HEIDEGGER ON THE WAY OF THINKING

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This thesis attempts to clarify what Heidegger meant by the term "thinking" (Denken), where this "meant" is submitted in the double sense: firstly, in the sense of what Heidegger intended by the use and exposition of this term that we find in his lecture series, *Was Heisst Denken?*, where Heidegger quickly makes it clear that this intention is to actually bring thinking on the way, viz. making provision for the leap into thinking, and where this intention was carried out with the employment of a specific guiding phrase. In the second sense, it is an attempt at clarifying the meaning of the term. But this is not to say that we are here simply out to see how Heidegger defines the word "thinking." It is in fact precisely within such definitive discourse that thought dies out. It is not merely be a case of defining a word, because this enterprise would be just as shallow as much as it would be unworkable. It is for this reason that Heidegger decided to establish for himself the task, not merely of explaining thinking as something to be beheld at a distance, but rather of bringing thinking underway by means of his lecture, proclaiming that, "Only the leap into the river tells us what is swimming. The question ‘What is called thinking?’ can never be answered by proposing a definition of the concept thinking, and then diligently explaining what is contained in that definition." (WCT, 21)

This being Heidegger’s intention, in order to understand Heidegger in his treatment of the term thinking, it is clear that we must also undergo an experience with thinking. It is in this spirit that the present work was written so as to collaborate the two senses of what Heidegger meant by "thinking."
CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations .................................................................................................................. 2.

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 4.
I. The Question at Hand: Thinking According to Heidegger ................................................. 4.
II. Thinking as Back-tracking, and Remaining on the Way ...................................................... 17.

Chapter One ............................................................................................................................... 25.
III. A Suggested Model for Conceptualizing Success in Thinking for Heidegger, and The Objection ......................................................................................................................... 25.
IV. Meditation as We Know It and Heidegger’s “Meditative” Thinking ............................... 26.
V. Boredom ................................................................................................................................ 33.
VI. Meditation, Non-Willing, and Boredom ............................................................................. 37.
VII. The Simplicity and Essential Poverty of Meditative Thinking ........................................ 42.

Chapter Two ............................................................................................................................... 46.
VIII. Back to Heidegger’s Guiding Phrase ................................................................................ 46.
IX. The Distress of Being Caught in the Between (Zwischen) ............................................... 49.
X. Suffering the Distress, and The Disposition(s) of the Distress .......................................... 50.
XI. Thinking and Attunement ..................................................................................................... 55.
XII. Being Attuned ...................................................................................................................... 64.
XIII. The Oblivion and Its Propriety .......................................................................................... 72.
XIV. The Poet and Appropriation (Ereignis) ........................................................................... 81.
XV. The Essential Style of Poetry: Reticence, Reservedness, and Future Thinking ............... 100.

Chapter Three ............................................................................................................................ 112.
XVI. What is Philosophy For? and Thinking as Useless ......................................................... 112.
XVII. Thinking as Thanking ....................................................................................................... 122.

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 126.

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 132.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS


BQ – Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Questions of Philosophy*. Translated by Richard

BW – Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*. Translated and edited by J. Glenn Gray, Joan

BT – Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated and edited by John Macquarrie and

CP – Heidegger, Martin. *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*. Translated by

DT – Heidegger, Martin. *Discourse on Thinking*. Translated and edited by John M.


ID – Heidegger, Martin. *Essays in Metaphysics: Identity and Difference*. Translated by

    William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
    1995.

OWL – Heidegger, Martin. *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter Hertz. New


QCT – Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.


INTRODUCTION

I. The Question at Hand: Thinking According to Heidegger

In this work we attempt to clarify what Heidegger meant by the term "thinking" (Denken), where this "meant" is submitted in the double sense: firstly, in the sense of what Heidegger intended by the use and exposition of this term that we find in his lecture series, Was Heisst Denken?, where he quickly makes it clear that this intention is to actually bring thinking on the way, viz. making provision for the leap into thinking; and, furthermore, as we will show, this intention was carried with the employment of a specific guiding phrase. In the second sense, we are attempting to clarify the meaning of the term. But this is not to say that in this second case we are simply out to see how Heidegger defines the word "thinking." It is in fact precisely within such definitive discourse that thought dies out. The special task before us cannot merely be a case of defining a word, because this enterprise would be just as shallow as much as it would be unworkable. It is for this reason that Heidegger decided to establish for himself the task, not merely of explaining thinking as something to be beheld at a distance, but rather of bringing thinking underway by means of his lecture, proclaiming that, "Only the leap into the river tells us what is swimming. The question ‘What is called thinking?’ can never be answered by proposing a definition of the concept thinking, and then diligently explaining what is contained in that definition" (WCT, 21). This being Heidegger’s intention, in order to understand Heidegger in his treatment of the term thinking we must undergo an experience with thinking. Definition is simply not enough; it is something
like the taxonomy of thought—lifelike as they might appear, they are only carcases. More than this, if in setting out to define the word we would propose to establish a definitive account of it—one that would do away with the question, as it were—then thinking would never be encountered and gone upon in the way Heidegger most certainly pointed toward in his work. As we shall see, this is because for Heidegger thinking can be characterized as waitful, anticipatory questioning—and moreover, thinking waits upon its own essence. It is clear then that when we now attempt to carry out what we have named as our present intention, that being both an *undergoing* of and an *understanding* of the way of thinking, we must insist upon taking an approach which is appropriate to its nature.

Then let us ask this: how could Heidegger approach thinking in accordance to its nature, and also to bring it on the way, when his intent is to uncover that nature? There is indeed circularity involved here, no doubt, but it remains to be seen whether it is harmless or not. How can Heidegger denounce the task of defining the term “thinking” as superfluous when his project began with the question: *Was Heisst Denken?* The answer is that he does not define thought in bringing it underway. Rather, he describes it—and does so means of a poetic utterance. It is our hope that in this present work, for the sake of answering to the second sense of our question concerning Heidegger’s meaning, to clarify Heidegger’s meaning of the word *Denken*, and do this *without* thereby procuring a definition of it; this is done by making study of its most preeminent characteristics, in hope that *characterization*, while it may be the most basic feature of *definition* as we have conceived it, also moves quite freely outside the confines of defining, so that the former does not entail the latter. We can in other words avoid speaking about it in a
definitive way. Taking our cue from Heidegger, we can look to see how, while he deliberately shied away from any definitive and final exposition of thinking, he certainly had many things to say about it.

Throughout his entire lecture series entitled Was Heisst Denken?, Heidegger repeatedly declared this decisive phrase: "Most thought provoking is that we are still not thinking" (WCT, 4). The impetus for the onset of thinking, in other words, is its very own absence. This, again, sounds like a "problem" to be "solved." However, if in this way we conceive of our still-not-thinking merely as a failure due to the delay of thoughtful effort, then we immediately thereby betray our own thoughtlessness, because we would be in this way still bound to a sort of strictly linear thinking which merely plans and deliberates the end of the problem at hand. With this kind of thinking which always calculates and wagers upon the end, the solution to the question always equals the dissolution of the question. It is in precisely this way that we have in English come to associate the word "question" in such a close proximity to the word "problem." Oddly enough, it is just this restriction to calculative thinking that is itself problematic. If thinking is not only to be "understood," but also carried out, then this very kind of thinking must be given up to some extent. For Heidegger, "In order to learn how to experience the ... essence of thinking purely, and that means at the same time to carry it through, we must free ourselves from the technical interpretation of thinking" (BW, 194). Now we recall that, at least on the surface, Heidegger’s declaration concerning the thought-provoking suggests a problem, and it is that we, all of us, are still not thinking. This seems to be a kind of blanket reproach, a long-overdue censure and call for new direction in our efforts. There is supposedly a lacking; specifically, Heidegger has pointed out our lack of thought.
According to this interpretation, (which we might call the “purely calculative”
interpretation), action ought to be taken so as to counteract this lacking, i.e. by filling it in
with what is missing—in this case, thinking. However, what is called “meditative
thinking” is not to be enacted in this fashion, for, if it were, then the call to think which is
housed in the fact that we are still-not-thinking would not be a perennial one; it would be,
along with all other calls to action, adequately responded to in such a way as to do away
with it altogether. In this case, we would in our response to the problem of still-not-
thinking simply overcome the present difficulty, which presents itself as a “delay” to
furtherance. In that case, “such human tardiness could then be remedied in human ways
by appropriate measures. Human neglect would give us food for thought—but only in
passing” (WCT, 6). For Heidegger, however, what is thought-provoking (our still-not
thinking) is never disavowed in this way, so that it continues to provoke, always.

It is tempting to conceive of meditative thinking, as John M. Anderson and others
do, as a walk along the path leading to Being, but this image is essentially misleading.
While it is true that according to Heidegger questions are always paths toward an answer,
it should be pointed out very clearly that “asking after an answer” is not the same as
demanding a solution to the question, so as to eradicate the question itself. Heidegger
gives his own account of how we are to hear the word “way” (Weg), suggesting that it
could serve as a key term in undergoing a thinking experience with language: “Perhaps
the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying conceals itself in the word ‘way,’ Tao, if
only we will let these names return to what they leave unspoken” (OWL, 92). It is
interesting to see that at this point Heidegger looks for help from the Taoists—
specifically, from Lao Tzu\(^1\)—in explaining what he means by “way,” which, first of all, must not be confused with something like a route ‘from here to there.’

“The word ‘way’ probably is an ancient primary word that speaks to the reflective mind of man. The key word in Laotse’s poetic thinking is Tao, which ‘properly speaking’ means way. But we are prone to think of ‘way’ superficially, as a stretch connecting two places, our word ‘way’ has all too rashly been considered unfit to name what Tao says” (OWL, 92).

While Heidegger did intend to bring thinking underway, the way was for him not something that is properly characterizable in terms of “from” and “two”; indeed, we find this very characterization of the way of thinking confirmed in Was Heisst Denken? when Heidegger says that, “The way of thinking cannot be traced from somewhere to somewhere” (WCT, 169). But why did Heidegger feel that the “poetic thinking” of Lao Tzu could help at this point in characterizing ‘way’? For one thing, it is clear he ascertained that, like his own “way,” the Taoists did not conceive of the way to be like a straightforward path ‘from here to there.’ Rather, as Heidegger has correctly surmised, the Taoists prefer and adore what has been called “free and easy wandering”, “aimless meandering”, and “going rambling without a destination” (xiao yao you). For both, we could say, moving on the way is regional, rather than destinational in character. In each case the way is not to be confused with “a stretch connecting two places,” nor as one that is laid always laid out in advance. Another Taoist named Chuang Tzu, (whose text

\(^1\) In the following passage from “The Nature of Language” this name is rendered “Laotse”.

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includes a chapter entitled "Xiao Yao You"), said that, "A road (Tao) becomes so when people walk on it." Surely Heidegger could have appreciated these remarks as well. Indeed, his own sound remarkably similar, for example, when he says that, "Only when we walk on it, and in no other fashion, only, that is, by thoughtful questioning, are we on the move on the way. This movement is what allows the way to come forward" (DT, 169). To what extent Heidegger was aware of these similarities is a matter that cannot be taken up here; sufficed to say that Heidegger was confident enough in his reading of Taoism to make explicit appeal to it as an explanatory resource in his work. In our appreciation of Heidegger's work, then, we should also recognize, as he did, the relevance that Taoist texts can have with respect to following some of his movements.

So far we have seen that the movement along the way of thinking is precisely "what allows the way to come forward," and also that, with thinking, there is no starting point, and never a point of arrival. But this is in no way to say that there is no "answer" to the questioning involved with thinking. How can this be? That is, how can there be an answer which does not disavow the question, and thereby bring questioning to a close? Heidegger explains: "... if the answer could be given it would consist in the transformation of thinking, not in a propositional statement about a matter at stake" (BW, 373). While this transformation certainly is the "answer" to the question, "what calls for thinking?", it does not, however, leave the question over and done with. This is because, in short, questioning after the essence of thinking is itself integral to thinking.

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This is just how Heidegger can make the claim that our still-not-thinking is the food for thought, i.e., what is to be thought on now and always. Heidegger announced: “What gives us food for thought we call thought-provoking. But what is thought-provoking [i.e. our still-not-thinking] not just occasionally, and not just in some given limited respect, but rather gives food for thought inherently and hence from the start and always” (WCT, 121). What does Heidegger mean by “always”? Is he saying that this as-yet absence of thought is to serve as the subject for our meditation “always”, that is, until thoughtfulness is accomplished? The answer is no. In an important passage he says: “When we follow the calling, we do not free ourselves of what is being asked. The question cannot be settled, now or ever” (WCT, 168). At first sight this sort of question, which is described as having no hope of solution, may seem to be utterly profitless. Heidegger himself readily admits in an earlier text: “Insofar as philosophy, in its incessant questioning, merely struggles to appreciate what is most worthy of questioning and apparently never yields results, it will always and necessarily seem strange to a thinking preoccupied with calculation, use, and ease of learning” (BQ, 5). No doubt, we have already entered upon this strangeness when we recognize that thinking is never to be actualized and accounted like any other “process.” But is this to say, as it seems to be, that not only is it the case that we are not yet thinking, but also that we shall not be thinking? In strictly analytical terms at least, we can say that this is so; for, in the “actualization” of thinking, there is entailed its conveyance from the realm of possibility, where alone the thought-provoking must remain if it is to persist in its thought-worthiness, since that is “where the most thought-provoking is invulnerably preserved in its problematic being” (WCT, 146). It is for this reason that answering the call of thinking
is so much like "waiting"—and even like a waiting upon of we-know-not-what, where, when we have named what is waited upon, we really wait no longer (DT, 68). Again, for Heidegger, thinking waits upon its own essence.

Is this to say that thinking can never be accomplished? The short answer is: no—rather, thinking itself accomplishes. Speaking again in terms of modality, we would say that thinking cannot be actualized in the regular sense, meaning that, as we shall demonstrate, the call to thought must always be sent from the realm of possibility. An objection might be raised here and the following question asked. By saying this, have we not now committed ourselves to a plain-faced absurdity, namely, that something impossible forever remains set within the domain of possibilities, i.e. what is possible? In reply we ought to say that, paradoxical as it may appear, it is this very same conundrum which must be dealt with if we are to have any hope of approaching what Heidegger aptly called, "being on the way."

For the purpose of making way into this issue, we must undertake the task of comprehending the answer which is at the same time also a question, (from out of a questioning disposition). With regard to his own guiding question, Heidegger says, "To answer the question 'What is called thinking?' is itself always to keep asking, so as to remain underway" (WCT, 169). Moreover, Heidegger tells us that we are capable of thinking only when we are inclined toward it, where what is essential here is this inclination itself. This implies that we must, in our characterization of thinking as such, include a consideration of what we have called "inclination" toward thoughtful questioning, by considering the disposition from out of which all such questioning arises. This we shall do in the second chapter.
For now, we ought to stay close by to what is at hand already: the utterance that was bespoken by Heidegger in an attempt to bring thinking on the way. Literally, it bore the thought-provoking over to his audience. Since its onset (what is thought on) is none other than its very own absence, thinking is not to be “done.” In other words, when thinking finds its place it is thinking no longer—this is the homesickness of philosophy. The proper object of thinking, therefore, is none other than thought itself as it holds sway in its absence. This “holding sway,” which, at least for the purpose of Heideggerian scholarship, serves as a common translation of the German “anwesen,” ends up in this case to be an exceedingly fitting term, since this absence of thought holds our attention and calls us on toward thinking; i.e., it sways us.

Heidegger announced to his students that, “By way of this series of lectures, we are attempting to learn thinking” (WCT, 12)—where “to learn” means, exactly: “to make everything we do answer to whatever essentials address themselves to us at a given time” (WCT, 14). This is very telling. The key term “learning” here is not something like the successful transmission of information. One way to describe learning might be to say that it is the taking upon and mustering up of a certain readiness, a certain guardianship—to be en garde for the essential, ready to learn from everything. Given an appreciation of what Heidegger meant by learning, we might say that the central phrase of the lecture which names the thought-provoking is also one which really teaches, because it teaches learning. More importantly, to “learn thinking” implies getting underway to thinking. This was Heidegger’s intention. It is for this reason no longer merely informative, because it is set to send the listener reeling directly into learning itself. More accurately, therefore, we might better call it performative instruction—it communicated learning.
The lecture series entitled *Was Heisst Denken?*, which was the first since his internment, was given in the years 1951 and 1952 at the University of Freiburg. Heidegger’s deliverance was wholly permeated by this same guiding phrase—*most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking*—which firstly says, succinctly, that what forever cries out for thought is our still-not-thinking, and which, further, in such a precise formulation was meant to turn thought ever toward thinking itself in its very evanescence, that is, in its turning away from us, “since the beginning.” When we “learn thinking”, therefore, we attune ourselves to the essence of thought, holding sway as is does upon us from out of the central phrase which delivers thought in its retreat—the phrase which points to thought’s withdrawal, in that what must be thought is non-thought, that is, our perpetual “as yet” not thinking. We are now perhaps in a position to see how, as a poetic utterance, it is a speaking which is also a listening. Specifically, those who learn are left pointing into withdrawal; and for Heidegger, this pointing is just what it means to “dwell poetically.”

Given Heidegger’s preoccupation with the relationship between thought and language as it is played out in the special nearness of thinker and the poet, we can see how it is fitting that, in later years (specifically, the late 50’s) we find a similar formulation to this—one which stands as an implementation not to undergo thinking, but rather “to undergo a thinking experience with language” (OWL, 70). In *Was Heisst Denken?*, thought refuses itself to us; and it is this very refusal which is responded to in the *call to thinking*. It is precisely this same self-refusing withdrawal that we find in the case of our attempt to undergo an experience with language. Heidegger says, “There is some evidence that the essential nature of language flatly refuses to express itself in
words—in the language, that is, in which we make statements about language. If language everywhere withholds its nature in this sense, then such withholding is in the very nature of language" (OWL, 81). In this case, rather than trying to define a term or explain a concept, Heidegger intended the undergoing of language, just as he earlier intended the undergoing of thought. In full view of the coordination of the two texts, which we hope to gain vantage of, we would say that the end of philosophy is inaugurated by the leap into the next beginning. It is this leap—the “leap back”, as it were—which is approached in the lecture series, Was Heisst Denken? as well as his later lectures series on language. In both cases, “The leap is the sudden return into the realm where Man and Being have already found together in their essence” (ID, 23-4). It is a leap into this nearness itself, indeed, which we find between Being, Thought, and Poetry. Poetry provides thinking’s induction for the leap back. It is a leap back to where we find ourselves already. Congruently, in terms of language rather than thought, this same leap is attempted later in “The Nature of Language”, this time as the attempting to undergo experience with language. Heidegger specifies his intention like this: “This series of lectures bears the title ‘The Nature of Language.’ It is intended to bring us face to face with the possibility of undergoing a thinking experience with language” (OWL, 70). Moreover “To experience something means to attain it along the way, by going on a way. To undergo an experience with something means that this something, which we reach along the way … meets and makes its appeal to us, in that it transforms us into itself“ (OWL 73-4). In both lecture series, Heidegger intended the bringing about of the possibility for transformative experience. That is what he meant to do. At one point, Heidegger warns about the danger of transcribing his lectures into print and then treating
them as strictly literary works—this is because a writer is not the teacher of his readers. Heidegger was teaching. Such transcription is dangerous precisely because such transcription always obscures the occupation of the teacher and the distinct responsibilities that are taken up in teaching. “Such transcripts,” he says, “even if made carefully, remain dubious sources”, and this is so since they inevitably result in “a distortion of its saying” (OWL, 49). Its saying was meant for students, the education of which a teacher is responsible for.

Describing him, J. Glenn Gray has said: “Heidegger is above all else a teacher” (WCT Intro., xvii). This is at least in part because “For him [Heidegger] the spoken word is greatly superior to the written” (WCT Intro., xvii). Gray also confirms that his giving the lecture Was Heisst Denken? as he did was primarily a matter of his intention to teach his students; and this means: to let them learn thinking, to bring them underway toward thinking. He writes: “In the present lectures it is evident that Heidegger is first and foremost preoccupied with the students before him, only secondarily with the wider circle of readers who will necessarily miss [its] vital character “ (WCT Intro, xviii). In his article on what he calls Heidegger’s “workshop” (Werkstatt) for thinking—i.e. Beiträge zur Philosophie—which is likewise thought by the authour to be intended for bringing thinking underway, George Kovacs corroborates this insight into Heidegger’s preeminence as a teacher when he says that, “The work of thinking constituted the main, perhaps the only task of Heidegger, his life-task. He wanted to learn and teach the art of thinking.”

Kovacs even hazards to suggest that a future reassessment of Heidegger work

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from the vantage of his pedagogical intentions (as which this present work would
certainly qualify) is a challenge that is still yet to be properly taken up: “The
appropriation of [Heidegger’s] ways of thinking in action, of his texts showing the
teaching thinker and the thinking teacher, it should be acknowledged, still remains a
demanding task to be accomplished.” For Kovacs, like Gray, this directive task of seeing
Heidegger in light of his occupation as a teacher is not just an arbitrary one, as in just
some new approach from “a different angle”; it is rather an assignment necessary for
following the labour of thought itself, because, for him, Heidegger “was convinced that
the familiarity with his lectures, thus with his teaching activity, constitutes a prerequisite
for following his pathway of thought, for training in the art of thinking.” In his lectures
then, it is proposed that Heidegger exclusively “pursued the task of thinking, the
development of the ideas explored in teaching as well as the attunement to what
continually calls forth thinking”, so as to engender, “the experience of thinking
reawakened or called forth in the course of these lectures.” But this is not to say that we
must consider Heidegger only in light of his role as educator. All in all, we should agree
with Kovacs to this extent, that while “The two aspects of Heidegger's work, i.e.,
teaching and thinking, are distinguishable in his writings; they, however, should not be
separated, should not be regarded in hermetic isolation, from each other”, because they
are integrally bound to one another, because thinking is learned through the lecture.” In
order (especially) to clarify then the intentions of Heidegger in this case, we simply

5 Kovacs, op. cit., 21.
6 Ibid., 22.
7 Ibid., 26-7.
8 Ibid., 26.
cannot afford to overlook his intentions as a teacher. Heidegger was not writing a book about thinking entitled Was Heisst Denken?—he was asking this guiding question of his students along with himself. He believed that “Every question posed to the matter of thinking, every inquiry for its nature, is already borne up by the grant [Zusage] of what is to come into question ... our listening to the grant for what we are to think always develops into our asking for the answer” (OWL, 75). Did he expect his students to answer? Yes, he expected them to be transformed—(transformed, that is, to be questioners after the essence of thinking, and therefore to be to thinkers after essential questions).

In Was Heisst Denken?, Heidegger's intention was none other than the learning of thinking, to get on the way to thinking and remain on the way. Likewise, in “The Nature of Language”, it was a matter of bringing his audience underway to the possibility of a thinking experience with language. But just what it means to be “underway” as such still remains to be clarified, most importantly for our present purposes because “The real nature of thought might reveal itself to us if we remain underway. We are underway” (WCT, 45).

