

# **Raising the Question of Being: A Unification and Critique of the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger**

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*Raising the Question of Being:  
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Dissertation.com  
Boca Raton, Florida  
USA • 2009

ISBN-10: 1-59942-298-0  
ISBN-13: 978-1-59942-298-5



## Abstract

The thesis consists of two main divisions. The first presents an original interpretation of Martin Heidegger's philosophy. The second – premised on the first – presents a fundamental and internal critique of his philosophy.

The interpretative division demonstrates the way in which the history of being is structurally grounded in the ontological conformation of *Dasein*. This amounts to evincing the unity of Heidegger's development of his basic philosophical project: the raising of the question of being, and requires an original account of both the philosophy of the history of being and the existential analysis of *Dasein*, as well as of the so-called *Kehre*.

The critical division, which is founded upon the conclusions of the interpretative division, focuses on the structural grounding that Heidegger attempts to provide, within the existential analysis of *Dasein*, for his ontological demand for the overcoming of the epoch of metaphysics. This grounding is the cornerstone with which Heidegger's philosophy as a whole stands or falls. It is shown that, for internal reasons, Heidegger's grounding fails, and that the existential structures of *Dasein* found an essentially different ontological imperative. The most basic consequences of this failure and substitution are subsequently drawn out both for Heidegger's philosophy in particular and more generally.

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## **Preface**

What follows is an essay on the structure of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. *Structure* here (sometimes *Structurality*) refers to a particular configuration of relations abstracted from their particular relata.

The essay's initial aim is to develop an original interpretation of Heidegger's thinking, guided by the task of bringing to light its inner unity. Amongst Heidegger's interpreters it is commonly held that his thought passed through a number of disparate and chronologically determinable phases or periods. Little has it been considered, however, whether and how these might structurally concatenate in the light of what is allegedly the inner problematic of them all: the question of being; how they might all systematically affiliate to that problematic's internal organisation.

We shall begin with the premise that there are only two diachronic phases to Heidegger's thinking. Later it will become clear how these are made structurally necessary – only these two and in so far as they are two – by the question of being itself. It will also be seen that the project to raise the question of being and the nature of the question of being do not themselves transfigure at all.

The two phases of Heidegger's thinking are that of the existential analysis of *Dasein* and that of the philosophy of the history of being. The texts considered here to constitute the former are most notably, of course, *Sein und Zeit*, but also the lecture courses leading up to the publication of the *magnum opus* and those held immediately afterwards, as well as the individual lectures up until *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, first given in 1930. We shall freely move between these texts in appropriating citations. The works considered to constitute the later phase are all those written after 1930, beginning with the latter named lecture and extending up until Heidegger's death in 1976, although the latest text that will be of importance to our purposes is *Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens*, which first appeared in 1964.

In accounting for the structural necessity of these two phases of Heidegger's thinking to the original project of raising the question of being, we shall be presenting an interpretation of the *unity* of his thought. At the same time – and precisely thereby – we shall be providing a thoroughgoing account of that thorn in the side of Heidegger-scholarship, the so called *Kehre*. The *Kehre*, at least as it has traditionally been conceived in the secondary literature,

will be recast in very concrete terms as the transition between the existential analysis of *Dasein* and the philosophy of the history of being. Laid out in this way, we shall be able to provide an account, not only of exactly what it amounts to, but also of its inner grounds, its inner necessity and motivation, within the architectonic of Heidegger's initial question. It will turn out that the *Kehre* is the necessary result of the unfolding of the inner structurality of the question of being.

As to the question of being itself, our interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy will also expressly amount to a wholesale reconsideration of its meaning. Giving a final account of what the question of being is, what it means to raise the question of being, what its motivations are, will constitute the final conclusion of our interpretation.

At that point we will be prepared to turn to criticism. In order to level a charge against Heidegger one must first locate him. This holds for every thinker, but the difficulties are compounded in the case of Heidegger because, on the one hand, the *status* of his claims is very much open to question, and, on the other, the terrain on which he is moving is, for essential reasons, unfamiliar to the objector. In so far as Heidegger's philosophy amounts to an "overcoming" of traditional, "metaphysical", modes of thought, any criticism itself grounded in these metaphysical modes of thinking begs the question against him, and is thereby rendered innocuous. Correspondingly, only criticisms which function *internally* to the structural configuration of Heidegger's philosophy, can be potent. Our critique will be internal in this sense – immanent to that configuration which we shall map out in the interpretative parts of the essay. The interpretative and critical parts will thus be seen to belong intimately together.

In essence, we shall level just one charge against Heidegger, one directed towards the very project of raising the question of being, and therefore towards the entirety of his philosophy. In the face of that single charge the whole considerable edifice of his thinking will stand or fall. However, in the course of our exposition we shall, where relevant, make reference and respond to other criticisms which have been directed towards Heidegger's thinking by his commentators.

In his recent book on Heidegger, Herman Philipse writes: 'I...argue that, for specific reasons pertaining to the nature of Heidegger's thought and to his highly innovative use of the resources of the German language, it is impossible to translate his texts without destroying their structure, their power, their magic.'<sup>1</sup> With this we agree. And we shall therefore retain the original German for quotation. This avoids the further problem of having to standardise the translations of Heidegger's locutions into the English language. Outside of the context of citations we shall translate only those concepts of Heidegger's which, on the one hand, can be

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, p. xvii

unproblematically translated into English, that is, which find more or less equivalents in the English language such that, in the process of translation, the meaning of the original German is not significantly lost, and, on the other, where this makes for a better English text. Typically the latter point will apply to those concepts which function both substantively and adjectivally. Inserting German adjectives into an English text leads to grammatical impasses. Those concepts which find no equivalent whatsoever in English, so that contriving a translation would put the non-German reader into no better a position than would the original, will be rendered in German. By these means we do not at all presume to clear up all the difficulties inherent in writing about Heidegger in English.

