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MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Basic Writings
Being and Time
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On the Way to Language
On Time and Being
Poetry, Language, Thought
The Question Concerning Technology
and Other Essays
What Is Called Thinking?

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

BASIC WRITINGS

from Being and Time (1927)
to The Task of Thinking (1964)

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION
EDITED, WITH GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND
INTRODUCTIONS TO EACH SELECTION,

BY

DAVID FARRELL KRELL

HarperSanFrancisco
A Division of HarperCollinsPublishers
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   by DAVID FARRELL KRELL

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it stands in closest proximity to the constantly lurking possibility of
deepest error. For this reason no amount of scientific rigor attains
to the seriousness of metaphysics. Philosophy can never be mea-
sured by the standard of the idea of science.

If the question of the nothing unfolded here has actually ques-
tioned us, then we have not simply brought metaphysics before us
in an extrinsic manner. Nor have we merely been “transposed” to
it. We cannot be transposed there at all, because insofar as we exist
we are always there already. Physei gar, ὁ φίλε, enesti τις φιλο-
σοφια τῇ του ανδρος διανοιαί ["For by nature, my friend, man’s mind
dwells in philosophy"] (Plato, Phaedrus, 279a). So long as man ex-
ists, philosophizing of some sort occurs. Philosophy—what we call
philosophy—is metaphysics’ getting under way, in which philosophy
comes to itself and to its explicit tasks. Philosophy gets under way
only by a peculiar insertion of our own existence into the funda-
mental possibilities of Dasein as a whole. For this insertion it is of
decisive importance, first, that we allow space for beings as a whole;
second, that we release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say,
that we liberate ourselves from those idols everyone has and to
which they are wont to go cringing; and finally, that we let the
sweep of our suspense take its full course, so that it swings back
into the basic question of metaphysics which the nothing itself com-
pels: Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?

III

ON THE ESSENCE OF TRUTH

<> The splendor of the simple.
According to Franz Brentano “being” in the sense of “the true” was the second of being’s manifold meanings in Aristotle. The difficulty proved to be that “true” also meant many different things. Judgments, propositions, and mathematical formulations could be true or false but so could something we perceive or remember, dream or imagine; “things” (pragmata) might be true or false in a sense and so might people.

Now, all these senses of “true” are analogous: while distinct in meaning they all tend toward “one sense and one dominant source.” Brentano tried to get at that one basic sense by offering a familiar example from geometry: at a certain point in the demonstration of a geometrical theorem one can only ask, “Is this, or is it not?” meaning, “Is this true, or false?” Hence the meaning of “the true” turns out to be the that-it-is of something, its Being—which of course has manifold senses!

Even as a youth Heidegger was intrigued by the intimate relationship of Being and truth. Brentano stated but did not solve this problem which stimulated Heidegger’s thought through the years. “On the Essence of Truth” (discussed in the General Introduction, pp. 30ff.) stems from the decade of the 1930s but points back to Being and Time and forward to virtually all the later works. Section 44 of Being and Time is entitled “Dasein, Disclosedness, and Truth.” It is divided into three subsections which treat (a) the traditional concept of truth and its ontological foundations, (b) the original phenomenon of truth and the derivative character of the traditional concept, and (c) truth’s mode of being, and its presupposition. The traditional concept derives from Aristotle, and Brentano is surely right in conjoining truth and Being—if only as a problem. Aristotle’s discussion of truth as homoiôsis, a kind of “likening” between things and the soul’s experience of them, transmitted through various Jewish and Arabian philosophers, influences medieval scholastic philosophy; the latter’s formulations survive in modern and even contemporary philosophy of knowledge. Aquinas speaks of adaequatio intellectus et rei, the correspondence of intellect and thing, Kant of “the agreement of knowledge with its object,” while some contemporary logical positivists define truth as “empirical verifiability”—the conformity of assertion to matter of fact. Heidegger wishes to know what is “tacitly posited” in the idea of truth as correspondence and what sort of Being the agreement between knowledge and its object or conformity of proposition and fact must have. The upshot is that a discovery (Entdecken) of beings that lets them be seen is always presupposed in all correspondence or adequation of judgment and state of affairs. Hence section 44 refers back to the meaning of apophansis in section 7 (cf. p. 78ff., above): the original meaning of truth appears in the word “phomenology” as a “taking beings out of concealment, letting them be seen in their unconcealment (uncoveredness).” But discovery of beings is grounded in the disclosedness (Erschlossenheit) of world and Dasein. Disclosedness or unconcealment (Unverborgenheit) is therefore the most original meaning of truth.

However, disclosedness never goes unchallenged. Dasein discovers beings but also covers them over: aware of its possibilities, Dasein is nevertheless “thrown” into the world and “ensnared” by it. Hence Dasein is “equally in truth and in untruth.” Open to beings and to its own being possible, Dasein nonetheless relinquishes this openness in exchange for the security of whatever “they” say is true. It lets truth slip into the same oblivion as Being and finds its “truths” as so many scintillating beings there before it, polished yet manipulable. The most dazzlingly finished become “eternal truths.” Presupposed in such truths of faith or science or even the university of life, however, is a kind of opening or openness by virtue of which something can and does show itself and let itself be seen. This opening resists depiction. Indeed the attempt to speak of it becomes embroiled in the most complicated absurdties in order to let this quite simple thing—which is no thing at all—show itself and become manifest.

To let unconcealment show itself: this is perhaps the most succinct formulation of the task of Heidegger’s thinking. At the heart of the task stands the question of freedom (see sections 3 and 4 of the present essay), a freedom that refers us back to the discussion of Dasein as transcendence (in section 7 of Being and Time, pp. 85–86). However, “freedom” and “transcendence” no longer mean what traditional morals and metaphysics take them to mean. Both refer to the mystery of the openness or “clearing” (Lichtung) of Being, “the clearing that
shelters." Finally, the task requires that we think historically. The word Wesen ("essence") in the title of the essay is to be thought historically as an "essential unfolding" (see Reading VII).

