Forgottenness

Machination

Science

Ontology

Metaphysics

The Resonating

(of beyng out of the plight)

What are beings?

leads to

The Interplay

(transition from the first beginning to the other beginning)

Thrown projection / Casting loose

What is the truth of beyng?

accomplished in

The Leap

(into beyng and truth)

Selfness

reveals

Being-toward-death

Language

Da-sein

(site of the truth of beyng)

Disclose a world

The Grounding

Assail us

Invisible

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(abyssal ground)

Truth

Moods

occurs as

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Openness

The Last God

Hesitant self-withholding

Constancy / Presence

through

Sheltered in beings

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Beyng

(as appropriating event)

Humans

Gods

Nietzsche

The Future Ones

Future Ones

Seekers

known to

**Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event) –** by Martin Heidegger

General

Hints of **Nietzschean elitism** almost straight out of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* sneak into Heidegger’s thinking here. He talks about preparing the ground for those who will come and the questioning of beyng being only for the few. It is only the few (creators and sacrificers) who “belong to the grounding of Da-sein in the time-space of which beings as beings are preserved and thereby the truth of beyng is sheltered.” (p.186) He also criticises the “arbitrary accessibility of everything for everyone” (p.49) which is again, very Nietzschean.

Heidegger is very much against “**worldviews**” and “**systems**” which, in that they aim at overcoming, encompassing, and mastering everything, they can’t question their own ground. Furthermore, a system can only appear out of mathematical, ‘Cartesian’ thought. That Heidegger’s thought is outside this domain, and therefore by definition *un*-systematic, doesn’t make it “confused” or “disordered”. This only follows if we take system as the measuring rod.

**Philosophy** is “the immediately useless but nevertheless sovereign knowledge” (p.35). Recall what Heidegger says about philosophy in *Introduction to Metaphysics*; philosophy cannot directly provide a foundation for the current or future age (it always operates indirectly through the few) nor can it make the building of a culture easier (it makes it harder), but because it addresses beyng itself, it frees us for different ways of being.

**Beings** covers quite an extensive range of things for Heidegger. Indeed, beings amount to everything actual, possible, necessary, accidental, anything that stands in beyng, including negativity and nothingness.

Although we can’t get to beyng through beings, because of the way we *are*, we nevertheless have to use these everyday terms initially and deepen our understanding until we can “call up at the right moment an inversion of thinking” (pp.66-67) which thrusts us into the word understood in the sense of beyng. I like this description and it’s very much how I feel when reading Heidegger. There is something to his thought which only becomes apparent after one has spent some time allowing the ideas to percolate until they suddenly seem to make sense in a way they never have before.

When all beings are interpreted by thinking as represented objects (identified by categories and reason), then the “question of the truth of beyng cannot be raised” (p.200) because beings no longer stand as beings.

***Being and Time*** was not a destruction, nor was it the presentation of an ‘ideal’ or ‘program’; rather, it was a purification aimed at outlining basic metaphysical positions and was a mere prelude to the resonating and interplay. It was the “self-preparing beginning of the essential occurrence of beyng itself” and that which “grounds truth as the temporal-spatial playing field wherein beings can again be beings, i.e., can be for the sake of the preservation of beyng.” (p.191) It was an attempt to implement truth, not as correctness, but as the ground of Da-sein. The title itself expresses Heidegger’s goal here. He wanted to shift the dialectic from beings and beingness to beyng and from thinking to time, where ‘time’ was “a name for the “truth” of being” (p.143).

However *Being and Time* was always insufficient for this task because it was “a *rejection* and so always took [its] orientation from that which [it] rejected” (p.278). We cannot get to the truth of beyng by building on earlier views. Instead, we need a “projection which leaps ahead” (p.278).

**Life** is “a “mode” of the beingness (beyng) of beings. The initial opening of a being toward itself in the preservation of the self.” (p.217) This is a non-scientific definition because Heidegger thinks science, in this case, biology, destroys “living beings”. When we objectify living beings, they withdraw more and more from us.

**Technology** has destroyed **nature**, which used to be the “site of the moment of the advent and sojourning of the gods”. Now, nature is interpreted under the auspices of calculative machination and economics so that all that is left is “scenic views” and “recreational opportunities”. Even these have been “calculated to gigantic proportions and prepared for the masses.” (p.218) What Heidegger means here is that nature has lost its beyng and has now been reduced to just another commodity.

The **gigantic** is “that whereby the “quantitative” is transformed into a “quality” of its own, into a kind of greatness” (p.348) which is grounded in calculation. Heidegger talks about the gigantic:

- retardation of history (no essential decisions, the absence of history)

- publicness of the uniting of everything interrelated

- claim of naturalness as what is self-evident and ‘logical’ (no need to question being)

- diminution of beings as a whole which loses something in the unconditional control we have over them.

What happens in each of the above forms is the “abandonment of beings by being” (p.348) as meditation on the question-worthiness of beings comes to an end in favour of “action” and “facts”. The gigantic is a “denial of the truth of beyng in favor of the “rational” and the “given”” (p.349). Calculative planning makes beings more accessible but it also shrinks beings as a whole, “the “world” becomes ever smaller” (p.389) in both the quantitative sense and also in “metaphysical significance: beings as beings, i.e., as objects, are ultimately so dissolved into their controllability that the character of beings with respect to being disappears, so to speak, and the abandonment of beings by being is consummated.” (p.389)

Heidegger talks a little bit about **decision**, but this is nothing to do with human choice. Indeed, it is beyng which “*de-cides* and *ap-propriates* gods and humans.” (p.69) De-cision (emphasis on the ‘de-’ meaning ‘privation’ or ‘separation’), as Heidegger uses the term, means the sundering (which seems to be another term for the event), which separates, and in separating lets the open realm, as the clearing for the self-concealing (of letting-be), first become ap-propriated. It is therefore not about choice because “choosing always concerns only something pregiven, something that can be taken or rejected” (p.79). On the contrary, de-cision is the grounding and creating of the very letting-be of beings themselves, without which, there could be no beings to choose from in the first place.

In a very Kierkegaardian, and quite complicated, passage, Heidegger says the essence of the decision is either-or, but he wants to drill deeper and ask “Whence the *only this* or only that?” (p.80). Why do we have an either-or decision here? Why not a third option; indifference, or non-deciding?

The either-or we are talking about here is at the “extreme”; that is, being or non-being. But, crucially, since we are “not [talking about] the being of some beings or other” (p.80), but being or non-being *itself*, Heidegger’s insight here is that non-being (the ‘that’ in the *either* this *or* that) is actually impossible. Because being is not objective presence, non-being is not mere absence. Rather, non-being here is actually the “*being of nonbeings*, merely a *higher nothingness*.” (p.80) Non-being is a mode of beyng and beyng is permeated with non-being. It is this deep connection between these opposites, beyng and non-being, that Heidegger sees as the reason for why beyng “shows itself in terms of Da-sein as an either-or, the one or the other, and only these” (p.80), as a kind of reflection of this unity of opposites, it seems.

So, what is the either-or decision at the “extreme” then? It isn’t *either* being *or* non-being because we have seen that non-being is a mode of beyng. The most essential either-or decision turns out to be between *decision* and *indifference* (i.e. non-deciding).

However, that isn’t the end of the story because the deepest, *most* essential *de-cision* is the event (the clearing for the letting-be of beyng itself) and is thus what allows one to bring oneself before the either-or in the first place. The essential either-or decision (between decision or indifference) is “already *decidedness*, because here already there is belonging to the event.” (p.80)

We typically think of **negation** as “sheer rejection, dismissal, disparagement, and even disintegration” (p.140), but Heidegger suggests that non-being might “constitute an essential possession of *being* itself... The no is the great leap *away from*, in which the “there” [*Da*-] in Da-*sein* is leaped into. This leaping-away-from “affirms” that from which it leaps but also possesses nothing negative as a leap… [it] is never “negation” in the usual sense of rejection and disparagement.”” (p.140) In this way, negation, withdrawal, and refusal are all positive elements which, far from denying beings, actually bring them forth in the first place. (More on negation and refusal in the final section on beyng)

Heidegger separates **thinking** into two kinds. Thinking (1) is a questioning and therefore presupposes a relation between the thinker and the thing being thought. In this mode, the thinker questions the being of beings. Thinking (2) is the guideline employed by thinking (1), or the “horizon within which beings as such are interpreted with respect to beingness” (p.360). Originally, Parmenides and Heraclitus were on the right track towards beyng with their respective, ‘active’ notions of νοείν [think, apprehend] and λόγος [gatheredness, discourse]. However, Plato, determining being as ιδέα [look, or that which is seen], turned Parmenides’ νοείν into something fixed, something already standing there before us, and Heraclitus’ λόγος into assertion. Aristotle added *ratio* to the mix, and Descartes, in the 17th century, made it all mathematical. In this way, thinking (2) as assertion (correctness) became the guideline for thinking (1) and this is why and how   
Western philosophy has drifted away from beyng.