In the first part, we shall delineate the historical structures which configure the history of being. In the second part, we shall outline the existential structures of *Dasein*. In the third part, we shall demonstrate the way in which these structuralities connect to one another, and thus the way in which the two phases of Heidegger's thinking are related, and we shall subsequently trace this bipartite conformation back into the basic structurality of the project of raising the question of being. We shall then, in the fourth and final part, develop our fundamental and internal critique of this project, which amounts to an ultimately decisive attack on the total construction of Heidegger's philosophy. In conclusion, we shall pursue the consequences which follow from our objection, both for Heidegger's legacy itself, as well as more generally.



**Part I:**  
**The History of Being**

## **Chapter 1:**

### **First Beginnings**

In his lecture entitled “*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*” Heidegger writes: ‘Die Ek-sistenz des geschichtlichen Menschen [fängt] in jenem Augenblick an, da der erste Denker fragend sich der Unverborgenheit des Seienden stellt mit der Frage, was das Seiende sei. In dieser Frage wird erstmals die Unverborgenheit erfahren...Erst wo das Seiende selbst eigens in seine Unverborgenheit gehoben und verwahrt wird, erst wo diese Verwahrung aus dem Fragen nach dem Seienden als solchem begriffen ist, beginnt Geschichte.’<sup>1</sup> This beginning, which Heidegger came to refer to as “the first beginning” [*der erste Anfang*], is the beginning of the history of being.

The history of being [*Geschichte des Seins*] is no history in the usual historiographical sense (for which Heidegger reserves the name *Historie*); it does not have simply to do with a temporally related system of events. Nor is it merely one history among others. Despite – for essential reasons, of course – being a peculiarly Occidental phenomenon, the history of being is the ground of the possibility of all fundamental historical reality as such. It is, Heidegger tells us, the *Ereignis* of being as such, the unfolding of being itself, the *time*, or essential temporal determination, that belongs essentially to being. ‘Die Seinsgeschichte ist weder die Geschichte des Menschen und eines Menschentums noch die Geschichte des menschlichen Bezugs zum Seienden und zum Sein. Die Seinsgeschichte ist das Sein selbst und nur dieses.’<sup>2</sup> But grounded in the history of being is the history of the relationship of being to the human essence, and, what amounts to the same thing, the history of *truth*.

In this first part we shall attempt to sketch out the basic epochal structures of this history. In his preface to *The Question of Language in Heidegger’s History of Being* Robert Bernasconi writes: ‘[The history of being] is not a story and cannot be retold as one’. – But

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<sup>1</sup> *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, Wegmarken*, pp. 189-190

<sup>2</sup> *Nietzsche II*, p. 447

*Geschichte* means just as much “story” as it does “history”. And so in what follows we are going to retell the story of Heidegger’s history of being, and that will sufficiently prove that it can be retold as one. It is of course an unusual story, perhaps the story of all stories; but it has a beginning, perhaps even a happy ending (or at least another beginning), and that is surely the mark of a story. Indeed it is even to be thought *eschatologically*: ‘Das Sein selbst ist als geschickliches in sich eschatologisch.’<sup>3</sup> But we are not going to tell this story chronologically, that is, historically; we are going to tell it *structurally*.

The torch of being’s history was lit in ancient Greece by the inceptual questioning of the pre-Socratic philosophers. Close attention to the nature of this beginning was always crucial to Heidegger’s *seinsgeschichtliches Denken*; for, he thought, only by understanding its beginning is it possible to understand what the history of being is; but understanding what the history of being is, is a necessary presupposition for understanding what is really happening in the world over two millennia of history later, and therefore, most importantly of all, for appropriately responding to it.

Heraclitus and Parmenides are the most important of the pre-Socratic philosophers for Heidegger. He charges them with bringing a particular experience of being as such to language, with drawing being up into unconcealment for the first time in a way which was fundamentally determinative for the entire history of the West. To understand this, the very beginning of Western history, we shall consider in turn three fundamental concepts of the ancient world that form the kernel of Heidegger’s interpretation of pre-Socratic thought.

## Φύσις

The word used by the Greeks to refer to beings as such and as a whole was φύσις. This named not merely the agglomeration of everything that is, but the law or order of beings as a whole. Φύσις is usually rendered into modern languages according to its Latin translation: *natura*; English: nature. *Natura* originally means birth, to be born, but with this translation the primary sense of the Greek word has already been lost, and once, after two thousand years, φύσις is understood in terms of a modern concept of nature, it has entirely lost its inceptual meaning. Indeed, it was the translation of the thought of the ancient Greeks into Latin that, claims Heidegger, ‘ist nichts Beliebigen und Harmlosen, sondern der erste Abschnitt des Verlaufs der Abriegelung und Entfremdung des ursprünglichen Wesens der griechischen Philosophie.’<sup>4</sup> Still, a scarcely audible echo of the original Greek determination of φύσις comes down to us when we speak of the “nature” of man, the “nature” of things.

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<sup>3</sup> Der Spruch des Anaximander, *Holzwege*, p. 302

<sup>4</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, pp. 10-11

According to Heidegger, φύσις originally said ‘das von sich aus Aufgehende...das sich eröffnende Entfalten, das in solcher Entfaltung in die Erscheinung-Treten und in ihr sich Halten und Verbleiben, kurz, das aufgehend-verweilende Walten’<sup>5</sup>. Φύσις means “emerging sway” (*aufgehende Walten*). It stems from φύω, meaning to bring forth, to produce, to put forth, also to beget, to procreate, and also to grow, to arise, to spring up. But Heidegger insists that it does not refer to a particular “natural” process; rather, it is that by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable at all, that is, unconcealed. Φύσις named being as such; but this insofar as it named ‘das Seiende als solches im Ganzen’.

However, this inceptual sense of φύσις began immediately to be narrowed down, in particular by its being contrasted with the concept of τέχνη – a generating or producing that involves knowing and skill.<sup>6</sup> Only an echo of it remains in Aristotle’s treatise on the concept in his *Physics* B, 1, in which it is brought into essential connection with the concepts of κίνησις, the state of “movedness”, motion (the state of rest being here also implicated) – although removed from the modern mathematical conception of movement as merely change of position through time<sup>7</sup> – and ἀρχή, origin, beginning; and limited to only one specific region of beings: those that “grow”, as opposed to those that are made (those beings that are in movement, the origin of that movement residing within themselves). Heidegger sums up the Aristotelian understanding of the essence of φύσις as follows: ‘die *ausgängliche Verfügung über die Bewegtheit des von ihm selbst her und auf sich zu Bewegten*’.<sup>8</sup> A sense of φύσις as emergence into presence remains in this characterisation, but in so far as it is used to characterise the mode of presencing of a particular region of beings, it is no longer taken to be the fundamental determination of beings as such and as a whole.