A note on the text. Heidegger indicates that the first paragraph (he surely means the first two paragraphs) of the final section of the truth essay ("9. Note") was appended to the second edition of the essay in 1949. In fact, it is clear that the entire note offers a retrospect on the essay. It tells us that the title "essence of truth" was to be reversed in a sequel on "the truth of essence," a phrase employed in sections 7 and 8 (pp. 132 and 135) of the essay. Heidegger was unable to carry out this reversal, for reasons that become clearer in Reading V. An indication of the growing importance of the history of Being in Heidegger's thinking is his adoption of the archaic spelling Seyn (here rendered as "Beyn," a form that disappears from English after the sixteenth century) as a name for the ontological difference—the difference between Being and beings—that dominates any given epoch in the history of Being.

ON THE ESSENCE OF TRUTH

Our topic is the essence of truth. The question regarding the essence of truth is not concerned with whether truth is a truth of practical experience or of economic calculation, the truth of a technical consideration or of political sagacity, or, in particular, a truth of scientific research or of artistic composition, or even the truth of thoughtful reflection or of cultic belief. The question of essence disregards all this and attends to the one thing that in general distinguishes every "truth" as truth.

Yet with this question concerning essence do we not soar too high into the void of generality that deprives all thinking of breath? Does not the extravagance of such questioning bring to light the groundlessness of all philosophy? A radical thinking that turns to what is actual must surely from the first insist bluntly on establishing the actual truth that today gives us a measure and a stand against the confusion of opinions and reckonings. In the face of this actual need, what use is the question concerning the essence of truth, this "abstract" question that disregards everything actual? Is not the question of essence the most unessential and superfluous that could be asked?

No one can evade the evident certainty of these considerations. None can lightly neglect their compelling seriousness. But what is
it that speaks in these considerations? "Sound" common sense. It has its own necessity; it asserts its rights with the weapon peculiarly suitable to it, namely, appeal to the "obviousness" of its claims and considerations. However, philosophy can never refute common sense, for the latter is deaf to the language of philosophy. Nor may it even wish to do so, since common sense is blind to what philosophy sets before its essential vision.

Moreover, we ourselves remain within the sensibleness of common sense to the extent that we suppose ourselves to be secure in those multiform "truths" of practical experience and action, of research, composition, and belief. We ourselves intensify that resistance which the "obvious" has to every demand made by what is questionable.

Therefore even if some questioning concerning truth is necessary, what we then demand is an answer to the question as to where we stand today. We want to know what our situation is today. We call for the goal that should be posited for man in and for his history. We want the actual "truth." Well then—truth!

But in calling for the actual "truth" we must already know what truth as such means. Or do we know this only by "feeling" and "in a general way"? But is not such vague "knowing" and our indifference regarding it more desolate than sheer ignorance of the essence of truth?

1. The Usual Concept of Truth

What do we ordinarily understand by "truth"? This elevated yet at the same time worn and almost dulled word "truth" means what makes a true thing true. What is a true thing? We say, for example, "It is a true joy to cooperate in the accomplishment of this task." We mean that it is purely and actually a joy. The true is the actual. Accordingly, we speak of true gold in distinction from false. False gold is not actually what it appears to be. It is merely a "semblance" and thus is not actual. What is not actual is taken to be the opposite of the actual. But what merely seems to be gold is nevertheless something actual. Accordingly, we say more precisely: actual gold is genuine gold. Yet both are "actual," the circulating counterfeit no less than the genuine gold. What is true about genuine gold thus cannot be demonstrated merely by its actuality. The question recurs: what do "genuine" and "true" mean here? Genuine gold is that actual gold the actuality of which is in accordance [in der Übereinstimmung steht] with what, always and in advance, we "properly" mean by "gold." Conversely, wherever we suspect false gold, we say: "Here something is not in accord" [stimmt nicht]. On the other hand, we say of whatever is as it should be": "It is in accord." The matter is in accord [Die Sache stimmt].

However, we call true not only an actual joy, genuine gold, and all beings of such kind, but also and above all we call true or false our statements about beings, which can themselves be genuine or not with regard to their kind, which can be thus or otherwise in their actuality. A statement is true if what it means and says is in accordance with the matter about which the statement is made. Here too we say, "It is in accord." Now, though, it is not the matter that is in accord but rather the proposition.

The true, whether it be a matter or a proposition, is what accords, the accordant [das Stimmende]. Being true and truth here signify accord, and that in a double sense: on the one hand, the consonance [Einstimmigkeit] of a matter with what is supposed in advance regarding it and, on the other hand, the accordance of what is meant in the statement with the matter.

This dual character of the accord is brought to light by the traditional definition of truth: veritas est aequatio rei et intellectus.
This can be taken to mean: truth is the correspondence [Angeleis-
zung] of the matter to knowledge. But it can also be taken as
saying: truth is the correspondence of knowledge to the matter.
Admittedly, the above definition is usually stated only in the for-
mula veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem [truth is the ade-
quation of intellect to thing]. Yet truth so conceived, propositional
truth, is possible only on the basis of material truth [Sachwaren-
halt], of adaequatio rei ad intellectum [adequation of thing to intellect].
Both concepts of the essence of veritas have continually in view a
conforming to... [Sichrichten nach...], and hence think truth
as correctness [Richtigkeit].