Heidegger also criticises the Western insistence that “thinking must be determined “logically,” i.e., on the basis of the *assertion*…” (p.363) With regard to the essence of beyng, it could quite well be the case that logic is a blind alley. After all, ““Logic” itself… can be grasped in its essence only out of the other beginning of the *thinking* of beyng…” (p.363) Given this, how can one hope to come to a realisation about beyng through a mode of thinking which has beyng as its source?

History

Heidegger differentiates between history and historiology. The latter is history as it is studied by historians; an academic subject which aims to reconstruct and understand events that occurred in the past. In his own words; historiology is “the explanation which establishes facts about the past out of the horizon of a calculative bustling about with the present…” (p.388)

So, what is history? Let’s look at some direct quotes before we attempt to come to an understanding of this term:

* “History *comes to be* only in the immediate leap over the “historiological.” (p.11)
* “The event of appropriation is original history itself… the essence of beyng is grasped altogether “historically.”” (p.27)
* ““Historical” means here: belonging to the essential occurrence of beyng itself…” (p.333)
* “History is not a prerogative of humans; instead, it is the essence of beyng itself. History plays out only in the “between” of the en-counter of gods and humans, with this “between” as the ground of the strife of world and earth; history is nothing other than the eventuation of this “between.”” (p.377)
* “If the human being is to *be* historical, however, and if the essence of history is to be known, then the essence of the human being must become questionable above all and being must become question-worthy, indeed question-worthy for the first time.” (p.387)
* History is “we ourselves in the moment of our relation to beyng” (p.394)
* “To become historical means to arise out of the essence of beyng and therefore to remain belonging to the essential occurrence of the truth of beyng” (p.359)

So rather than being something we study or know (and certainly nothing to do with what is past), history is something human beings *are* and rather than belonging to us, it refers to the essential occurrence of beyng itself, i.e. the event of appropriation. To be historical then, because we are talking about a process rather than a noun, is a way of being; a way of being in which Da-sein, in being fully open to beyng, is open to its essential relations to beings as such and as a whole in an authentic and meaningful way.

It seems to me that living *historically* is just Heidegger’s way of describing a ‘real’, ‘authentic’, ‘genuine’ existence. As long as we have fallen prey to the technological/calculative/logical way of being that so aptly describes modern life, we aren’t *really* living for Heidegger; that is, we have failed to be *historical*. It’s only once we attune ourselves to beyng and begin to live authentically that life, which is to say, *history*, really starts.

The Resonating

Perhaps before jumping into what the resonating is, we ought to look at the situation in which the resonating arises. Modern, everyday life is characterised by a forgottenness of beyng. What Heidegger means by this is that we no longer question things as to their essence. We know more and more about things, as physical lumps of matter, for example, but this superficial understanding can’t yield any genuine, deep insights. The result of this mode of presencing of beings (forgottenness) which knows only beings (i.e. not beyng) is that beings have been abandoned by beyng. We live in a world bereft of essences, a world in which beings have been abandoned by beyng precisely because we have forgotten beyng. This situation; i.e. the abandonment of beings by beyng, Heidegger calls *the* *plight*.

In the midst of the plight, where we no longer concern ourselves with essences (because we think we already know everything there is to know), beings are reduced to mere objective presence and “objects of machination” (p.88)[[1]](#footnote-1). In this, beyng abandons beings, or as Heidegger says, “beyng *conceals itself* in the manifestness of beings.” (p.88)

Heidegger puts at least some of the blame for the plight at the feet of Christianity. In Christianity God made everything. This automatically reduces beings (things) to things made by another being. They lose something essential they once possessed in their own right; they now depend on God for their being. In addition, because God is now proclaimed the essence of beyng, we no longer need to question it. Beyng turns out to be just another being (albeit a supernatural one).

Heidegger also talks about *the* *greatest plight*, and this is “*the lack of a sense of plight in the midst of this plight*” (p.90). If we fail to realise the plight we are in, there is absolutely no chance of ever escaping it.

There are three reasons why the plight itself has been forgotten by us in this way; calculation, speed, and the massive. *Calculation* refers to the way everything is calculable and therefore measurable and certain. The world has been reduced to sterile, empty, mathematical equations; the movements of particles, the interplay of forces. Simplifying the world like this fosters unrestrained optimism; everything is calculable so anything is possible. Even what hasn’t been calculated yet, will be one day. Because nothing is impossible, there is no need to question anything; just plug in the numbers and do the math. *Speed* refers to our constant need to be engaged in activity and bustle and our almost pathological fear of boredom. Finally, *the massive* is the way quantity has become a quality of things (of *every*thing) and specifically the way this levels everything down so there are no differences anymore. When quantity is no longer just one (less important) aspect of things but *the* defining quality, the value of everything can be converted into this currency meaning nothing has value in and of itself anymore.

These three reasons lead to the “*the denuding, the making public and common, of every disposition*” and indicate we are in the “*era of the complete unquestionableness of all things*…” (p.97) Where these traits dominate, the lack of a sense of plight is greatest. We no longer question who we are or what we are supposed to do. And it is here that *resonating* comes into the picture.

Heidegger begins the section on the resonating with the following pseudo-poetic account: “*Resonating* / of the essential occurrence of beyng / out of the abandonment by [beyng] / through the compelling plight / of the forgottenness of beyng.” (p.85) This gives us a fairly good map of the territory we can flesh out in more detail.

So, what resonates? Beyng. Or more precisely, the *occurrence* of beyng (a hint that beyng isn’t *a* being but an event). I think of this as beyng beginning to resonate, or pulse, with significance, appearing once more on our radar after the abandonment. In this opening section, Heidegger also tells us where the resonating commences from. It arises from out of our lostness in the plight in which beings have been abandoned by beyng.

What about the goal of the resonating? This is simply to bring back “beyng in its *full essential occurrence* as event.” (p.92)

Heidegger also talks a little about *repetition* here but it is important and so worth mentioning. ‘Repetition’ doesn’t mean the recurrence of the same thing again and again in time; rather, it means “to *let* the *same*, the uniqueness of beyng, become a plight *again* and *thereby out of a more original truth*.” (p.58) In Heidegger’s sense, the ‘same’ is the *uniqueness* of beyng, so when the resonating occurs, we find ourselves brought before beyng *again*, as something (which isn’t a thing, remember) we had forgotten. Repetition means to re-encounter beyng and therefore to experience a deeper, more original, truth.

On this topic, Heidegger thinks Nietzsche also recognised the abandonment by beyng but, as he was interpreting it through the guiding question (i.e. not the more original, question of beyng)[[2]](#footnote-2), saw it as nihilism (the lack of goals). However, Heidegger notes that in ignoring Nietzsche, people committed “the genuine nihilism: the unwillingness to acknowledge the lack of goals” (p.109) and then went about setting up meaningless goals purely to cover this lack.

*Machination*

Machination (*Machenschaft*) isn’t a kind of human conduct “but a mode of the essential occurrence of being… (the conduct) is itself possible precisely only on the grounds of an interpretation of beings in which their makeability comes to the fore” (pp.99-100). It is the “schema of thorough and calculable explainability, whereby everything draws equally close together to everything else and becomes completely foreign to itself” (p.104).

Machination then, doesn’t describe an action (making things), but the way we understand and interpret (the beingness of) beings, as made things, and therefore as things which are fundamentally explicable by calculation. Beings lose whatever it is that makes them special as they all become reducible to the same thing by this ‘building block’ mentality. This leads to the complete absence of questioning that so characterises our age – nothing is any longer impossible or inaccessible. Everything ‘is made’ and ‘can be made’, if only the will exists to do so, but this is the case only because we interpret beings in the mode of machination.

Mechanistic (things as machines) and biologistic (living things as machines) modes of thinking derive from this machinational interpretation of beings, which Heidegger goes on to describe as a kind of “bewitchery” (which we ironically think we have dispelled from society); the bewitchery of the “unbridled dominance of machination”, which “directs everything toward calculation, utility, breeding, manageability, and regulation.” (p.98)

Heidegger adds three laws he sees as operative in machination, which basically culminate in *the greatest plight*:

1. The more machination there is, the more it conceals itself.
2. The more machination conceals itself, the more it predominates over, what appears to be its opposite, “lived experience”.
3. The more lived experience grounds correctness and truth, the more hopeless it is that machination will be recognised and understood.

*Science*

Heidegger has a somewhat downgraded view of science that stands in stark opposition to the way we tend to glorify science these days as the ultimate arbiter of truth and the only form of knowledge. On the contrary, he claims that “…“science” itself is *not knowledge*… in the sense of a grounding and preserving of an essential truth. Science is a derived *instituting* of knowledge, i.e., a machinational showcasing of a domain of correct findings within an otherwise concealed region of truth… a region which for science is by no means worthy of question.” (p.114) What this means is that science doesn’t get to the ground of beings, which is what Heidegger means by the “otherwise concealed region of truth”. Science describes beings, which have already been pre-given. It is therefore a derivative form of knowledge grounded in the deeper truth of beyng (why beings appear as beings in the first place).