As a mode of presencing of a particular region of beings, φύσις in Aristotle’s sense is a particular determination of οὐσία. Οὐσία is formed from the feminine participle of the Greek verb to be, εἶμι, and could be used to refer to the “beingness” [*Seiendheit*] of beings, the determination as which beings are in so far as they are.<sup>9</sup> Determined according to φύσις,

<sup>5</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Cf. chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> And fundamentally determined by the crucial Aristotelian concepts of ἐντελέχεια and μεταβολή.

<sup>8</sup> Vom Wesen und Begriff der Φύσις Aristoteles, *Physik* B, 1, *Wegmarken*, p. 261 Aristotle writes, for example: ‘Of things that exist, some exist by nature [φύσις], some from other causes. By nature the animals and their parts exist, and the plants and the simple bodies (earth, fire, air, water) – for we say that these and the like exist by nature. All the things mentioned plainly differ from things which are *not* constituted by nature. For each of them has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration).’ [*Physics*, B, 1, 192b 9 – 16] And: ‘Nature is a principle of motion and change.’ [*Physics*, Γ, 1, 200b 12]

<sup>9</sup> It also has the meaning of property, what is one’s own-most.

it refers to the beingness of the region of beings which have the character of ἀρχὴ κινήσεως, a source (within themselves) of movement. Οὐσία was first coined as a technical term by Aristotle. Its originary meaning, claims Heidegger, is thrust aside when it is translated with Roman ears into “substance”. An appropriate modern translation for its inceptual Greek sense is however available, he claims, in the German word *An-wesen*, which can be rendered into English as “coming-to-presence”. In the Aristotelian concept of οὐσία, Heidegger also finds a sense of *abiding in presence* (not to be understood in terms of mere duration), and accordingly determines the late Greek understanding of beingness to be fundamentally: *constant presence* [*beständige Anwesenung*]. He claims: ‘Diese Auslegung des Seins wird weder begründet, noch wird gar der Grund ihrer Wahrheit erfragt. Denn wesentlicher als dieses bleibt im ersten Anfang des Denkens, daß überhaupt das Sein des Seienden begriffen wird.’<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Aristotle comes to understand φύσις as merely a particular determination of οὐσία betrays a subtle shift in Hellenic thinking, a repositioning beyond the thinking that constituted the inception of philosophy. The original sense of φύσις, emerging sway, becomes subordinated to οὐσία, constant presence, which thereby replaces it as the fundamental Greek determination of being as such. The shift from φύσις to οὐσία is made possible by a meaning shared between the two concepts: φύσις as coming-to-presence, οὐσία as constant presence. This inner core of the understanding of being in terms of presence, Heidegger will claim, remains decisive throughout the development of Western philosophy.

After Aristotle the meaning of φύσις was further narrowed down eventually to the concept of the physical and the contemporary notion of nature (whereby it is understood merely in terms of what naturally is). These developments, signifying fundamental changes within the Western understanding of being, are determined by the deep structures of the history of being. Their grounds will become clearer in what follows.

## Λόγος

This word occurs very often in Heidegger’s writings. He devotes to it an essay-length treatment in the volume *Vorträge und Aufsätze* in relation to a saying of Heraclitus. Λόγος comes from λέγειν, Latin *legere*, from which the German word *legen*, “to put”, “to lay down”, derives. *Legen*, however, is the same as the German *lesen*, English: “to collect”, “to gather” (fruit or firewood, for example), perhaps “to glean”, but also “to read”. *Lesen*, as

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<sup>10</sup> Vom Wesen und Begriff der Φύσις Aristoteles, Physik B, 1, *Wegmarken*, p. 266

regards its etymology, is to be understood in terms of “gathering” [*versammeln*], “bringing together” and “putting-forth into unconcealedness”. “Reading” is merely a variant application of this authentic sense of gathering. In this notion of gathering and putting-forth into unconcealedness lies the essence of the Greek understanding of λόγος: ‘ὁ Λόγος, das Legen: das reine beisammen-vor-liegen-Lassen des von sich her Vorliegenden in dessen Liegen. So west der Λόγος als das reine versammelnde lesende Legen. Der Λόγος is die ursprüngliche Versammlung der anfänglichen Lese aus der anfänglichen Lege. Ὁ Λόγος ist: die lesende lege und nur dieses.’<sup>11</sup> Λόγος is the gathering together that puts forth into unconcealedness [*vor-liegen-Lassen*], into presence; that which gathers into oneness [Ἐν Παντα] all that presences. This account of the Greek conception of λόγος dates from 1951, but its basic idea is also to be found in *Sein und Zeit*’s brief characterisation of the concept in relation to the determination of the concept of phenomenology. Here Heidegger writes for example: ‘λόγος als Rede besagt vielmehr soviel wie δηλοῦν, offenbar machen das, wovon in der Rede “die Rede” ist... Der λόγος läßt etwas sehen (φαίνεσθαι)...’<sup>12</sup>

It should be expected that according to Heidegger there is to be found an inner connection between the concepts of φύσις and λόγος. Such a connection is discussed in the 1935 lecture course *Einführung in die Metaphysik* under the heading *Die Beschränkung des Seins: Sein und Denken*. Here, again in the context of a discussion of the philosophy of Heraclitus, λόγος and φύσις are claimed to be the same. Λόγος as constant gathering, as the gatheredness of beings that stand-forth in presence, is the same as being itself, that is, the same as φύσις, the *emerging sway*. Emerging sway and gathering mean the same: the being of beings – gathered-coming-to-presence. ‘Das Sein, die φύσις, ist als Walten ursprüngliche Gesammeltheit: λόγος’<sup>13</sup>. The ground of the sameness of φύσις and λόγος rests in the revealing character of λόγος. Λόγος, as gatheredness, puts forth into unconcealment, that is, lets beings presence, present themselves.