Nonetheless, the one is not the mere inversion of the other. On
the contrary, in each case intellectus and rei are thought differently.
In order to recognize this we must trace the usual formula for the
ordinary concept of truth back to its most recent (i.e., the medial)
origin. Veritas as adaequatio rei ad intellectum does not imply the
later transcendental conception of Kant—possible only on the basis
of the subjectivity of man's essence—that "objects conform to our
knowledge." Rather, it implies the Christian theological belief that,
with respect to what it is and whether it is, a matter, as created (ens
creatum), is only insofar as it corresponds to the idea preconceived
in the intellectus divinus, i.e., in the mind of God, and thus meas-
ures up to the idea (is correct) and in this sense is "true." The
intellectus humanus too is an ens creatum. As a capacity bestowed
upon man by God, it must satisfy its idea. But the understanding
measures up to the idea only by accomplishing in its propositions
the correspondence of what is thought to the matter, which in its
turn must be in conformity with the idea. If all beings are "created,"
the possibility of the truth of human knowledge is grounded in the
fact that matter and proposition measure up to the idea in the same
way and therefore are fitted to each other on the basis of the unity
of the divine plan of creation. Veritas as adaequatio rei (creandae)
ad intellectum (divinum) guarantees veritas as adaequatio intellec-
tus (humani) ad rem (creatam). Throughout, veritas essentially im-
plies convenientia, the coming of beings themselves, as created, into
agreement with the Creator, an "accord" with regard to the way
they are determined in the order of creation.

But this order, detached from the notion of creation, can also be
represented in a general and indefinite way as a world-order. The
theologically conceived order of creation is replaced by the capacity
of all objects to be planned by means of a worldly reason [Weltver-
unfält] which supplies the law for itself and thus also claims that its
procedure is immediately intelligible (what is considered "logical").
That the essence of propositional truth consists in the correctness
of statements needs no further special proof. Even where an effort
is made—with a conspicuous lack of success—to explain how cor-
rectness is to occur, it is already presupposed as being the essence
of truth. Likewise, material truth always signifies the consonance
of something at hand with the "rational" concept of its essence.
The impression arises that this definition of the essence of truth is
independent of the interpretation of the essence of the Being of all
beings, which always includes a corresponding interpretation of the
essence of man as the bearer and executor of intellectus. Thus the
formula for the essence of truth (veritas est adaequatio intellectus
et rei) comes to have its general validity as something immediately
evident to everyone. Under the domination of the obviousness that
this concept of truth seems to have but that is hardly attended to
as regards its essential grounds, it is considered equally obvious that
truth has an opposite, and that there is untruth. The untruth of
the proposition (incorrectness) is the nonaccordance of the state-
ment with the matter. The untruth of the matter (nongenuineness)
signifies nonagreement of a being with its essence. In each case
untruth is conceived as a nonaccord. The latter falls outside the
essence of truth. Therefore when it is a question of comprehending
the pure essence of truth, untruth, as such an opposite of truth,
can be put aside.

But then is there any further need at all for a special unveiling
of the essence of truth? Is not the pure essence of truth already
adequately represented in the generally accepted concept, which is upset by no theory and is secured by its obviousness? Moreover, if we take the tracing back of propositional truth to material truth to be what in the first instance it shows itself to be, namely a theological explanation, and if we then keep the philosophical definition completely pure of all admixture of theology and limit the concept of truth to propositional truth, then we encounter an old—though not the oldest—tradition of thinking, according to which truth is the accordance (homoioísis) of a statement (logos) with a matter (pragma). What is it about statements that here remains still worthy of question—granted that we know what is meant by accordance of a statement with the matter? Do we know that?

2. The Inner Possibility of Accordance

We speak of accordance in various senses. We say, for example, considering two five-mark coins lying on the table: they are in accordance with one another. They come into accord in the oneness of their outward appearance. Hence they have the latter in common, and thus they are in this regard alike. Furthermore, we speak of accordance whenever, for example, we state regarding one of the five-mark coins: this coin is round. Here the statement is in accordance with the thing. Now the relation obtains, not between thing and thing, but rather between a statement and a thing. But wherein are the thing and the statement supposed to be in accordance, considering that the relata are manifestly different in their outward appearance? The coin is made of metal. The statement is not material at all. The coin is round. The statement has nothing at all spatial about it. With the coin something can be purchased. The statement about it is never a means of payment. But in spite of all their dissimilarity the above statement, as true, is in accordance with the coin. And according to the usual concept of truth this accord is supposed to be a correspondence. How can what is completely dissimilar, the statement, correspond to the coin? It would have to become the coin and in this way relinquish itself entirely. The statement never succeeds in doing that. The moment it did, it would no longer be able as a statement to be in accordance with the thing. In the correspondence the statement must remain—indeed even first become—what it is. In what does its essence, so thoroughly different from every thing, consist? How is the statement able to correspond to something else, the thing, precisely by persisting in its own essence?

Correspondence here cannot signify a thing-like approximation between dissimilar kinds of things. The essence of the correspondence is determined rather by the kind of relation that obtains between the statement and the thing. As long as this “relation” remains undetermined and is not grounded in its essence, all dispute over the possibility and impossibility, over the nature and degree, of the correspondence loses its way in a void. But the statement regarding the coin relates “itself” to this thing in that it presents [vor-stellt] it and says of the presented how, according to the particular perspective that guides it, it is disposed. What is stated by the presentative statement is said of the presented thing in just such manner as that thing, as presented, is. The “such-as” has to do with the presenting and its presented. Disregarding all “psychological” preconceptions as well as those of any “theory of consciousness,” to present here means to let the thing stand opposed as object. As thus placed, what stands opposed must traverse an open field of opposedness [Entgegen] and nevertheless must maintain its stand as a thing and show itself as something withstanding [ein Ständiges]. This appearing of the thing in traversing a field of opposedness takes place within an open region, the openness of which is not first created by the presenting but rather is only entered into and taken over as a domain of relatedness. The relation of the presentative statement to the thing is the accomplishment of that bearing [Verhältnis] which originally and always comes to prevail as a comportment [Verhalten]. But all comportment is distinguished by the fact that, standing in the open region, it adheres to something
opened up as such.* What is thus opened up, solely in this strict sense, was experienced early in Western thinking as "what is present" and for a long time has been named "being."