Science values findings, results. It isn’t concerned with the “determination of the essential character of the beings themselves” (p.116). In this, it is not knowledge, but only “the instituting of correct findings within a region of explanation…” (p.116), where the “region” means pre-given beings.

In comparing science to the humanities, Heidegger has this to say; “…science *must* be exact (in order to remain rigorous, i.e., to remain science) if its subject area is determined in advance as a domain (the modern concept of “nature”) accessible solely to quantitative measurement and calculation and only thus guaranteeing results. The “human sciences,” on the other hand, must necessarily remain *inexact* in order to be *rigorous*. That is not a deficiency; it is their merit.” (p.117) Exactness is possible in science precisely because its domain of investigation is clearly prescribed (i.e. nature or beings). Philosophy and the humanities on the other hand, will never be exact in this way because their domain of inquiry goes ‘beneath’ the certainty possible when one delimits ones area of investigation.

The Interplay

The interplay is essentially the transition from the first beginning/guiding question (stuck in metaphysics / what are beings?) to the other beginning/basic question (going beyond metaphysics / what is beyng?). As Heidegger says, it “builds the first bridge of the transition” (p.133).

He is also quick to point out that while it is a “confrontation with the necessity of the *other* beginning, out of the originary posing of the first beginning” (p.133), it is not “a *counter-movement*; for all counter-movements and counter-forces are essentially codetermined by that which they are counter *to*” (p.146) and therefore fail as essential transformations of history. This is an important point. The transition to the other beginning (which we will discuss shortly) is an essential, historical transformation, not merely a reaction to the metaphysically-oriented understanding which preceded it.

In another Kierkegaardian intimation, Heidegger talks about the transition being the “most historical decision” (p.180), the either-or, in which we decide *either* to remain mired in the metaphysics of the guiding question *or* to transcend this in the basic question, grounding ourselves in beyng and truth.

*The First and the Other Beginnings*

The first beginning/guiding question (the two terms are interchangeable) turns on the question, “What are beings?” and therefore starts its questioning from beings. This means that it presupposes beings, which in turn means that it isn’t foundational. In asking about beings, what is asked for “is determined as that which is common to all beings [i.e. general characteristics]. Being has the character of beingness.” (p.336) Beingness, or the being of beings, then turns out to be a mere list of categories which apply to all beings in common. In addition; “Within the questioning that proceeds from beings and asks *back* into them, beingness proves to be something supplementary to beings.” (p.336) So beingness becomes both something over and above the beings themselves and an object of representation for, and on the basis of, the *subjectum*. The significance of this latter point is that ever since Descartes, the *subjectum* has come to be seen as an object, an individual present-at-hand I-thing, meaning that even more priority has been given to beings (of which the subjectum is just another example) over beyng.

The other beginning/basic question (also interchangeable terms), on the other hand, doesn’t start from beings or beings as such and as a whole; instead it leaps into the *truth* of beyng itself; i.e. what it is that allows beings to appear in the first place, or as Heidegger says, “the *openness for essential occurrence* as such” (p.60) in which the essence of truth is “grasped as the clearing of what is self-concealing and thus as belonging to the essence of beyng itself.” (p.338) The truth of beyng thus reveals itself as the beyng of truth and we have truly risen beyond beings to the point where “beyng “is” not a supplement to beings, but is what essentially occurs” (p.338).

Heidegger summarises the distinction between the two ‘beginnings’ as follows, “*The first beginning* experiences and posits the *truth of beings* without asking about truth as such, for the things unconcealed in the truth of beings—namely, beings as beings—necessarily overpower everything… *The other beginning* experiences the truth of beyng and asks about the beyng of *truth* in order first to ground the essential occurrence of beyng and to let beings arise as the true of that original truth.” (p.141)

There are a couple of important consequences to this shift from the first to the other beginning. The first is Heidegger’s rejection of traditional ontology and metaphysics. Ontology, in *Being and Time*, essentially meant the study of being, and Heidegger used the word without any reservations. He rejects the term here because he comes to see ‘ontology’ as a word which “delimits the measure and the sphere of inquiry.” (p.48) It was too restrictive for what Heidegger meant by the term ‘beyng’. ‘Metaphysics’ also needs to go, because, although the word ‘metaphysics’ means beyond the physical or natural, it nevertheless proceeds by starting from beings as objectively present entities and *stepping over* to something else. There are two problems with this as far as Heidegger is concerned. First, you can’t get to beyng through beings. Secondly, you cannot bridge the gap between beings and beyng by merely “stepping over” from the one to the other. Beings and beyng are so different that there can be no direct transition between them; rather, it requires a *leap* because nothing from the former bears in any way on the latter. To try and step from beings to beyng would simply result in “a new application (to beyng) of the guiding question; instead, there is only a leap, i.e., the necessity of an *other* beginning.” (pp.60-61)

Heidegger also equates his ‘first’ and ‘other’ beginnings with two formulae; “being and thinking” and “being and time”, respectively. In the first formula, being is understood as the beingness of beings; in the second, as that whose truth is interrogated. In the first, “thinking” means the guideline for questioning beings with regard to their beingness; it means representational assertion. In the second, “time” is the initial indication of the essence of truth in the sense of the open (by way of transport) clearing of the field in which beyng conceals itself and in so doing first bestows itself explicitly in its truth.” (pp.341-2)

There are three ‘attitudes’ which characterise what Heidegger calls the “basic disposition of thinking in the other beginning” (p.14). The first is shock, which means “to be taken aback, i.e., back from the familiarity of customary behaviour… taken aback by the very fact that beings *are*… and that being has abandoned and withdrawn itself from all “beings”” (p.14). The second is restraint, which is a readiness for the refusal (i.e. the way beyng withdraws and conceals itself) as gift. The third is diffidence, which is not to be mistaken for shyness. Diffidence is a drawing near and remaining near to the last god.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Heidegger echoes Nietzsche in saying that the thinkers who transition to the other beginning are never understandable in their own times “because understandability already signifies the destruction of their thinking.” (p.343) This follows from Heidegger’s claim that the other beginning cannot be reached by merely stepping over from the first beginning. If the other beginning were merely an addition to, or extension of, the first beginning, then it would immediately be understandable to those accustomed to thinking from it.

In addition, understanding implies certainty; i.e. the end of inquiry. Heidegger, on the other hand, insists that a questioning attitude, one in which one falls prey to doubt and despair, is essential to coming to know beyng. Indeed, he insists that the transitional thinkers must “take those who so “feverishly” desire “understandability” and make of them non-knowers, ones who do not yet know…” (p.343). Those who aren’t certain about everything and have preserved a questioning attitude towards beyng are what Heidegger calls “inceptual wanderers” (p.343)

Finally, understandability also implies some kind of verification by facts; however, “no thinking of being, no philosophy, could *ever* be verified by “facts,” i.e., by beings. To make itself understandable is suicide for philosophy…” (pp.343-4)

Heidegger has introduced this concept of *inceptual thinking* in conjunction with the other beginning, so what does he mean by it? He defines it as “the original carrying out of resonating, interplay, leap, and grounding in their unity” (p.51), and he uses it here to distinguish the other beginning from a ‘new’ beginning, which would therefore (by virtue of being ‘new’ at its outset) quickly become out of date. Rather than being ‘new’, the other beginning is a *repetition*.

Repetition is a leap into the first beginning (which, after all, is philosophy), although without wanting to reinstate that beginning (and thereby repeat the mistakes made therein). Rather, the return is “precisely, removal from it [the first beginning], the occupying of that remote position which is necessary in order to experience what began in that beginning and as that beginning. For *without* this remote position… we would always remain too near the beginning…” (pp.145-6) It is essentially a re-engagement of the fundamental question Heidegger thinks underlies philosophy, what is beyng?

*History of the First Beginning*

The first beginning began with Plato who interpreted beings as εἶδος (‘appearance’, ‘look’, that which is seen) or ἰδέα (‘idea’, derived from the Greek ‘I see’) and ἰδέα as κοινόν (‘common’) or the most general. The being of beings therefore became “the κοινόν. To be the “most general” becomes *the* essential determination of being itself.” (p.161) Heidegger calls this *beingness*.

This notion of ἰδέα, bound up with the ‘look’ of something, what offers up a ‘view’, refers to the *presencing* of beings and first provided the distinction between *essentia* (‘what it is’) and *existential* (‘that it is’). “A being is a being in virtue of constant presence, ἰδέα, the seen *in its seen-ness* (αλήθεια).” (p.163)

Once the idea of the being of beings (ἰδέα) as the “most general” (κοινόν), or beingness, was established, it was a short step from there to then see beingness in relation to individual beings as that which is most eminently real. Obviously, Heidegger is referencing Plato’s theory of the forms here. “The ἰδέα especially, indeed the ἰδέα alone, satisfies the essence of beingness and may therefore claim to count as what *is* most eminently, a being in the most proper sense. What is individual and changeable thus becomes μή ὅν [non-being], i.e., what does not ever satisfy beingness.” (p.164) Christian, post-Christian, anti-Christian, and non-Christian Western interpretations of beings all build on this central idea.