II. Thinking as Back-tracking, and Remaining on the Way

The leap into thinking is not a matter of “progress”, since it is always the leap back to where we find ourselves already, to where we encounter our essence as thinkers. It seems then that to be on the way of thinking is somehow at the same time to be on the way back to thinking. In his “Dialogue on Language (Between a Japanese and an
Inquirer), Heidegger establishes this essential movement of thinking again, when he says that "ways of thinking hold within them that mysterious quality that we can walk them forward and backward, and that indeed only the way back will lead forward" (OWL, 12). This is a very important characterization of the movement of thinking as "back-tracking"—and it can be sounded in striking harmony with the following words from Lao Tzu: "The way that leads forward seems to lead backward." Hypothetically, if we were to venture a serious consideration of these words, where "turning back is how the way moves" and the way is most essentially to be one of moving backwards, we would have to consider what this back-tracking movement implies conceptually. For example, from where and towards which does the way approach, paradoxically, by way of receding?

As it happens to be, these same questions are in fact the ones that we are pursuing presently with regard to Heidegger’s thought. That is, the way of thought is a "back-tracking" way, where the way forward seems like the way back, from where to where? For Heidegger, perhaps the answer can be located one step outside the question. That is, in our coming to acknowledge the worthiness of this questioning—i.e. in raising the question of the essence of thinking and recognizing thinking’s own withdrawal since the beginning—we are already on the way. In other words, the questioning after thinking, which requires an inclination toward it, is in a way already the answer: a transformation. On this matter, Heidegger remarks (some pages after his discussion about the "way" of Lao Tzu): "As soon as we try to reflect on the matter we have already committed

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10 Ibid., 47.
ourselves to a long path of thought. At this point, we shall succeed only in taking just a few steps. They do not lead forward, but back to where we already are” (OWL, 101). He goes on to say that “the steps do not form a sequence from here to there, except—at best—in their outward appearance” (OWL, 101). This is to say that even though the steps taken in thought seem to be steps from here to there—specifically, backwards—it is only so in appearance. The way forward only “seems” to lead backward, as Lao Tzu says. Moreover, as we have shown above, for Heidegger “progress” in the strictly linear sense—where even the movement back is always still a linear traversal, i.e., “from somewhere to somewhere”—is not a term that is properly applied to thinking, because the way of thinking cannot be traced in this manner. We say in summary therefore, that even though the way is always the way back, this movement is reflected in a progression which is only so in appearance, and that we can never count on a point of arrival or departure. Moving as its own reversal, then, it appears in and as its own self-refusal.

While this conceptual sketch of the “essential movement” of reversal is helpful, we would do well to look at a more singular instance of the back-tracking movement. Describing it, Heidegger says: “The ‘back track’ starts with what has not yet been thought, from difference as such, to proceed toward what is yet to be thought. That is the oblivion of difference. The oblivion we have in mind here is that of an enshrouding of difference as such—we are thinking of Lethe” (ID, 43). To summarize this passage, we see that the leap back starts “from” what has not yet been thought: difference as such, and leaps “to” what is yet to be thought: oblivion of difference.
From | To
---|---
Not yet thought (past oriented) | Yet to be thought (future oriented)
Difference | Oblivion of difference (*Lethe*)

To be sure, in strictly linear terms (i.e. as the movement “seems” in its “appearance”), where travelling upon a way is always surely a matter of the “from” and the “to”, we are moving from the *discovery* of the difference, not yet thought, back to the *original covering* (*Verborgung*) itself, which is yet to be thought. The first is negative while the second is positive. That is, “not yet” tells us of a lacking actuality, (specifically of *thinking* upon difference), while the “yet to be” speaks directly to its possibility—(the possibility of *thinking* upon oblivion). While it is negative, however, the first neither denies nor posits thinking’s possibility in the future; on the other hand, the second does not explicitly deny nor posit its past occurrence. The two statements are inverted, so that the first—the “not yet”—stares facing into recesses of the past and finding no thought, leaves the future ambiguous and unattended; and the second—the “yet to be”—does the reverse, anticipating the arrival of thinking on the horizon, leaving the past to be ambiguous and unattended. Furthermore, what is anticipated in the latter is thinking upon the very forgetfulness of what has not yet been thought in the former. What is so very fascinating about this is that, while this back-tracking movement of return is no doubt *the* essential movement of thinking, it is nevertheless a movement from the “not yet” of the past, to the “yet to be” of the future, which means that we never actually encounter thinking itself, and yet, in response to the call, the thinker is always on the way to
thinking. Always only within the realm of possibility, thinking itself is thus preserved as the thought-worthy.

Thinking in other words remains forever stationed within what we have called "the ambiguous and unattended." We have claimed that Heidegger's phrase was meant to send one pointing into withdrawal—specifically, the withdrawal of thought. From the past's not-yet to the future's yet-to-be, whether facing forward or backward, we never encounter thinking itself. Furthermore, the essential movement of thinking is the pivot from one vantage to the other. Thinking is the very movement itself which crosses over and forever finds thought lacking, and yet always asks after it, and waits for it, so that we are left hanging on the threshold of thinking, neither knowing the way in nor out, on the way. Perhaps then we are seeing the first indication of how he call to thinking is for Heidegger something that is characteristically burdensome.

"From now on", Heidegger announced, "we will call 'most thought-provoking' what remains to be thought about always, because it is at the beginning, before all else" (WCT, 4). Given careful consideration of this pronouncement, we can easily surmise already that what is forever most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking. As the "forever" most thought-provoking, that is, it "remains to be thought about always." The word "forever" (and also "always") should draw immediate attention; for, under the direction of this word, thought is thus understood to be forever provoked only by its own absence—it would be the forever-still-not. Its own accomplishment, in other words, would likewise be its own end. As we have seen, however, Heidegger's integral composition of the "not yet" and "yet to be" allows for thinking to remain without concretizing itself at any time past of future. In this way it maintains its withdrawal into
the ambiguous and unattended. This maintenance, ultimately, is the work handed over to
the preeminent custodian, who, in his (thoughtful) vigilance, practices waiting. In the
next chapter, we will consider how this practice might be characterized.

For now, we will consider what we have already learned about thinking; namely,
that its finalization is *not eventual*. Let us turn back to the assertion that names the
thought-worthy—"Let us listen more closely! That assertion says, what is most thought-
provoking is that we are still not thinking. The assertion says neither that we are no
longer thinking, nor does it say roundly that we are not thinking at all. The words 'still
not,' spoken thoughtfully, suggest that we are already on our way toward thinking" (WCT, 30).
Moreover, this being on the way toward thinking is not a preamble to the act
of thinking "some day to be practiced," rather, *toward* thinking should be heard as "our
way within* thinking, on the way of thinking" (WCT, 30).

Heidegger insists that if we are to hear his utterance which names the thought-
worthy as it must be heard, then we should proceed as he does (between lectures 3 and 4)
by looking to its "tone" and its "nature as a statement"—both of which "hang together" in
*melody* (WCT, 37). This suggests that the utterance, repeated and extrinsically
investigated by the speaker himself, is meant to move in its performance. This is why we
must "consider the way in which it speaks, or how it speaks. By 'way,' of 'how,' we
mean something other than manner or mode. 'Way' here means melody, the ring and
tone, which is not just a matter of how the saying sounds" (WCT, 37).

With regard first of all to its tone, which cannot "be determined simply like that of
an ordinary statement", we are told that it is "neither pessimistic nor optimistic" (WCT,
36). This is to say, it is neither negative, nor positive, in the special sense that it neither
negates nor posits the actuality of thinking. To illustrate just this, Heidegger directs our attention back to the utterance itself—specifically, to the “still not” of our thinking: “This ‘still not’ is of a unique kind, which refuses to be equated with other kinds. For example, we can say, around midnight, that the sun has still not come up. We can say the same thing in the early dawn” (WCT, 35). We might say instead then that the sun is in both cases still on its way; thinking is likewise always on its way: the forever still-not. In this brief but important analogical movement—one which was perhaps inspired by those powerful images of Xeno, who, in ancient Greece designed such analogues in defense of his master, Parmenides—we find something which is ever approaching and yet never arriving; hence, Heidegger avoids admitting the inevitability of finalization with regard to thinking. He has in other words found a way to maintain thinking’s own perpetual withdrawal and station within the realm of possibility. For those who might object to Heidegger’s analogy by saying that while our sentiments here may be correct, but that the completion of the sun’s rising is an eventual certainty, it is retorted (on the same page) that such certainty, scientific as it is, is certain of an eventuality that modern science now disavows as an “illusion.” That is to say, we need never posit the necessary actual finalization of thinking, since thought will not be established by empirical verification, (i.e. it will never “exist” for science, just as a sunrise, after Copernicus, does not). As such, it lies outside the sphere of scientific reckoning, just as much as “the daily morning expectation of the sun is of a nature that has no room for scientific proofs” (WCT, 35). Hence we can see Heidegger modifying, and, indeed, surpassing Xeno’s model, by introducing the concept of waitfulness. So tellingly, in “A Conversation on a Country Path”, we find the following interplay between the scientist and the teacher. The scientist
laments: "With the best of will, I can not re-present to myself the nature of thinking ... what in the world am I to do?", and the teacher replies: "We are to do nothing but wait" (DT, 62; my italics).
CHAPTER ONE

III. A Suggested Model for Conceptualizing Success in Thinking for Heidegger, and The Objection

To begin with, we recall that “when we follow the calling [to thought], we do not free ourselves of what is being asked. The question cannot be settled, now or ever”—and we have already had a glimpse at how this could be so. For Heidegger, “Thinking itself is a way”, and this being the case, when we respond to the call of thinking, “We respond to the way only by remaining underway” (WCT, 169). A most important question still lingers here however—namely, how can we understand success in thinking as being on the way to thinking? After all, since the call is answered without the question ever being settled, then the call itself must be unsettling. In order to approach this understandingly, we would do well to learn something from an appropriate model. Incidentally, in this case such a model suggests itself in Zen—specifically, in the conception of the nature of the meditative practice which is most pronounced in the Soto sect of Zen discipline. Dogen, who was the founder of Soto Zen, is known as one who maintained a doctrine which centered upon the “oneness of practice and attainment.” That is to say, under this model meditation is not a means to some extrinsic end; but neither is it an “end in itself.” Rather, it is a way. Specifically, it is a way of arriving at where one is already.

Now we have equipped ourselves with a way of approaching success as being on the way and remaining underway. But there are two objections that need to be dealt with here. Firstly, it is important for us to point out that there is no equation being alleged
between what Heidegger called thinking and what some meditators have called "enlightenment." Nonetheless, as we will show in the next section, both models share an important conceptual element, which is that this very special kind of success involves the "merger of ends and means." The second objection may come with regard to our having borrowed a movement from "the far East" at all, and indeed, from a source that may seem unlikely to many. But we can allow this objection to stand as it is. Foreign or familiar, "philosophical" or not—conceptually speaking, these two movements resemble one another, and can be helpful in explaining one another. To be sure however, should we for whatever reason feel compelled to look for a counterpart from a religious tradition of the West instead, we could easily say in this same spirit, with Saint Catherine of Sienna, that "All the way to Heaven is Heaven." It is impossible to say whether or not Heidegger was directly familiar with either one of these sources; but it is also patently and equally irrelevant in both cases. Indeed, even if our interpretation of both Dogen and Saint Catherine is respectively lacking or inaccurate in some way, all that is required is that the reader may follow the analogue in all of its inaccuracy. Crooked or straight, that is, our interpretation of both points toward an understanding of Heidegger in what is meant by remaining underway.

IV. Meditation as-We-Know-It and Heidegger's "Meditative" Thinking

The question we are faced with now is whether it could be that what Heidegger meant by saying that thinking properly consists in remaining "on the way" to thinking
itself is similar to what is gotten at when it is said, for example, that “satori is dhyana”? To see how these two—practice and attainment, dhyana and satori—might be one and the same is perhaps a task of great perplexity, and it is one which we now take upon ourselves in thinking Heidegger, for example, when we read such things as: “The very seeking is the goal and at the same time what is found” (BQ, 6).

Although it is not our encumbrance to say so—and, as it will become clear on its own shortly—it is certainly not here being argued that Heidegger was a Buddhist, either publicly or otherwise. However, in the interests of approaching Heidegger’s “meditative thinking”, we nonetheless find ourselves considering the practice of meditation itself as we understand it, because it is helpful to do so. We must add this “as we understand it” because, by drawing out a comparison of what has been called Heidegger’s “meditative thinking” to the very practice of meditation—“as it is known to us”—we are at the same time, from a purely practical perspective, asking to what extent we are justified in using the term “meditative thinking” at all to translate “besinnliches Denken.” Does it lead the Western reader astray? That is, given the connotations that the term is laden with in the English language, as it is known to us, does the term really speak truly to what we are to understand by Heidegger’s Denken? By the same right, then, we are asking to what extent is it irresponsible to use this term. We ask this because, for the Western sensibility, the word “meditation” seems to immediately conjure up the image of this same sublime scene: the meditator sits in a beautiful spot, being himself beautiful, palms up, cross-legged and serene, somehow piercing the mysteries of mind with his solemn repose.

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Commonly, in other words, this is how meditation is known to us. But this is certainly not what Heidegger had in mind when he spoke of *besinnliches Denken*, is it?

Perhaps the problem lies in the image itself. That is, could it be that this ready-made picture of ours—(ready-made, and in fact very much readily exploitable by big business advertising campaigns, whereby the practice of seated meditation is depicted as being part of a newly rounded, healthy lifestyle)—has in bringing to the fore the efficacy and prestige of the craft corrupted and covered over what is essential to the practice of meditation? Of course it has. We must ask therefore about what is really essential to meditating. What does one *do* when he meditates, besides sitting in this way, or for that matter, in assuming any of the received postures, (i.e. fully upright or lying on one’s side)? There must be more to it. Could this “more” then be a matter of the meditator’s being, as we might say in the West, “deep in thought”? Unfortunately (or so it would seem) this phrase which speaks to the depth of thought—one which on its own is so capable and, indeed, perfectly suited for speaking to the essence of meditation—is so clumsily handled in our regular parlance that it becomes a catch-phrase for all things philosophical. “Deep in thought”, we imagine one to be in a kind of hibernation, so thoroughly nestled within the folds of great thoughts that he has forgotten the world.

Like all things, in any case, we understand it in light of how it has been presented to us. In this case, (that is, at least in the case of a modern Westerner) the practice of meditation has always been presented through various media as something from a far-off and more ancient land, as something old for them but new for us; exotic, elitist, and above all, ultimately *effective* in inducing a certain peacefulness and state of well-being within the practitioner. In recent years, it has been sold to the public (and then in turn
used as a selling device for other things, by means of association) as a non-medicinal method of stress relief, as a way of improving concentration in the affairs of business and academia, and finally, as we have already mentioned, as a daring and innovative component to a new, more wholesome and modern lifestyle. It appears to us as being a good thing, to be sure, and useful in the highest degree; it is thought to be something fit for the ambitions of those in search of "self-actualization."

But what if anything have we accomplished here besides explicating the most obviously pedestrian and uninformed notions about the meditative practice? That is, it may be pointed out at this juncture that it should really come of no surprise for us to learn that this common understanding is in fact a gross misconception regarding the proper and essential benefits of meditation. It might be further stated that, in order to uncover these benefits—i.e. the ends toward which meditation was originally oriented—we would do best to begin with the words of the appropriate religious authorities, i.e., by those who set this orientation in its origination. This line of thought presupposes two things: firstly, that meditation has its origin in the contrivance of man, and secondly, that its essence lies in its effectiveness (i.e. its usefulness). Perhaps our approaching the matter from the outset with a consideration of the most common (mis)conception of meditation—that of the Western layman—was helpful at least in showing that, insofar as these two assumptions are concerned, it is even possible that the nature of meditation may even be lost on those who ought to know it best. What if it turned to be the case that, most surprisingly of all, the skill of the meditator lies in his propensity for devotion to a thoroughly useless practice, and that the orientation of which we spoke is most properly set toward the unflinching embrace of such uselessness. Are not we—when we set off on the way of
thinking after endless and apparently profitless lines of questioning—also standing in need of such skill? It could be that what we have called “profitless” about the question of thinking as Heidegger has portrayed it, and about the non-eventuality of thinking, is exactly what we are after in the whole affair of thinking, so that a profitless endeavor becomes the most urgent, and what we understand by “the profitless” can be divorced from “the ineffectual.” In the case of the meditator, it could be that apart from our glorifications of the practice, the seated figure which we collectively use to represent to ourselves the practice of meditation, empowered as he might seem, is really most essentially on the way to practicing a perfectly profitless craft, so that it can be done without end in sight, and the meditator exceeds profitability itself; in practice, this could mean moving closer toward “just sitting, and nothing more”—what the Japanese have called: Shikantaza.

For help in looking into what is essential to the practice of meditation, we might turn to the word Dhyana itself—one which, as the case happens to be, is the same word that has come to name the culmination of Buddhist practice in the far East: Zen. In his book entitled An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, D.T Suzuki writes:

“Dhyana comes from the root dhi, meaning ‘to perceive’, ‘to reflect upon’, ‘to fix the mind upon’; while dhi etymologically may have some connection with dha, ‘to hold’, ‘to keep’, ‘to maintain’. Dhyana thus means to hold one’s thought collected, not to let thought wander away from its legitimate path.” ¹²

To understand meditation in this way—that is, at the root of the word—is at once also to do away with and banish once and for all the superficiality inherent to our representing meditation as anything which is most essentially to do with any specifically organized (and ordained) physical practice, seated or otherwise. In saying this, strangely enough, we are not saying that the formalization of meditation (coming to shape as an art long before the advent of Buddhism, certainly) was something accidental or even unnecessary, any more than it would be dismissive of painting to say that the essence of art is not a matter of pigment and brush. It seems that the essence of meditation, if we assume that Suzuki has indeed struck to the heart of the matter from out of the word itself, must be something “done” with relation to thinking; specifically, according to Suzuki, it is a holding thought steadfast upon a singular course. It may in fact turn out to be rather something closer to what at first seemed a mere cursory phrase, i.e., being “deep in thought”—but this claim is as yet premature.

We ought first to consider what has been said, whereby meditation now means “to hold one’s thought collected, not to let thought wander away from its legitimate path.” Is this an adequate definition? Most likely not, even the author would agree, if by “adequate” we mean “exhaustive.” This need not concern us, however, so long as we are only after what is essential. To make yet another return to our popular and imprecise conception of meditation in the West, there is no question that what we call meditation can bring about stress relief, improve the performance of skills demanding concentration, etc. However, what is found out as useful in this sense is far from what is essential. We might say that claims like these about—and indeed, claims upon—the usefulness of meditation, which are so easily conditioned into being billed as selling points for its
becoming idolized in congruence with our contemporary obsession with “the complete lifestyle”, are entirely correct, they are at the same time far from touching upon the true import of the practice.

It may however be once again objected here that the mere overcoming of what has been portrayed as the popular reception (and misconception) of meditation in the West is no major feat, assuming that it is an “overcoming” which is called for in this case. One might easily suggest that we have missed something essential to meditation here because we have taken it from out of its proper place of authourity within its native religion(s), and further, that properly understood in this way, we would recognize that meditation is first and foremost a practice which is taken up for an explicit religious purpose—for example, the overcoming of attachment. And what’s more, meditative practice as we know it really does have this effect. Given this consideration, it would seem once again that meditation is something which is useful first and foremost. Must we now abandon the claim that what is most essential to meditation lies outside the useful? After all, was not the practice of meditation invented entirely for the purpose of overcoming of attachment? We answer, firstly, no; in fact, the purpose of overcoming attachment was only come upon in the midst of meditating. In this sense, we can say that meditation has always been prior to its ultimate use, so that essence precedes utility. In saying so, we now also answer, secondly: no, because meditation was not and could never have been “invented” at all. It has, however, been formalized. Lastly, meditation is not useless, to be sure. Most essentially, however, it is really something like inviting in unpurposeful moments, non-doing, and boredom, and therefore as much as it is something done, it is much more essentially something undone. As we shall argue
presently, for Heidegger the attunement of boredom appears to operate in the same manner, and, like meditation, provides for moving outside the bounds of purposefulness, and thus for stepping out of the confines of calculative thinking which reigns in the era of technology. In the words of Parvis Emad, that is, "When we are overwhelmed by boredom, technological rationality is confronted with something that it cannot manage and control [i.e. remaining unoccupied with beings]. Existing in such a disposition, we are with one stroke removed from the domination of technology."13

IV. Boredom

With regard to boredom, it seems that we are more bored the less we have to do. Then how is it when we approach doing nothing? How is it, for example, when someone just sits there with all of his might?

According to Heidegger, when one is facing boredom—when there is ‘nothing to do,’ and the passing the moments stretch out to hold us in distress—there is the compulsion to wish time away. Boredom sets in when we are no longer preoccupied with something in particular; and it is for this reason that Heidegger says: “The inherent predicament of becoming bored is precisely that we cannot find anything in particular” (FM, 99). For Heidegger then, the now is always fraught with a kind of impatience and a pressure to satiate one’s interest. It would seem that even though the present moment is in a sense all that we really have, we seem to nonetheless continually and anxiously await its passage—and so often want nothing more than to “get on with it”, where, presumably,

it stands for “what is really worthwhile.” The present is all that we really have, (in the sense that no one will ever be any more than simply alive, here)—and yet, strangely, perhaps for this very reason, it (the present) presents itself as what is most unbearable. For Heidegger, boredom sets in when the onslaught of being-there (Dasein) makes itself apparent—‘onslaught’ in the sense here as in an attack upon a person, when the person is oppressed by just being there. Heidegger points out that people are under constant compulsion to find occupation for their time and thoughts, so that “Passing the time is a way of taking action against the dragging of time that oppresses us” (FM, 99).

At this juncture it is helpful to look to the distinction that Heidegger draws between two senses of the word “interest.” The first sense is an interest that can only be taken in interesting things—where such interest moves from one novelty to the next. As we will show, this model of interest—in contrast to the privileged sense, *Interesse*—is characterized in its limitation to the field of interesting things. Heidegger remarks: “Many people take the view that they are doing great honor to something by finding it interesting. The truth is that such an opinion has already relegated the interesting thing to the ranks of what is indifferent and soon boring” (WCT, 5). Heidegger depicts a sort of interest that uses up interesting things, like a consumer of novelty. This is in keeping with the temperament of modernity, which quickly and efficiently uses up everything available. This is when interest can only be taken in things, that is: when the question of Being is overwhelmed and snuffed out by this interest taken in beings. “Today’s interest,” Heidegger says, “accepts as valid only what is interesting” (WCT, 5).