Comportment stands open to beings. Every open relatedness is a comportment. Man's open stance varies depending on the kind of beings and the way of comportment. All working and achieving, all action and calculation, keep within an open region within which beings, with regard to what they are and how they are, can properly take their stand and become capable of being said. This can occur only if beings present themselves along with the presentative statement so that the latter subordinates itself to the directive that it speak of beings such-as they are. In following such a directive the statement conforms to beings. Speech that directs itself accordingly is correct (true). What is thus said is the correct (the true).

A statement is invested with its correctness by the openness of comportment; for only through the latter can what is opened up really become the standard for the presentative correspondence. Open comportment must let itself be assigned this standard. This means that it must take over a pregiven standard for all presenting. This belongs to the openness of comportment. But if the correctness (truth) of statements becomes possible only through this openness of comportment, then what first makes correctness possible must with more original right be taken as the essence of truth.

Thus the traditional assignment of truth exclusively to statements as the sole essential locus of truth falls away. Truth does not originally reside in the proposition. But at the same time the question arises as to the ground of the inner possibility of the open comportment that pregives a standard, which possibility alone lends to

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*The text reads, "ein Offenbares als ein solches." In ordinary German offenbar means "evident," "manifest." However, the context that it has here through its link with "open region" (das Offene), "open stance" (Offenständigkeit), and "openness" (Offenheit) already suggests the richer sense that the word has for Heidegger: that of something's being so opened up as to reveal itself, to be manifest (as, for example, a flower in bloom), in contrast to something's being so closed or sealed up within itself that it conceals itself.—Tr.
“waver ing reed”? What forced itself upon sound judgment again and
again in the previous discussion now all the more clearly comes to
light: truth is here driven back to the subjectivity of the human
subject. Even if an objectivity is also accessible to this subject, such
objectivity along with subjectivity, still remains something human
and at man’s disposal.

Certainly deceit and dissimulation, lies and deception, illusion
and semblance—in short, all kinds of untruth—are ascribed to
man. But of course untruth is also the opposite of truth. For this
reason, as the nonessence of truth, it is appropriately excluded from
the sphere of the question concerning the pure essence of truth.
This human origin of untruth indeed only serves to confirm by
contrast the essence of truth “in itself” as holding sway “beyond”
man. Metaphysics regards such truth as the imperishable and etern-
al, which can never be founded on the transitoriness and fragility
that belong to man’s essence. How then can the essence of truth
still have its subsistence and its ground in human freedom?

Resistance to the proposition that the essence of truth is freedom
is based on preconceptions, the most obstinate of which is that
freedom is a property of man. The essence of freedom neither
needs nor allows any further questioning. Everyone knows what
man is.

4. The Essence of Freedom

However, indication of the essential connection between truth as
correctness and freedom uproots those preconceptions—granted of
course that we are prepared for a transformation of thinking. Con-
sideration of the essential connection between truth and freedom
leads us to pursue the question of the essence of man in a regard
that assures us an experience of a concealed essential ground of
man (of Dasein), and in such a manner that the experience trans-
poses us in advance into the originally essential domain of truth.
But here it becomes evident also that freedom is the ground of the
inner possibility of correctness only because it receives its own es-
ence from the more original essence of uniquely essential truth.
Freedom was first determined as freedom for what is opened up in
an open region. How is this essence of freedom to be thought? That
which is opened up, that to which a presentative statement as cor-
rect corresponds, are beings opened up in an open comportment.
Freedom for what is opened up in an open region lets beings be the
beings they are. Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be.

Ordinarily we speak of letting be whenever, for example, we forgo
some enterprise that has been planned. “We let something be”
means we do not touch it again, we have nothing more to do with
it. To let something be has here the negative sense of letting it
alone, of renouncing it, of indifference and even neglect.

However, the phrase required now—to let beings be—does not
refer to neglect and indifference but rather the opposite. To let be
is to engage oneself with beings. On the other hand, to be sure,
this is not to be understood only as the mere management, preser-
vation, tending, and planning of the beings in each case encoun-
tered or sought out. To let be—that is, to let beings be as the beings
which they are—means to engage oneself with the open region and
its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that
openness, as it were, along with itself. Western thinking in its be-
ginning conceived this open region as ἀλήθεια, the un concealed.
If we translate ἀλήθεια as “unconcealment” rather than “truth,” this
translation is not merely more literal; it contains the directive to
rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness
of statements and to think it back to that still uncomprehended
disclosedness and disclosure of beings. To engage oneself with the
disclosedness of beings is not to lose oneself in them; rather, such
engagement withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might
reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are, and in
order that presentative correspondence might take its standard from
them. As this letting-be it exposes itself to beings as such and trans-
poses all comportment into the open region. Letting-be, i.e.,
freedom, is intrinsically exposing, ek-sistent.* Considered in regard to the essence of truth, the essence of freedom manifests itself as exposure to the disclosedness of beings.

Freedom is not merely what common sense is content to let pass under this name: the caprice, turning up occasionally in our choosing, of inclining in this or that direction. Freedom is not mere absence of constraint with respect to what we can or cannot do. Nor is it on the other hand mere readiness for what is required and necessary (and so somehow a being). Prior to all this (“negative” and “positive” freedom), freedom is engagement in the disclosure of beings as such. Disclosedness itself is conserved in ek-sistent engagement, through which the openness of the open region, i.e., the “there” [“Da”], is what it is.

In Da-sein the essential ground, long ungrounded, on the basis of which man is able to ek-sist, is preserved for him. Here “existence” does not mean existentia in the sense of occurring or being at hand. Nor on the other hand does it mean, in an “existentiell” fashion, man’s moral endeavor on behalf of his “self,” based on his psychophysical constitution. Ek-sistence, rooted in truth as freedom, is exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such. Still uncomprehended, indeed, not even in need of an essential grounding, 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? In this question unconcealment is experienced for the first time. Being as a whole reveals itself as physis, “nature,” which here does not yet mean a particular sphere of beings but rather beings as such as a whole, specifically in the sense of upsurgent presence [aufgehendes Anwesen]. History begins only when beings themselves are expressly drawn up into their unconcealment and conserved in it, only when this conservation is conceived on the basis of questioning regarding beings as such. The primordial disclosure of being as a whole, the question concerning beings as such, and the beginning of Western history are the same; they occur together in a “time” which, itself unmeasurable, first opens up the open region for every measure.