The next phase occurred through nominalism where the “this”, the factuality of the individual became that which is genuinely real; “For various motives, the individual, the individual soul, the individual human, the “I,” is experienced correspondingly as what most eminently is, as the most real being” (p.167). This gave us Descartes’ *cogito* which elevated that which is grasped in the thought of the individual, the *perceptio*, or the representation, to that which is most real. It was only a short step from here to Hegel’s Absolute Idea. This is why Heidegger characterises the history of Western philosophy as *being and thinking*. Here, being is understood as the “beingness of beings and places being, grasped in this way, into relation with representing (thinking).” (p.167)

The leap into Da-sein and the other beginning then, is impeded by this Platonic interpretation of beings as a whole; “we thus face the unavoidable task of initiating an overcoming of Platonism through a more original knowledge of its essence.” (pp.171-2)

Even Nietzsche didn’t escape the first beginning. While he “experiences beings as becoming, he is an *opponent* who still remains inside the *traditional* framework with this interpretation; beings are simply interpreted differently, but the question of being is never posed as such.” (p.168) Nevertheless, Nietzsche did recognise the importance of Plato as its progenitor. He also noticed that Christianity was “Platonism for the people” (p.171).

Heidegger also talks about transcendence here, dividing it into three types. First is “ontic” transcendence which involves one being surpassing all other beings. Second is “ontological” transcendence which gives us beingness as the general. Finally, there is transcendence as the “fundamental ontology” of *Being and Time*. “Here the word “transcendence” receives again its original meaning: the surpassing as such, grasped as the distinctive feature of Da-sein, indicating thereby that Da-sein in each case already stands in the open realm of beings.” (p.170)

*Metaphysics*

Metaphysics, as the name suggests, is an attempt to go beyond ‘physics’; i.e. beyond beings. This sounds like it should be exactly what Heidegger is trying to do. Unfortunately, it isn’t. Metaphysics attempts to go beyond beings by searching for what it is that makes beings beings (fine so far), but it does so by interrogating beings themselves. It’s core question is, “What are beings?” If it can uncover the deepest essence of beings, the thing all beings share, it thinks it will have achieved its goal. However, in interrogating beings, it is necessarily looking for something that *is*; i.e. it is looking for another being. “The more exclusively thinking turns toward beings and seeks for itself a foundation that *is* most eminently… all the more decisively does philosophy withdraw from the truth of beyng.” (p.134)

What metaphysics succeeds in discovering is what Heidegger calls *beingness*, the being of beings, what is universal, or common, among all beings. But in discovering something that *is*, it merely discovers another being and this being’s being must therefore be accounted for; i.e. how is it that *this* being arises as the being it is?

The thinking Heidegger is trying to cultivate here is one that doesn’t oppose metaphysics; “since that would simply bring metaphysics back into play; rather, the task is an overcoming of metaphysics out of its ground… all endeavors reacting *against* metaphysics… are precisely *re­*-active and thereby fundamentally dependent on metaphysics. And so they themselves remain metaphysics.” (p.136) The overcoming of metaphyiscs can happen only if “the directionality of thinking is maintained, although in another respect it is thereby at the same time radically raised beyond itself.” (p.143) Maintaining the directionality means still aiming at the *being of beings*, but raising beyond itself (overcoming) requires starting, not from beings, but by inquiring into the *truth* of beyng. Heidegger seems to be recommending something like moving in the same direction, just on a higher level.

The Leap

Heidegger’s leap is not an attempt to *surpass* (leap *over*) beings – this is the transcendence of metaphysics – rather, he wants to leap over this very transcendence directly into beyng and truth. The leap is therefore a leap directly into beyng as event which opens up, what Heidegger calls, the *abyss of the* *fissure*, or just the *fissure*. Importantly, this isn’t a leap into a pre-existing ‘place’ or ‘viewpoint’, as if we are just describing the action of a being which already ‘is’. “Instead, the leap first allows the “there,” as appertaining and appropriated in the call, to spring forth as the site of the moment of some “where” and “when.”” (p.186)

So, in talking about the springing forth of the “there”, Heidegger obviously means Da-sein. Indeed, he also says that in the leap, “we place ourselves in what is thereby opened up [the fissure of beyng], become steadfast, and by being appropriated come to ourselves for the first time” (p.182). In ‘coming to ourselves’, Heidegger means this is how we, as Da-sein, the site of the clearing in which beings first appear as beings, and where “where” and “when” first attain meaning, come to be. This springing forth of Da-sein happens as a result of the leap which thrusts us into (while also creating) the fissure.

In addition, Heidegger calls the leap “the thrown projection” meaning that it enters “into the open realm such that the projector of the projection experiences himself as thrown, i.e., as appropriated by beyng.” (p.188) So, as we already noted, the leap isn’t something we do (as if we were already beings); rather, it is an occurrence which we experience as happening to us. In leaping into beyng, we don’t actively do anything; rather, we find ourselves “appropriated by beyng.”

Heidegger continues to talk about the leap as projection and asks what projection is. Projection is a “casting oneself loose... from beings and into beyng… [in which] the human being first becomes the human being.” (p.356) Next, comes a “turning back” towards beings where “what was already there is now encountered as what ties down…” (p.356) through comportment (language). The problem occurs when “the casting loose and the turning back are *forgotten*, how everything becomes an objectively present, orderable, and producible possession, how ultimately the human being even comes to self-understanding in the same terms (*subjectum*)” (p.357). Heidegger contrasts this with the Platonic notion of the knowledge of being resting on recollection. Our knowledge of being (as beingness) is actually based on forgetting, not recollection, and an inability to retain the turning back.

In expanding a little on the casting loose, which, you recall, is the leap into beyng, Heidegger goes on to add that, in leaping, the essence of the human being is grounded in the fissure of beyng, which Heidegger calls here the “strangeness of the *open realm*. Only now begin the history of being and the history of the human being. As for beings? They no longer come to their truth in a turning back, but as the preservation of what is strange…” (pp.358) What is interesting to note here is that from the standpoint of the clearing, the open realm, the appropriating event, beings no longer appear in the turning back (which ties us to them once more); rather, they appear as what is strange. This seems to mean that we are able to preserve a kind of ‘gap’ between us and beings such that we no longer get caught up in the everydayness of the world (what Heidegger called *falling prey* in *Being and Time*).

In another revealing passage, Heidegger also says that; “History *comes to be* only in the immediate leap over the “historiological.”” (p.11) This serves to remind that, for Heidegger, history only occurs in beyng and so in leaping into the fissure, the leap overcomes not just beings and the transcendence of metaphysics, but the historiological as well.

Linking the leap with the transition from the first to the other beginning we talked about in the last section, Heidegger notes that the latter is the “run-up to the leap which alone can initiate a beginning and especially the other beginning as constantly surpassed by the first.” (p.180) The idea here seems to be that successfully completing the transition to the other beginning (the interplay) requires the leap. One can even see this in what we said in the prior section about there being no direct path from the first to the other beginning.

He also links this idea to *Being and Time* calling this work, the “*transition* to the leap (the asking of the basic question). Therefore, as long as this attempt is accounted a “philosophy of existence” [“*Existenzphilosophie*”], everything remains uncomprehended.” (p.184) Again, we see Heidegger distancing himself from everything which came before.

The Grounding

*Da-sein*

What does Heidegger mean by the term Da-sein? Let’s start with a definition and work from there; Da-sein is “…*the one who grounds and preserves the truth of beyng*… the “there” as the ground required by the very essence of beyng… *care*” (p.15).

First, Da-sein *grounds* the truth of beyng. Heidegger also talks about Da-sein being the *site* “of the moment of the turning for the clearing of beings in the appropriation” (p.215) and the *sheltering* of the unconcealment of beings. Exactly what Da-sein grounds and shelters as a site (the truth of beyng, the clearing/unconcealment of beings), we will address later. For now, the important thing is that Da-sein is *where* something (the truth of beyng) occurs, although this obviously doesn’t refer to a physical location in time and space.

Secondly, Da-sein *preserves* the truth of beyng as *care*. ‘Care’ was understood in a very practical sense in *Being and Time* as the way Da-sein interacted with and interpreted the things it encountered in the world. Here it receives a more ‘fuller’ treatment. To care means to be a preserver or steward of beyng. It refers to the way Da-sein grounds the truth of beyng; i.e. as care-taking. In caring for beyng, Da-sein isn’t using or handling any individual being; rather, it is holding open the space in which a deeper truth, the truth of beyng, can be revealed.