Superficially, this may appear to be a rather strange thing to say. We may want to ask, for example, what else is there besides interesting things to attract our interest? Generally
speaking, as we will soon see, we could say with Heidegger that we might be captivated by none other than the nothing in particular; in a sense, it is an interest taken in boredom itself. In short, since interest in the first sense is only concerned with interesting things, it is precisely the Nothing, (i.e. Being) that must be attended to in meditative thinking as it is characterized by the second sense of interest. Furthermore, the nothing that shows up in boredom—i.e., when the nothing in particular bears its weight upon a person, and when interest in the first sense, with all its bounding from thing to thing, is quelled—always does so only in its own departure: it always keeps us waiting and on the edge; it is musical. What does it mean to take an interest in boredom? The strongest, deepest and most intense concentration upon nothing, or, at least, no interesting thing—is precisely what is attained in the meditative practice. It might be said at the very least that meditating engenders the conditions for boredom, though not necessarily for boredom’s sake.

Interest taken in the common sense is, according to Heidegger, really always a matter of managing to divert one’s interest—“Divert it from what?”’, he asks, and answers by saying that it is indeed a diversion from time itself (FM, 99). For Heidegger, in other words, we are oppressed by time in profound boredom. He asks: “How can it oppress?”, and tells us finally: “We already know this oppression. We found it in that very thing which is boring, that which bores us: that which holds us in limbo” (FM, 99).

Furthermore, being held in limbo, we might add, means residing in the between—neither here nor there. As we will see, this “neither here nor there” is a conceptual articulation of what was called “neither knowing the way in nor out” in the text, Basic Questions of Philosophy; and, as it will become clear, this is precisely why Heidegger is justified in
saying that “boredom ultimately … prevails in the ownmost ground of Dasein” (FM, 98). Heidegger goes on to say that “in passing the time [i.e. in deferring boredom] we simultaneously seek to occupy ourselves with something” (FM, 101; my italics). We should hear the word “occupy” also in the sense of “fill”, especially when we see that Heidegger goes on to speak of this occupation in contradistinction to “being left empty” (FM, 101). He makes another careful distinction between, in the first sense, “being left empty” which grows as a feeling of dissatisfaction out of a seeking that has gone unfulfilled, (such as, for example, with the emptiness of a growling belly), and in the second sense, what it means to be left empty in profound boredom. With regard to the latter, Heidegger said, “Here too what bores us has the character of leaving us empty, but of a leaving empty that attacks more profoundly; it is a preventing of that seeking” (FM, 117). In short, we can say that common boredom requires common interest, while profound boredom tends to do away with the demands of this kind of interest. That is, contrary to the first sense of emptiness, where “its own precondition, namely seeking to be satisfied with beings” is preeminent, in the second sense, “It now no longer even arises” (FM, 117). Emptiness in this second, important sense, therefore, which is the correlate of the boredom that we have considered in conjunction with the meditative practice—-involves the dissolution of the seeking will, for which emptiness and boredom are always necessarily obstacles to be overcome. And we have already been well advised that, when it comes to meditation, it is best to do nothing rather than to seek after something. “No end in sight” then, is perhaps the ideal perspective of both meditative thinking and also of the meditative practice itself. In the case of profound boredom, no longer conditioned outright by this seeking “to be satisfied with beings,” when to this
extent one lets go of purely calculative thinking, he encounters the nothing in particular on its own ground—without ‘why’.

VI. Meditation, Non-Willing, and Boredom

It seems after all that, even for Heidegger, meditation really is always something that disavows thinking as willing in some way. Of course, the puzzle begins when we recognize that ‘disavowal’ must itself be an act of the will. The “Conversation” in *Discourse on Thinking* itself begins by introducing a discourse on the paradox of “willing non-willing” when the Teacher says “I want non-willing,” and the dialogue continues with the Scholar surmising that there are two senses of the term to be brought to light.

Scholar: “Non-willing, for one thing, means a willing in such a way as to involve negation [of willing itself] … Non-willing means, therefore: [1] willingly to renounce willing. And the term non-willing means, further, [2] what remains absolutely outside any kind of will.”

Scientist: “So that it can never be carried out or reached by any willing.”

Teacher: “But perhaps we come nearer to it by a willing in the first sense of non willing.”

Scholar: “You see, then, the two senses of non-willing as standing in definite relation to each other” (DT, 59).

The paradox we are now approaching is the one faced by all those who conceive of or practice to give up willfulness to any degree, since we would think that such practice, strenuous as it is, would call for the utmost in one’s will—“it requires great willpower,” we might say, but at the same this is precisely what we aim to extinguish when we “want non-willing.” Coming upon (conceptually speaking) the same predicament, Foyan said:
“You shouldn’t strain to seek the path; if you seek it, you will lose the path.” 14 Likewise, I-Hsuan warns us: “If you seek after the Buddha, you will be taken over by the devil of the Buddha, and if you seek after the patriarch, you will be taken over by the devil of the patriarch. If you seek after anything, you will always suffer. It is better not to do anything.” 15 Is that what is important then, doing nothing? Master Pien said: “Have you never heard how the Perfect Man conducts himself? ... Vague and aimless, he wanders beyond the dirt and dust; free and easy, tending to nothing is his job.” 16 With regard to the paradox of non-willing, we might say that “Giving up” seems to be at the same time something done as well as something undone, perhaps with great difficulty. To return to the model we have been working with, and as we have already mentioned, Shikantaza is the practice just sitting, or “sitting and nothing more.” This is by no means to say that it is easy—far from it. It is an especially vital part of the Soto Zen school, and it is said to be perhaps the most arduous form of zazen. In light of our previous considerations, we might say that, in such sitting, the sitter is left entirely exposed and overwhelmed by nothing beside and all around him, when nothing is going on. That is to say, the nothing is all that is left when the sitter does nothing more. Then doesn’t this practice collide head on with the issue of boredom in some way, since we become bored with doing nothing? According to Emad, who says that “Only in deep boredom do we come across the very


15 Wing-Tsit Chan op. cit., 447.

limit beyond which beings slide into nothing, where no-thing prevails, i.e. where being holds sway”, it would certainly seem so.17

In a very important way, boredom brings us to an encounter with the present. It is arguably for this reason that Heidegger said: “Boredom is accordingly the fundamental attunement of our philosophizing … This boredom becomes essential, if only we are not opposed to it, if we do not always immediately react to protect ourselves, if instead we make room for it. This is what we must first learn: not to resist straightaway but to let resonate” (FM, 82). The profound boredom is abysmal. How does it resonate and what if anything are we to hear in it? Moreover, as Heidegger asks: “How are we to bring this [boredom] about? Are we explicitly and intentionally to produce boredom in ourselves? Not at all. We do not need to undertake anything in this respect” (FM, 82)—in other words, becoming attuned through boredom is not like any other deed to be undertaken willfully; and as we will demonstrate, this is precisely because “it”, being releasement (Gelassenheit), is beyond the scope of activity and passivity. It is for this reason that Emad remarks that, “as a disposition, boredom must be allowed to be awake (wachsein lassen), rather than be forced to awake (wachmachen).”18

The matter of is not then a matter merely of cultivating boredom for boredom’s sake. Heidegger disavowed any determinate practice to incite boredom as such; and while he certainly did not subscribe to the specific nuances of say, seated Buddhist meditation—Heidegger still meditated nonetheless. He tells us that it is not a matter of adopting a specific method of inducing boredom; following up however, he says, “Yet

17 Emad, op. cit., 77.

18 Ibid., 66.
how are we to make room for this … boredom? Only by not being opposed to it, but
letting it approach us and tell us what it wants, what is going on with it. \textit{[Was es gibts?]"}
(FM, 82). Perhaps this points to what we give ear to in meditation, to what resounds in
boredom.

One feature that seems common to meditation, in its manifold variations, is the
practice of slowing down, sometimes, to a stand still. For those first introduced to
\textit{Vippasanna} meditation, for example, the practice of utter silence and non-doing (in the
concrete sense) can be radically estranging, and even traumatizing. Imagine, for example,
the disorientation of the man who, having been running his entire life, for a moment stops
to catch his breath! For the uninitiated, and especially for the Westerner, Buddhist
meditation carries with it the promise of a certain prestige; but this is because it has been
sold to us as perhaps the most glamorous asceticisms, exotic and beautiful. What the
novice practitioner very quickly realizes, however, is that there is nothing glamorous
about it. This is primarily because it is really a trip straight into solitude. It is a practice
which faces the \textit{endurance} of calm, and provides for an encounter with the severity of
stillness. Immediately, sitting down and beginning, time becomes long, and boredom
shows up (in German, the term is \textit{Langweile}—literally, a compound of “long” and
“while”). Moreover, in the meditative practice this boredom is not to be “overcome”;
rather, it is \textit{let come} and \textit{let be}. This is because boredom is our attunement to the open
field of being.

As the Buddhists correctly point out, the mind has a tendency to wander from
thing to thing—clinging to this thought and then the next, never stopping to gather its
 bearings, like a monkey swinging from branch to branch, (i.e. bounding from one
interesting thing to another, as Heidegger suggests—it is commonly referred to by monks and Buddhist teachers, in fact, as the “monkey” mind. In much the same sense, Heidegger says, “Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking” (DT, 46). What has here been call “calculative thinking” (Verrechnen), unlike meditative thinking, does not know how to pause and gather. Boredom arises when stillness is approached and calculative thinking is abandoned. But this is not to say that the practitioner of meditation somehow cultivates boredom so as to bath in it, even though this is involved in the practice. This boredom is especially pressing upon those who are new to it. How to deal with just sitting there, with no end in sight! Formal meditation does not aim specifically at this boredom, just as Heidegger did not, to be sure. In fact, it aims at the stillness which impresses itself upon us in boredom.

The Noh theater of Japan, to use Heidegger’s own example, can be from the perspective and testimony of a modern Westerner, observed as being excruciatingly slow, and outwardly redundant. From the perspective of a wholly unexpecting Western audience, strange as it may be, we might say that the performance of Noh can be too much for us in its not being enough—a single dancer on stage, for example, masked, and walking, very slowly, very carefully around and around within an otherwise empty space. Does the boredom speak there for us? With nothing else to turn to, and with being committed as they were to seeing s show, the audience’s attention is fixed upon this figure for a “long while,” come what may. Innocently enough, no doubt, in the course of such practices, especially as newcomers, we are inclined at first to fret and say to ourselves: It seems I’m doing nothing here; Let’s get on with it; or, What are we waiting
for? This is precisely the distress which must be preserved in meditative thinking, in order to dissolve—i.e. leap out of—horizontal, representational thinking (Vorstellung). In a skillful stroke, Heidegger says: “As soon as we re-present to ourselves and fix upon that for which we wait, we really wait no longer” (DT, 68). Likewise, for the Zen novice confronted with the dictum that dhyana is satori, (which is to also say, somewhat funnily, that “Zen is Zen”), then there is nothing left to wait for; there is only waiting. Meditation is stylized waiting. All in all, we really wait upon nothing.

VII. The Simplicity and Essential Poverty of Meditative Thinking

The question that we must now ask—now, that is, since we have found the congruence between Heidegger’s meditative thinking and meditation as we commonly understand it—is one which asks what the according “legitimate path of thought” for Heidegger is. First off, it is by no means to “harness the power of Being.” Heidegger says, for one thing, that “As the ek-sisting counter-throw to Being … man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being … he [thereby] gains the essential poverty of the shepherd” (BW, 221). Likewise, when he tells us that “Thinking is on the descent to the poverty of its provisional essence,” he is speaking of the leap from philosophy (metaphysics) to thinking, and telling us that thinking is making its way down into the recesses of its essential poverty (BW, 242). We ask ourselves: What is the provision for thinking—the provision by which thinking may be said to stand in poverty?—and moreover, what is this poverty?
The first question points us toward what enables providing food for thought, as in “letting a herd graze at pasture” (WCT, 3). We might answer the second question in light of the same image, in that, although there is food in inexhaustible abundance, the cows live in poverty, and this is because they harbor the most meager of diets—i.e., their poverty lies in the simplicity of their provision. Likewise, Heidegger tells us that “Every thinker thinks only one thought” (WCT, 50). More specifically, in contrast to “the researcher [who] needs constantly new discoveries and inspirations”, the thinker is a thinker only so long as he abides in the poverty of simple provision:

“The thinker needs one thought only. And for the thinker the difficulty is to hold fast to this one only thought as the one and only thing that he must think; to think this One as the Same; and to tell of the Same in the fitting manner. But we speak of the Same in the manner that befits it only if we always say the same about it, in such a way that we ourselves are claimed by the Self-Same. The limitlessness of the Same is the sharpest limit set to thinking” (WCT, 50).

We can see within this passage, for one thing, that the task of the thinker is delineated through his thought and speech—(“to think this One as the Same; and to tell of the Same in a fitting manner”)—that is, both thinking and saying are bound to the simplicity of provision. This simplicity in saying is best reflected in Heidegger’s insistence upon a necessary tendency toward sparing words; or alternatively, a commitment to acknowledging, as another thinker did, that “Great speech is simple (as in simple taste).” Heidegger is famous for harbouring the simplest of tastes in this regard. Reviving the dictum of Parmenides’, he says in unison: “One ought to both think and say

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19 Wing-Tsit Chan, op. cit., 180.
that Being is.” In this sense, the man who resorts straight back to the source must always abide in a certain poverty, since this is the mark of the simple and the same. On this issue William Richardson comments: “[T]he appeal of the Simple, the One, is uttered only so long as man, endowed with a unique affinity [i.e., a unique attunement] to it, is able to attend to this appeal.” Moreover, as Richardson points out, in order for man to attend to this appeal of Being as the Simple (to be understood as “the One”)—that is, in order to tune-in and catch the tune, “man must overcome the ravages of technicity which distract him, dull his ear to the appeal, make the wondrously Simple seem to be merely a dull uniformity.” It is in this way that Richardson understands technicity’s tendency toward the implication of what is simple and the same as something that is most essentially monotonous.

Meanwhile, we might reflect accordingly on how we now live in what is commonly conceded to as being the most interesting of times—it is perceived that things now change now faster than ever, and that the pace is only quickening. Heidegger perceived that in this epoch of technology, “All distances in time and space are shrinking,” (PLT, 165). Things (as objects) are becoming closer and closer, and in fact becoming equidistant in their universal objectification. The “entertainment value” of a thing is easily assessed; the entertainment industry, fueled by the marketing industry and accompanying science of demography, makes a science of divining out of the winds of vogue the next thing that will turn-on the population: the next big thing. It is common sense that tells us that “variety is the spice of life”, and we confess it without flinching.


21 Ibid., 560.
But what this tells us more than anything is that we have grown weary of the cuisine tirelessly brought before us. We have refined our taste, such that it is not the ghastly which repulses us most, it is rather the bland. As such, in the dimension of language, likewise, the dullness of the Simple anoints it, so that it “glides so inconspicuously through our chatter, blanched with the anemic pallor of the obvious” (BW, 100). For Heidegger, due to the appreciative character of thinking, what is most obvious becomes itself the most enticing, although that is not to say entertaining, (see section XVII of this work).

What would it mean, then, to be ready for the appeal of the Simple, to be attuned as such? When we attempt to clarify what it would mean to be attuned to the “splendor of the simple”, first of all, we should be careful not to represent this splendor as being something “added by our perspective”; rather, the splendor itself comports and seizes us in the transporting grasp of the origin-al attuning disposition, which has long been called “wonder.” Specifically, as we will see in the following chapter, it is the wonder that there is at all.
VIII. Back to Heidegger’s Guiding Phrase

To begin this chapter we will make the following claim. Heidegger’s poetic articulation of the thought-worthy—"Most thought provoking is that we are still not thinking"—opens a rift (Riss). This is because, as a poetic and engaging feat, it is also artistic. How can we justify this claim? What is a rift? Briefly put, the Riss is that which houses the arena of disclosure and concealment, also known as world and earth.\(^{22}\) When Heidegger says that what discloses itself to us as the thought-worthy is the very self-refusal of thought, we witness the off-setting of unconcealment and concealment—and, indeed, in such a way that the latter comes to fore. In other words, Heidegger is here saying the truth (aletheia), and in such an authentic way that we see concealment itself "lit up." We therefore call Heidegger’s articulation of the thought-worthy an artistic Werk in the truest sense. In this case, we would do well to recall how language, as that which "lets lie before", is so intimately related to aletheia. It is this primary relationship between language and truth (aletheia) which bears out the very possibility for the common conjunction of language and correctness.

Given this, we can see that poesy, while it encompasses art more than just as a matter of words alone, is still most dear to the work of the poet most of all, who, in Heidegger’s case, speaks directly and immediately to the strife between thinking and thoughtlessness. In other words, this is the poetry of poetry. Heidegger is writing

\(^{22}\) See PLT. 62-6.
“thoughtful poetry.” 23 This is especially poignant when one bears in mind the relationship between thinking (Denken) and recollection (Andenken), i.e., with respect also to an awareness of forgottenness (Vergessenheit) and the self-concealment (Verborgung) of Being.

We have claimed that Heidegger’s poetic utterance is, by his own standards, an artistic work which renders—both in the sense that it “draws it out in shape” and also “tears asunder”—the rift between the onset of thinking and its withdrawal, such that this very movement of self-refusing withdrawal is showcased. This is what Heidegger called "the earth towering up through world.” In order to understand this, we must ask ourselves how the earth—which is the tendency toward withdrawal and retreat into itself—can itself come to the fore; we must imagine concealedness being revealed. This means that it must be such as to make an appearance in the very sheltering of itself. Truth is the coordination of clearing and concealedness, wherein the earth is brought to bear as “the sheltered one.” Even concealedness must enter the clearing so as be exhibited, and it is just as much essential to the nature of truth as is the tendency of the self-opening world. Gadamer puts it quite elegantly: “It is not only the emergence into the light but just as much the sheltering of itself in the dark. It is not only the unfolding of the blossom in the sun, but just as much its rooting of itself in the depth of the earth.”24 To carry the analogy further, we might point to Heidegger’s consideration both of the earth’s capacity for the

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23 The term “thoughtful poetry” (or ‘thinking poetry”) was in point of fact a designation originally bestowed by Heidegger upon those like Rilke, Hölderlin (see “What are Poets For” in PLT, 95), and Lao Tzu (OWL, 92). Of course he did not ever use the term in reference to his own work.

bringing forth of bounty along with its "unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field" (PLT, 34)

Farming is a bit like midwifery: the labour consists in co-bearing what comes to bear as growth in the world. This is the gesture appropriated to man, namely, to let beings be, like the farmer would let grow the crops under his care. This is not to say that man is responsible for the production of beings, any more than we would say that the farmer "makes" crops; it is rather a case of allowing things to arise out of depth. This "allowing", as any farmer will testify, is a matter of the most taxing labour, and as such could never be confused with a simple non-involvement.

As we have seen, thinking is arduous. It is also characterizable as being much like "waiting", and even "allowing". Lastly, although thinking is perhaps what is ownmost to man, it cannot be properly called "productive." Heidegger says, for example: "Thinking is not a means to gain information. Thinking cuts furrows into the soil of Being" (OWL, 70). Cultivation can be described as a letting bear forth. The earth bears forth its abundance the way a mother bears (Gebärt) the child in birth. This is the bestowing gesture (Gebraute) of the earth. It is in this sense that we hear freedom (in Ek-static thought) as letting beings: be (that is, come to presence). The thinker is the farmer—"slow of step"—plodding through the field that is Being in the Open. Unfortunately, this word "Open" which we use to translate "Lichtung", cannot convey the sense of "lightening" which is essential to it. It is not to be understood as a lightening as when we would think of "making things bright (Licht)." Rather, we might say that die Lichtung gebart das Licht— the Clearing bears out the Light. Accordingly, the term "lightening" can be heard as it points to a sense of freeing from density and obstruction. Heidegger
tells us that the Open is necessarily prior to light; that is, “free openness is a ‘primal phenomenon’ [Urphänomen]” (BW, 385). The clearing lets light in to play with darkness and secrecy, which is, evidently, the more primordial. Heidegger recognized even that self-concealment and obscurity, and not exposure, is really at the heart of the process of coming to be called truth (aletheia). Here we sense the rendering of an ontology from out of the tendency toward restraint and withdrawal. This also points to the reason why Heidegger felt compelled to state that “What is sayable receives its determination from what is not sayable” (EP, 78). Man as poet pays homage to the ontological primacy of silence by holding fast to—i.e. entreating the craft of—the styling of words which show themselves hesitantly. This is all in keeping with the model of “hesitant refusal” which is the principle characteristic of nature’s performance. But how should we hear “hesitant” here? We say that people do something hesitantly where there resides a decisive and irretactable obligation to do it, when what is self-keeping and enshrouded gives way to the necessity of disclosure, hesitantly, as a debtor hands over his due—i.e. “satisfies its essence”—and yet also as a gift is given.

IX. The Distress of Being Caught in the Between (Zwischen)

Heidegger tells us that man is first disposed to thinking through the need invoked by the most primordial “distress.” More precisely, it is the distress which grips man and holds him fast in the Open, ex-posed to beings, so originally that “man himself first arises out of this distress” (BQ, 133). It is clear that in this case “thinking means here to let beings emerge in the decisiveness of their Being and let them stand out before oneself”
(BQ, 133). In other words, ecstatic man is born out of this said "distress", born over to Dasein in its historicality. Further, it is this same distress which compels man into the basic disposition of wonder; and this is so because this distress first rivets man into place as ecstatic beholder of beings (in their beingness).

When Heidegger is speaking about this distress which determines the need for thinking, he calls it, quite precisely, "the distress of not knowing the way in or the way out" (BQ, 132). In other words, the predicament at the heart of humanity—that which bears man into thinking—is just this placement into the between (Zwischen).

Not knowing the way in or the way out, one never arrives nor leaves, but is always on the way. As we have seen in the previous chapters, thinking is a matter of remaining underway toward thinking, with no proper point of departure or arrival. We have seen meditative thinking in light of its characterization as rigorous waiting, and even as something severe. We have seen that the rift that was rendered by Heidegger's poetic phrase between thinking and thoughtlessness holds us in a certain distress; namely, it seemed there was no way in nor out of thinking.

X. Suffering the Distress, and The Disposition(s) of the Distress.

Now that we have seen thinking characterized in relation to the distress of wayfulness, let us look further at this distress itself. In particular, since we are interested in considering the basic disposition of thinking, then we should look to what man is originally disposed toward—i.e. the primal distress—which originates man's own ex-

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posure to beings and thus disposes him into thinking. “This distress, as such a not knowing the way out of or into this self-opening ‘between,’ is a mode of ‘Being,’ in which man arrives or perhaps is thrown and for the first time experiences—but does not explicitly consider—that which we are calling the ‘in the midst’ of beings” (BQ, 132).

Briefly put, and significantly, man originates as the beholder of beings from out of the distress, taken up by the disposition of wonder.