But if ek-sistent Da-sein, which lets beings be, sets man free for his “freedom” by first offering to his choice something possible (a being) and by imposing on him something necessary (a being), human caprice does not then have freedom at its disposal. Man does not “possess” freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom, ek-sistent, disclosed Da-sein, 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. Only ek-sistent man is historical. “Nature” has no history.

Freedom, understood as letting beings be, is the fulfillment and consummation of the essence of truth in the sense of the disclosure of beings. “Truth” is not a feature of correct propositions that are asserted of an “object” by a human “subject” and then “are valid” somewhere, in what sphere we know not; rather, truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds [west]. All human comportment and bearing are exposed in its open region. Therefore man is in the manner of ek-sistence.

Because every mode of human comportment is in its own way open and plies itself to that toward which it comports itself, the restraint of letting-be, i.e., freedom, must have granted it its endowment of that inner directive for correspondence of presentation to beings. That man ek-sists now means that for historical humanity the history of its essential possibilities is conserved in the disclosure of beings as a whole. The rare and the simple decisions of history arise from the way the original essence of truth essentially unfolds.

However, because truth is in essence freedom, historical man can, in letting beings be, also not let beings be the beings which they are and as they are. Then beings are covered up and distorted. Semblance comes to power. In it the nonessence of truth comes to the fore. However, because ek-sistent freedom as the essence of

*This variant of the word Existenz indicates the ecstatic character of freedom, its standing outside itself. —Tr.
truth is not a property of man; because on the contrary man exists and so becomes capable of history only as the property of this freedom; the nonessence of truth cannot first arise subsequently from mere human incapacity and negligence. Rather, untruth must derive from the essence of truth. Only because truth and untruth are, in essence, not irrelevant to one another, but rather belong together, is it possible for a true proposition to enter into pointed opposition to the corresponding untrue proposition. The question concerning the essence of truth thus first reaches the original domain of what is at issue when, on the basis of a prior glimpse of the full essence of truth, it has included a consideration of untruth in its unveiling of that essence. Discussion of the nonessence of truth is not the subsequent filling of a gap but rather the decisive step toward an adequate posing of the question concerning the essence of truth. Yet how are we to comprehend the nonessence in the essence of truth? If the essence of truth is not exhausted by the correctness of statements, then neither can untruth be equated with the incorrectness of judgments.

5. The Essence of Truth

The essence of truth reveals itself as freedom. The latter is existent, discursive letting beings be. Every mode of open comportment flourishes in letting beings be and in each case is a comportment to this or that being. As engagement in the disclosure of being as a whole as such, freedom has already attuned all comportment to being as a whole. However, being attuned (attunement)* can never be understood as “experience” and “feeling,” because it is thereby simply deprived of its essence. For here it is interpreted on the basis of something (“life” and “soul”) that can maintain the semblance of the title of essence only as long as it bears in itself the distortion and misinterpretation of being attuned. Being attuned, i.e., existent exposedness to beings as a whole, can be “experienced” and “felt” only because the “man who experiences,” without being aware of the essence of the attunement, is always engaged in being attuned in a way that discloses beings as a whole. Every mode of historical man's comportment—whether accentuated or not, whether understood or not—is attuned, and by this attunement is drawn up into beings as a whole. The openedness of being as a whole does not coincide with the sum of all immediately familiar beings. On the contrary: where beings are not very familiar to man and are scarcely and only roughly known by science, the openedness of beings as a whole can prevail more essentially than it can where the familiar and well-known has become boundless, and nothing is any longer able to withstand the business of knowing, since technical mastery over things bears itself without limit. Precisely in the leveling and planing of this omniscience, this mere knowing, the openedness of beings gets flattened out into the apparent nothingness of what is no longer even a matter of indifference, but rather is simply forgotten.

Letting beings be, which is an attuning, a bringing into accord, prevails throughout and anticipates all the open comportment that flourishes in it. Man's comportment is brought into definite accord throughout by the openedness of being as a whole. However, from the point of view of everyday calculations and preoccupations this “as a whole” appears to be incalculable and incomprehensible. It cannot be understood on the basis of the beings opened up in any given case, whether they belong to nature or to history. Although it ceaselessly brings everything into definite accord, still it remains indefinite, indeterminable; it then coincides for the most part with what is most fleeting and most unconsidered. However, what brings into accord is not nothing, but rather a concealing of beings as a whole. Precisely because letting be always lets beings be in a particular comportment

*The text reads, "Die Gestimmtheit (Stimmung)..." Stimmung refers not only to the kind of attunement that a musical instrument receives by being tuned but also to the kind of attunement that constitutes a mood or a disposition of Dasein. The important etymological connection between Stimmung and the various formations based on stimmen (to accord) is not retained in the translation.—Tr.
that relates to them and thus discloses them, it conceals beings as a whole. Letting-be is intrinsically at the same time a concealing. In the ek-sistent freedom of Da-sein a concealing of being as a whole propriates [ereignet sich]. Here there is concealment.

6. Untruth as Concealing

Concealment deprives alētheia of disclosure yet does not render it sterēsis (privation); rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to alētheia as its own. Considered with respect to truth as disclosedness, concealment is then undisclosedness and accordingly the untruth that is most proper to the essence of truth. The concealment of beings as a whole does not first show up subsequently as a consequence of the fact that knowledge of beings is always fragmentary. The concealment of beings as a whole, untruth proper, is older than every openedness of this or that being. It is also older than letting-be itself, which in disclosing already holds concealed and comports itself toward concealing. What conserves letting-be in this relatedness to concealing? Nothing less than the concealing of what is concealed as a whole, of beings as such, i.e., the mystery; not a particular mystery regarding this or that, but rather the one mystery—that, in general, mystery (the concealing of what is concealed) as such holds sway throughout man’s Da-sein.