It is precisely this sense of λόγος that grounds its determination as the essence of *language*.<sup>14</sup> The Greeks, Heidegger would like to say, conceived of language in terms of this originary opening up of beings. Λόγος came to be understood in terms of language, only by virtue of its originary meaning in terms of the revealing of beings.<sup>15</sup> Language itself gathers

<sup>11</sup> Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50), *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, pp. 207-8

<sup>12</sup> *Sein und Zeit*, p. 32

<sup>13</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 123

<sup>14</sup> Λέγειν means not merely “to lay down” and “to gather” but also “to say”, “to speak”.

<sup>15</sup> Cf., for example, the accepted translation of the beginning of the Gospel according to John: ‘[1]In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. [2]He was in the beginning with God. [3]All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came

and puts-forth beings into unconcealedness, reveals beings. Heidegger writes: ‘Die Eröffnung des Seienden geschieht im Logos als Sammlung. Diese vollzieht sich ursprünglich in der Sprache.’<sup>16</sup> Heidegger kept to this supposedly Greek conception of language throughout his philosophical career.

Insofar as λόγος determines the essence of the Greek understanding of language, it also determines the Greek conception of the essence of the human. In terms of his capacity for language, as the speaker, man, to whom beings are revealed, become present in their being, is understood as the “preserver” and “governor” of the open region as such, that is of being as such. ‘Menschsein heißt: die Sammlung, das sammelnde Vernehmen des Seins des Seienden, das wissende Ins-Werk-setzen des Erscheinens *übernehmen* und so die Unverborgenheit *verwalten*, sie gegen Verborgenheit und Verdeckung *bewahren*.’<sup>17</sup>

This understanding of the essence of man, however, was quickly covered over in subsequent thought and with it the inceptual meaning of λόγος. Man became eventually the *animal rationale*, and λόγος merely one of his “faculties”, albeit still the one that fundamentally determined his essence, and this definition subsequently became a basic supposition of Western thinking, the prevalence of which still remains unshaken. In this development, λόγος was taken out of its essential belonging together with φύσις and became instead *juxtaposed* to it: reason came to preside over being, thinking and being were rendered asunder. Being was set across and apart from thinking as something that is to be *represented* by thinking, as object to a subject. The inner grounds of this transformation will become clearer in what follows; it can, however, here be stated that in this historical division between φύσις and λόγος, Heidegger sees the fundamental determination of the history of the Western world.

## Ἀλήθεια

Ἀλήθεια is traditionally translated into English as “truth”, or “reality”. It is not with these translations as such that Heidegger takes issue, but with the fact that they are understood without Greek ears. For ἀλήθεια, originally at least – perhaps even pre-originally –, meant something fundamentally different from that which is understood by us moderns under the

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into being that has come into being. [4]In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. [5]The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.’ [New Revised Standard Version] The word, λόγος, is here placed into essential connection with *beginning*, with *coming into being*, with *life*, and with *light*.

<sup>16</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 141

<sup>17</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 133 Heidegger presents an in depth discussion of the Greek understanding of the being of man in relation to the Greek concept of tragedy from p. 106 *ff.*

title “truth”. Heidegger translates ἀλήθεια with “unconcealment” [*Unverborgenheit*]. This translation captures the etymology of the word and therefore, for Heidegger, its originary meaning. Λήθη means forgetting, forgottenness, originary concealedness, place of oblivion. The addition of the Greek *α-privativum* implies its opposite: un-concealedness, dis-closure.<sup>18</sup>

But defining truth in terms of its opposite in this way means that untruth is determinative of truth. Unconcealment is possible only on the basis of a prior concealment; indeed, only possible on the basis of an emergence into unconcealment. This determination of truth in terms of its opposite introduces a binary opposition on which, as we shall see, the whole structurality of Heidegger’s thinking hangs.

Now truth and being belong essentially together for Heidegger. Being is “what” is true. The Greek concept of truth is thus, according to him, intrinsically connected to the Greek understanding of being. Indeed, Heidegger claims: ‘das griechische Wesen der Wahrheit ist nur in eins mit dem griechischen Wesen des Seins als φύσις möglich.’<sup>19</sup> We have characterised φύσις in terms of emerging sway, as the coming into *appearance* as such, emerging into *presence*. It is not difficult to see the connection between this understanding of the being of beings and the understanding of truth in terms of unconcealment: coming to presence, presencing, is precisely to be understood in terms of emerging out of concealment into unconcealment, in terms of the relationship between concealment and unconcealment. ‘Unverborgenheit ist der Grundzug dessen, was schon zum Vorschein gekommen ist und die Verborgenheit hinter sich gelassen hat... [D]as Unverborgene [wird] unmittelbar nur als das zum-Vorschein-Gekommene, Anwesende erfahren’<sup>20</sup>. Thus unconcealment is a basic determination of the Hellenic understanding of being as such. ‘Indem Seiendes als ein solches *ist*, stellt es sich in die und steht es in der *Unverborgenheit*, ἀλήθεια.’<sup>21</sup> The essence of φύσις and the essence of ἀλήθεια mutually imply one another.

But as the emergence into unconcealment, being is also essentially to be understood in terms of concealment: ‘Der Grundzug des Anwesens selbst ist durch das Verborgene- und Unverborgenbleiben bestimmt.’<sup>22</sup> Heidegger frequently discusses the notions of concealment and unconcealment in relation to a saying of Heraclitus known as Fragment 123: φύσις

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<sup>18</sup> There is, of course, some debate surrounding this etymological derivation of ἀλήθεια. We shall assume, with the majority of scholars, that it is correct. In any case, Heidegger’s thinking here does not stand or fall with the etymology.