It seems that, according to Heidegger, man is always played out exclusively in the between. That which invoked wonder in man—(or rather, we really should say that man was invoked in wonder)—was conductive of the very purity which originated metaphysical thought, although this is not meant to say that metaphysical thought is itself “pure,” in the sense of its being purely recollective. Heidegger says, “Ek-sistence … is exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such”, and continues, “the ek-sistence of historical man begins at that moment when the first thinker takes a questioning stand with regard to the unconcealment of beings by asking: what are beings?” (BW, 128). The questioning disposition brought upon was necessarily one step (albeit also a leap) from any purposeful, technical questioning about the particular beings around us, because it was instead a questioning with regard to our very eventful situation, which is a thrown displacement into the midst of beings, knowing neither the proper way in, nor out. It would seem that such being held out in the Zwischen, stepping along paths of questioning toward we know not what, must be a predicament wholly human and mortal, which would be characterizable first and foremost in its painstakingness. Indeed, Heidegger confirms this early on when he says, “[T]he thoughtful questioning of beings as such, is essentially suffering [Leiden]” (BQ, 151). In one way at least, thinking is always
suffering because it is neither here nor there, always only underway, with no end in sight—in fact thinking first and foremost involves receptivity to the distressfulness of this. As much as a philosopher is comparable to a “lover of wisdom”, then perhaps philosophy itself is comparable to an acute lovesickness.

This thoughtful questioning, as central as it is to thinking, long called “philosophy”, is so close to the essence of man that they can be described under the same model. That is, the vacillation back and forth, and the distinctive “hovering between certainty and uncertainty”, which is the marked feature of philosophizing (FM, 19), is precisely what is reflected just as essentially in man’s “neither knowing the way in nor out”; and we argue that this is so because, as Heidegger says: “Everything that belongs to the existence of Dasein belongs just as essentially to the truth of philosophy” (FM, 19).

This portrays an ana-logy, which is this: *In our philosophy: In our human being*. On both “sides”, as it were, it is a case of our being caught in and spanning the between. We are always underway toward beings as a whole. In fact, “We ourselves are this underway, this transition, this ‘neither the one nor the other’” (FM, 6).

So how is it that this predicament, being caught and torn in the middle, as it were, reaches us in (and as), for example, *startled dismay* in the one case, and *wonder* in the other? Are these two supposed to be identical? Surely not—although they *are* at the same time grounded in the same primordial distress. In point of fact, Heidegger explicitly points to a multitude of fundamental attunements, saying that “The grounding-attunement of another beginning can hardly ever be known merely by one name—and especially in crossing to that beginning. And yet, manifold names do not deny the onefoldness of this grounding-attunement” (CP, 16). The grounding-attunement is the same in all cases
because it is in all cases, under its various names and in its manifold aspects, an attunement by distress—i.e. they all arise inasmuch as philosophizing arises historically, seizing the heart of man with its urgency. They come to bear insofar as philosophy (and the call to thought) sets upon us in this essential way: that the distress, i.e., the questionableness of all things, grips man and pulls him asunder, torn and oscillating between the way in and the way out.

Heidegger says, “If we had to say something immediately about this basic disposition of philosophy, i.e., of futural philosophy, we might call it ‘restraint’ [Verhaltenheit]. In it, two elements originally belong together and are as one: terror in the face of what is closest and most obtrusive, namely that beings are, and awe in the face of what is remotest” (BQ, 4); and more succinctly, “Restraint is the disposition in which this terror is not overcome and set aside but is precisely preserved and conserved through awe” (BQ, 4). Here we should keep in mind that the primal distress which compels thought in attunement is always the distress of questionability. Its reception is painful. This is exactly why, in another text, Heidegger quite rightly tells us that “Philosophy is the opposite of all comfort and assurance. It is turbulence, the turbulence into which man is spun” (FM, 19).

Truly, for Heidegger philosophy is something that is not properly taken up until one feels as though he is fighting for his life.26 He even goes so far as to say that “… in philosophizing the Da-sein in man launches the attack upon man” (FM, 21). Yes. Anyone who has really felt the squeezing cinch of a guiding question’s grasp, the constrictions of

26 We are reminded here of the kind of urgency that is required of the sitter when the sensei tells him that his task requires the urgency that a man feels for a gasp of air when his head is held under water.
doubt and regress, can verify it. The strain of perpetual incompletion can be a vicious affair—"Thus man in the ground of his essence is someone in the grip of an attack, attacked by the fact 'that he is what he is', and already caught up in all comprehending questioning. Yet being comprehensively included in this way is not some blissful awe, but the struggle against the insurmountable ambiguity of all questioning and being" (FM, 21). Facing "insurmountable ambiguity," there is no way in, but being human and "belonging" to philosophy, as it were, there is no way out.

But if this is the case, then why practice philosophy? If after all it is but a torment, why chase after it? In short, 'becoming philosophical' is as much a choice of vocation as a man defending his home 'chooses' the part of a warrior. If we were to answer our previous question as to why we practice philosophy then, we would do best by saying the following: Since the questions themselves lay siege and attack us, we must go out to meet them. This is why the philosophical arts run in such close congruence with the martial arts. It is as Nietzsche says of wisdom: "she is a woman and never loves anyone but a warrior."27 The call to philosophy is in this case the call to love which is a kind of agony over the beloved, but it is also very much a war cry, and it resounds out of nothing other than that primal distress, from out of which man is struck by wonder, and from out of which he must be struck by the fundamental disposition of terror in the next beginning.28

What now can we see in light of the analogy of philosophy and man? Precisely the following: Sensitivity to the distress is entrance into the urgency of human being. Specifically, the urgency urges thought.

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28 See BQ, 4; and PLT, 93.
Nietzsche was, perhaps, that thinker to which Heidegger looked as one who felt the original distress as terror before everyone else, being as he was of such an acutely sensitive nature. It is no accident therefore that Heidegger, in what in fact makes up the bulk of his lecture, *Was Heisst Denken?*, introduces and works upon Nietzsche’s fateful words: “The wasteland grows.” According to Heidegger, this, Nietzsche’s “scream”—which is inevitably smothered in the process of its circulation—is (an appropriately) terrified response to the destitution of the world, seen, however dimly, in the deepening night, where what needs to be thought upon is rightfully approached as one who is terrified to the core, aghast.

XI. Thinking and Attunement.

For Heidegger, attunements are disclosive in their bringing to bear what is attuned, by letting it be encountered in the first place. Wonder, we recall, was not for Heidegger just some emotion, but rather that very original attunement that transported us into the midst of beings, to let them appear as such, and moreover, to let them appear in the conspicuity of their “is”. Let us see what else Heidegger said earlier with regard to the disclosive nature of attunements.

Generally speaking, in *Being and Time* Heidegger discusses attunements (*Stimmungen*), not so much with respect to “thinking” *per se*, but rather in light of its correspondence with what he then referred to as “understanding,” which was, along with attunement, “another existential structure in which the Being of the ‘there’ maintains itself” (BT, 182). In this context—and in similar fashion to his later treatment of
thinking’s *Grundstimmung*, “wonder”—Heidegger spoke of attunement as what delivers Dasein into the possibility of encounter with things in the world. There he said that “The [attunement] has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something” (BT, 176). More importantly, for our purposes, at this point Heidegger also provided us with a justification for his claim that attunement is disclosive in such a radical way—i.e. that attunement allows for the very possibility for encountering things in the world at all—when he clarified what he meant by the “encounter”: “Letting something be encountered is primarily *circumspective*; it is not just sensing something, or staring at it. It implies circumspective concern, and has the character of becoming affected in some way [*Betroffenwerdens*]; we can see this more precisely from the standpoint of state-of-mind [mood]” (BT, 176). Therefore, according to Heidegger one’s encounter with things always already implies a comportment to them, because they are encountered on the plane of circumspective concern, where the “something” appear insofar as is “matters” to us, and “becomes ontologically possible only in so far as Being-in as such has been determined existentially beforehand in such a manner that what it encounters within-the-world can ‘matter’ to it in this way” (BT, 176). Since for Heidegger “The fact that this sort of thing can ‘matter’ to it [Dasein] is grounded in one’s state-of-mind”, it was natural for him to conclude that “Dasein’s openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of state-of-mind” (BT, 176).

At this juncture, we would do well to give a brief consideration to two attunements that Heidegger examined in *Being and Time*. With respect to our current purposes, the first is helpful in its role as a conceptual mediator to the second. The first is
Heidegger's treatment of fear. He says: "That in the face of which we fear can be characterized as threatening," and, "what we have thus characterized as threatening is freed and allowed to matter to us" (BT, 180-1). Being "freed and allowed to matter" then, something particularly fearsome enters our purview. On the other hand we might recall Heidegger saying, in the special case of boredom, that "The inherent predicament of becoming bored is precisely that we cannot find anything in particular" (FM, 99). That is to say, boredom sets in when there is nothing in particular which, by "mattering" to us, makes its entrance in the circumspection of our concern. In fact it seems to be this very lack of fixation upon something in particular which characterizes boredom from the start.

The second attunement that Heidegger discusses is a singular one, insofar as it is the attunement which is marked by the lack of attunement. It is here argued that, at the very least, this special Stimmung was the conceptual forerunner (and placeholder) for what would later be discussed as boredom:

"Dasein always has some mood ['gestimmt ist', i.e., 'Dasein is always attuned']. The pallid, evenly balanced lack of mood [Ungestimmtheit], which is often persistent and which is not to be mistaken for a bad mood, is far from nothing at all. Rather, it is in this that Dasein becomes satiated with itself. Being has become manifest as a burden" (BT, 173).

Although in Being and Time Heidegger did not call this "pallid lack of mood" (Ungestimmtheit) boredom, it is clear that the two bear a striking conceptual resemblance to one another. First of all, Heidegger has said that this special attunement called
Ungestimmtheit—which is referred to as a “lack of mood,” and which might be provisionally translated as “Unattunedness”—is neither something “bad”, nor is it nothing. Likewise, boredom is far from being something purely negative for Heidegger; on the contrary, as we have seen, he has even said that it is meant to serve as the attunement of “our” philosophy. On the other hand, this is not to say that boredom is not altogether oppressive. As we have already demonstrated, in boredom, just as in what Heidegger called Ungestimmtheit in Being and Time, “Being becomes manifest as a burden.”

The conceptual association of boredom, Langweile, with Being and Time’s Ungestimmtheit is helpful to us in a second way. In a fashion that may seem strange at first, Heidegger describes Ungestimmtheit as when “Dasein becomes satiated with itself”—and yet, at the same time, it is also when “Being becomes manifest as a burden.” It sounds strange because satisfaction seems for us to be the relief of a burden, and not the opposite. In the case of boredom, this problem can be solved by making appeal to what Heidegger calls “emptiness” in profound boredom. It is as we recall, not emptiness in the sense of being a mere hollowness, lacking, or dis-satisfaction. This boredom leaves us empty, to be sure, but it is “a leaving empty that attacks more profoundly,” because it is “a preventing of that seeking” (FM, 117). In other words, it is satiation in the sense that the very “seeking to be satisfied with beings” is left behind in this emptiness. Boredom is therefore for Heidegger pure satiation, where there is nothing left to be satisfied. Satisfying though it is however, it is also still an “attack” upon man by Dasein, where time becomes long and burdensome, and naked being-there presses in upon us. Here we
can see how, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger was able to claim that becoming satiated coincides with the becoming manifest of Being as a burden.

Heidegger indicates that attunement not only makes possible the encounter with beings, but is always also disclosive of Being-in itself. "Fearing about something," for example, "as being-afraid in the face of something, always discloses equiprimordially entities-within-the-world and Being-in—the former as threatening and the latter as threatened" (BT, 181). Quite literally then, (given an understanding of the original German word *Befindlichkeit*), along with the disclosure of fearsome things, we find ourselves in and through attunements. This is also certainly the case in boredom; however, where nothing enters the purview of circumspective concern, beings *as a whole* become impressive upon this concern, in that for the moment none of them interest us. This is the equanimity that can be encountered in the midst of boredom and in the practice of meditation alike. Since boredom is an attunement to nothing in particular, then its disclosure encompasses beings as a whole—along with a very acute sense of being-there, which is oppressive and burdensome.

Now, why all this fuss about the attunement? For our purposes, Heidegger answers that "grounding-attunement *attunes* Da-sein and thus attunes *thinking*" (CP, 16). If thoughtfulness involves this responsive attunement to distress, then to say that thought is lacking is also to say that the distress is not properly felt. Accordingly, in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, Heidegger tells of the time wherein we find "the need arising from the lack of need" (BQ, 156). For the poet, this is the time of utmost destitution, when "the destitute time is no longer able even to experience its own destitution", and
where “that inability, by which even the destitution of the destitute state in obscured, is the time’s absolutely destitute character” (PLT, 93).

Given this, there can be no doubt as to the direct correspondence between, firstly, the distress which determines man’s being one who is “on the way”—i.e. the distress of being by nature caught in the Zwischen, the distress which is to be preserved in “creative tolerance”—and secondly, the distress meant to be brought to bear in Heidegger’s pronouncement on the thought-provoking, with the special “still not”, and our being caught at the entrance to thinking, perplexed as we must be with the “way in” and the “way out.” And now we have just seen that, in the neighbourhood of poetry, the distressing need also shows itself in the destitution of the times to the poet. It is especially fitting, therefore, that in this context Heidegger continues by redressing (quite subtly) the issue of disposition here, in saying that, “Long is the time because even terror, taken by itself as a ground for turning, is powerless as long as there is no turn with mortal men” (PLT, 93). From this we can gather that this “turning” which takes place—from out of Ereignis—is also a turn in grounding-attunement (Grundstimmung). It must therefore be a turn in how we are disposed toward beings; and that is to say, a turn in how beings address us and in what way they hold us, “gripped.” Heidegger says: “philosophizing pertains to such being gripped, to awakening and planting it. All such being gripped, however, comes from and remains in an attunement”—and as we recall, what is essential to Dasein is so also for philosophy. This points to the affective dimension of philosophical thought. He goes on to say that philosophizing is not some “arbitrary enterprise alongside others”, but rather something that happens “in the ground [Grunde] of human Dasein”, such that “the attunements out of which our being gripped
philosophically ... are always necessarily *fundamental attunements* [Grundstimmungen]" (FM, 7). Furthermore, wonder cannot be something which is to be "re-awoken" and to be reinstated, since "our basic position toward beings is not any more and never again will be that of the first beginning ... Therefore the basic disposition can no longer be the one of wonder" (BQ, 159). But we're not ready for that beginning yet; moreover, Heidegger insists that the crossover to the next beginning is grounded in a reverence for the first.

Heidegger's words render the rift. The rift houses the strife (*Streit*). Is the strife we envision here comparable to the "distress" at the heart of the onset of thinking? To this we say: yes, and for one simple reason, namely, that the thought-worthy—i.e. that which *calls* thought—remains the same in both cases, indeed, in all cases. In other words, the distress of still-not-thinking serves as the impetus for thought in both cases. Man stands in the strife by nature, implemented in the between. Heidegger's poetic utterance recalls this call from deep in the past, long ago, "in the beginning." It is the trace which the "few and rare" are prepared to hear; it resonates throughout the history of metaphysics like an echo. With its immanent carriage of what is most thought-worthy—and of what in fact gives thinking over—as a saying from which to learn thinking, it is one that points toward the "other" beginning, at the end of philosophy. Indeed, it was Heidegger's explicit task to send his students and himself reeling toward the leap into what is most astounding by virtue of its being the nearest of the near: the leap into *thinking*. In this way, the call to thought, as the echo—articulated as it has been by Heidegger's poetic endeavor—simultaneously points back to the original (in the sense of origin-bearing beginning) self-refusal of thinking, *and* also toward the leap which signifies the next beginning, yet to come. Standing between, it points back to the original
withdrawal (just as, significantly, Man himself is, as the speaker of language, "the pointer into withdrawal"), comporting itself to that first beginning. And secondly, it gathers the distress which calls out in the new beginning. What is more, these two things it must do as such a saying, for this reason: "The style of thoughtful mindfulness in the crossing from one beginning to the other is also already determined by the allotment of the one beginning to the other beginning" (CP, 4). It is worth acknowledging at this point that, roughly speaking, the texts *Basic Questions in Philosophy* and *Contributions to Philosophy* were composed concurrently.

In the previous sections, we have taken a preliminary glance into what we have now called the rift (*Riss*) that was opened up in Heidegger's words, "*Most thought provoking is that we are still not thinking.*" We have surmised that these poetic words point back to thought's own self-refusal. After saying this, Heidegger goes on to say, as we have seen, that this still-not-thinking is nothing like the ill effect of a lack of effort to think, in which case the issue would be quickly calculated and resolved (i.e. the question would be "solved" and disavowed). No; in fact, what he says next is the following:

"That we are still not thinking is by no means only because man does not yet turn sufficiently toward that which, by origin and innately, wants to be thought about since in its essence it remains what must be thought about. Rather, that we are still not thinking stems from the fact that the thing itself that must be thought turns away from man, has turned away long ago ... what really must be thought keeps itself turned away from man since the beginning" (WCT, 7).

There is something so strange here; namely, it is the notion that what "wants to be thought about" has turned away from the thinker "since the beginning." It is in other
words something always in recession from us. What seems strange is that, naturally, we would wish to say that this turning away, this withdrawal as it were, could not possibly be the proper movement of what by its very essence wants to be thought upon, simply because turning away is preeminently a movement of repulsion. We want to ask, accordingly, why doesn’t that which desires to be thought just come forward and meet us? In response we should say that it does meet us, greeting most intimately, by giving itself as withdrawal. It is withdrawal itself which is to be food for thought, or, what amounts to the same, it is forgetting itself which is to be recalled; in Heidegger’s formulation, indeed, he says that it is thoughtlessness which is to be thought. The self-refusal of thought, literally, takes shape (Gestalt) and shows itself in Heidegger’s words, when he pronounces the thought-provoking—what is to be thought, now and always—as thought’s own absence, i.e. the want of thought. We attain to entrance upon thinking only when we address the withdrawal and as-yet historical refusal of thinking itself.

In order to understand what Heidegger means in referring hear to “the beginning”, where, really, the self-refusal of the thought-worthy calls “from”, we must turn back to older text, Basic Questions of Philosophy. In chapter five, we are given an extensive elaboration on his portrayal of the basic disposition which orients primordial thinking—that being the disposition of wonder. When we make ready to name this “disposition which orients our thinking” as such, we find that Heidegger is speaking about that thinking which is most fundamental to the ecstatic being of man. As such, it is the very disposition which disposes us—and indeed displaces us—amidst beings in a primordial sense. If we should want to render a figuration of thinking, then immediately for us “the task is to clarify the basic disposition of the beginning of thinking” (BQ, 135).
As Heidegger anticipates, however, when we begin a consideration of basic dispositions, it seems “a misunderstanding immediately insinuates itself, to the effect that the dispositions would be something man ‘has’ … whereas in truth, i.e., understood on the basis of the essence of Being (as appropriating event), the dispositions have man and consequently determine him in various ways” (BQ, 133). Accordingly, from this it becomes clear that disposition can no longer be reduced to explication in terms of “mood”, although moods are indeed an important element in clarifying the nature of dispositions. To clarify what has been said about dispositions here, we might turn to another place where Heidegger performs just the same, somewhat counterintuitive movement. Heidegger characterizes wonder using a method of distinction strikingly similar in form to the one used to distinguish fear from anxiety in *Being and Time*, (a movement that certainly predates Heidegger himself).²⁹ Admiration, astonishment, and awe are distinct from true wonder, because “All the previously mentioned modes of marveling—if we may collect them under this title—have one thing in common throughout all their differentiations, namely that in them *a determinate individual object stands out as being unusual*” (BQ, 143-4; my italics). While marveling is always in respect to some thing in particular, (and thereby presupposes the subject-object dichotomy), wonder then presumably determines itself in regard to nothing in particular; or, what is the same: in particular, the Nothing.

²⁹ See BT. 230.
When we consider that man is still for Heidegger most essentially a thinking being—(still, that is to say, even after his rejection of modernity’s obsession with man as thinking being in the sense of *animal rationale*)—we see that, since he also says that “the essence of man lies in ek-sistence,” then the relation between ek-sistent standing out (in the midst) and the thoughtful essence of man share an intimate and intriguing relation to one another (BW, 224). They are bound to one another because it is this very ek-static standing in the midst—and the distress which inhabits us therefrom—which, as we have seen, compels us toward thinking. We might formulate it this way, that in the distress inherent to essentially ecstatic Being of man, man is originally attuned in the disposition of wonder. It is no accident, also, that wonder is also the beginning of philosophy.

For us, since the task at hand is to approach *Denken* on its own terms, and since, as Heidegger says, “Wonder is the basic disposition that primordially disposes man into the beginning of thinking” (BQ, 147), we must turn back to the beginning and to the basic disposition of wonder.

Contrary to wonder, in the case of marveling and common astonishment, something “arouses the desire for amazement, engages it, and sustains it, specifically in such a way that it makes the search for ever new things of this kind more ardent” (BQ, 136), such that what is called “extraordinary” and “amazing” becomes a commodity like any other, and is thereby reduced to the realm of the exceedingly ordinary—when “the uncommon itself becomes something familiar” (BQ, 137). As we have already seen (in Chapter Two of this work), in *Was Heisst Denken?* Heidegger speaks of the same matter in reference to what counts as “interesting.” Similar to his characterization of “the amazing,” Heidegger expressed it like this: “Interesting is the sort of thing that can freely
be regarded as indifferent the next moment, and be displaced by something else, which then concerns us just as little as what went before”; and from this we can gather how it is that Heidegger saw philosophy as so injured when it is thought of as being just a matter of curiosity (WCT, 5). That these two texts should bear such a resemblance to each other in this way, now revealed to us, was preambled in our assertion that, in order to make sense of Heidegger’s saying that what desires to be thought upon has kept itself withdrawn since the beginning, we must rediscover what was said (some nine years earlier) about this beginning. As Heidegger says, “we must pass through this reflection in order to allow the meditation on the first beginning to become what it is: the thrust into the transition [to another beginning]” (BQ, 160).

In order to open up what Heidegger was getting at with his discussion of “basic dispositions”, we should say first of all that, properly speaking, people never “have” dispositions; neither are we in them, as if we were “transported into” them in the course of our dealing with beings. Instead, “it is the disposition that transports, transports us into this or that basic relation to beings as such. More precisely, disposition is what transports us in such a way that is co-founds the time-space of the transporting itself” (BQ, 134). With regard to disposition, in other words, we might say that it is the disposing of man amongst beings which allows for his position, spatially and temporally. Here we can see the words “dispose” and “expose” draw nearer one another. That is, since “the essence of man lies in ek-sistence”, it is natural for Heidegger to make the claim that “’Disposition, man’s heart … means not merely the sensitive and emotive side of human consciousness, but the essential being of all human nature” (WCT, 148).
According to Heidegger, people never have dispositions. We also detect a marked similarity between what Heidegger is saying here and what he said about freedom in his “On the Essence of Truth”—namely, that “Man does not ‘possess’ freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom, ek-sistent Dasein, possesses man—so originally that only it secures for humanity that distinctive relatedness to being as a whole as such which first founds all history” (BW, 129). Accordingly, we find that Heidegger’s earlier portrayal of wonder as the basic disposition of man, (a disposition which now seems to share a close affinity with what was later named “freedom”), also imbibes man’s historicality. He says, “We call it the basic disposition because in disposing man it displaces him into that on which and in which word, work, and deed, as historical, can be based and history can begin” (BQ, 147). The disposition is best described as being that of wonder since, for Heidegger, the legacy of Occidental thinking begins with the first asking of the question, “What are beings?”

