'deconstruction',
    see also *B & T* 43/*S & Z* 21, and *PAR* 71/*GA*54 104–12.