<sup>19</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 78 Also: ‘Weil, griechisch erfahren, das Seiende als solches φύσις, *Aufgang*, ist, gehört zum Seienden als solchem die ἀλήθεια, die Unverborgenheit.’ [*Grundfragen der Philosophie*, p. 97]

<sup>20</sup> Aletheia (Heraklit, Fragment 16), *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 251 And further: ‘Mit dem Unverborgenen und seiner Unverborgenheit ist jeweils das genannt, was in dem Aufenthaltsbezirk des Menschen jedesmal das offen Anwesende ist.’ [Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit, *Wegmarken*, p. 219]

<sup>21</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 77

<sup>22</sup> Aletheia (Heraklit, Fragment 16), *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 254



κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ, conventionally translated: “nature loves to hide”. Heidegger translates it: ‘Sein [aufgehendes Erscheinen] neigt in sich zum Sichverbergen.’<sup>23</sup> He takes this fragment to express the thought that concealment – or self-concealment – is a fundamental determination of being as such. Indeed, only once it is understood that, for the Greeks, concealment belongs essentially to being, does it become understandable why they expressed their concept of truth *negatively*, ἀ-λήθεια.

Insofar as truth as ἀλήθεια has an intrinsic connection to being as φύσις, and being as φύσις has an intrinsic connection to λόγος, there must also be an intrinsic connection between ἀλήθεια and λόγος. Λόγος is the “happening of unconcealment”, the gathering putting-forth into unconcealment, that is, into truth, ἀλήθεια. Truth as unconcealment is the basic determination of the essence of λόγος. ‘Die lesende Lege hat als der Λόγος Alles, das Anwesende, in die Unverborgenheit niedergelegt... Der Λόγος legt ins Anwesen vor und legt das Anwesende ins Anwesen nieder, d. h. zurück. An-wesen besagt jedoch: *hervorgekommen im Unverborgenen wahren*. Insofern der Λόγος das Vorliegende als ein solches vorliegen läßt, entbirgt er das Anwesende in sein Anwesen. Das Entbergen aber ist die Αλήθεια. Diese und der Λόγος sind das Selbe. Das λέγειν läßt ἀλήθεια, Unverborgenes als solches vorliegen.’<sup>24</sup> This determines the relation of language to truth: language, as the opening up of beings as such, is grounded in truth as ἀλήθεια; and it also determines the essence of the human implicated therein: the essence of the human must be understood as intrinsically related to truth as such; the human must be conceived as standing in the truth, which says the same as: standing in the open presence of being – but this in the sense of revealing, un-concealing being.

Insofar as both λόγος and φύσις are mutually determined essentially by revealing, by emerging into presence, truth as ἀλήθεια is the ground of their essential belonging together, their inner equivalence. ‘Die Unverborgenheit nämlich ist jenes Innere, d. h. der waltende Bezug zwischen φύσις und λόγος im ursprünglichen Sinne.’<sup>25</sup> This is expressed beyond the horizon of the interpretation of the Greeks as follows: ‘Die Unverborgenheit ist gleichsam das Element, in dem es Sein sowohl wie Denken und ihre Zusammengehörigkeit erst gibt.’<sup>26</sup> It is precisely a change in the essence of truth that determines the subsequent *juxtaposition* of φύσις and λόγος at the end of the great Greek inception of philosophy, the juxtaposition of being and thinking that is decisive for the history of the West.

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<sup>23</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 87

<sup>24</sup> Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50), *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 212

<sup>25</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 145

<sup>26</sup> *Zur Sache des Denkens*, p. 76

## Chapter 2:

### ***An Ambiguity in Plato: the Changing of the Essence<sup>1</sup> of Truth***

The great inception of Western philosophy culminated with the thought of Plato and Aristotle. Between them, they defined the horizon, according to Heidegger, for all subsequent philosophical and, more broadly, “cultural” developments in the West. But nevertheless Plato and Aristotle, for him, already mark a falling away from their origins. What determined the history of the West was not the inception of thinking in its originariness, but in its decline. Restricting our view for the time being, we shall examine how this falling away from the inception took place, and the sense in which it was determinative for the history of the West, by focusing on Heidegger’s discussion of Plato’s philosophy in his famous essay *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*<sup>2</sup>.

In this essay Heidegger presents an interpretation of Plato’s so called simile of the cave.<sup>3</sup> In the first place it should be pointed out that with this simile, Plato is, explicitly at least, giving an account of παιδεία, meaning something like “education” (Heidegger claims that it is untranslatable), as he states right at the beginning of Book VII.<sup>4</sup> The cave dweller who is led out of the cave corresponds to one who goes through a process of παιδεία. The result is the seeing, or knowledge, of things as they really are, not just as they seem. In

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<sup>1</sup> One might initially wonder what Heidegger can possibly mean by a change in the *essence* of truth, since truth *itself*, one thinks, is always unchanging, even if one wishes to claim that *what* is true changes in the course of history. At the very most what can change is the way in which truth is understood, or the way in which truth is implicitly or explicitly conceptualised. But this would be to take Heidegger’s usage of essence [*Wesen*] to mean the same as *essentia*. And this would be erroneous. For *Wesen*, for Heidegger, is to be understood verbally, as the way in which truth, in this case, *holds sway*; that is: the way in which it *is* as truth. When he speaks of a change in the essence of truth, Heidegger is speaking of a historical change in the holding sway of truth, which is the same as to say, in the destiny of being itself. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity we shall for the most part speak of a change in the understanding of truth. For, in any case, the way in which truth is understood and the way in which truth holds sway ultimately amount to the same thing.

<sup>2</sup> In *Wegmarken*, pp. 203-238.