Now, how are we to characterize this original disposition called “wonder”? At the outset of this question, we should look to this simple declaration: “Wonder as the basic disposition belongs to the most unusual” (BQ, 147). This claim seems to be straightforward enough; again, it easily seems correct to say to say something like: ‘Of course, this is obvious. It stands to reason that the most unusual things would evoke the most wonder.’ Even so, we have with this “correct” reading of the line, “Wonder as the basic disposition belongs to the most unusual,” missed the truth of this statement, which is revealed only upon our seeing that that which is meant here by “the most unusual” is also what is ubiquitously taken to be the most usual and obvious of all. Why is this? Because Being always hides in the oblivion of the obvious.
Our first interpretation was purely an ontical one. We were still only ankle-deep in the question—relegated to asking only after the “awe”, and “marveling” and the “wonders” of the world—when really, the wonder is that there is a world! If we heed the ontological difference, if we relay ourselves through its hermeneutic, we could attempt to render the meaning of Heidegger’s line by saying that wonder, as it draws upon thoughtful questioning, “belongs to the most unusual,” where what is most unusual is the presence of the present. Being itself, then, is the most wonderful.

With regard to the disposing displacement amongst beings (i.e. transport) of wonder, Heidegger says that “wonder displaces man into the realm where the most usual [beings] … are established in their most proper unusualness, namely the one of their Being, and where beings as such then become the most worthy of questioning” (BQ, 147). It is in this way that man first beholds beings as question worthy, not from out of a fascination with their variety and glamour, but rather with respect to their Being at all. Regarding the relationship between wonder and Denken, Heidegger concludes: “Wonder is the basic disposition that primordially disposes man into the beginning of thinking” (BQ, 147). In other words, wonder is the disposition of the thinker. In fact, wonder is the very means by which the distress reaches thought.

What is most familiar to us, we might say, is always what is closest to us, since, after all, it is familiarity that gains ground through our regular acquaintance and keeping of close company with things. Strangely enough, (although indubitably nonetheless), familiarity breeds negligence in a particular way. In this sense, Heidegger says, “The familiar carries an air of harmlessness and ease, which causes us to pass lightly over what really deserves to be questioned” (WCT, 154). Things and circumstances, that is, tend
fade in their impression upon us when they become more and more a matter of commonplace and thereby become to that extent ignorable. In plain terms, they recede into forgottenness (oblivion) when things are 'as they should be' and customarily have been. Thus arises for Heidegger "The danger of having done with things" (WCT, 179). Forgetfulness, then, can be dangerous in the highest degree.

On the other hand, according to Heidegger, "Wonder—understood transitorily—brings forth the showing of what is most usual in its unusualness" (BQ, 145). Moreover, wonder transports and holds man in the between, not knowing the way in or out of this unusualness. There is then, again, only the layover, only the waiting. This unusualness of the usual is not to be done away with—"it is incapable of penetrating the unusualness by way of explanation, since that would precisely be to destroy it", BQ, 145). This is why we are not here dealing with specifically unusual things. Something's being unusual, "exotic", is, as we have seen, an attractive selling point for modernity. But thinking, like meditation, cannot be sold as such. By being heralded as "unusual" and "interesting", it is in fact relegated to the sphere of those things, the unusualness of which can be used up in people's taking interest in them and becoming familiar with them. Therefore, when speaking on the apparent surge in modern man's interest in philosophy, Heidegger says that "today's interest accepts as valid only what is interesting. And interesting is the sort of thing that can freely be regarded as indifferent the next moment, and be displaced by something else" (WCT, 5). What we call "the unusual", "the exotic", "the wondrous", are all what we expect to find in a circus act. It is entertainment at best. But thinking begins with wonder because wonder plunges us into the necessity of questioning. Man is a thinker, and so also a wonderer, and so, indeed, also a wanderer, always underway. For
Heidegger, as a thinker, “We must let ourselves be admitted into questions that seek what no inventiveness can find” (WCT, 8). Likewise, wandering along, “Not knowing the way out or the way in … is not helplessness, for wonder as such does not desire help but instead precisely opens up this between” (BQ, 145).

But how does wonder compel us into the unusualness, i.e., the extraordinary nature of the ordinary? How in other words do we attain a wondrous vantage? Heidegger answers, “The purest acknowledgement of what is most unusual is fulfilled … in the questioning that asks what the most usual itself might be, such that it can reveal itself as what is most unusual” (BQ, 148). For Heidegger, in other words, the very thoughtful consideration of what it could be that makes something qualifiable as “usual”—i.e. the question, “what does it mean for this to be usual?”—at once brings us face to face with what is most unusual in beings, namely, their “is” (BQ, 145); and also directs us toward the very oblivion of that unusualness, in that we are compelled to consider how the movement toward usualness is always one of forgetfulness—in this case, the ontological case, it points specifically to Seinvergessenheit.

According to Heidegger, “The origin keeps itself concealed in the beginning” (WCT, 152). The beginning—i.e. the slipping into the oblivion of the obvious—is at once the onset and the retirement of Being’s poem, “just begun” with man. It hides in plain sight, and prefers to submerge into forgetfulness, as it were, as if into a sweeping river; that is, the river: Lethe. Truth is primordially self-concealing in its propensity to shroud itself in the cloak of platitude. To this extent, Heidegger says, “Being remains mysterious, the simple nearness of an unobtrusive governance” (BW, 212), for, “It gives itself and refuses itself simultaneously” (BW, 215). Is this to say that forgetfulness itself
is somehow integral with recollection? Heidegger's answer is positive. Namely, for him *Lethe* completes *A-lethe*. What is more, concealment is the heart of it all. As Werner Marx has it, for Heidegger, "Concealment as mystery and errancy permeates the clearing ... [this] is meant to indicate that everything overt originates in concealedness and continues to belong to it."^30 But how is it that the shadows take precedence? It seems that for Heidegger, light (disclosure) places itself in the Open. The light is shed then, as we would say, and emanates; it lights things up in a contour against their own shadows—for example, as the crest of the illumined moon is shaped against its own shadowy side—but darkness is already and always everywhere. For Heidegger then, darkness takes precedence over the light because darkness precedes light, and because it is therefore a place of return.

In a very significant way, Being remains hidden in obscurity for Heidegger; it successfully withdraws into *oblivion* insofar as it settles into the *obvious* and *normal*. Admittedly, it seems that all things can become commonplace. It seems even that, as technological man persists and novelties spring up, new things lose their shine faster. This is because things are not properly left to shine. Accordingly we might say that the art of the 20th century truly is showmanship, or *show biz*. At this juncture we would do well to point out that Heidegger never made claim to forerunning a project of pure exposition of Being. He was out to rekindle the question of Being, and not to simply excavate it and put it on show. Heidegger understood the necessity of oblivion, just as he recognized the precedence of concealment.

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XIII. The Oblivion and Its Propriety

As we have seen, for Heidegger historical man is grounded (based) in the basic disposition of wonder, where history ignites in man's original questioning stance towards beings as such. However, this is not to say that, since according to Heidegger man now finds himself dangerously ensconced in the era of Seinvergessenheit, then man must have "fallen" from this once noble and authoritative way of thinking and questioning, first encountered by the Greeks. Indeed, even the Greeks could not sustain the question of the Being's truth (aletheia), delivered though they were to it (thinking) from out of the transporting, relating disposition called wonder. Heidegger says that "[T]he Greeks would have renounced their most proper task if they had expressly questioned aletheia itself. How so? They would then not have been questioning any longer, i.e., they would not have kept themselves on the path of their questioning ... for, in order to remain within the questioning of being, they had to remain on the periphery of that which brings this question to its final end" (BQ, 119). There are two consequences of this development. Firstly, the original, basic disposition of wonder is by no means the ultimate disposition, and certainly not one that we are supposed to try clambering back to. We need to think back to the original disposition of wonder in order to prepare for the disposition of the next beginning. In looking back to wonder at the beginning of Occidental thinking, the "need" and "distress" is uncovered, and this is what is most important. What we are headed back to is the need itself, to the distress which seize upon man most originally, such that "man himself first arises out of this distress." We
head back to wonder, specifically, because wonder is “the mode of compelling of the need”—and this is to say that wonder is “the way this need itself exists and incorporates man” (BQ, 135).

In Being’s flinging man—displacing him, as it were—into the midst of beings, it compels thought *through* wonder, it exists *as* wonder: then, when wonder holds sway, we say that Being has “embraced” its essence, and that thought has come to bear. For Heidegger, wonder is wonder at the most unusual—i.e. that “there is”—which itself always manages to pass as the most usual of all things. Being struck by wonder, one is stupefied at the sight of thought’s fateful communion with Being. Heidegger therefore asks:

That a thinking is, ever and suddenly—
whose amazement could fathom it?

Is it too crude to say that it is the very Being of thinking which demands thought? As the above couplet presages, it is indeed the *factum est* of the thinking which sets upon us, staggering all fathomability. The communion of Being and thought, as the most obvious, is the most readily forgotten, finding appropriate refuge in the oblivion. Like the *Tao*, Being resides in the most inconspicuous, everyday affairs. Being nothing out of the ordinary, it is easily forgotten.

Let us more carefully consider Heidegger’s portrayal of the relation between the oblivion and the forgetfulness of Being (*Seinvergessenheit*). In order to do this, we must first turn to a third term which for Heidegger names the essence of modern technology: *Gestell* (i.e., “Enframing”). Beginning the essay “The Turning”, Heidegger says: “The
essence of Enframing is that setting-upon gathered into itself which entraps the truth of its own coming to presence with oblivion” (QCT, 36). In addressing the “oblivion” of Being, Heidegger says that, “Oblivion of Being means: the self-concealing of the origin of Being divided into whatness and thatness in favor of Being which ... remains unquestioned as Being” (EP, 4)—he then goes on to say that division as such was an event in the history of Being: the occasion of Being’s admission into forgottenness. As the last section presaged, it is “most fleeting” in its being the “most unconsidered” (BW, 132), and what is more, “It all too easily escapes us and slips away into obviousness” (WCT, 178). Accordingly, for Heidegger, as it recedes into the oblivion of what seems most obvious (i.e., the “most usual”), Being escapes us. It needs to be thought upon however, to be sure, and this necessity manifests itself as the compulsion of wonder—i.e. the compulsive situation amongst beings—and yet it gives itself over hesitantly, with reservations, as though it preferred to remain unknown. Hence by the same right as we say that it needs to be thought upon, according to Heidegger, we can see how Being likewise wants to be forgotten; and so, it makes its way into oblivion.

Heidegger tells us that the essence of modern technology, enframing, involves the trapping of the truth of its own “coming to presence” in oblivion, where it remains forgotten. But Heidegger also tells us that the essence of technology is itself nothing technological. It is nothing man-made. This is because man’s venturing anything is always secondary to his originally being ventured from out of the ultimate venture, which is Being.

Let us try to explain this by first turning to Heidegger’s account of poetry and “measurement.” According to him, man as the speaker of language “dwells poetically”—
and what is more: "Poetry is measuring" (PLT, 221). Therefore Being, insofar as it dares ek-sistent relationship to man, also dares its own measurement. Now, what stands in need of clarification here is the word "measurement." The poetic measure is for Heidegger something quite apart from simple quantification, whereby the use of instruments disposes beings to calculation, and where "by the use of something known—measuring rods and their number—something unknown is stepped off and thus made known, and so is confined within a quantity and order which can always be determined at a glance" (PLT, 224). This kind of measurement readies the material of "space" for the process. Things are standardized by numbered measurement, so that we can wrangle up the usability of them all in a flash. Likewise, we might observe that under the modern rubric of information theory, language itself is subject to this sort of measurement (i.e. in its capacity for words to deliver information), so that words themselves can become material of specific volume and price, and are thereby commodified, (for example, as when advertisement space is sold by-the-word). Language itself then becomes Bestand.

Measurement in the common sense, such as when we tally things up and thereby arrange them, harbours the assumption that measurement is always quantitative. Poetic measurement is different. Heidegger says: "[Poetic m]easure-taking is no science. Measure-taking gauges the between, which brings the two, heaven and earth, to one another. This measurement taking has its own metron, and thus its own metric" (PLT, 221). For Heidegger it becomes significant that this poetic measure 'taking' is not at the same time also a 'grasping,' but rather more like a 'letting': "[W]e, in order to think of poetry, must ever and again first give thought to the measure that is taken in poetry; we must pay heed to the kind of taking here, which does not consist in clutching or any kind
of grasping, but rather in letting come of what has been dealt out” (PLT, 224). It is
therefore “A strange measure for ordinary and in particular also for all merely scientific
ideas” (PLT, 223). It is likewise a strange seeming measure because it is not
instrumentational, but rather *manual*: it is "certainly not a palpable stick or rod but in
truth simpler to handle than they [are], provided our hands do not abruptly grasp but are
guided by gestures befitting the measure here to be taken. This is done by a taking which
at no time clutches” (PLT, 223). In a very original way, Heidegger has commissioned the
gestures of the hand for the measure-taking of the poet; this is because “the hand’s
gestures run everywhere through language” (WCT, 16).

These passages come to have special relevance for us when we notice that, as
with the case of poetic measurement, “Thinking guides and sustains every gesture of the
hand” (WCT, 23). Accordingly, “Every motion of the hand in everyone of its works
carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself in that
element” (WCT, 16). It is for this reason that, when Heidegger refers to “thinking,” what
he has in mind “the handicraft *par excellence*” (WCT, 23). Moreover, like the poetic
measure, “Thinking is not grasping,” and it is a craft of which the gestures resemble those
of such measure, to the extent that, “Taking is not grasping, but letting come what lies
before us” (WCT, 211). What is essential to *Kraft* for Heidegger is its relatedness to its
material. For thinking, this is the thought-worthy. The relationship is thoroughly poetic,
borne over in a measure of poetry.

Given Heidegger’s elucidation of the difference between the poetic and non-
poetic measure taking, specifically with regard to the language of measurement, we are
now in a better position to see how, in the sending of itself as Enframing—that is, as the
readily calculable—Being dares its own calculative measurement, since “Within Framing, speaking turns into information” (OWL, 132). This, the informative word, is the speaking that prevails in the era of technology, when “‘Information’ at one and the same time means the appraisal that as quickly, comprehensively, unequivocally, and profitably as possible acquaints contemporary humanity with the securing of its necessities, its requirements, and their satisfaction”, such the informational model of language is the precondition for technological undertakings of this sort (PR, 124). This speaking is perhaps most pronounced in its propensity for quick-reference measurement, where what is questionable is leveled off and forgotten in favour of what is readily accessible. This is what Heidegger calls “erring.” But again, it is not a “mistake” on the part of mankind. Rather, as Werner Marx correctly perceives, “Being, reigning as the Geschick sent in errancy, is what now leads man astray in his measure-taking.”31

Being dares man to Enframe. As Heidegger tells us, man is dared in the double sense. That is, man is dared in so far as he is ventured into being. Secondly, he is dared in the sense that he is constantly set upon and urged—that is, placed within urgency—by this threat and that, but most primordially, by his mortal predicament that is the pressing need to take care of himself. Heidegger said: “To the extent that Being is challenged, Man is likewise challenged, that is to say ‘framed’ so he will safeguard the Existence which concerns him as the very substance of his planning and calculating” (ID, 26). Safeguarding our Existence is a necessary condition of doing anything besides. It is also a necessary condition for thinking of any kind. We are—each of us—“thrown”, no doubt, into a world which is already underway; we must all likewise take decisive action so as to

31 Werner Marx. op. cit., 41.
stay there, alive, acting further as we are compelled. In other words, insofar as death is default, it is do or die. This means that without concerted effort, our lives would all be over soon enough. If Man really is the keeper—that is, the preserver—of the truth of Being, then his survival is presumably vital and imperative to the presence of Being. Being destines itself, as it does, with regard to man, in its belongingness with thought, and perpetuates this belongingness (i.e. the Same), through an engagement of mutual challenge to *enframe*. It is this sense in which Heidegger said:

“Our whole existence is challenged everywhere—now as in play, now urgently; now as if set upon, now as if pushed—to plan and calculate everything. What does this challenge mean? … [Is] not Being itself then subject to the challenge of having Existence appear within the purview of calculability?”, ID, 25).

According to this, Being destines *itself* in and through Enframing, and that means that it is responsible for the response it provokes. As Frank Schalow has it, Heidegger has discovered that “Technology arises in conjunction with this forgottenness as a phase in the completion of metaphysics in which beings assume priority over being and yield to schemes of manipulation”, and moreover, this testifies not to the misbehavior of mankind, but rather to “[B]eing’s abandonment of beings to instrumental processes which reorganize the natural realm into resources for human exploitation—'standing reserve.'”, such that the forgottenness of Being associated with the epoch of technology issues from the orchestration of Being itself.32 It is Being’s own abandonment that we recall when we recall the usurping (literally, the expropriation) of Being, in which beings come to take

ultimate priority over Being. But this is more of a description than an accusation. In short, enframing, as the dynamic essence (Anwesen) of Being itself, makes way for Being to escape into forgetfulness. As we have seen, Being heads for the oblivion. This brings us back to the beginning once again.

For Heidegger, “The history of Western thought begins, not by thinking what is most thought-provoking, but by letting it remain forgotten. Western thought thus begins with an omission, perhaps even a failure. So it seems, as long as we regard oblivion only as a deficiency, something negative” (WCT, 152). Thinking begins with forgetting, and this origin itself is forgotten as a matter of course. Heidegger is not so quick to equate forgetfulness with something definitively wrong; in this sense, Seinvergessenheit is not the metaphysical sin. To Heidegger it seemed that “We are inclined, because we are so accustomed, to see forgetting only as a failure to retain, and to consider this failure a defect. If what is most thought-provoking remains forgotten, it does not appear. It suffers an injury. At least, so it seems” (WCT, 152). It seems to be at loss, it seems to be injured. What kind of talk is this? It is mainly because Being makes way for its own preservation (in Dasein) by occupying the lowest, i.e. the forgotten depths of the commonplace, that it appears as injured in being the most neglected. Moreover, Heidegger tells us that, “Abandonment of being is strongest at that place where it is most decidedly hidden. That happens where beings have—and had to—become most ordinary and familiar” (CP, 77).

For Heidegger however, the further off what is forgotten recedes, the more urgent the urgency, the more acutely the poet tunes in—perhaps this is the saving power immanent within the height of danger. For the poet, familiarity itself becomes most urgently conspicuous. We must remember that, for Heidegger (via Hölderlin) the saving
power resides with the danger—they grow together. The echoing cry is loudest, therefore, when the distress is greatest, where it is “most decidedly hidden” as no distress at all.\textsuperscript{33} Likewise, most dangerous in the danger of technology is its passing unrecognized as a danger. Perhaps the “saving power” of the most destitute time lies in this crescendoed amplitude of the call to thought—\textit{the outcrying silence of no distress at all}—where the poet is most needed to point the way to turning, when everything has become familiar and commonplace, where it is always obvious what needs to be done. The saving power is strong with the danger. It is the case here, perhaps, as we often say, that the night is darkest just before the dawn.

Just as that which desires to be thought upon is something that has always been in recession from us since the beginning, clearly for Heidegger the distance of the most forgotten is itself what gives food for our thought. Its call is most readily heard when it is farthest off, because it is all the more urgent in its absence. Heidegger traces Being’s admission into the oblivion, that is, thinks historically to the origins of thinking, where forgetfulness presides. Could it be that, in accordance to the back-tracking movement of thinking that we have identified, this recession into oblivion since the beginning is really just so “seemingly”? To Heidegger’s mind, “What looks like a digression is in fact the actual proper movement on the way … When we intend nearness, remoteness comes to the fore” (OWL, 102). Again, we might at this juncture recall another movement that we find in Lao Tzu, when he says: “Receding, it is described as far away, / Being far away, it is described as [returning]”\textsuperscript{34}—or, as Hinton translates: “Gone far away means it’s come

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} See CP 8-9.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Lao Tzu, \textit{Tao Te Ching}, translated by D.C. Lau (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1963), 30.
\end{itemize}
back.” Just as “the way forward seems backward,” what seems to be “receding” and thus to be the furthest off, is really on the way near. Likewise, perhaps, the distress of no distress at all is the greatest when distress is the furthest off. We therefore have to find our way back—through thinking alone? Heidegger asks: “But are there other ways in the epoch of distress?”, and replies, “What good fortune here is preserved for the poet!” (CP, 42).

XIV. The Poet and Appropriation (Ereignis).

For Heidegger, it is up to the poet to hear language as it speaks, and then to Say. For this, he says, “… it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss” (PLT, 92). Likewise, the thinker thinks back to appropriation, where, “The leap starts in Being as the ground [Grund] of Existence and heads for the abyss [Abgrund] …”—here Heidegger links Ereignis to the abyss. He continues, saying that: “Nevertheless, this abyss is neither an empty nothing, nor is it a dark confusion. Rather, it is [Ereignis]. In [Ereignis] we get the essential vibration of what is communicated as Speech” (ID, 30). Accordingly, we find this same important insight with regard to the abyss as it is said in “What are Poets For?”—this quotation continues: “The abyss holds and remarks everything … reach[ing] into the abyss, [the poet] comes to know the marks that the abyss remarks” (PLT, 83). Heidegger has identified Ereignis with that abyss which grants the “essential vibrations” of Speech. Moreover, such “reaching into the abyss”

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which traces its marks into language, is for the poet the essential bearing of Being, whereby he marks its remarks.

The poet listens to language. Now, what he hears in the destitute time is none other than the language of communicative technique. This is because Enframing is the essence of Being in the age of technology, and Being delivers itself over (i.e. is allocated to man) as the readily calculable. Accordingly, the language of Being (as *Gestell*) is of a specific character; namely: “Within Framing, speaking turns into information” (OWL, 132). The language that the poet hears in our dangerous age is this very language of Framing; words become vessels for the “information” that they carry. As we shall show presently, for Heidegger this is actually the language that is appropriate to the challenge of Being. Here he explains in this important passage:

“Because Framing challenges man, that is, provokes him to order and set up all that is present being as technical inventory, Framing persists after the manner of Appropriation, specifically by simultaneously obstructing Appropriation, in that all ordering finds itself channeled into calculative thinking and therefore speaks the language of Framing. Speaking is challenged to correspond in every respect to Framing in which all present beings can be commandeered” (OWL, 131-2).

The calculative persuasion that has been called “the framework”, which runs both ways in the mutual challenge of Being and man (the challenge to challenge, that is), is really a necessary feature of the Destining of Being; in fact, Being features itself as such.