In letting beings as a whole be, which discloses and at the same time conceals, it happens that concealing appears as what is first of all concealed. Insofar as it ek-sists, Da-sein conserves the first and broadest undisclosedness, untruth proper. The proper nonessence of truth is the mystery. Here nonessence does not yet have the sense of inferiority to essence in the sense of what is general (koinon, genos), its possibilitas and the ground of its possibility. Nonessence is here what in such a sense would be a pre-essential essence. But “nonessence” means at first and for the most part the deformation of that already inferior essence. Indeed, in each of these significations the nonessence remains always in its own way essential to the essence and never becomes unessential in the sense of irrelevant. But to speak of nonessence and untruth in this manner goes very much against the grain of ordinary opinion and looks like a dragging up of forcibly contrived paradox. Because it is difficult to eliminate this impression, such a way of speaking, paradoxical only for ordinary doxa (opinion), is to be renounced. But surely for those who know about such matters the “non-” of the primordial nonessence of truth, as untruth, points to the still unexperienced domain of the truth of Being (not merely of beings).

As letting beings be, freedom is intrinsically the resolutely open bearing that does not close up in itself. * All comportment is grounded in this bearing and receives from it directedness toward beings and disclosure of them. Nevertheless, this bearing toward concealing conceals itself in the process, letting a forgottenness of the mystery take precedence and disappearing in it. Certainly man takes his bearings [verhält sich] constantly in his comportment toward beings; but for the most part he acquiesces in this or that being and its particular openedness. Man clings to what is readily available and controllable even where ultimate matters are concerned. And if he sets out to extend, change, newly assimilate, or secure the openedness of the beings pertaining to the most various domains of his activity and interest, then he still takes his directives from the sphere of readily available intentions and needs.

However, to reside in what is readily available is intrinsically not to let the concealing of what is concealed hold sway. Certainly, among readily familiar things there are also some that are puzzling,

"Resolutely open bearing" seeks to translate das entschlossene Verhältnis. Entschlossen is usually rendered as "resolute," but such a translation fails to retain the word’s structural relation to verschlossen, “closed” or “shut up.” Significantly, this connection is what makes it possible for Heidegger to transform the sense of the word: he takes the prefix as a privation rather than as indicating establishment of the condition designated by the word to which it is affixed. Thus, as the text here makes quite clear, entschlossen signifies just the opposite of that kind of “resolve” in which one makes up one’s mind in such fashion as to close off all other possibilities: it is rather a kind of keeping un-closed.—Th.
unexplained, undecided, questionable. But these self-certain questions are merely transitional, intermediate points in our movement within the readily familiar and thus not essential. Wherever the concealment of beings as a whole is conceded only as a limit that occasionally announces itself, concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgottenness.

But the forgotten mystery of Dasein is not eliminated by the forgottenness; rather, the forgottenness bestows on the apparent disappearance of what is forgotten a peculiar presence [Gegenwart]. By disavowing itself in and for forgottenness, the mystery leaves historical man in the sphere of what is readily available to him, leaves him to his own resources. Thus left, humanity replenishes its "world" on the basis of the latest needs and aims, and fills out that world by means of proposing and planning. From these man then takes his standards, forgetting being as a whole. He persists in them and continually supplies himself with new standards, yet without considering either the ground for taking up standards or the essence of what gives the standard. In spite of his advance to new standards and goals, man goes wrong as regards the essential genuineness of his standards. He is all the more mistaken the more exclusively he takes himself, as subject, to be the standard for all beings. The inordinate forgetfulness of humanity persists in securing itself by means of what is readily available and always accessible. This persistence has its unwitting support in that bearing by which Dasein not only ek-sists but also at the same time in-sists, i.e., holds fast to what is offered by beings, as if they were open of and in themselves.

As ek-sistent, Dasein is insistent. Even in insistent existence the mystery holds sway, but as the forgotten and hence "unessential" essence of truth.

7. Untruth as Errancy

As insistent, man is turned toward the most readily available beings. But he insists only by being already ek-sistent, since, after all, he takes beings as his standard. However, in taking its standard, humanity is turned away from the mystery. The insistent turning toward what is readily available and the ek-sistent turning away from the mystery belong together. They are one and the same. Yet turning toward and away from is based on a turning toward and fro proper to Dasein. Man's flight from the mystery toward what is readily available, onward from one current thing to the next, passing the mystery by—this is erring.⁴

Man errs. Man does not merely stray into errancy. He is always astray in errancy, because as ek-sistent he in-sists and so already is caught in errancy. The errancy through which man strays is not something which, as it were, extends alongside man like a ditch into which he occasionally stumbles; rather, errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the Da-sein into which historical man is admitted. Errancy is the free space for that turning in which insistent ek-sistence adroitly forgets and mistakes itself constantly anew. The concealing of the concealed being as a whole holds sway in that disclosure of specific beings, which, as forgottenness of concealment, becomes errancy.

Errancy is the essential counter-essence to the primordial essence of truth. Errancy opens itself up as the open region for every opposite to essential truth. Errancy is the open site for and ground of error. Error is not merely an isolated mistake but the realm (the domain) of the history of those entanglements in which all kinds of erring get interwoven.

In conformity with its openness and its relatedness to beings as a whole, every mode of comportment has its mode of erring. Error extends from the most ordinary wasting of time, making a mistake, and miscalculating, to going astray and venturing too far in one's essential attitudes and decisions. However, what is ordinarily and even according to the teachings of philosophy recognized as error,

⁴"To err" may translate erra only if it is understood in its root sense derived from the Latin errare, "to wander from the right way," and only secondarily in the sense "to fall into error."—Tr.
incorrectness of judgments and falsity of knowledge, is only one
mode of erring and, moreover, the most superficial one. The errancy
in which any given segment of historical humanism must proceed
for its course to be errant is essentially connected with the openness
of Dasein. By leading him astray, errancy dominates man through
and through. But, as leading astray, errancy at the same time con-
tributes to a possibility that man is capable of drawing up from his
ek-sistence—the possibility that, by experiencing errancy itself and
by not mistaking the mystery of Da-sein, he not let himself be led
astray.