<sup>3</sup> *Republic* VII, 514a, 2 – 517a, 7

Heidegger's view, this account of the concept of παιδεία rests upon a certain way of conceiving truth, ἀλήθεια, unconcealment. It is clear that Ἀλήθεια and παιδεία are, in Plato's simile, intimately and essentially connected: παιδεία is described as a process involving fundamental changes in the way in which beings are unconcealed: the things taken to be real are at first merely shadows projected on the wall by the light of a fire, next they are things lit up by the light of the fire itself, and finally things revealed by the light of the sun; and thus in the sorts of things that can appear: first the shadows, then the things of which they are shadows, then the fire, then real things, and finally the sun itself. Indeed, Plato's simile is only decipherable on the presupposition that truth is to be understood in terms of unconcealment, and only then does something like the image of a cave become structurally possible: 'Überhaupt kann dieses "Gleichnis" nur deshalb ein auf den Anblick der Höhle gebautes "Gleichnis" sein, weil es im voraus von der für die Griechen selbstverständlichen Grunderfahrung der ἀλήθεια, der Unverborgenheit des Seienden, mitbestimmt wird.'<sup>5</sup>

However, Heidegger claims that Plato's simile introduces a subtle modification into the understanding of truth as unconcealment, a change, which, although barely perceptible, had the deepest ramifications for the subsequent thinking of the West. This change fundamentally hinges on Plato's concepts of εἶδος and ἰδέα. Εἶδος (from εἶδω, to see, Latin, *vi-deo*) means *that which is seen*, a form, a shape, a figure. Ἰδέα, from which εἶδος takes its root, ἰδ, means *the look* of a thing, the outward or surface appearance. 'ἰδέα ist...der *Anblick*, den etwas bietet, das Aussehen, das es hat und gleichsam vor sich her zur Schau trägt, εἶδος.'<sup>6</sup> Thus εἶδος and ἰδέα have to do with the see-able-ness of that which is see-able, the *visibility* of that which is *visible*:

Im "Höhlengleichnis" entspringt die Kraft der Veranschaulichung nicht aus dem Bilde der Verschlossenheit des unterirdischen Gewölbes und der Verhaftung in das Verschlossene, auch nicht aus dem Anblick des Offenen im Außerhalb der Höhle. Die bildgebende Deutungskraft des "Gleichnisses" sammelt sich für Platon vielmehr in der Rolle des Feuers, des Feuerscheins und der Schatten, der Tageshelle, des Sonnenlichtes und der Sonne. Alles liegt am Scheinen des Erscheinenden und an der Ermöglichung seiner Sichtbarkeit. Die Unverborgenheit wird zwar in ihren verschiedenen Stufen genannt, aber sie wird nur daraufhin bedacht, wie sie das Erscheinende in seinem Aussehen (εἶδος) zugänglich und dieses Sichzeigende (ἰδέα) sichtbar macht. Die eigentliche Besinnung geht auf das in der Helle des Scheins gewährte Erscheinen des Aussehens. Dieses gibt die Aussicht auf das, als

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<sup>4</sup> This discussion is, of course, embedded within a wider one that is ultimately political in bearing. Perhaps importantly, Heidegger completely ignores the political contextualisation of Plato's simile of the cave.

<sup>5</sup> *Wegmarken*, p. 224

<sup>6</sup> *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, p. 62

was jegliches Seiende anweist. Die eigentliche Besinnung gilt der ἰδέα. Die “Idee” ist das die Aussicht in das Anwesende verleihende Aussehen.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence for this can be found, for example, in the following passage in which Socrates is speaking of the man freed from his fetters, who, dragged out of the cave, is at first blinded by the light: ‘Then there would be need of habituation, I take it, to enable him to see the things higher up. And at first he would most easily discern the shadows and, after that, the likenesses or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves, and from these he would go on to contemplate the appearances in the heavens and heaven itself, more easily by night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon, than by day the sun and the sun’s light.’<sup>8</sup>

The focus of this passage is on not the degree of unconcealment as such that is brought about by the exit from the cave, but rather on the *visibility* of the things themselves revealed in this unconcealment, their *visible* appearance, what the former prisoner can *see*, even though it is precisely the degree of unconcealment that determines in advance the visibility of the things.

Fundamentally, this is the meaning of the sun as the image for the form that gives reality to all forms: τὸ ἀγαθόν. The sun, as the source of light, is, of course, that which determines the highest unconcealedness, that in reference to which unconcealedness as such is to be understood.<sup>9</sup> But in so far as the sun is the source of light, that which gives visibility to everything that it shines upon, unconcealment here is to be understood in terms of the *becoming visible* of things, that is, in terms of ἰδέα. Fundamentally, unconcealment, ἀλήθεια, is, after Plato, to be understood *in terms of* visibility, seeing: “Unverborgenheit” meint jetzt das Unverborgene stets als das durch die Scheinsamkeit der Idee Zugängliche. Sofern aber der Zugang notwendig durch ein “Sehen” vollzogen wird, ist die Unverborgenheit in die “Relation” zum Sehen eingespannt, “relativ” auf dieses.<sup>10</sup> To drop the metaphor, in Plato’s metaphysics, it is the idea of the “good” that is the source of all that is seen: ‘in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things

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<sup>7</sup> *Wegmarken*, p. 225

<sup>8</sup> *Republic* VII, 516a, 5 – 516b, 2

<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the idea of the good is to be understood as being the source of all knowledge: ‘This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth in so far as known.’ *Republic* VI, 508e, 1 – 508e, 3

<sup>10</sup> *Wegmarken*, p. 226

of all that is right [ὀρθῶν] and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world'.<sup>11</sup>

Insofar as it is the *ιδέα* that determines unconcealment, Plato attributes to it a *priority* over ἀλήθεια. This determines a shift in the understanding of truth, whereby unconcealment ceases to be grasped as its fundamental determination. Instead, since the possibility of our apprehension of beings is now to be understood, not in terms of their unconcealment as such, but in terms of their visibility, in terms of the seeing of their visible form, the view that they offer, what comes to be understood as the fundamental determination of truth is the *adequate* or *correct* seeing of them – ὀρθότης. In Plato's simile, what is essentially important for παιδεία is the securing of the possibility of this correct seeing. The journey out of the cave is not to be understood primarily in terms of the progressive unfolding of unconcealment, but rather in terms of the becoming more correct of the seeing of the former prisoner, whereby the respective things that he takes to be real become *realer*, that is, more in being. Further, the centrality of the concept of ὀρθότης explains Plato's emphasis on the necessity that the eyes of the released prisoner adapt themselves to the particular level of unconcealment in order to see or identify properly the things that surround him. This adaptation is the conforming to the thing of the seeing, which thereby becomes correct. 'Zufolge dieser Angleichung des Vernehmens als eines *ιδεῖν* an die *ιδέα* besteht eine *ὁμοίωσις*, eine Übereinstimmung des Erkennens mit der Sache selbst. So entspringt aus dem Vorrang der *ιδέα* und des *ιδεῖν* vor der ἀλήθεια eine Wandlung des Wesens der Wahrheit. Wahrheit wird zur ὀρθότης, zur Richtigkeit des Vernehmens und Aussagens.'<sup>12</sup>