It is a common misconception to suppose that the threat and affluence of enframing have come about solely as a result of man’s explosive industrialization. Indeed, to misconceive the matter in this way is in the same stroke to betray a thinking
which is utterly confined to the systematic calculative apparatus of technology itself. That is, such a conception, even when it attempts to make its way to an earnest view of the essence of technology, still figures everything in terms of the effects born out of man’s imperious domination over nature—in his taking hold of it technically. In truth, technological invention could not have been itself an invention of technology, and therefore not an invention of man: “The [revealing] itself, within which ordering unfolds, is never a human handiwork, any more than is the realm through which man is already passing every time he as a subject relates to an object” (QCT, 18). It is also for this reason that Heidegger claims that man can never overcome technology in the ordinary sense, because it is a matter of Being destining itself in the constellation of the framework (ID, 25-6). This “framework” is for Heidegger the integrative outfitting of reciprocity between man and Being: they challenge each other thereby. Man did not build the framework; precipitously, he finds himself positioned in it. What is more, to this extent we can say that Being engenders calculative thinking. In this sense, indeed, man is challenged more originally than anything else; he is “challenged to exploit”. This is why he says that revealing as enframing is not a human device, (not uniquely, essentially human); it belongs primordially to the Anwesen of Being.

Furthermore, let us recall that Enframing brings with it the trapping of its own coming to presence in oblivion. Heidegger insists that it is the nature of Being to hide and withdraw in and through its own coming to presence; therefore, we can see that Being hides in oblivion, i.e., in the forgetfulness associated with the consideration of Being qua Being as dejected in favour of the calculative consideration of beings and their potential for bestowing advantage. In this way, it retires in its very approach. On the other hand, in
memory—"the gathering of thinking that recalls"—what is most thought-provoking is preserved and kept. But "from what does the keeping preserve what is to-be-thought? From oblivion" (WCT, 151). At first glance, it seems as though forgetfulness were the enemy of memory. However as Heidegger points out, "this keeping is not compelled to preserve in this manner. It can permit the oblivion of what is most thought-provoking. What is our evidence? The evidence is that what is most thought-provoking, what long since and forever gives us food for thought, remains in its very origin withdrawn into oblivion" (WCT, 151). Thus it has become clear how when we recognize that the essence of man is nothing man-made, we gain vantage of how Being dares its own Enframing, its own measurement, as well as the historical errancy which consists in the forgetting of itself. Moreover, it is because Ereignis is a way of self-enshrouding that Being is fashioned after the easily forgotten. Nevertheless, "Memory, Mother of Muses—[is] the thinking back to what is to be thought is the source and ground of poetry. This is why poesy is the water that at times flows backward toward the source" (WCT, 11). For Heidegger, there is a poetic building (dwelling) that is the source of necessity for all other buildings. Moreover, what is most essential to this primordial building is its being manifest as measuring out the between of Heaven and Earth.

With a view of Being as Ereignis, the question, "What is called thinking?", is a world-historical question. Speaking in reference to this, Heidegger adds: "But in our usage, the word 'world history' means the factum that there is world, and that man is as its inhabitant" (WCT, 136). That is to say, the question is world-historical in that it speaks to the origin of thinking's enjoinment to Being—the adopting of Being to man, specifically, in the consummating being (factum est) of world. The worlding of the world
attests to this event poetically. In other words, the Saying of world points back to the event (Ereignis) itself. And conversely, “In [Ereignis] we get the essential vibration of what is communicated as Speech” (ID, 30). To be sure, human speech is something that must be distinguished from the Saying (die Sage), which Werner Marx calls “nonhuman saying”; also, making this distinction allows us to witness more closely how it is that, as Heidegger has it, speaking is always also a listening. Marx writes: “’Hearing’ the ‘address’ [Zusage] of saying is what constitutes the way; it constitutes it in the form of a bridge that connects the nonhuman occurrence of the saying … and human speaking.”

The appropriating event brings Saying to speech. But at the same time, we must be careful in our use of the term “event,” even though it is a direct and simple translation of the word Ereignis. Heidegger says that, “[Ereignis] seen as it is shown by Saying, cannot be represented either as an occurrence or a happening—it can only be experienced as the abiding gift yielded by Saying” (OWL, 127). Still, we may wish to ask again, how can we talk straight-faced about an “event” which is “recalled” and yet which never “happened”? Clearly, that it cannot be represented as an occurrence in this sense because it simply “cannot be represented … it can only be experienced.”

It is at this point that Heidegger directs the reader back to his Identität und Differenz, so as to clarify the nature of Ereignis—“theme word in the service of thought”—as that by which Being and man are “allocated” to one another. To wit, “Being belongs together with Thought into an identity whose essence derives from that causative

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36 Werner Marx, op. cit., 93.
belonging-together which we call [Ereignis] (ID, 29). But what does it mean to claim that Ereignis is a “causative belonging-together”? In order to understand this, it is helpful to clarify what Heidegger meant by “Identity”.

For Heidegger, “The essence of identity is a property of [Ereignis]” (ID, 29). In contrast to equality, identity is to be understood as what preserves essential difference. This characterization of identity—as well as the above mentioned relationship between identity and Ereignis—can be seen reflected in the following: “In [Ereignis] Man and Being are alienated in their essential togetherness” (ID, 29). This is the same alienation that comes to bear between Man and Being in the “framework” of mutual calculability: the reciprocal, compelling challenge to enframe which calls Being and Man in account to one another. Furthermore, and indeed, as we have already seen, “Within the frame-work there prevails a strange alienation [Vereignen] and dedication [Zueignen]” (ID, 27).

As we have seen, this Appropriation cannot really be represented, it can only be experienced. But how? Heidegger says, “For a thinking that pursues Appropriation can still only surmise it, and yet can experience it even now in the nature of modern technology, which we call by the still strange-sounding name of Framing” (OWL, 131). The question that remains is how appropriation can be experienced in Framing itself. One suggestion may be that, for Heidegger, this is done by listening to language, and that means: listening to the language of Framing, the parlance of the day. That is, since appropriation is what brings our Speech to Saying in order to Show, then our mode of speech and, indeed, the very way in which things come to be “shown” in our epoch, is

\[^{37}\text{Again, to avoid confusion, we have replaced the “Concern”, which was the translator’s rendition of Ereignis, with the original German.}\]
accorded and fashioned after appropriation. In Heidegger’s words, “Because Framing challenges man, that is, provokes him to order and set up all that is present being as technical inventory, *Framing persists after the manner of Appropriation*” (OWL, 13; my italics). All in all, we might say that our speech—the modern speech which is “geared toward” the challenging measure—is appropriate to the challenges that besiege us and necessitate the calculation of things. Moreover, there is a very important way in which the language of Framing is, in its peculiar manner of revealing, especially germane to the movement of appropriation, “specifically by [its] simultaneously obstructing Appropriation” (OWL, 131-2). That is to say that appropriation, by enjoining man to the commandeering speech of *Gestell*, has successfully receded into obscurity. We now recall that just as the thought-worthy, which *wants* to be thought upon, turned away from man since the beginning, so it is with the recession of the appropriative event viz. the obfuscating tendency of language under the reign of Framing, (i.e., as “information”). We recall what is forgotten here, retrieve it as such, by listening to the essence of modern language, by recognizing its obfuscating tendency—i.e., its allegiance to the trappings of Framing.

Just as in the case of thought, where Heidegger’s formula ends up being one which induces thinking on thought *qua* thought (as it is shown in its absence), in the case of appropriation, Heidegger gives “The formula for the way: to speak about speech *qua* speech”. In both cases, the appropriation is approached in a fitting way. “Thinking thought”, as well as “speaking speech” both lead back to taking up a vantage of the most primal nature of each. This nature shows itself to reside in man’s essential allocation to the role of thinker and speaker, and in so doing, it points directly back to the
belongingness of each—thought and speech—to Being. Specifically, we mean the "causative belongingness" called Ereignis. Heidegger says, "[Ereignis] is the internally oscillating realm through which Man and Being touch each other in their essence and attain their essential nature" (ID, 28). They are thus appropriated to one another.

We might say therefore, somewhat vaguely, that insofar as Ereignis is like the very nearness of belongingness itself, it appropriates in bringing what is appropriated into its own. This way-making movement, although it is a principle of arrangement, is not anything like a coercive force; and to this extent it is fundamentally characterizable as a "letting," (as in "letting arise"), rather than as a special kind of constraint. At one point, Heidegger says that "Appropriation is the plainest and most gentle of all laws" (OWL, 128). We should be careful here in how we are to take the word "law". As Heidegger says, it is "not law in the sense of a norm which hangs over our heads somewhere" (OWL, 128). That is, its lawfulness does not consist in its ordering and regulating things after the fact, but rather in their very inception. We might describe Ereignis therefore as the non-coercive guidance which makes provision for things to come into their own.

Finally, we take heed of the modus operandi of Ereignis. Firstly, the way-making movement of Ereignis is characterizable as "yielding"—and yet, not "productive" in the usual sense. "The appropriative event", he says, "is ... the giving yield whose giving reach alone is what gives us such things as a "there is," a "there is" of which even Being itself stands in need to come into its own as presence" (OWL, 127). It should be evident now that in exactly this way, by Ereignis provision is made for this "need" of Being—accomplished by way of bringing man into his own as the speaker (and therefore also the listener) of language and the beholder of beings.
Ereignis is a fundamentally yielding principle. It makes way for things to arise in the same way that a valley lets mountains be. Heidegger writes: “That which primordially unfolds the mountains into mountain ranges and courses through them in their folded togetherness is the gathering that we call “Gebirg” [mountain chain]” (QCT, 300). The valley way gathers the mountains into the range, so that they (ar)ranged. The valley way, by its depth and by its absence, configures the mountains as mountains. This metaphor aptly expresses the way-making movement of letting things be by holding fast to depth. Fittingly, both in the case of the valley and the way-making movement of Ereignis, that which yields all the grandeur of the mountain range withdraws itself in favour of what is bestowed. Heidegger says, “The region gathers, just as if nothing were happening, each to each and each to all into an abiding, while resting in itself” (DT, 66).

It is worth pointing out that, immediately following the above mentioned passage concerning the way-making movement of the valley, Heidegger goes on to speak of the “original gathering from which unfold the ways in which we have feelings of one kind or another we name ‘Gemüt’ [disposition]” (QCT, 300). Disposition, then, as it is a gathering, likewise “courses through” the between of Being and man—“in their folded togetherness.” To be sure, dispositions certainly do not “produce” beings; but, as we have seen in the case of the basic disposition (wonder), dispositions transport man into the midst of beings.

Again, the way-making movement is definitely one of “yielding.” In the first sense of the term, we find that it yields the gift of possibility by its making-way for things, the way that a valley makes way for mountains to rise up. Indeed, most commonly in English, we say of something which yields that “it gives way.” When we give space
and let something pass, we "make way" for it. It is essentially the same in the non-productive yielding of Ereignis. In pointing this out, however, we have already touched upon the second sense of the word "yielding", which is marked by the tendency toward compliance and adaptability.

Heidegger says: "Tao could be the way that gives all ways ... Perhaps the enigmatic power of today's reign of method also, and indeed preeminently, stems from the fact that the methods, notwithstanding their efficiency, are after all the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything" (OWL, 92; my italics). It might be suggested that the image of a great hidden stream showcases the adaptability of water and the waterway (river), and not only because it is an analogy that is so highly favoured in Taoist literature. For Lao Tzu in particular, water was esteemed for its inclination to sink to the depths and to inhabit the low places where nobody wants to be, nourishing everything thanklessly. By nature, water only moves insofar as it settles. As it does not contend, water shapes the landscape in its movement, not by forcing its way to overcome everything, but rather by way of its softness and pliability. Water is so powerful, and yet perfectly yielding, accommodating every shape. The "great hidden waterway," as Heidegger describes it, indeed moves all things. It brings them on the way (Weg): it ways (bewegt) them. This is precisely why it is so striking that, on the same page as this passage describing the movement of Tao, Heidegger supplies an etymological survey of what the word "bewegen" encompasses. In

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light of his consideration of the related words "beweglich" and "beweglichkeit", and especially with regard to the connotations that they carry in the sense of versatile movability—that is, of adaptability—it is easy to see why Heidegger thought it helpful to introduce the Taoist conception of "the way that gives all ways," and also, how the image of the waterway enhances the scope of qualification for the words "Weg," "beweglich," and "beweglichkeit."

If Being itself is really stylized after the fashion of way-making movement of Ereignis, then "What gives destining its character as destining is that it takes place so as suitably to adapt itself ... to take place so as to adapt means to set out in order to adjust fittingly to the directing already made apparent" (QCT, 37). It moves in other words like a waterway through a valley. It runs the course that it finds, and yet, also fashions the course as it goes. Heidegger reiterates, "Being itself takes place so as to adapt itself ..." (QCT, 38)—this points to Being's propensity for adaptive self-accommodation, housed as it is in language—and next: "... [Being] ever comes to presence as a destining and, accordingly, changes in the manner of a destining" (QCT, 38). This points to the dynamic essence (Wesen) of Being, and the possibility of a turn. Broadly speaking, this turning—which might also be called a "re-attunement" and "reintroduction" of man to Being—would take place on the plane of language, because the deliverance (revealing) of Being is a matter of language. By giving itself over as the readily calculable, Being takes place so as suitably to adapt itself (sich schickt) to the contours of calculative thought and speech. Being's destining (Geschick) comes to pass in accordance with its inclination and facility (Geschick, in the sense of "aptitude") in adapting to, for example, the words of the business man as well as the poet. What is important to see here is that, according to
Heidegger, "if enframing is a destining of the coming to presence of Being, then we may venture to suppose that Enframing, as one among Being's modes of coming to presence, changes" (QCT, 37). All in all, for Heidegger, Being had many faces, each one appropriate to the historical epoch.

Since Being's coming to presence as a destining is so characterizable in its versatility, and since this versatility is so essential to the way-making movement of Ereignis, we can now say without hesitation that Being fashions itself after the way-making of Ereignis. It is in this sense that it is directed, as if by a "gentle law."

Furthermore, this consideration of the relation between Being and Ereignis has led us toward the consideration of a third term, language, and its relation to the first two. Heidegger said that language is the house of Being—the thinkers and poets are the guardians of this house. But what do they guard against? For Heidegger, it is the oblivion of the obvious: that wretched corruption of language to servitude as a mere sketch-board for representing ideas—to package them in words so as to be distributed—and also against the technical diminution of the essence of thinking. Furthermore, the thinker and the poet are cooperative in a way like the carpenter and woodsman: both bear an essential relation to the wood, first and foremost in their craft. According to Heidegger, "To think of [Ereignis] ... means constructively cooperating in this internally oscillating realm. The building material for this self-supporting structure is derived by thought from speech" (ID, 29). Speech then provides building material for thought—food for thought. For Heidegger, finally, who takes hold of it poetically in his lecture, his speech delivers the thought-worthy in a way befitting its nature, that is, poetically.
To return once more to the image of water once more, we can see that water excels in that, since it moves insofar as it settles, it moves without contending.\(^{40}\) Being a force both versatile and effortless, for the Buddhist thinker it has long served as a great prototype for what might be called “the no-striving act” (anabhoga-carya). This is because even though it is always moving, it does so without any aspiration, and so it well portrays the mark of perfecting the way of “effortless efforts.” This consideration is relevant to our purposes insofar as we wish to enter the domain of Heidegger’s speaking about what could be beyond the reach of the distinction between activity and passivity. Speaking with regard to his own characterization of thinking as suffering, Heidegger adds: “This suffering is beyond activity and passivity as commonly understood” (BQ, 151). In another instance where he is speaking again on the nature of thinking, this time in reference to Gelassenheit, (translated as “releasement”), we find the same issue arise. There he says, “releasement lies—if we may use the word lie—beyond the distinction between activity and passivity” (DT, 61). Suffering then—specifically, the suffering that we have identified with thinking as waiting and as questioning—to this extent lies close in nature to another aspect of thinking for Heidegger: releasement.

It is easy to see how any insight into the subject of “effortless efforts” could be helpful in our discussion of what might qualify as being outside the categories of active and passive. Analogically speaking, water presents itself as candidate for employment here,

\(^{40}\) See Herman Hesse’s Siddharta—“They both listened silently to the water, ... the voice of Being” (Hesse, Herman, Siddhartha, translated by Hilda Rosner (New York: Bantam Books, 1951), 108; and, “You have already learned from the river that it is good to strive downwards, to sink, to seek the depths”, Hesse, op. cit., 105.
since it travels the course of least opposition and, in travelling, comes to rest. In Heideggerian terms, “It abides into the expanse of resting” (DT, 66). In the midst of the Conversation, the question is raised: “But in this return, which after all is a movement, can there be rest?” Heidegger’s answer: “Indeed there can, if rest is the seat and the reign of all movement” (DT, 67). This movement, which we have so far identified as sharing a great affinity with the movement of water, is very peculiar in its juxtaposition of rest and movement. It is, moreover, exceedingly reminiscent of the words that Heidegger himself reportedly had hung in Chinese brush on his office wall, (see Poggeler’s article in: Parkes, Graham. Heidegger and Asian Thought. University of Hawaii Press. Honolulu, 1990: 64). It read: “Only he who undertakes the way as underway is able to clarify into stillness the turbulence of the water of life, and to engender rest through movement.”

In this case, too, the merger of rest and movement coincides with being on the way.

But how can rest and movement meet each other conceptually in this way? Also, how can we ever compare the suffering involved in thoughtful questioning with releasement? Both are described as residing outside the realm of activity and passivity; but what seems so perilous about this conjunction between the painstaking character of questioning and releasement is that on the one hand, the first appears to be really a matter of the highest willing, requiring a great resolution, because it is therein that the arduous pursuit of questioning is maintained despite the suffering it entails; while, on the other

41 Given here as it is translated in Parkes’ text. The passage itself can be found in chapter 15 of Lao Tzu; see Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, translated by D.C. Lau (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1963), 19; or Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, translated by David Hinton (Washington, Perseus Books Group, 2000), 17.
hand, the connotations of "letting" (*lassen*) surrounding the second term, *Gelassenheit*, seem to be more in keeping with what we would call "non-willing."

At this juncture we might recall how the *Conversation on a Country Path* begins where the dialogue between the teacher, scientist, and scholar—already underway—has left off, with the teacher re-asserting, paradoxically: "I want-non-willing", (DT, 59). It is here submitted that, in all of these seemingly strange coordinations—that is, between rest and movement, effort and effortlessness, suffering and releasement—we can detect the same fundamental dilemma of "Willing non-willing." As Heidegger saw clearly, since it seems that these two (i.e. willing and non-willing) are mutually exclusive, then we must investigate the *neither-nor* scenario. This is the dilemma of activity and passivity. Now then, we will attempt to answer the question as to how the suffering of thinking can be compared to releasement as that which lies "beyond the realm of activity and passivity."

For Heidegger, the suffering of thoughtful questioning must be—just as releasement must be—described as being so "because [it] does not belong to the domain of the will" (DT, 61). In other words, thoughtful questioning, on the one hand, endless and painstaking as it is, though seemingly a matter of willing in the highest degree, really is not. And on the other hand, releasement, though seeming to be such a simple and effortless thing, is perhaps what is the most difficult for man. The same paradox is therefore inverted between the two. That is to say, the movement from the semblance of willing to non-willing is just as counterintuitive as that movement from non-willing to the semblance—Heidegger calls it a "trace"—of willing (i.e., the highest effort of man). As Anderson has accurately remarked in his introduction to the text: "... meditative thinking involves an
annulling of the will. Yet, such thinking is not a passive affair either; clearly, man does not come to be open through indifference or neglect” (DT, 25).

So along the way to a consideration of the similarity between thoughtful questioning and releasement, we have now been brought into encounter with yet another conundrum, which is the prospect and feasibility of willing non-willing. We have also followed Heidegger’s conception of thinking, both as suffering and as releasement, as a way of proceeding outside the parameters of this conundrum. Under the pressure of this conceptual dilemma, “releasement” comes to surface for Heidegger as a prime candidate for what could be discerned as being beyond the distinction between activity and passivity. The term “releasement” is apt to fit this possibility simply because letting go of something, while it is true that we might commonly call it an “act”, is something unique in that it is an “act” which is really the cessation of an act. This may remind us of Heidegger’s strange articulation of poetic measuring, namely that it is a specific “taking,” and yet one which “does not consist in clutching,” when rather “our hands do not abruptly grasp but are guided by gestures befitting the measure”—what is more, these gestures must inhere “in letting come of what has been dealt out” (PLT, 224). But how can one take hold of something without trying to grasp it? It seems that here again we are consigned to the problem of willing non-willing.

We have submitted that, for Heidegger, releasement serves as a candidate for transposing the present dilemma out of the realm of activity and passivity. Something which is taken and yet not grasped is presumably something that is let come (as in, “letting come of what has been dealt out”), or let go (that is, released). The first is identified with the poetic measure, the second is a consequence of thinking’s proximity to
what Heidegger called *Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*, which is meant to be a free and easy relationship to things, so that they do not get the best of us. Let us consider the case of releasement in reference to the hand. The hand, when it is relaxed and in a natural position, has already let go. The hand is in other words empty by default; indeed, only grasping calls for an activity in the regular sense. And yet, this is not to say that releasement comes about of itself, with no effort; indeed, “at times it requires a greater effort” (DT, 47). This act of “letting-go”, then, since it is that very action which is manifest both negatively—as the cessation of grasping (in the case of the hand)—and also positively—as it is surely something which must be “willed” in a certain sense—straddles the distinction between activity and passivity. A short illustration will help in this elucidation. There was once a very unique drama class offered at the University of Saskatchewan. We had a teacher of the first rate, who knew how to compel without forcing. One evening, in wide open studio space, the teacher told us all to relax our bodies completely; and so, we all loosened up, dropping our shoulders and sighing slightly. This was not enough, however. To give a demonstration—(and it was actually quite a memorable thing to see)—the teacher moved in to join us, where suddenly, his entire body collapsed and he fell to the hard wooden floor in a heap. No one else in the class had enough courage to follow suit. It was in other words too difficult for us, and too daring. It seems to me now that, really, in a flash, the teacher had gestured the willing of non-willing.

With one eye on this illustration, we can begin to see how perfect exertion can coincide with perfect rest. The greatest exertion is in this case a kind of release, specifically, from willful action. Clearly, releasement (*Gelassenheit*) primarily involves
for Heidegger an annulment of the will; indeed, at one point he says, "So far as we can wean ourselves from willing, we contribute to the awakening of [keeping awake for] releasement" (DT, 60).

Now, we must finish the comparison between releasement and thinking as suffering. According to Heidegger, thinking calls for the creative tolerance of the suffering—this we should call: *Leidenskraft*. But Heidegger also said that this suffering as such is at the same time a sort of *grasping*, and moreover that, "In such suffering there occurs a correspondence to what has to be grasped, while the one who grasps is transformed according to it" (BQ, 153). A distinct problem presents itself here, and that is, if *suffering* is any kind of *grasping*, then, how can it ever be comparable to *releasement*? It is because thinking as suffering also consists in a grasping that releases: "The one who is grasping and perceiving must accord with what is to be grasped so that the latter, beings themselves, are indeed grasped, though in such a way that thereby they are precisely released to their own essence" (BQ, 153). Like the poetic measure, Heidegger calls for kind of grasping that does not hold, but rather lets come and lets go. Incidentally, this might also remind us of the following advice: "To grasp all beneath heaven, leave it alone. Leave it alone, that's all."42 In all of this we can detect the way into willing non-willing, and thereby see the way beyond the realm of activity and passivity.