Thirdly, Da-sein is the “there”. Da-sein literally means “*There-being*” and from a metaphysical perspective, “there” means something like “presence”, or as Heidegger puts it; “…*to occur essentially (there) by emerging out of itself as unconcealed*…” (p.233), or again; ““Dasein” means presence in some place or other; it means *to turn up* in a “where” and a “when.” (p.235) This is the Da-sein of the first beginning. Seen from the perspective of the other beginning however; that is, by a more original interpretation, “there” is “the openness of beings as such and as a whole, the ground of the more originally conceived αλήθεια [*aletheia* = unconcealedness]… “to be” [*sein*] does not simply mean “to turn up”; rather, it signifies steadfast *enduring* as grounding the “there” [*Da*]. The “there” does not refer to some determinable “here” or “yonder”; it means the *clearing* of beyng itself.” (pp.234-5). So, Da-sein is “there”, not in the sense that it exists “over here” or “over there”, but in the sense that it opens the ‘space’ (by sheltering and preserving the truth of beyng) in which “here” and “there” first acquire meaning.

Fourth, Da-sein is the one. In *Being and Time* it is easy to get the impression that Da-sein is simply a synonym for a human being. This would be a mistake. On p.234, Heidegger says, “Da-sein is a way to be…”, suggesting it is something like a characteristic, but this would also be a mistake; Da-sein “can never be encountered as a characteristic of beings which are simply to be found present at hand nor as a characteristic of beings which allow present at hand beings to become objects and which stand in various relations to objects. Furthermore, Da-sein is not some characteristic of the human being…” (p.234) How are we to understand this? Da-sein is not a characteristic because characteristics are aspects of beings which already exist. Da-sein is more foundational than this. It is only because Da-sein “is”, that there can be beings and characteristics in the first place. Ultimately, I think, Da-sein is human being, but not any human being. It is a human being who has fundamentally altered his or her relation to the world and experiences it authentically as the site for the opening of the truth of beyng. It is something we reach, not through analysis or protracted study, but only “in a leap by leaping into the grounding of the openness of what is self-concealing…” (p.234)

(Since it has come up here, it is also worth pointing out that “…*authenticity* is not to be understood in a *moral*-existentiell sense but, rather, in terms of fundamental ontology as a character of *that* Da-sein which *endures* the “there” by sheltering the truth in some fashion or other (such as thoughtfully or poetically, or by building, leading, sacrificing, suffering, rejoicing).” (p.238))

Fifth, Da-sein is required by beyng. This means that Da-sein isn’t the subject of action; i.e. the human being, in the mode of being that is Da-sein, isn’t *doing* something. Earlier, I talked about Da-sein in an active sense, as *grounding*, *preserving*, and *sheltering* the truth of beyng, but Heidegger is quite clear that Da-sein is a passive mode of being. “The “there” is ap-propriated by beyng itself. The human being, as steward of the truth of beyng, is subsequently ap-propriated and, as belonging to Dasein, is ap-propriated in a preeminent and unique way.” (p.236) The concept of *thrownness* makes this same point. Da-sein doesn’t initially project itself into the world; rather it is thrown (appropriated) by beyng wherever beings appear.

Sixth, as the site of the truth of beyng, Da-sein is the *between*. “Da-sein… reveals itself as the “between” which is developed by beyng itself so as to become the open domain for beings that protrude into it…” (p.236). What exactly is Da-sein between? Heidegger talks about Da-sein being between “humans (as grounding of history) and the gods (in their history)” (p.247), between “in relation to earth and world, the center of their strife…” (p.254), and also “between *beyng and beings*” (p.271). As preserving, sheltering site, Da-sein is between all of these things, holding open the clearing in which the truth of beyng is manifested.

The ordinary way of being human; i.e. in contrast to Da-sein, is what Heidegger calls *being-away*. Being-away is a forgottenness of beyng, or being “*infatuated with things, smitten with them, lost in them*…” (p.238) It is the human being ““*removed*” *from* the enduring of the “there”… [and manifests in] the manner of *bustling about* with objectively present things” (p.256). In a nice phrase, Heidegger calls being-away “the completely other of the “there,”” (p.257) Nevertheless, he also asserts that “this manner is conceived on the basis of the “there” and belongs to the “there.”” (p.256) This is because, in order that there be beings for us to be smitten by in the first place, Da-sein must already be preserving beyng. Being-away isn’t *not* being-there, it’s a *forgottenness* of being-there. And as forgottenness, being-away is “the *more original* term for the *inauthenticity of Da-sein*.” (p.256)

Heidegger also talks about being-toward-death here. Sounding a little defensive, he lambasts the “facile conclusion” that since death is an end, or nothingness, being-toward-death, as a being-toward-nothingness, is therefore nihilism. This attitude can only arise from a misunderstanding of being-toward-death as a “worldview”. Since Da-sein isn’t an objectively present being, it’s death as ““ending” can by no means signify the mere discontinuing or disappearing of something objectively present.” (p.256)

In *Being and Time*, ‘death’ was discussed in terms of fundamental ontology. In *Contributions*, Heidegger prefers the term ‘beyng’ to ‘ontology’ (for reasons already discussed) and refines what he understands death to be. Death, far from being mere absence, ending, or something that happens *to* us, is for Da-sein (the “there”), it’s most extreme possibility (of the impossibility of being Da-sein). As a possibility of Da-sein’s, death is therefore something that Da-sein is *necessarily*, *intrinsically* moving towards, whether or not it acknowledges the fact. Being intrinsic to Da-sein, Da-sein can only fully become itself if it embraces death, not in some macabre nihilism, but as it’s most extreme possibility. In other words, only as being-toward-death “is Da-sein that “between” which offers a moment and a site for the “event” and which can thereby belong to being [I think Heidegger means ‘beyng’ here].” (p.224)

Heidegger seems to flirt with the idea of equating death with the forgottenness of being-away when he says, ““ending” here means… a complete dislodging of the “there” as such into the “*away*.”” (pp.256-7) where “being-away is the completely other of the “there,” entirely concealed to us” (p.257) and again, on the same page, when he says running ahead toward death “is the highest Da-*sein*, the one that incorporates the concealedness of the “there” into the steadfastness of enduring the truth.” Both of these quotes talk about death as a concealedness of the “there” but this obviously requires someone for the “there” to be concealed from. If death is *physical*, this condition clearly can’t be fulfilled.

I’m not sure what I think about this. If Heidegger really intended death to mean nothing more than the inauthenticity of being-away, this would seem like an overly dramatic (not to mention unnecessary) redefinition. In addition, to my knowledge at least, aside from these hesitant and oblique comments, he never explicitly endorses this interpretation. I’ll leave my money on death for Da-sein being physical, but since Da-sein isn’t just an objectively present being, it’s a death which means a lot more.

So who are humans? What is selfness? For Heidegger, these questions can only be answered through the lens of Da-sein and have nothing to do with “subjectivity” or “consciousness” or “lived experience”; “…the question of the “who,” as the carrying out of meditation on the self, has nothing in common with an overcurious, egotistic, lost preoccupation with one’s “own” lived experiences but, instead, is an essential path in the carrying out of the question regarding what is most question-worthy, namely, the question that first opens the worthiness of what is most question-worthy, the question of the truth of being [this should read ‘beyng’]… Humans “must ground their essence historically, through the grounding of Da-sein…” (p.42)

We usually think of our *selves* as the subjective locus of experience, the *I* who experiences, but we must remember that this “I” is first and foremost lost in the fallen, inauthentic, forgottenness of being-away. Existence on this level is not ‘self’, it is the ‘they-self’ of *Being and Time*. It is only through the appropriation of beyng that Da-sein can realise its *selfhood*; “…the self is not a property of an objectively present human being, and only semblantly is the self given with *I-consciousness*… Selfhood, as the essential occurrence of Da-sein, arises out of the origin of Da-sein… Appropriation [*Eignung*] is at once assignment [*Zu-eignung*] and consignment [*Übereignung*]. Inasmuch as Dasein is assigned to *itself* as belonging to the event, Da-sein does come to its *self*, but never as if the self were already an objectively present item that simply had not previously been reached.” (pp.252-3)

Later on, Heidegger talks about ‘seeking’ as being what “brings the seekers to *themselves* for the first time, i.e., brings them into the selfhood of Da-sein, wherein the clearing and concealment of beings occur. Being a self is the finding that already lies *in* the seeking…” (p.315) Again, here we see the idea that human beings aren’t automatically ‘selves’ who then do things; rather, we must ‘earn’ our selfhood through an inquiry into beyng and truth.