The possibility of this change in the essence of truth rests upon an *ambiguity* in Plato's thinking. While he speaks of ἀλήθεια, he understands unconcealment in terms of visibility, that is, in *relation* to the eyes, and thus it is the correctness of the seeing rather than unconcealment as such that it implicitly understood to be what is *most* essential to the determination of truth. The ambiguity consists in the fact that ἀλήθεια is understood both in terms of unconcealment (visibility) *and* in terms of correctness, in so far as the particular determination of correctness, appropriately adjusted seeing, is grounded in unconcealment as visibility. The exposition of the levels of unconcealment is throughout determined according to the visible form of things, and consequently according to the correctness of the gaze. We can see the ambiguity manifest clearly in the quote above [*Republic* VII, 517b, 8 – c, 3] where the idea, or form, of the good is said to be both the cause of all that is ὀρθῶν (translated by Paul Shorey as "right", but in the sense of right-ness ("*Richt-ig-keit*"), the correctness of

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<sup>11</sup> *Republic* VII, 517b, 8 – c, 3

knowing), and of *light*, of the unconcealment of things as such. Truth, grounded in the form of all forms, is here, at one and the same time, *both* unconcealment and correctness, although correctness already has the priority in the determination of the way in which it holds sway.

It is precisely the presence of this ambiguity that allows the change in the essence of truth to take place. Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of this change is the shift in the *locus* of truth: conceived in terms of unconcealment, truth is a basic trait of things themselves<sup>13</sup>; as the correctness of the gaze it is located on the side of the human comportment. This conception finds its first clear expression in Aristotle who writes in Book VI of the *Metaphysics*: ‘For falsehood and truth are not in actual things... but in thought’<sup>14</sup>. Thus judgement or assertion becomes the locus of truth, which is subsequently determined according to whether the judgement or assertion conforms, accords or corresponds with the object or state of affairs that it purports to be about; if so, it is correct, if not, it is false. Unconcealment, the *emergence* into *presence*, has completely dropped out of the picture for this determination of truth, it has retreated into oblivion, forgottenness, concealment, and truth is understood entirely without recourse to it. The essence of truth has decisively changed.<sup>15</sup>

Essentially connected to the changing of the understanding of truth is a corresponding change in the Hellenic understanding of being. We have seen how intimately being as φύσις is entwined with truth as ἀλήθεια. Plato understands being in terms of ἰδέα, more precisely, in terms of ἡ ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, the form of the good, and the ambiguity in his understanding of truth cannot be divorced from this particular understanding of being. The

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<sup>12</sup> *Wegmarken*, pp. 230-31

<sup>13</sup> ‘Die ἀλήθεια ist für die Griechen eine, ja *die* Grundbestimmung des Seienden selbst’.  
[*Grundfragen der Philosophie*, p. 130]

<sup>14</sup> *Metaphysics* E, 4, 1027b, 25

<sup>15</sup> It might be wondered how much the supposed change in the implicit understanding of truth testified by Plato’s parable hangs on what is allegedly its key theme: παιδεία, education. Does not the possibility of a process of education essentially require that truth be conceived in terms of correctness? Is not the process of education precisely that of routing falsehood and cultivating correctness? At least for Plato, this is not the case. For his simile does not have to do with correctness *and falsity*, but merely with the progressive unfolding of degrees of reality, both as a consequence of taking up, literally, a higher standpoint and of the adaptation of the eyes, the “cognitive faculty”. What the prisoners see (shadows) is nothing *false*, but rather something with only a *marginal degree of reality*. They see the shadows correctly after all, and even have competitions and honours for he ‘who is quickest to make out the shadows as they pass and best able to remember their customary precedences, sequences and coexistences, and so most successful in guessing at what was to come’ [516c 8 – d 2]. As far as παιδεία is concerned, the simile has to do with the progressive unfolding of the unconcealment of reality as such. In which case Heidegger’s claim does not seem to hang on the central place accorded to παιδεία. For him, Plato’s process of παιδεία has finally to do with a change in the essence of the human. Later we shall see that this change means entering into the unconcealment of being as such.

difference between understanding being as φύσις on the one hand and as ἰδέα on the other is fundamental:

Φύσις ist das aufgehende Walten, das In-sich-dastehen, ist Ständigkeit. Ἰδέα, Aussehen als das Gesichtete, ist eine Bestimmung des Ständigen, sofern es und nur sofern es einem Sehen entgegensteht. Aber φύσις als aufgehendes Walten ist doch auch schon ein Erscheinen. Allerdings. Nur ist das Erscheinen doppeldeutig. Erscheinen besagt einmal: das sich sammelnde, in der Gesammeltheit Sich-zum-Stand-bringen und so Stehen. Dann aber heißt Erscheinen: als schon Dastehendes eine Vorderfläche, Oberfläche darbieten, ein Aussehen als Angebot für das Hinsehen.<sup>16</sup>

For Plato the fundamental determination of being as ἰδέα is see-able-ness. ‘Die Idee ist das Gesicht, wodurch jeweils etwas sein Aussehen zeigt, uns ansieht...Aus diesem Aussehen her sieht es uns an.’<sup>17</sup> This corresponds to the determination of truth as correctness in so far as see-able-ness grounds the normativity of an adequate seeing, a seeing that conforms to that which it sees. Adjustment to the light and adjustment to the dark, metaphors determined according to being as see-able-ness, are necessary in order that man perceive the things as they are, no matter for the degree of their being.