Because man's in-sistent ek-sistence proceeds in errancy, and be-
cause errancy as leading astray always oppresses in some manner or
other and is formidable on the basis of this oppression of the mys-
tery, specifically as something forgotten, in the ek-sistence of his
Dasein man is especially subjected to the rule of the mystery and
the oppression of errancy. He is in the needful condition of being
constrained by the one and the other. The full essence of truth,
including its most proper nonessence, keeps Dasein in need by this
perpetual turning to and fro. Dasein is a turning into need. From
man's Dasein and from it alone arises the disclosure of necessity
and, as a result, the possibility of being transposed into what is
inevitable.

The disclosure of beings as such is simultaneously and instrin-
sically the concealing of being as a whole. In the simultaneity of
disclosure and concealing, errancy holds sway. Errancy and the
concealing of what is concealed belong to the primordial essence
of truth. Freedom, conceived on the basis of the in-sistent ek-sistence
of Dasein, is the essence of truth (in the sense of the correctness
of presenting) only because freedom itself originates from the
primordial essence of truth, the rule of the mystery in errancy. Letting
beings be takes its course in open comportment. However, letting
beings as such be as a whole occurs in a way befitting its essence
only when from time to time it gets taken up in its primordial es-
sence. Then resolute openness toward the mystery [Ent-schlossen-
heit zum Geheimnis] is under way into errancy as such. Then the
question of the essence of truth gets asked more originally. Then
the ground of the intertwining of the essence of truth with the truth
of essence reveals itself. The glimpse into the mystery out of errancy
is a question—in the sense of that unique question of what being
as such is as a whole. This questioning thinks the question of the
Being of beings, a question that is essentially misleading and thus
in its manifold meaning is still not mastered. The thinking of Being,
from which such questioning primordially originates, has since
Plato been understood as "philosophy," and later received the title
"metaphysics."

8. Philosophy and the Question of Truth

In the thinking of Being the liberation of man for ek-sistence, the
liberation that grounds history, is put into words. These are not
merely the "expression" of an opinion but always already the ably
conserved articulation of the truth of being as a whole. How many
have ears for these words matters not. Who those are that can hear
them determines man's standpoint in history. However, in the same
period in which the beginning of philosophy takes place, the marked
domination of common sense (sophistry) also begins.

Sophistry appeals to the unquestionable character of the beings
that are opened up and interprets all thoughtful questioning as an
attack on, an unfortunate irritation of, common sense.

However, what philosophy is according to the estimation of com-
mon sense, which is quite justified in its own domain, does not
touch on the essence of philosophy, which can be determined only
on the basis of relatedness to the original truth of being as such as
a whole. But because the full essence of truth contains the non-
essence and above all holds sway as concealing, philosophy as a
questioning into this truth is intrinsically discordant. Philosophical
thinking is gentle releasement that does not renounce the conceal-
ment of being as a whole. Philosophical thinking is especially the
stern and resolute openness that does not disrupt the concealing but entreats its unbroken essence into the open region of understanding and thus into its own truth.

In the gentle sternness and stern gentleness with which it lets being as such be as a whole, philosophy becomes a questioning which does not cling solely to beings yet which also can allow no externally imposed decree. Kant presaged this innermost need that thinking has. For he says of philosophy:

Here philosophy is seen in fact to be placed in a precarious position, which is supposed to be stable—although neither in heaven nor on earth is there anything on which it depends or on which it is based. It is here that it has to prove its integrity as the keeper of its laws [Selbsthalterin ihrer Gesetze], not as the mouthpiece of laws secretly communicated to it by some implanted sense or by who knows what tutelary nature. (Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten. Werke, Akademieausgabe IV, 425.)

With this essential interpretation of philosophy, Kant, whose work introduces the final turning of Western metaphysics, envisages a domain which to be sure he could understand only on the basis of his fundamental metaphysical position, founded on subjectivity, and which he had to understand as the keeping of its laws. This essential view of the determination of philosophy nevertheless goes far enough to renounce every subjugation of philosophical thinking, the most destitute kind of which lets philosophy still be of value as an “expression” of “culture” (Spengler) and as an ornament of productive mankind.

However, whether philosophy as “keeper of its laws” fulfills its primordially decisive essence, or whether it is not itself first of all kept and appointed to its task as keeper by the truth of that to which its laws pertain—this depends on the primordiality with which the original essence of truth becomes essential for thoughtful questioning.

The present undertaking takes the question of the essence of truth beyond the confines of the ordinary definition provided in the usual concept of essence and helps us to consider whether the question of the essence of truth must not be, at the same time and even first of all, the question concerning the truth of essence. But in the concept of “essence” philosophy thinks Being. In tracing the inner possibility of the correctness of statements back to the existent freedom of letting-be as its “ground,” likewise in pointing to the essential commencement of this ground in concealing and in errancy, we want to show that the essence of truth is not the empty “generality” of an “abstract” universality but rather that which, self-concealing, is unique in the unremitting history of the disclosure of the “meaning” of what we call Being—what we for a long time have been accustomed to considering only as being as a whole.