In this chapter, we have already considered the poetic nature of Heidegger's guiding phrase in *Was Heisst Denken?*. This saying was intended to bring the students on the way toward thinking, where "thinking is a thinking that is underway (CP, 4). The

phrase points into withdrawal—it is in this way that the teacher fastens his pupils to the arduous path of thoughtful questioning. This discovery lead us to touch upon some important aspects of thinking, including its fundamental attunement, the basic disposition of wonder, as well as toward Heidegger’s characterization of thinking as suffering and as releasement. Moreover, as we recall, Heidegger’s phrase also pointed back to “the beginning,” where the origin of thinking was said by him to coincide with a certain forgetting. We then saw that Heidegger correlated forgetfulness with the oblivion of the obvious.

Given this recapitulation, it seems that one question remains to be addressed—namely, could thoughtful questioning itself be subject to this wash-over of the commonplace, where the guiding question itself is too readily acknowledged? As Heidegger points out, “The greatest debilitation of essential questioning [consists] in being hardened into its own obviousness, petrified, and degraded into a mere formula by which it may be passed on from everyone to everyone” (BQ, 120). It seems that for Heidegger questions are blunted when handled unskillfully, as when they are codified and shut up into pale formulaic renditions of a question which, properly thought, should impose itself like a dagger upon the questioner. “Essential questioning” is clearly for Heidegger not something that can just be tossed around or broadcast to everyone. It is therefore not just a matter of information transference. Instead, the essential questioning of thinking can only be offered as a kind of invitation, or perhaps a threat. Just as in the case of dancing, for example, just following the steps is not enough because it is not what is essential, because you can’t really dance until you feel the music—more specifically, you must feel the need to dance.
We have seen that the call to thought thus operates through affectivity, as a matter of dispositional attunement. In *Was Heisst Denken?*, Heidegger asserts at the outset that in order to get underway to thinking we must first of all find ourselves *inclined* toward it: we have to be receptive to the thought-worthy, i.e. we have to be tuned in. It is for this reason that Heidegger declares, “The calling itself, on its own, needs thought” (WCT, 121). As a corollary, this is also to say that philosophy is never entered upon just because a student is taught the subject, even if in this teaching, as ought to be the case, the student is exposed to an assault of the most riveting questions—never, that is, so long as the student is not *affected* to the core, a place of utmost solitude. Overcome and struck by wonder, having now taken note of his having been flung into this “midst,” the student squirms, knowing neither the way in nor out, caught up in thought. All in all, it is a matter of attunement which points back to the original distress of man, the “neither here nor there,” of the between.

XV. The Essential Style of Poetry: Reticence, Reservedness, and Future Thinking.

In a very important way, since the entire lecture series *Was Heisst Denken?* is but a teaching—i.e. a directive letting-learn—of thinking, then the title question serves as a primary device in the an exclusive attempt to bring thought on the way. Heidegger tells his students that:

“The question ‘What is called thinking?’ presents itself at first quite innocently. It sounds as if, and we unknowingly take it as if, the question merely asked for more precise information about what is supposedly meant when we speak of such a
thing as thinking. Thinking here appears as a theme with which one might deal with as with any other. Thus thinking becomes the object of an investigation. The investigation considers a process that occurs in man. Man takes a special part in the process, in that he performs the thinking. Yet this fact, that man is naturally the performer of thinking, need not further concern the investigation of thinking. Being irrelevant, it may be left out of our reflection on thinking” (WCT, 115).

In sum, if we take this very special question to think “about” thinking (i.e. represent it before us as an object of investigation), then we’ve already counted ourselves out of thinking. Thinking is not an object. Neither is it an objective. Since thinking is not to be accomplished like any other deed, (since it rather *accomplishes*), it likewise cannot be “a theme with which one might deal with as any other.”

Presumably, on the other hand, when we hear the question are ready to learn thinking, as was Heidegger explicit intention, then “We ourselves are, in the strict sense of the word, put in question by the question. The question ‘What is called thinking?’ strikes us directly, like a lightning bolt” (WCT, 116). This is because, “The question ‘What is called thinking?’ asks for what gives us something to think about in the preeminent sense: it does not just give us something to think about, nor only itself, but it first gives thought and thinking to us” (WCT, 121). What is most thought-worthy is then what gives thought and thinking to us in the first place. That is why the answer to the question, which is Heidegger’s guiding phrase, must point to what calls on us to think, i.e., what enjoins us to thinking. That is also why the answer must be poetic: a non-propositional utterance from a correspondence—*Most thought-provoking is that we are not yet thinking.* In other words, this saying is non-referential, in the sense that it does not refer to something completely other, in the sense that “This saying … does not stand over
against what is said. Rather, the saying itself is the ‘to be said’” (CP, 4). Perhaps this passage, in which Heidegger is referring to a “saying from Ereignis,” (and not specifically to the phrase in question), could serve as an indication of the kind of saying that Heidegger spoke when he named the thought-worthy as such.

As we have seen thinking Heidegger is a thinking that tends to thinking itself, Likewise, for him poetry speaks back to itself; and it is as such that poetry can imbibe the possibility of a “thoughtful experience” with language which Heidegger sought to accomplish through his lectures in On the Way to Language. Since man is above all appropriated to Being in language, then the saying of poetry must be truthful to the way in which Being’s own truth holds sway. Moreover, this is precisely the way which shows itself by a making show of its withdrawal; beheld, it is something like a “parting gesture.” This is why poetry, to be truthful, must itself be attuned as reticent, reserved and self-refusing. Why? Because “What attunes is [Ereignis]”—and what is more, as we have seen, Ereignis, which we might call the way-making of Being, is itself a way of withdrawing into self-concealment, (CP, 181), Being’s poem, then, is a reserved one, dictated hesitantly.

Accordingly, the craftsman, the poet, set and forge this truth “into work and word in the style of reservedness” (CP, 9). For Heidegger, the poetic word is always resonant with the hesitant self-refusal of the truth of Being. He even goes so far as to decree the “Law of the fittingness of thought: Rigor of meditation, carefulness in saying, frugality with words” (BW, 241). Likewise, he declares unequivocally that “Reservedness is the style of thinking only because it must become the style of future humanness … reticence only grows out of reservedness” (CP, 24). Heidegger’s insistence upon a style founded on
fundamental reticence in poetry points toward his conviction that expression is in best harmony with Being's truth when it is itself reserved. The style of reticence is enacted in accordance, really, to the style of Being itself. Just as the thoughtful poetry of Lao Tzu has it, it is because "The great voice sounds faint," that words should be kept spare. All this could explain why the essential minimalism of Japanese Noh drama appealed to Heidegger so strikingly; so much so, indeed, that in his "Conversation" he published his own critical acclaim for a specific text on the subject of Noh (OWL, 17-19). However, for him, the essential reservedness of poetics with respect to future thinking was not simply a matter of fashion or preference; rather, it was a matter of the greatest import, to wit, of human destiny itself.

Reservedness is a style, to be sure. At the same time, it cannot just be some putting on of airs, or a trumped up display of attitude. As a style—the style of thinking—it is decisive in the highest sense. This is because it is reservedness specifically in the face of the Being's self-refusal—a holding out that first gives rise to the possibility (and pressing necessity) of decision—because it is "... the reservedness that holds unto itself against the hesitating self-refusal of the truth (clearing of sheltering) of distress" (CP, 55). Reservedness is therefore the style of creative tolerance (CP, 26). Being poetic, Heidegger also says that when this style comes to word, "Its word is not somehow only a sign for something totally other" (CP, 55). That is to say, with such words we are no longer dealing with an event of representation. On the contrary, it is a matter of lawful presentation—lawful, that is, insofar as it remains faithful to the way(ing) of Being—in

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that it *presents sheltering*. It speaks the *truth*; that is, where "*Truth* is sheltering that lights up" (CP, 49).

Now, since we have declared Heidegger's guiding phrase to be poetic, the question we must ask at this point is this: Do Heidegger's words which name the thought-provoking bring sheltering to light? Do they let withdrawal lie before? Entirely. Moreover, in this naming, the word is not merely a "sign" representative of something "totally other"—rather, the thought-provoking is *in* the word, in the saying of it. It is rendered in a poetic style such that the saying itself is the 'to be said', as in the case of saying from *Ereignis* (CP, 4). In this case, Heidegger explains, "What it names is what it means. But meaning is owned up to only as Da-sein and that means in thinking-questioning" (CP, 55). That is to say, what it names (the thought-provoking) is *meant* for Dasein in the saying, and only thoughtful questioning is the transformative "answer" to it.

It seems from this that we are presently drawing near to a view of Heidegger's pronouncement of the thought-provoking in *Was Heisst Denken?* from the vantage of this much earlier work, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, (circa 1936-8). Written as a treatise, it seems to inform the architecture of the later lecture wherein he names the thought-worthy. It is not entirely surprising, then, to find the following passage (which might otherwise seem somewhat out of place) emphasized on the next page of CP:

"*Whoever seeks has already found!* ... *Therefore the originary find in the originary sheltering is sheltered precisely as seeking as such. Acknowledging what is most question-worthy [means] staying in the questioning and inabiding*" (CP, 56).
It is quite telling that early on Heidegger associates the poetic style of the next beginning with the on-setting of thoughtful questioning, the success of which coincides with remaining waitfully on the threshold of thinking, just as, later on, Heidegger’s poetic utterance stretches his students across the threshold. In other words, in his lecture series Was Heisst Denken?, it was Heidegger’s intention that, through “acknowledging what is most question-worthy,” the audience would “stay in the questioning and inabiding.”

For Heidegger, the unspoken makes room for what is spoken. This is not just a kind of verbal hijinx. Instead, it is a reflection of the essential ontological movement; it reflects how Being withdraws itself in its very approach as presence. Does silence then likewise conceal itself in sounding? It would seem so. For Heidegger, even in the loudest of places, we are always somehow in the midst of silence, if only in an unresponsive mode—just as it is with the Nothing. Accordingly, as we have seen, profound boredom with its emptiness and stillness announces the Nothing, attuning as such. Perhaps after all we keep to the way best when we are silent since so often we make noise in reaction to silence, because silence is unnerving.

What is left to say then, after all of this espousal of restraint and taciturnity? Heidegger’s answer: “What remains for thinking is only the simplest saying of the simplest image in pure reticence. The future thinker must be capable of this” (CP, 50). The tendency toward reticence is taken up, fittingly, and man remains riveted and attuned through this reservedness, so that silence reigns by default. This means that every word is a compromise—the breaking off and betraying of silence—and so also that saying is inherently painful. If we lend ourselves to this thought specifically, how can we fail to give adequate attention to the weight of words? This is the weightiness that is covered
over when words are tossed about in chatter, or yoked under the enterprising service of information transference 44: the first is a matter of indulgent distraction, while the second passes over the real significance of words because it merely uses them. When we recognize and heed this intimation into the gravity of the matter—that of language itself—discretion with regard to saying comes on its own. This in itself determines a strange and agonizing task to the poet; namely, it is up to the poet to practice appropriate betrayal. Heidegger’s discussion of this style leads us to see truthful disclosure as reticent through and through. Speaking is after all the betrayal of silence, where “betrayal” is understood, firstly, in the sense of ultimate desertion (apostasy), as when we break with silence in our speaking out—an act of treason, as when we are untrue to our benefactors. Secondly, “to betray” means also “to reveal.” The betrayal of things (our being treasonous to them) lies in their portrayal as objects. Through the fateful coursework of enframing (Gestell), things are betrayed to the extent that we hone in on their possible utility—or, what is the same: to the extent that their raw usefulness is betrayed (revealed). Given this, we naturally want to know immediately who has committed this betrayal, and what to do about it. As if heralding a great crime, it has been claimed that, “things are betrayed …”, conjunctively, in the double sense. Who is responsible? According to Heidegger, we must respond to this in saying that, the truth is, Being betrays itself first and foremost. Respectfully, at this point we ought to pause once more; here, where we are talking about what “the truth is”, we should be especially clear as to what we are saying. In the first place, we are saying that, in all truth, it is Being itself which is responsible for its portrayal as the readily calculable—it has endangered itself in its self-

44 See OWL. 132: “Within Framing, speaking turns into information.”
betrayal. In the second, much more straight-forward way, we mean, literally, the truth (aletheia) is Being’s self-betrayal (revealing). What does it mean to betray oneself? It means, simply, to place oneself in danger. According to Heidegger, Being places itself dangerously into the framework. Being is daring. It is in this way that the wordly discretion of the poet is itself most daring. As Heidegger tells us, Man is the most daring because he dares language.

For Heidegger, if we were to ask why it is that, given his essential tendency toward reticence, the poet does not simply “remain silent” altogether, then accordingly, we would at the same time be asking, with regard to his accordance with the truth of Being, why it is that Saying does not just shut itself up altogether. Although both speak hesitantly, that is, reservedly—or, “with reservations”, as we say—they both speak freely nonetheless. To ask after the necessity of Saying (and therefore of speaking, which is brought to primordial Saying in Appropriation), is to ask what that secret motivation is that supercedes the “hesitant” countenance of revealing. Wherefore this obligation? In a word, why? (i.e., Why something rather than nothing?).

Finally, this same question which asks of the hesitancy and motivation for the poet also asks of the thinker: what calls the calling to call?—or, what is the same: What could possibly provoke the thought-provoking into play as the provocative? To be sure, in articulating the question as such, we run the risk of seeming to smother the matter under a pile of redundancy. On the contrary, however, we are in reality only following the trace of the poet, who responds not so much to redundancy as to resonance.

In the second stanza of a poem from “The Thinker as Poet” (PLT, 9), Heidegger writes:
All our heart’s courage is the echoing response to the first call of Being which gathers our thinking into the play of the world.

What is the “echoing response” to the first call? For one thing, it is itself an echo. This echoing response can only resonate in the question. This first call, at the beginning of thought, rings through history in the essential vibrations of language. The poet is he who reaches into the abyss (Ereignis); pointing into it, “remarking on its marks”, i.e. listening and speaking, the poet shows the way who “trace for their kindred mortals the way toward the turning” (PLT, 94). In our essential belonging with (and to) language—just as much as with thinking—man is poetic through and through. It is for this reason that in speaking, for Heidegger, “Man in the pointer … [pointing] not so much at what draws away as into the withdrawal” (WCT, 9). It is important to see that, in plain terms, it is not a matter of pointing out what moves, but rather how it makes its way. What exactly does Heidegger point to in his lecture series when he speaks of the thought-provoking? In his poetic prompting—pointing as it does to the withdrawal of thought, and also into the withdrawal of the thought-provoking, “since the beginning”—the student undergoes coming into the nearness of distance. The distance of us from thinking is what we draw near to in thinking.

The question, Why is there something rather than nothing?, for Heidegger, also asks: What called Being into its continuance with thought? Only that it was not yet. Without making appeal to reasons “why”, the world simply is for its own sake. What
called thinking, "ever and suddenly", into communion with Being?—only that there was not yet thinking. Heidegger tells us that "It does not just give us something to think about, nor only itself, but it first gives thought and thinking to us" (WCT, 121). If thinking is for the sake of anything, we could only say that it is for Being, which, ultimately, is in itself groundless, without "for".

If we are to heed the words of Heidegger when he tells us that "the answer to the question 'What is called thinking' is of course, a statement, but not a proposition ...", WCT, 168), then what is left to say? Elsewhere, Heidegger says that "The more poetic a poet is ... the greater is the purity with which he submits what he says to an ever more painstaking listening, and the further what he says is from the mere propositional statement that is dealt with solely in regard to its correctness or incorrectness" (PLT, 216). Roughly put, we must see that our very movement toward answering this question is already itself a response to the call for thinking. Hence we see how Heidegger arrives at his designation of the core question at hand as being, rather: "What calls for thinking?"—that is, "what is most thought-provoking?". Since thought is the craft—the handicraft, par excellence—to ask after the essence of this craft is immediately also to ask after what the craftsman relates to essentially; in the case of a carpenter, for example, it is the wood; accordingly, we find (continuing along the same passage): "... the answer to the question is, of course, an utterance, but it speaks from a correspondence" (WCT, 168). The guiding question is therefore transformed into asking after this correspondence, toward the thought-provoking. What the thinker relates to, what he must "learn" in the sense of making everything he does answer to the call for this guiding relation, is the thought-provoking which just is our still-not-thinking. As Heidegger said, answering the
question “what is called thinking?” is a statement (utterance), and yet not a proposition. It is to be, we recall, a “transformation (Wandlung) of thinking”, and not a “propositional statement about a matter at stake”—now, as we can clearly see, it must be nothing other than a transformational utterance.

What would this statement sound like? This is both an obvious and entirely worthy question. Of course, Heidegger did answer the question; that is, he answered the most wholesome rendition of the question “what is called thinking?” by answering the one question that properly held thinking in the light of its being a craft (i.e. what calls for thinking?); and in doing so, he answered this question: To what does the thinker relate which makes his craft what it is? He answered by hurling this utterance at his students: *Most thought provoking is that we are not yet thinking.* This is it: the answer. It is a proposition which cannot be dealt with as an ordinary proposition—i.e., as something which simply proposes at arm’s length—because it speaks from a correspondence, specifically, to what is worthy of the craft of thinking. Heidegger’s utterance is rather, in *truth*, the spoken laying before of what the thinking craftsman is to comport himself to in his efforts, and in this sense, being itself a skillful contrivance (*upaya-kausalya*) fashioned by the teacher in order to “let learn”, this utterance itself activates and engenders the craft of thinking—it fastens the relationship between the thinker and his craft by setting before him the essence of that craft, that is, what calls to the thinker as shapes slumbering in wood call to the carpenter. The lecture’s guiding question “What is called thinking?” in its most preeminent formulation, asks: “What calls upon thinking?”, to which Heidegger responds: *this*—he hands it over directly. His words now are no longer signifiers standing for something “totally other,” Heidegger is not merely “talking
about” that which is to be thought upon in the informative sense, he is *delivering* the thought worthy over, speaking from and toward “a correspondence.” Understood in this way, Heidegger’s utterance is no more a “proposition” than is the hand that beckons forth, proposing that you get underway. More appropriately speaking, in fact, this utterance is really something more like a gesture. This is because, for one thing, gestures do not wait on the legalities of propositional deliverance for their legitimization. Instead, they strike directly to the matter itself, like “lightning bolts.” In this case, the matter is thinking.
CHAPTER THREE

"Esti gar einai: 'For there is Being.'
The primal mystery for all thinking
is concealed in this phrase"
(Letter on Humanism, BW, 214).

"This thrust, this 'that it is'
... disappears in usefulness"
(Origin of the Work of Art, PLT, 65).

XIV. What is Philosophy For? and Thinking as Useless

In this chapter, we shall raise the question concerning the practical dimension of
Heidegger's thinking, beginning with a formulation of the question concerning the
purpose of philosophy in general.

What presents itself initially as being among the most sober and legitimate of
questions seems, for the philosopher, to be also the most painful: What is philosophy for?
What does it do for us? Already, however, we should watch our step here; we should stop
and consider whether these two questions are exactly the same or not. It is ventured here
that, in a very real way, everything depends upon the answer to this question. For, should
we answer "yes", we have already disclosed our allegiance to the following two
assumptions: firstly, that if philosophy is for something, it is for in the specific sense of
producing a favourable effect; secondly, it means that whatever philosophy does, and
whatever that effect may be, it is done for us, "the people." Hence, in affirming the
identity of the two questions, we show that right from the beginning we already only see
the matter of philosophy by the outline of its utility; we have only heard the question as it
speaks within the bounds of calculative thinking, and have therefore not heard it
essentially.

What is philosophy for? What does philosophy do for us?—when these two
questions are spoken in the same breath as one and the same, then the philosopher
agonizes. To those who remain within these questions as if they were one—and in this
way ask us, “what after all is philosophy good for?”—we can only reply in the same way
as the great Louis Armstrong did, so deftly, when he was asked by an interviewer about
the essence of jazz. In his gravelly, unmistakable voice, he replied to the gentleman: “If
you have to ask, you’ll never know.” Presumably, Armstrong’s interviewer was not
especially encouraged by this answer, just as little as people are to be happy with hearing
this same answer offered in response to the question(s): “What is philosophy for? What
does philosophy do for us?”—when we say: “If you have to ask, you’ll never know”, and
we mean in other words, that the answer is in the doing.

But this response of ours rings of a certain exclusivity, namely, that those who
seek entrance through asking are forever banned—but why? It seems that those who have
been taken up by the call of a particular craft (like jazz) find this asking after the essence
of a craft to be so inappropriate, so obtrusive what is being asked about, that the question
is thought to be askable only by someone who is already and forever outside the sphere of
the craft. The question itself announces exile from the answer.

Let us now consider, on the other hand, how it would be to say that the two above
mentioned questions are not equivalent. First of all, it implies the suggestion that, while it
may indeed be the case that philosophy does something—and even that philosophy does for, (i.e. we can count its success in effects)—we are in this case however not yet committed to also saying that this “for” points directly and specifically toward catering to the satisfaction of man’s intentions. In other words, for is not here equivalent to for us—(as we will see, this is the sense in which Heidegger was to say that in order to reach the nature of man, Menschenwesen, we must look away from man, because this means to look away from thinking as willing). To put it another way, this is to say that, being unequivalent, we might still answer the first question without also answering the second.

Suppose, then, that we eliminated this “for us” from the second question, so that they would read this way: “What is philosophy for? What does it do … ?” Have we now moved closer to an equivalence of the two? It seems that once again the first question now waits upon the second to be answered; that is, it waits to first see what is done before asking what the deed is for, regardless of to whom or what it is intended. In other words, we must know what is done before we can say to what end it is directed.

Again we pause; for we have, in this case just as in the last, failed to reach accord between the two questions: “What is philosophy for?”, and “What does philosophy do…?” This is due to our having neglected to discharge the second assumption, which we have named as the supposition that claims that everything that is done is necessarily done for. In other words, to hold these questions identical still retains the assumption that whatever is done is necessarily done for this or that purpose. Herein we find come manifest that doggedly enduring metaphysical reassurance for all things: The Principle of Sufficient Reason.
As this principle is so thoroughly and inconspicuously imbedded at the root of all our figurings, we find that we understand just so far as we can derive what stands under as ground. Reckoning thus commemorates itself as grounding establishment (Begründung); we see it everywhere. So commonly—and therefore all the more remarkably—we say to those in despair: "just remember, everything happens for a reason." This is meant, and most often genuinely so, as a consolation for those who have undergone some painstaking hardship. Yet at its source, it is nothing besides the headstrong reiteration of an article of faith—one that provides ground/reason for every possibility. In so doing, it succeeds in restraining (by satiating) the question "why", allowing it to drive only so far. This question "why", with its digging after and uprooting of answers (i.e. the "causes" which, under the rubric of the principium rationis, become "reasons" handed over to us in the "because"), does so unremittingly, that is, until reasons have been exhausted, and the question finally reaches the bottom.