Heidegger claims that something fundamental has changed here concerning the understanding of both truth and being. One might wonder, however, whether that really is so, and whether Plato has not merely refined the understanding of truth as unconcealment; made it more precise by determining it in terms of visibility, and provided it with an *explanation*. But for Heidegger, Plato’s attempt to identify a *source* of unconcealment – αἱ ἰδέαι, the forms, more precisely, the form of the good – marks a radical displacement away from the inceptual questioning at the origin of philosophy. On the one hand, shifting the terms across, being is no longer the process of unconcealment itself; it is now the ground of it. On the other hand, shifting them back again, Plato has here attempted to *explain being as such in terms of beings*. By doing this he establishes what Heidegger calls a *priority* [Vorrang] of beings over being. This determines beings to be the proper objects of philosophical thought; at the origin of philosophy it was being itself, understood in terms of φύσις, which was the matter for thinking. Thus Plato inaugurates a forgottenness of being [Seinsvergessenheit]. As we shall see, *Seinsvergessenheit* subsequently holds sway over the entire history of the West.

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<sup>16</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 139

<sup>17</sup> *Was Heißt Denken?*, p. 135

Plato attempts to explain unconcealment in terms of beings, determining being as see-able-ness and inaugurating the implicit understanding of the essence of truth in terms of the correctness of the gaze. In doing this Plato *disperses* the elements which once comprised the inceptual understanding of being: φύσις, ἀλήθεια and λόγος. These three, φύσις as emerging sway, ἀλήθεια as unconcealment and λόγος as gathering putting-forth, all arise from the same experience. But once being is understood as see-able-ness and truth is understood as correctness, *subjectivity* is introduced, which amounts to the falling away of the inceptual sense of λόγος. Subjectivity is that which stands across and opposed to beings determined in their being as see-able. Subjectivity is that which *sees*. The three elements that once formed a simple unity are dispersed, for see-able-ness, correctness and subjectivity say not at all the same thing. This is apparent from the fact that truth as correctness is understood in terms of a *relation* of conformance or *correspondence between* subjectivity and beings. To this dispersion of truth, subjectivity and being belongs essentially the forgetting of being as such – the inceptual unity of them all.

The change in the essence of truth from unconcealment to correctness marks a fundamental event in the history of being: it inaugurates the epoch of metaphysics, which endures fundamentally unchanged in its essence throughout Occidental history until its essential culmination [*Vollendung*] in Nietzsche's philosophy. Metaphysical thinking is wholly grounded upon the understanding of truth in terms of correctness. What is decisive for the history of being is that the particular understanding of being corresponding to the reinterpretation of truth in terms of correctness thematises being as such only in terms of beings (e.g. Plato's forms), which amounts to saying that it replaces being as such with beings as causes, higher *beings*.<sup>18</sup> The understanding of being in terms of beings – in terms of ἰδέα – becomes the sole and definitive understanding of being remaining thenceforth determinative throughout the history of the West, even up until Hegel, who explicitly conceives being, the actuality of the actual, as "idea".

Whilst the transformations of these original Greek concepts are all mutually implicatory, Heidegger insists that it is the change in the essence of truth that is most fundamental of all: 'Der Wandel von φύσις und λόγος zu Idee und Aussage hat seinen inneren Grund in einem Wandel des Wesens der Wahrheit als Unverborgenheit zur Wahrheit

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<sup>18</sup> To this extent, following Plato in attempting to identify a source of unconcealment, metaphysical thinking is *essentially* theological. 'Die Metaphysik ist in sich Theologie.' [*Nietzsche II*, p. 313] For an extended discussion of this implication see *Die Onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik, Identität und Differenz*.



als Richtigkeit.<sup>19</sup> Only once the remainder of Heidegger's philosophical architecture is in place will the meaning of this claim become transparent.

At this point we should mention Heidegger's famous "retraction" of his essay on Plato's doctrine of truth. In *Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens* (first published in French in 1964) Heidegger writes:

Der natürliche Begriff von Wahrheit meint nicht Unverborgenheit, auch nicht in der Philosophie der Griechen. Man weist öfter und mit Recht darauf hin, daß schon bei Homer das Wort ἀληθές immer nur von den verba dicendi, vom Aussagen und deshalb im Sinne der Richtigkeit und Verlässlichkeit gebraucht werde, nicht im Sinne von Unverborgenheit. Allein dieser Hinweis bedeutet zunächst nur, daß weder die Dichter noch der alltägliche Sprachgebrauch, daß nicht einmal die Philosophie sich vor die Aufgabe gestellt sehen zu fragen, inwiefern die Wahrheit, d. h. die Richtigkeit der Aussage nur im Element der Lichtung von Anwesenheit gewährt bleibt.

Im Gesichtskreis dieser Frage muß anerkannt werden, daß die Ἀλήθεια, die Unverborgenheit im Sinne der Lichtung von Anwesenheit sogleich und nur als ὀρθότης, als die Richtigkeit des Vorstellens und Aussagens erfahren wurde. Dann ist aber auch die Behauptung von einem Wesenswandel der Wahrheit, d. h. von der Unverborgenheit zur Richtigkeit, nicht haltbar.<sup>20</sup>

This statement should be read against the context of Heidegger's well-known dispute over Plato's understanding of truth with the German classicist Paul Friedländer.<sup>21</sup> Aside from etymological issues (which will not concern us here), Friedländer points out that ἀλήθεια was being used in the sense of the correctness of utterance much earlier than Plato, for example, already in Homer, and that therefore it cannot be the case that Plato somehow introduced this new understanding of truth. Heidegger's statement here is commonly taken by commentators to be a simple retraction of his essay. But how much of a retraction is it?

In the first place it should be noted that Heidegger is only discussing the "natural" usage of the concept of truth. In regard to the Greeks, he points out that the fact that this concept was not used in the sense of unconcealment proves only that everyday usage, poets and even philosophers had failed to see that the correctness of the assertion is only possible given the clearing of presence, that is, unconcealment. Nevertheless he maintains that unconcealment as such *was* experienced; he claims, for example, a few pages earlier:

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<sup>19</sup> *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 145

<sup>20</sup> *Zur Sache des Denkens*, pp. 77-78

<sup>21</sup> See his *Platon*, and for an overview of the debate see Bernasconi's *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being*, pp. 19-23.