Finally, Heidegger talks about the relation between Da-sein and beyng in the context of *Being and Time*. He acknowledges that in “*Being and Time*, Da-sein still has an appearance that is “anthropological,” “subjectivistic,” “individualistic,” etc.,” but is clear that “the opposite of all this is in view there.” (p.233) In *Being and Time*, Da-sein was presented as *understanding* in the sense of a *projection* which is *thrown*; which we now see means “as belonging to an ap-propriation by beyng itself. [However,] If we now fail to recognize the strangeness and *uniqueness* (incomparability) of beyng and, in unity with that, the essence of Da-sein, then we will all-too-easily lapse into the opinion that this “relation” corresponds to—or is even identical with—the one between subject and object. Da-sein, however, has overcome all subjectivity, and beyng is never an object, something we set over and against ourselves, something representable.” (p.199) Beyng is never an object to Da-sein’s subject. To posit this is to make the mistake of thinking both Da-sein and beyng are merely objectively present beings.

*Language*

Within the history of metaphysics, language has been understood as *assertion* (or ‘statement’), and this sees “…language as a present-at-hand object (tool—a product capable of giving form to things and a divine gift)…” (p. 391). Heidegger wants to go beyond this. The first step in doing this is to notice that language is usually seen as being given concomitantly with human beings, but so closely intertwined with us that the opposite is also true – human beings are given concomitantly with language. “Language and the human being determine each other reciprocally. How does that become possible? Are they both in a certain respect the same, and in what respect are they so? In virtue of their belonging to beyng.” (p.393)

This then begs the question, what does it mean to belong to beyng? We have seen how for the human being to belong to beyng means to be “appropriated by beyng itself for the sake of the grounding of its truth. As so appropriated, the human being is consigned to beyng, and such consignment indicates the preserving and grounding of this human essence in that which human beings themselves must first make their explicit property (with reference to which they must be more authentic and more inauthentic), i.e., in Dasein, which is itself the grounding of truth, the abyssal ground thrown out and borne by beyng (event).” (p.393)

So, what about language? How does language relate to beyng? Heidegger talks about “…the essence of *language* as the naming that founds the truth of beyng.” (p.139) From these scant clues, it appears that language is to be understood as working with Da-sein to ground the truth of beyng. Language’s contribution is to name beings, thereby allowing them to appear as what they are in the clearing Da-sein holds open.

*Truth*

Truth is ordinarily understood as *correctness*, but this “rational” conception of truth, which operates between propositions and beings, Heidegger calls “distortion” and a veiling of genuine, “originary” truth. In *Contributions*, Heidegger defines truth as the “clearing for self-concealment” (p.25) or even more simply, “the clearing-concealing”. He is quite specific about this; “…truth is never merely clearing; it essentially occurs as concealment just as originarily and intimately along with the clearing. These, clearing and concealment, are not two; instead, they constitute the essential occurrence of the one truth itself.” (p.276) Heidegger also specifies the essence of truth to be “openness” or the “open realm”. What does all of this mean?

Let’s take this idea of *openness* first. Heidegger speaks of this as “something like an *inner recess*” (p.268) and likens it to the inside of a jug, where “the inner recess is not just a haphazard emptiness which arises purely on account of the surrounding walls and which happens not to be full of “things.” It is just the opposite: the inner recess itself is what determines, shapes, and bears the walling action of the walls and of their surfaces…” (p.268). The important idea here is that the inner recess is not equivalent to ‘emptiness’ or ‘nothingness’. On the contrary, this inner recess of truth is precisely that ‘space’ in which beings come to be as things, tools, work, acts, etc. Far from being a passive emptiness, truth is a wholly active concept for Heidegger. But haven’t we already said that Da-sein is the site of the event? Are we overlapping here? I don’t think so. Heidegger goes on to describe the “there” as the “surrounding, walling action” (p.268) which encloses the inner recess of truth. It is in this capacity that Da-sein operates as site. We can think of Da-sein as ‘holding open’ the inner recess of truth.

Let’s move on to *concealment*. This refers to the way that the inner recess always “conceals itself at the same time that beings come to stand in it” (p.268). Indeed, even as truth creates the space in which beings can first appear, truth itself, necessarily disappears. This is why truth (and beyng in general) is so hard to discern; precisely because if it is working as it should, it leaves no trace of itself, or rather, what it leaves behind is only its concealment. This concealing dimension of truth causes Heidegger to say; “*The essence of truth is un-truth*…” (p.281), where un-truth is understood as concealing; “the *negative* belongs intrinsically to truth, by no means as a sheer lack but as resistance, as that self-concealing which comes into the clearing as such…” (p.281).

Finally, lets look at the term *clearing*. Heidegger makes clear that this doesn’t mean the elimination or “sublation [*Aufhebung*] of the concealed, i.e., its liberation and transformation into unconcealment. It instead means precisely the grounding of the abyssal ground for the *concealment* (the hesitant withholding).” (p.278) So, this is something like ‘clearing away’ or ‘making room’ for the empty recess, which is at the same time a self-concealing.

There are two final points I want to make concerning truth. The first is that Heidegger is quite clear that truth “as the clearing for concealment is thus an essentially different projection than is αλήθεια…” (p.277). Truth is not about unconcealedness; it is not that by which beings appear as the beings they are; it is more preparatory than revealing. Second, truth never “is”; rather, it essentially occurs. This is because “truth is the truth of beyng, and beyng “only” essentially occurs. Thus what essentially occurs is also everything that belongs to truth, including time-space and consequently “space” and “time.” (p.271) Truth is an event, not a propositional fact.

*Time and Space*

Heidegger has a number of things to say about time and space, although it is by no means clear exactly what he is getting at. First of all, however, it *is* pretty clear that he is not talking about time and space as science understands them; i.e. as themselves calculable and essentially ‘empty’ frameworks for calculable and objectively present things. These calculative terms “arise out of time-space, which is more originary than they themselves” (p.281). By the same token, although Heidegger does unite the two terms and talk of “time-space”, he is clear that this is quite different from the mere coupling of space and time which has taken place in physics, and which still treats time and space as objectively present beings. Of course, it is important to note here that Heidegger isn’t calling the scientific understanding of time-space ‘wrong’ or ‘false’. He’s merely pointing out that they are limited and not originary.

He also wants to make it clear that primordial temporality is not “lived time”, in the same way that spatiality “is not the spatiality of the “subject” or the “I”” (p.59). *Being and Time*, on the other hand, did tend to define these terms, particularly spatiality, more from a subjective angle, tying them to lived experience. Time-space in *Contributions* is then a significant move away from the phenomenological/existential way they were treated in *Being and Time*.

So, that’s what temporality and spatiality *aren’t*. What *are* they then? One way Heidegger describes them is as the “abyssal ground”. “The abyssal ground, as the staying away of the ground… is the first clearing of the open as “emptiness.”” (p.300) As we saw above, this obviously doesn’t refer to emptiness as a blank framework which objectively present things fill up. Rather, this is the first essential occurrence of the ground, and as this first essential occurrence, it grounds (in the sense of allowing the ground to occur as ground) in the mode of temporalisation and spatialization. If this is right, then Heidegger seems to be saying that time-space is ‘deeper’ than truth. The chain would then start with the event (beyng), which grounds time-space, and time-space would, in turn, ground truth.

The abyssal ground is characterised by what Heidegger calls the *hesitant* *self-withholding*. Let’s look at each of these terms, in turn. First, the self-withholding:

The self-withholding creates not only the *emptiness* of privation and austerity but also, along with these, an emptiness as one that is in itself transporting, i.e., transporting into the “to come” and thereby simultaneously bursting open what has been… This abandonment, however, because it originarily occurs as remembering and expecting… is the present—the *moment*— which is raised up and is directed out only toward the decision. Incorporated into the moment are all the transportings, and the moment itself essentially occurs merely as the gathering of the transportings. The *remembering expectation*… brings up for decision the question of whether or not beyng intrudes… (p.303)

This is how I interpret the above passage. The emptiness of the abyssal ground is essentially a *transporting*. This means that it is (somehow) a futural/anticipating and having-been/preserving; i.e. it acquires temporal depth (indeed, this transporting is precisely the essence of temporalising). The meeting of these two transporting movements occurs as remembering and expecting, and it is this meeting which forms the present, or the *moment*. The moment is the gathering of the transportings in both ‘directions’ and it is therefore where all decision occurs.

Since it has come up, what does Heidegger mean by the word *moment* here? Firstly, it isn’t ‘now’ as in the present instant; ““moment” is by no means merely an infinitesimal, scarcely graspable remnant of “time.”” (p.256) Rather, Heidegger talks about time-space unfolding as the “*site of the moment* of the event” (p.256), suggesting that the moment is something more like the ‘occurring’ of Beyng, as event.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Second, let’s look at the hesitant with another quote:

Yet what withholds itself does so in a hesitant way and thereby grants the possibility of bestowal and appropriation. The self-withholding dispenses the transporting which is characteristic of temporalizing, but, as *hesitant*, it is also the most originary *captivation* of things. This captivation is the *embrace* in which the moment and thus the temporalization are held fast (like the *originary* abyssal ground? “Emptiness”? Neither that nor fullness). This captivation also makes possible a bestowal as an essential possibility, grants bestowal a space. The captivation is the spatialization of the event. (p.303)

This passage is even more obscure than the above one. Essentially, Heidegger is saying that the transporting is hesitant (although he doesn’t explain what this means) and that makes it a *captivation* of things. This captivation is an *embrace* in which temporalisation, as the moment, is held fast. This, in turn, (somehow) creates space. Although none of these terms are particularly well explained and the whole section sounds like inchoate ruminating, it is possible I think to get a hint of what Heidegger is aiming at here.