To this widest sweeping stroke of the question "why"—and here we have in mind Heidegger’s revival of Leibniz’s ultimate metaphysical question: Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing? (BW, 112)—the reply can only be, ultimately: "Because." This answer is not, as it might first seem, merely in keeping with the inexhaustibility of the principle which renders reasons. It does not in other words simply abbreviate and repeat that "everything happens for a reason" in the sense that, no matter what condition the "why" enters upon, including the ultimate metaphysical condition of existence in totality, there will always be found a reason. On the contrary, the word—Because—says that while there is indeed an eminent reason/grounding for everything that is, the tracing of this grounding points the way back to Abgrund. According to Heidegger,
"... The word of Being says: Being—itself ground/reason—remains without a ground/reason, which now means, without why" (PR, 126). When the question is raised why is there something rather than nothing, the answer comes from the last resort of grounding. The answer is simply "Be-cause"—which means: there is cause, there is grounding. Arriving at this seemingly empty answer—the unqualified "because"—we have indeed hit the bottom. But the bottom is necessarily the ground for all things, since all things rest upon it. It is for this same reason itself without ground. It is in this sense that Heidegger said that "[B]eing, since it is itself ground/reason, remains without a ground/reason" (PR, 125). The "why" breaks off here, leaving only the most rudimentary "be-cause", which is Being. We find ourselves grounded in that which is ungrounded.

Are we, then, really grounded upon depth? It is manifestly so.

The importance of this discovery must not be understated. In his work called "What are Poets For?", Heidegger tells us that Being is the "daring" venture. This term is exceedingly appropriate; for, in the first, it is a characterization which seems to neutralize the question "why" in a way similar to that stated above. That is, in asking the question which is now: "why does Being dare presence?", the "why" falls short of the matter at hand, simply because daring doesn't wait upon reasons—i.e. the question finds no hold. Daring is groundless. Moreover, it is this being groundless that makes it properly daring. To this extent we can say that the daring venture of Being is irrational; that is, it does not embellish for itself any reasons, regardless of what sufficiency we ourselves might offer up. Being is, as a venture, its own reason. In saying this, however, we must take adequate care so as not to mistake Heidegger's offering this self-sufficiency of Being (as it is
without “why”) for the philosophical God: causa sui. Failure to take such care should serve notice of our lingering within the constraints of the onto-theo-logical.

Being dares defiance of being-not. As Heidegger puts it: “‘Being’ means that beings are, and are not nonexistent. ‘Being’ names … the decisiveness of the insurrection against nothingness” (EP, 1). What is this “decisiveness” which the word “Being” names? Commonly, when we speak of the word “decisiveness”, we have in mind the propensity for taking up a course and following through decisively, courageously, regardless of whether or not this decision can be immediately discerned as being the best. This is because every decision by nature requires taking upon the risk of uncertainty, (a daring), in order for it to be a decision at all.

So far, our questioning with regard to the purpose of philosophy has remained within the subtle constraints of calculative thinking, because we have tacitly assumed from the start that whatever is done is always done for. How then can we think our two questions at hand outside the bounds of the purely calculative domain? It is only by removing the implicit demand for a grounding telos from within them. That is, it would have been better from the start to abbreviate both questions, and in so doing, bring them into accord with one another thusly: “What is philosophy … ? What does philosophy do … ? In this case we learn the essence of philosophy by seeing what it does, or rather, by doing it. Here we avoid such a crippling response as Armstrong offers, simply because our question, rather than recoiling from its subject matter, is answered in the doing—we are granted entry by way of our participation. Likewise, by operating outside the principle of sufficient reason, (i.e. by omitting the prime operative of calculability, “why?”), we are on the way to meditative thinking.
Our question now is: What does philosophy do? With the primacy of the doing (i.e. the primacy of the \textit{how}) is now so explicitly brought to the fore in the questions, we move one to detect the implication of philosophy being a practice of some sort—i.e., something that is done. More precisely, when it is thought essentially, philosophy is the craft of thinking. As Heidegger also perceived, it is surely to be objected at this point that all of us are already thinking at every waking moment, and that we’ve surely never needed anything called “philosophy” to do so. In this case philosophy really is, as it appears to be, an entirely superfluous decoration of thought, rightly deemed unnecessary. This is where we ought to give pause, however, and listen to what has already been said; namely, that thinking is a craft to be learned, and that not one of us can properly call himself a great craftsman as yet. There is something in the word craft (\textit{Kraft}) which speaks out; it is telling of a certain rigour—one which is essential to all crafts. This rigour is set bearing toward the consummating perfection of the very craft at hand, \textit{especially because of} (and not despite) the fact that such perfection is impossible. Perfection is perpetually beyond us. In strictly linear terms, its movement is a recession. For Heidegger, as a craftsman the thinker gives chase to withdrawal itself, where “to give chase” means “to name the question-worthy.” In this sense, “… withdrawal is what properly gives food for thought, what is most thought-provoking” (WCT, 25).

Heidegger’s thinker \textit{must} question; the call of the thinker is toward questioning response. Questions ask. Now, we recall the words of the masterful musician, and \textit{think}: “If you have to ask, you’ll never know”, and the words really do in fact release the essence of his craft, and indeed that of all crafts. This is to say: “If you are called to think, (if the question besieges you, i.e., ‘if you have to ask’), then you are thereby destined to
chasing that which withdraws.” In following the withdrawal of what withdraws, one reaches into the abyss. Thinking, always a questioning, gives chase to withdrawal, perhaps, we could say, by letting it approach him, ever approaching and yet never reaching. To this extent, indeed, the most thought-provoking thing will always be that we are not yet thinking.

What keeps us from seeing this aforementioned essentiality (of all craft) is the same as that which keeps us from clearly seeing the nature of thinking itself. This is because we began by asking (1) “What is philosophy for?” rather than (2) “What is the essence of philosophy?” It would be preferable to begin with the second question—beginning, as it were, with the essence of things. But this is not, by and large, the question that people ask of the philosopher, not the plain and innocent enough question that holds him there like a constricting vice, until he squeezes something out that speaks to some purpose (usefulness) of his task, perhaps about how philosophy serves us in its capacity for the promotion of “free thought”, while being at the same time the organizational founding (bottom-level) to the sciences, whose own worth is easily seen in the wealth of technology. But all of this is the sound of philosophy clambering after the prestige of the scientific. Thinking slips out of its element and now justifies itself as techne. Nonetheless, this characterization does not reach the basic nature of thought. What is essential to thinking cannot be described away in establishing it as something like the proper operation of an apparatus, fitted and configured toward some specific end. In other words, meditative thinking cannot be a technique in the usual sense.

Accordingly, for Heidegger, philosophy is useless. Though perhaps a retreat, this is not a surrender, for Heidegger insists that philosophy is “useless, but at the same time
masterful knowing from out of mindfulness” (CP, 31). However, “What is useless belongs no place. Thus it is out of place wherever it appears” (WCT, 205). Perhaps this perpetual “being out of place” points back to how the task of philosophy, like the poetic measure, must necessarily appear as strange and sometimes ridiculous to ordinary thinking.

The essential poverty of thought’s provision bears a special relationship to the uselessness of thinking. Specifically, “The poverty of reflection [Besinnung] is the promise of a wealth whose treasures glow in the resplendence of that uselessness which can never be included in any reckoning” (QCT, 181). On the other hand, that which can never be included in any reckoning is specifically the unthought, and therefore the unspoken. In this way Heidegger says: “The more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it. The unthought is the greatest gift that thinking can bestow” (WCT, 76).

Now all of this indicates that, for Heidegger, “Thinking, when taken for itself, is not ‘practical’ (BW, 194). Furthermore, "Such thinking has no result. It has no effect. It satisfies its essence in that it is” (BW, 236). It is because thinking needs only Being that it satisfies its essence in that it is. It is also for this reason that, in the end, it is not a matter of what thinking can bring us, but rather, “The issue is to keep meditative thinking alive” (DT, ).

All in all, meditative thinking is not something that can “properly” be called productive—“Thinking towers above action of production, not through the grandeur of its achievement and not as a consequence of its effect, but through the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment” (BW, 239). So it is humbleness, humility, that counts in thinking. As we have seen already, the way is not to be understood as a thoroughfare, a
means of eating up the between; rather, the way is it. At this juncture Heidegger says:
"we do not want to get anywhere. We would like only, for once, to get to just where we
are already" (PLT, 190). Thinking neither produces products nor takes us places. What he
has in mind here instead is a deliverance into nearness—perhaps we would say into the
nearness of this place, to these things. That is mindfulness. The humility of
inconsequence breeds reverence for the ordinary and the as-it-is.

As a result, Heidegger declares, "The claim of philosophical thinking can never
be met by way of a prompt co-enactment that is common to all ... " (CP, 41). That is, just
as philosophy and its "findings" can never be passed around to many like so much
information, suddenly and unanimously seized representationally, as with another "bright
new idea," nor can the weight of the questions at hand be lightened by a group effort; this
points to how philosophy is so essentially bound to solitude: as what is ownmost,
philosophy is in the end always done on one's own. As Heidegger points out next, it
"does not tolerate exploitations," and as such cannot be used. It therefore always appears
irregular and out of place with things. Likewise, philosophy always seems outlandish to
common understanding in its preoccupation with the exceedingly usual:

"Because such thinking thinks Being, i.e., what is most unique in its strangeness
and most ordinary and familiar in the usual understanding of being, such thinking
remains necessarily rare and foreign. But because its has this uselessness about it,
it must immediately exact and affirm in advance those who can plow and hunt,
who do manual labor and drive, who build and construct. This thinking itself must
know that it can at any time count as unrewarded effort" (CP, 41).

45 See FM for a detailed consideration of solitude.
For Heidegger then, in short, "this thinking" that he describes must, as the Taoists would say, at once know the useful, but keeps to the useless.

Nonetheless, however useless it may be, this thinking is nonetheless also decisive with respect to man's future. In this sense, uselessness does not entail frivolousness. This is because what is useful is not always the same as what is valuable. Nonetheless, Heidegger reminds us, "This decision is not made in the well-tended garden of our inclinations, wishes, and intentions. If the decision is set there, it is no decision. It takes place in the domain of our preparedness or unpreparedness for the future" (BQ, 108).

Thinking "cuts furrows"—that is, it prepares the soil, presumably in order for roots to find their way down with ease. Heidegger always maintained that his work was strictly preparatory in nature, for the decision was to him a matter of Being's own destiny, and not something to be "decided by" man. What Heidegger has done is recollective (andenklich). For him, "Remembrance of the inception of our history is the awakening of knowing about the decision that, even now, and in the future, determines Western humanity. Remembrance of the inception is therefore not a flight into the past but readiness for what is to come" (BC, 17). Here recollection (Andenken) is part and parcel of the "readiness for what is to come" which is perhaps the only genuine success, and which is prepared along the way by thinking, just as a farmer tills the soil in preparation for what is to come, that is, what is to be yielded by the depths of the earth. Only thinking accomplishes this furrowing out of Being.

XVII. Thinking as Thanking
In remarking on Heidegger’s characterization of thinking as thanking, we would do well to first say something about his account of memory: “memory—the concentration of our disposition, devotion—does not let go of that on which it concentrates, memory is imbued … with the quality of an unrelenquishing and unrelenting retention” (WCT, 140). In conjunction with this, moreover, Heidegger points out that, “The originary word ‘thane’ is imbued with the original nature of memory” (WCT, 141). Thankfulness, therefore, is for Heidegger integral to the devotional disposition, marked by the character of “unrelenting” concentration upon—what? Heidegger says, “When we give thanks, we give it for something … the highest and really most lasting gift given to us is always our essential nature” (WCT, 142). Therefore, Heidegger concluded that “The ‘thane,’ [is] the original memory,” simply because “original thanking is the thanks owed for being” (WCT, 142-1). Specifically, it is thanks owed for our being as thinkers. This being—whose imagination could fathom it? In thinking, we recall in thought that to which we owe thanks for the endowment of our nature as thinkers—in a word, our being.

For Heidegger, the greatest thanking is thinking, which means giving thought to the thought-provoking: “How can we give thanks for this endowment, the gift of being able to think the most thought-provoking, more fittingly that by giving thought to the most thought-provoking [i.e., that we are still not thinking]?” (WCT, 143). To be thankful for is therefore also to be devoted to thinking. Steadfast concentration upon the thought-worthy is the staple of such devotion—the recollective appreciation of our being as thinkers. It doesn’t need to be thankful for anything beyond its own capacity for thankfulness. The gift is the bestowal of our essence as thinkers; in a sense, for Heidegger, reception of this gift depends on the thankful disposition, along with “The
thankful disposal [drawing in] of what is most thought-provoking, into its most integral seclusion, a seclusion where the most thought-provoking is invulnerably preserved in its problematic being” (WCT, 146). The thought-provoking, that we are still not thinking, remains forever problematic. The forever “still not” should have a shattering effect, when it becomes clear that we are forever underway. But again, this is not an informative, but rather a dispositional transformation: “To ‘philosophize’ about being shattered is separated by a chasm from a thinking that is shattered. If such thinking were to go fortunately for a man no misfortune would befall him. He would receive the only gift that can come to thinking from Being” (BW, 223). Furthermore, that gift is our nature as thinkers, by which is bestowed the possibility of thinking, though not necessarily the capability for it, such that “Being is the quiet power of the enabling-favoring” (BW, 196). For Heidegger, what Being enables, favours, and makes possible is thinking. This possibility (Möglichkeit), which Heidegger calls the “may be” (das “Mög-liche”), is essentially a favoring, so that “such favoring is the proper essence of enabling”, where “favoring [Mögen] means to bestow essence as a gift” (BW, 196). Heidegger therefore surmises that the granting possibility of thinking is properly what thanks gives thanks for. In keeping with this, and as Richardson correctly discerns, “Being’s supreme gift to the thinker is the very Being by which he is a thinker”, such that, “the purest form of acknowledgement is simply the accepting of the gift … Acceptance, then, is the most original form of thanks.”46 And so, in accordance with the proximity of Denken and Danken, perhaps for Heidegger the gift is none other than the thankful disposition which is proper to its own reception. In this case then, the gift’s giving would really reside in the

46 Richardson, op. cit., 601.
taking of it, in how it is properly taken, when taking is attuned. It was in this sense that Heidegger introduced his lecture on *Denken* by saying that we have the capability (*Vermögen*) for thinking only insofar as we are inclined toward it—i.e., insofar as we “want” (*mögen*) it—and it in turn inclines toward us, “wanting” thought, and therefore providing for its enabling possibility by way of Being’s “quiet power.”
CONCLUSION

In concluding this work we might take our cue from the sentiments of Richardson, to say that, even though “at this point we draw our study to a close, the reason is not that we have reached the end of the way but only that we have discerned its direction with sufficient clarity to permit us to comprehend its sense”, and that, accordingly, “We wish now to prescind from the different steps we have followed and to meditate the sense of the way as such.”47 The question of thinking is certainly not now over and done with, being undis-solved and, ultimately, indis-soluble. After all, travelling along a way, headed in whatever direction, is never itself a guarantee of an eventual arrival. In fact, this is what we learned first of all in this study.

We began with the task of clarifying Heidegger’s intention with regard to thinking. Have we approached in a way befitting its nature? Have we come across this nature along the way of this approach? The lecture series Was Heisst Denken? began with this clause: “We come to know what it means to think when we ourselves try to think” (WCT, 3). This trying, moreover, is really a matter of becoming “more waitful” and “more void” (DT, 82). In the course of this work, accordingly, we have witnessed the waitfulness of thinking. We have seen that thinking is waitful upon its own essence. Perhaps in this we can see a way into—and not out of—the circularity that we first anticipated in setting out on the way toward Heidegger’s “Denken”, (i.e., that circularity which gave rise to our question: How could Heidegger approach thinking in accordance to its nature, and also to bring it on the way, when his intent is to uncover that nature?).

47 Richardson, op. cit., 623.
This is because thinking implies the waiting after its own essence. It was this realization which lead Heidegger to conclude at the end of his *Conversation* that, “we are now close to being release into the nature of thinking … through waiting for its nature” (DT, 67). Since thinking is essentially a waitful craft, then we may say that, when we wait upon *its* essence, we really recall this essence in thought, and thus, waiting, we recall in thought—in memorial thankfulness—that which endows us of our nature as thinkers. In meditative practice, it is exactly the same case of waiting upon great waitfulness. Now what can we gather about all that has previously been said with regard to “releasement”, “waiting”, and “thinking”? In brief, and quite precisely, Heidegger says, “We are released by way of waiting, when we think” (DT, 68). With one eye on this intricate embroidery of terms, therefore, when we are asked what just what Heidegger *meant* by “thinking”, in the double sense, then we ought to reply, hesitantly, as if to defer answering altogether: “just wait.”

In the second chapter we explored the nature of Heidegger’s thought-provoking in order to understand the strategy employed by Heidegger the teacher: to find out, as Schalow puts it, that “Thinking is … inseparable from what summons its activity.”48 We argued that Heidegger’s intention to bring thinking underway was sublimated and enfigured in a poetic turn of phrase. What is most thought-provoking is our distance from the thought-provoking; Heidegger heard this, and spoke. His words pointed back and reached into “[*Ereignis*] through which alone Man and Being attain their true nature through alienation” (ID, 31). This alienation, (our distance), however, is what determines our allocation to what needs thought. That we are not thinking—that is, not thinking

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48 Schalow, op. cit., 51.
Being—is the most astonishing. Recognition of this distance, which is itself in a sense the onset of thinking, nonetheless never closes the distance. The way of thinking is therefore characterizable as a way of suffering the distress of the forever still-not, and the “ever approaching, never reaching”, in other words, of remaining underway, caught in the between. As we have seen, this way is most essentially governed by the attunement and disposition of thinking, by which man faces up to his “standing exposed” in a way which is revelatory of Being’s own epochal sending. This essential alienation of thinking from Being, moreover—through which man and Being “attain their true nature”—is a matter of forgetfulness. Heidegger speaks of the “perversion” which persists in the tragedy of great thoughts made common in their circulation; they are watered down, corroded for the most part by ‘that endless profusion of books describing the state of the world today’” (WCT, 49). Nonetheless, “the threat of this perversion is part of what gives us food for thought” (WCT, 49). In a sense, Heidegger believed, the written word smothers the scream that signals the neglect of what is thought-worthy; that is unless, as Heidegger tells us—it is written such that it does not merely explain itself away, but rather it remains a way—a path which is cleared in its being walked upon.

During the course of this work, it should be noted, we have found help in explicating some of these figurings and ideas by hearkening back to a source which Heidegger himself made appeal to in expressing his notion of the “way” (Weg). Taoism, (as well as Zen), it may be argued, stands to provide a working model in which, for a number of reasons, there can be found many conceptual parallels with Heidegger’s later thought. For this reason it is possible—and fruitful—to open a dialogue between the two, whereby, (as we have demonstrated in the examination of “remaining underway”), it may
well happen that in some cases the same conceptual dilemma is faced, either in analogous or divergent ways. This means that both sides of the dialogue have an opportunity to learn from each other. It does not mean that we are to make Heidegger out to be either a Taoist or a Buddhist—a project which, even if conceivable, would be entirely worthless. What is at stake in such “comparative” endeavours is really nothing beyond, and nothing less than, a sincere attempt to approach an understanding of Heidegger’s thought in light of all available resources.

In the third chapter we attempted to approach the question concerning the usefulness of Heidegger’s Denken. We found in fact that it was remarkably singular in its apparent uselessness and impoverishment, regimented as it was to the simple and the slow. Perhaps, however, meditative thinking, like the practice of meditation itself, excels specifically in its tendency toward the valuation (not e-valuation) of such uselessness and non-doing, to somehow make room for the useless by a kind of letting go. As Heidegger also conceived, this aspect of meditative thinking, (i.e., its very discourse from calculative thinking), may indeed prove to be decisive as regards the possibility of a “turning” within the realm of relation between man and Being, which is in the present era fully dominated and entranced by the gigantic technological matrix of ends and means, of problems and their respective technical solutions. This first involves, as we have attempted in the present work, the recognition of thinking’s true nature, beyond the strictly calculative reach of its import. That is, since for Heidegger thinking is not useful, then “In order to learn how to experience … thinking purely, and that means at the same time to carry it through, we must free ourselves from the technical interpretation of thinking” (BW, 194). Even so, this is not easily and quickly done. Meditative thinking as
such—i.e., as useless—remains strange to us, and problematic. It is not a new way of thinking that can solve our problems, and it cannot be passed around and enacted like a plan of action. By nature, it is not even something properly made popular—so much so, indeed, that Heidegger was prompted to say: “perhaps it is not fitting anyhow to let the way be seen in public” (WCT, 170). As useless, meditative thinking will always remain out of place. Nevertheless this thinking is not nothing, and the recognition of its sovereignty as thinking, i.e., the recognition of a thinking apart from its technical interpretation, allows for, if nothing else, the possibility of seeing beyond calculative thinking, and for clarifying the situation of the framework—but not of disassembling it. For Heidegger, after all, the essence of technology is itself nothing technological; it is not a human construct, and so neither can it be like some great beast to be slain. To conceive of meditative thinking as being itself a means of eradicating calculative thinking along with technological contrivance misses the mark, since, under this conception, meditative thinking becomes itself no more than a sort of self-regulatory device for technicity, and is in this way reduced to serving as a means of solving the technological problem. This points directly to the predicament which is inherent to establishing the “usefulness of the useless”, whereby it seems that meditative thinking is exposed to the threat of being commandeered into popular service, where it might be produced en masse like an antidote to the present technological epidemic. This predicament—that is, of just how meditative thinking might play its role in determining the lineaments of the possible future deliverance of mankind from the danger of the present technological epoch—is one which remains outstanding, and which stands in need of careful consideration. The challenge of this predicament must be taken up in detail at a later date, reserved for a
forthcoming work.

If we should wish to claim any accomplishment for the present work, it would be, at least, the commencement of answering to Kovacs’ “demanding task,” which was said to be the “appropriation of [Heidegger’s] ways of thinking in action, of his texts showing the teaching thinker and the thinking teacher.”49 Like Heidegger himself, from the start of the work at hand, we have restrained from attempting dis-solve the problematic of thinking, so as not to “betray” it altogether. But perhaps, by following Heidegger’s poetic pointing into the withdrawal of thought, we too have a hand in the abyss, and thereby have been able to remark on the marks of thought. We have remarked that the nature of thinking resides in the approach to thinking—it is, then, a benign circle. To define thinking would have made thinking no more than a trophy; but we didn’t define it, we characterized it, because we described it. Even so, it might still be argued that, “[a]ny description would reify it”—to which Heidegger answers: “Nevertheless it lets itself be named, and being named it can be thought about” (DT, 67). Being thought on, the nature of thinking is recalled and held secure in the devotional appreciation of thinking, the heart of man.

49 Kovacs, op. cit., 21.
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