Time-space is temporal in the sense that it opens up ‘space’ in which existence acquires a *transported*, or ‘spread out’, quality, from a preserving past to an anticipated future. On the other hand, it is spatial as a consequence of a *hesitancy* in the transporting which (although this is left unexplained) somehow spatialises the event, bestowing extension on it.

One important point that Heidegger does make regarding time-space is that the two are inextricably intertwined, noting that “each belongs intrinsically to the other” even though they “are not of the same essence” (p.150). He even goes so far as to say; “Spacing (which is temporalizing)—temporalizing (which is spatializing)…” (p.205) emphasising just how closely they are entwined.

Closely related to this, Heidegger also talks about time-space as the constancy and presence in which all of being appears as what it is. “*Constancy* is the *enduring* of the transporting into the having-been and into the to-come, and “duration” as mere continuance is only a consequence of this endurance. *Presence* is the *present* in the sense of the gatheredness of the enduring in accord with the withdrawal of the latter out of the transportings… Grasped spatially, *constancy* is the filling and fulfilling of space (space that is not explicitly experienced) and thus is a *granting of place*. *Presence* is a *granting of a place* in the sense of giving space for beings which are put back into presence and thus are constant.” (p.151)

In this passage, Heidegger explains these central terms, constancy and presence, in terms of time-space. Temporally speaking, *constancy* is the way the transporting (futural anticipation/past preservation) manifests before us while *presence* is the way this transporting is ‘gathered’ and acquires some ‘density’ in the present. In a spatial sense, *constancy* establishes space as a background not explicitly experienced, while *presence* establishes space in the sense of a *place* for beings.

The way constancy and presence participate in both time and space like this further reinforces their intimate connection between the two. Nevertheless, Heidegger reminds us; “Even in their unity, space and time have nothing in common; instead, what unifies them, what allows them to emerge *in* that inseparable referentiality, is time-space, the abyssal grounding of the ground: the essential occurrence of truth.” (pp.304-5) Temporality and spatiality are completely different but when they unite as time-space, the “site” of the event, they mutually reinforce, and intermingle with, each other in such a way that they become an “inseparable referentiality”.

The Future Ones

This short section is Heidegger at his most Nietzschean. He talks about our task being “to prepare for these future ones” (p.313), whom he thinks will ground *Da-sein*. He continues, “*Our own hour is the era of downgoing*. The down-going, in the essential sense, is the path to the reticent preparation for what is to come… The *ones who go down* in the essential sense are those who run beneath what is coming (the futural) and sacrifice themselves to it as its future invisible ground: the steadfast ones who perpetually expose themselves to questioning… Those who go down are always questioning. (pp.314-5) This passage could have come straight out of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. We are a preparation, a going-down, a sacrifice for those who will come after us. The way we are to go down is by questioning; specifically questioning into the truth of beyng. Interestingly, Heidegger says that some of these “future ones” are around today although they are inconspicuous and receive no publicity.

He also talks about a people being a people *only* if it “receives its history as allotted to it through finding its god, the god that compels this people beyond itself and thus places the people back amid beings…” (p.316). We’ll talk more about the ‘god’in the next section, but in order to find this ‘god’ and therefore find, or take, its place in history (i.e. become a “people”), there must be seekers in this group who seek *on behalf* of, and often *in conflict with*, other members of the group.

In short, there are two groups of people Heidegger wants to bring to our attention here. First, the “future ones” themselves, who will ground Da-sein, and second, the seekers whose task it is to prepare for the future ones. This is pure Nietzsche. The future ones are the *ubermensch* and the seekers are the *prophets*, like Zarathustra.

In my opinion, this whole idea of the “future ones” and us “ones who go down” is a Nietzschean concept that only connects to Heidegger’s philosophy in an awkward fashion. It certainly seems to step on the message of *Being and Time*, which was, at least in part, a treatise directing us to authenticity and resolute Being-a-whole. How are we to reconcile this with the idea that Da-sein is actually not for us, but for those who will come later? Secondly, Heidegger himself doesn’t dwell on it much. Most of his work is about beyng and how we can bring ourselves to stand in the midst of it. To be told that, after wading through all of Heidegger’s writings, the most we can aspire to is to sacrifice ourselves for some future ones is a little incongruous.

The Last God

Needless to say, in using the word ‘god’, Heidegger doesn’t have in mind anything even remotely religious. Nor is it supposed to represent some kind of irreligious, but still mystical or spiritual, personal encounter; “…neither in “personal” nor in “massively shared” “lived experience” does the god still appear.” (p.330) It is therefore tempting to think that he is using it as a synonym or placeholder for beyng, but this is not the case either; “The god is neither a “being” nor a “nonbeing” and is also not to be identified with *beyng*.” (p.207)

Let’s see if we can get some hints from the text about how we are to understand Heidegger’s use of this term. We’ll start with this; “Beyng essentially occurs as the appropriation of the gods and humans to their en-counter.” (p.375) First of all, we can note that since beyng is the appropriation of the gods and humans, this reinforces the fact that god is not a reference to beyng. Secondly, the gods and humans en-counter each other in some way through beyng. Can we flesh out this en-counter a little?

“By fitting into the juncture of beyng we are *at the disposal of the gods*…” (pp.16-7) So, in beyng, we find ourselves powerless before, and taken up by, the gods for some end. This is even clearer in the following quote; “The *appropriating event* consigns god to the human being, even while it assigns the human being to god…” (p.220). Beyng *consigns* (give over for safekeeping) god to us, while we are *assigned* (set apart for some purpose) to god. It now looks as if human beings shelter and provide some kind of supporting ground for god even as we find ourselves at its/their disposal. In addition, we have the following; “History plays out only in the “between” of the en-counter of gods and humans…” (p.377) So, in this consigning/assigning en-counter between gods and humans instigated by beyng, history first occurs.

So far so good, but what exactly is this god? Another two quotes carry us a little further; first, “A people is a people *only* if it receives its history as allotted to it through finding its god, **the god that compels this people beyond itself and thus places the people back amid beings**…” (p.316 – highlights added). And second, “…this essential occurrence of beyng is not itself the last god; instead, the essential occurrence of being grounds the sheltering, and thereby the creative preservation, of **the god, who *pervades* beyng *with divinity* always only in work and sacrifice, deed and thought**.” (p.206 – highlights added)

[At this point, we need a brief detour to clarify what Heidegger means by, “work, sacrifice, deed, and thought”. Two more quotes will help us with this. First, “The openness of this clearing first grants the space for every possible determinate “here” and “yonder” and thus **for the instituting of beings in historical word, deed, and sacrifice**.” (p.235 – highlights added) and second, “…provide the encompassed open realm for **the play of beings which, in the sheltering of their truth, come to be as thing, tool, machination, work, act, sacrifice**.” (p.56 – highlights added) Both of these make it fairly clear that work, sacrifice, deed, etc., are simply different manifestations beings may take; different ways beings can appear as beings, different ways being can be meaningful to us.]

So, god carries people beyond themselves to the point where they are surrounded by beings, and what god does is pervade beyng with work, sacrifice, deed, and thought. This seems to suggest to me that ‘god’ plays some role in the way beings appear. Within beyng, it lifts people beyond their horizons and surrounds them with beings.

There are three more quotes I want to draw your attention to:

“To speak of the “gods” does of course not mean that a decision has been made here affirming the existence of many gods instead of one; rather, **it is meant to indicate the undecidability of the being of gods, whether one or many**. This undecidability carries within it the question of whether something like being can be attributed to gods at all without destroying everything divine. **To speak of “the gods” is to name the undecidability as to whether a god, and which god, could arise once again as an extreme plight for which essence of the human being in which way.**” (p.345 – highlights added)

“Yet why should thinking about the Godhead be a matter of calculation instead of an attempt at meditation on the danger of **something strange and incalculable**.” (p.322 – highlights added)

“In the essential occurrence of the truth of beyng, *in* the event and *as* the event, **the last god is hidden**.” (p.21 – highlights added)

Taken together these quotes describe ‘god’ as something mysterious, incalculable, and hidden, and yet something which arises for the human being conditioning his or her “essence” and the “way” that essence manifests. This converges nicely with the way Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly describe the gods as ‘moods’ which assail and attune (or orient) us to specific situations, in effect, disclosing a world *as* world. Furthermore, in disclosing a world, the gods (moods) *necessarily* recede into the background and remain hidden. The only thing visible is the world and the beings before us; by contrast, that which allows the world (and the beings) to appear, in order to perform that function, must be invisible. If it were visible, it wouldn’t be able to disclose the world because it would be a part of it.

The only thing remaining is to outline why he calls it the *last* god. He doesn’t mean ‘last’ as in the end; rather, he intends us to think ‘last’ as the highest; “If we think calculatively here and take “last” in the sense of sheer stoppage and ending, rather than in the sense of the most extreme and most compendious decision about what is highest…” (p.322) Far from being the end then, it is therefore the beginning; “The last god is not the end; the last god is the other beginning of the immeasurable possibilities of our history…” (p.326)

Beyng as Appropriating Event

Finally, we come to beyng itself – the sole focus of Heidegger’s philosophical life. What is Beyng? As with some of the previous chapters, we can start here by looking at what beyng isn’t before we tackle what it is. First, beyng is not a being. This means that it isn’t something we can objectify, that is, hold before us as an object. Secondly, beyng is not “the most general property of beings” (p.185). It isn’t an abstraction which encompasses all beings as that which is common to every individual being. Heidegger calls this formulation the being of beings, or *beingness*, and notes that it goes astray “because the view of the being of beings already takes place outside of the momentariness of Dasein [where Beyng occurs]” (p.60). Thirdly, beyng is not “some immense being, one which would cause all the other, presumably known “beings” and would encompass them in this way or that.” (p.185) Fourthly, we can never talk of beyng itself immediately or directly. This is because, first, it cannot be an object in this way, and second, “every saying arises from beyng and speaks out of the truth of beyng. All words, and thereby all logic, stand under the power of beyng.” (p.63) In other words, speech can’t explicate beyng directly because it only arises out of beyng in the first place. It is like an eye trying to see itself perceiving. It’s impossible because in order to see it must already be perceiving.

So what is beyng? By way of entry to this topic, we can note that Heidegger repeats the following phrase all throughout *Contributions*; “Beings are. Beyng essentially occurs.” This formulation gives us a start by clarifying that the distinction between beyng and beings is “*beings belong within the essential occurrence of beyng*.” (p.212) In occurring, Heidegger defines beyng as, not just *an*, but *the* event; specifically the appropriating event. Now by ‘event’, Heidegger doesn’t mean what we usually mean when we think of an event, which is a happening that occurred and finished at some time in the past. By calling it an ‘event’, Heidegger is mainly trying to distinguish it from a being, which is something fixed or static, thereby emphasising its dynamic or active nature. It doesn’t exist once and for all (like a being); rather, it ‘happens’ all the time, causing things to exist.

The other element of the event is appropriation, principally the appropriation of Da-sein (or the “there”); beyng “needs those who go down and has already *appropriated* them, assigned them to itself, wherever beings appear. That is the essential occurrence of beyng itself; we call this essential occurrence the *event*.” (p.8) We must be careful, Heidegger stresses, that we don’t set beyng up as an event Da-sein can think about and understand, as if it were something apart from Da-sein which it could stand in relation to; “beyng needs Da-sein and does not at all essentially occur without this appropriation.” (p.200). Although Da-sein does *understand* beyng, it doesn’t do so the way a subject understands an object. Heidegger is working at a level beyond the subject-object division. Rather, it understands beyng as thrown projection, “a coming into the open realm (truth) which already finds itself in the midst of opened beings, rooted in the earth and protruding up into a world. Accordingly, the understanding of being as grounding of the truth of being is the opposite of “subjectivation,” since it is the overcoming of all subjectivity and of the modes of thought determined on that basis.” (p.205).

Regarding appropriation, Heidegger also says this:

“Beyng essentially occurs as the appropriation of the gods and humans to their en-counter. In the clearing of the concealment of the “between,” a “between” which arises out of, and with, the en-countering appropriation, there arises the strife of world and earth. It is only within the temporal-spatial playing field of this strife that the appropriation comes to be preserved and lost and that so-called beings step into the open realm of this clearing.” (p.375)

So, beyng appropriates humans *and* gods in an en-counter (the hyphen emphasising the within-ness of the meeting). It is difficult to know what to make of this but I still favour my earlier interpretation of ‘god’ as mystery and unknowability. In the encounter of the unknowable and Da-sein, they are both appropriated by beyng which opens a clearing, a “between”, in which the strife of world and earth can play out.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Taking a brief detour for a moment… given that beings are what we normally encounter, they are the usual. Beyng, on the other hand, as something quite different, is, by definition, *un*usual. Heidegger then says; “In order to know [beyng], we must therefore distance ourselves from all conventionality; because conventionality is precisely *our* contribution and our constant pursuit, however, we could never achieve this distancing on our own. Beyng itself must extract us from beings; i.e., inasmuch as we are *immersed* in beings, beleaguered by them, beyng itself must un-settle us, free us from this beleaguering.” (p.379) Again, beyng appears to be a self-directing force, however, we must not misunderstand Heidegger here. He is talking metaphorically. Beyng appropriates us in the same way that the sun makes us squint; not by consciously desiring to have an impact on us, but just by being a certain way.

Another important aspect of beyng is the way it always withdraws. In *Contributions*,Heidegger calls this *refusal*. In *What is Metaphysics?*, he called it ‘nihilation’, but they are essentially the same thing.[[6]](#footnote-6) He argues that the refusal, nothingness, non-being, of beyng is not to be interpreted on the basis of beings, which would make it something destructive or empty. On this interpretation, since beings *are*, they are real and true, while beyng, as nothingness, is, by definition, unreal or merely a negation of the real. On the contrary, the nothingness of beyng, as a self-withdrawing or self-concealment (‘nihilating’ in *What is Metaphysics?*), “is the origin of all “creating” (beings coming to be more fully)” (p.194). Beyng *is* not, but far from this being a limitation or disparagement, it is precisely by virtue of this refusal or self-concealing that beyng is able to occur as appropriating event.

Heidegger also distinguishes between the way beyng ‘operates’ in relation to humans and other beings. We have seen how it *appropriates* Da-sein but with regard to other beings, he says it “vibrate[s] right through them” (p.201). This strikes me as important. Beyng is the truth of beings, their essence, and its truth; “i.e., *the* truth itself, essentially occurs only if *sheltered* in art, thinking, poetry, deed.” (p.201) Sheltering beyng in everything we do, questioning things as to their essence, is the only way to glimpse what Heidegger was searching for.

In an interesting passage, Heidegger says; “Beyng (as event) needs beings so that it might essentially occur. Beings do not need beyng in that way. Beings can still “be” in the abandonment by being” (p.26). Given the way Heidegger talks about beyng as that which makes beings appear as the beings they are, it is easy to slip into thinking of it as the ultimate source, and therefore necessarily prior to beings. This is something we have already seen to be false (see the section above about beyng as ‘cause’). It is easy to forget that beings can be (and frequently *are*) abandoned by beyng, yet they still exist, albeit bereft of their essence. They remain before us as things or tools, implements we fail to see to the heart of. Inceptual thought is precisely an attempt to see things in a new light, in the light of beyng.

By way of a fairly tidy summary I would be remiss not to include here, Heidegger describes eight features that make up the event of beyng; each one connecting to the one following. We have covered 1, 2, 3, and 5 already, so I won’t add any more details regarding them.

1. ***Appropriation***
2. Appropriation includes the ***de-cision***
3. Appropriation, as decision, brings the separated ones into the ***en-counter***
4. En-counter leads to strife, and “strife essentially occurs by ***unsettling*** beings from their lostness in mere beingness” (p.370 – emphasis added). We briefly discussed this above when we talked about the unusualness of beyng.
5. Unsettling is simultaneously the ***withdrawal***
6. Beyng is structured and without image, resting in this ***simplicity***. By nature, it lacks any of the complicating features that make up beings.
7. The simplicity of beyng is marked by ***uniqueness*** and this uniqueness does not occur in relation to anything else (i.e. any other being).
8. “The *uniqueness* of beyng grounds its ***solitude***, in accord with which beyng casts round about itself only nothingness…” (p.371 – emphasis added) Being solitary, beyng occurs in relation to beings only through the strife of world and earth.

I will give Heidegger the final word on beyng with this passage which encapsulates much of what I have tried to articulate in this section:

“Beyng is the conflictual appropriation which originarily gathers that which is appropriated in it (the Da-sein of the human being) and that which is refused in it (god) into the abyss of its “between.” In the clearing of the “between,” world and earth contest the belonging of their essence to the field of time-space wherein what is true comes to be preserved.” (p.382)

1. We will look at ‘machination’ in more detail in the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. More on this later. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We will look at what Heidegger means by “the last god” at the end of this summary. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We will look at the *event* in more detail in the final section of this summary. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *The Origin of the Work of Art* for a detailed look at earth and world. Briefly, earth is the sheltering and concealing while world is the self-opening. Their ‘strife’ (although perhaps a better word is ‘intermingling’) helps create the open space for the appropriating event. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Technically, I think they describe the same process although from different perspectives. *What is Metaphysics?* takes the perspective of the human while *Contributions* takes the perspective of beyng itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)