9. Note

The question of the essence of truth arises from the question of the truth of essence. In the former question essence is understood initially in the sense of whatness (quidditas) or material content (realitas), whereas truth is understood as a characteristic of knowledge. In the question of the truth of essence, essence is understood verbally; in this word, remaining still within metaphysical presentation, Becyn is thought as the difference that holds sway between Being and beings. Truth signifies sheltering that clears [lichtendes Bergen] as the basic characteristic of Being. The question of the essence of truth finds its answer in the proposition the essence of truth is the truth of essence. After our explanation it can easily be seen that the proposition does not merely reverse the word order so as to conjure the specter of paradox. The subject of the proposition—if this unfortunate grammatical category may still be used at all—is the truth of essence. Sheltering that clears is—i.e., lets essentially unfold—acquiescence between knowledge and beings. The proposition is not dialectical. It is no proposition at all in the sense of a statement. The answer to the question of the essence of truth is the saying of a turning [die Sage einer Kehre] within the history of Being. Because sheltering that clears belongs to it, Being appears primordially in
the light of concealing withdrawal. The name of this clearing [Lichtung] is alētheia.

Already in the original project, the lecture “On the Essence of Truth” was to have been completed by a second lecture, “On the Truth of Essence.” The latter failed for reasons that are now indicated in the “Letter on Humanism” [Reading V].

The decisive question (in Being and Time, 1927) of the meaning, i.e., of the project-domain (see p. 151), i.e., of the openness, i.e., of the truth of Being and not merely of beings, remains intentionally undeveloped. Our thinking apparently remains on the path of metaphysics. Nevertheless, in its decisive steps, which lead from truth as correctness to ek-sistent freedom, and from the latter to truth as concealing and as errancy, it accomplishes a change in the questioning that belongs to the overcoming of metaphysics. The thinking attempted in the lecture comes to fulfillment in the essential experience that a nearness to the truth of Being is first prepared for historical man on the basis of the Da-sein into which man can enter. Every kind of anthropology and all subjectivity of man as subject is not merely left behind—as it was already in Being and Time—and the truth of Being sought as the ground of a transformed historical position; rather, the movement of the lecture is such that it sets out to think from this other ground (Dasein). The course of the questioning is intrinsically the way of a thinking which, instead of furnishing representations and concepts, experiences and tests itself as a transformation of its relatedness to Being.
THE WAY TO LANGUAGE

What is spoken is never, in any language, what is said.
Early and late, Heidegger remained on the trail of language. If being, time, and truth constitute the motto on his escutcheon, it is nonetheless true that these things, whatever else they may be, are words. Heidegger never lost sight of that fact. Virtually every other text in these Basic Writings thematizes language, however briefly; in the present essay the question of language receives its most intensive treatment in Heidegger's oeuvre. Here his thought goes to encounter that of many others in our century—one thinks of Russell and Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine, and Austin, to mention only a few—for whom language is the matter for thinking. Yet the way it goes to encounter them is unfamiliar and even uncanny.

Heidegger seeks a way to language. He does not come on the scene already outfitted with a program and a procedure, a methodology and a prescription for language. He does not run an analytical vacuum cleaner over language in order to tidy it up; he does not put it through the wringer of formalization in order to make it fit to occupy the House of Science. He does not even formulate arguments concerning language, spin out a theory of it, or concoct a meta-language that would allow him to say impossible things about language. His search is less impressive than all that. Indeed, there is an undeniable simplicity about "The Way to Language," which is doubtless why it is the most difficult of these Basic Writings. A word now about the gestation of the piece, followed by a brief discussion of a few of the decisive turns on Heidegger's simple way to language.

In January of 1959 Heidegger joined a group of distinguished colleagues in a lecture series sponsored jointly by the Bavarian and Berlin art academies. The series' unadorned title: "Language." The contributions varied widely in subject-matter and approach. Carl von Weizsäcker spoke on cybernetics and information theory; Thrasybulos Georgiades recounted the importance of traditionally set rhythms in and for ancient Greek diction. Heidegger took the opportunity to summarize the whole of his later thinking on language, which is also a thinking of Ereignis or "proprigation." ("Later" here means from 1935 onward; see especially the remarks on language in Readings IV, V, and IX.)

In Being and Time Heidegger had emphasized the primary importance of discourse or talk (die Rede) for language, and the secondary or "derivative" character of assertions and propositions—the discourses of science and philosophy, but also of journalism, politics, and culture generally. He also stressed the importance of our listening to and heeding speech, suggesting that the silence that enables us to listen is more significant than all the noise of signification. (His remarks on silence in Being and Time receive a noteworthy qualification in the present essay.)

"The Way to Language" too takes its orientation from the spoken rather than the written word. After all, a long line of thinkers from Aristotle to Wilhelm von Humboldt set their written seal of approval on the primacy of speech for language. Language speaks. The Romantic writer and thinker, Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772–1801), who contributes the phrase that opens Heidegger's "Way," tells us that language "concerns itself purely with itself alone." If language speaks, its speech is a "monologue." Heidegger's own way to language begins with this dual inheritance. Language speaks. Yet its monologue is not a self-absorbed mumble. Language says something when it speaks, and such saying (sagen, die Sage) will be Heidegger's major concern in "The Way to Language." As simple as that sounds.

By saying something, language addresses people and things in the world; it points to them, as it were, showing them to be matters of concern. The showing and pointing (zeigen, die Zeige) that language perform constitute the very essence of language. They delineate its profile, its rift-design (der Auf-Riss; see Reading IV). Through its saying, showing, and pointing, language lets people and things be there for us, allows them to come into their own and radiate in presence. Monologue never simply upstages the things. It owns up to the fact that its saying becomes telling only when it lets a being come into its own.

What about this "owning up" and its "owning"? Perhaps the most hazardous turns on Heidegger's way to language involve the words own and owning in their many cognate forms. "Own" is eigen in German, and it is the root of a whole series of resonant words for Heidegger: eigentlich, the crucial epithet of Heidegger's analysis of
Dasein, meaning "appropriate," applied in this essay to language "proper": *eigen*, to own or possess, especially in the form *an-eigen*, "to appropriate," a word Heidegger often employs, though not in this essay; *eigens*, meaning "expressly" or "explicitly," as when Heidegger tries to say explicitly what language on its own is; *das Eigene*, whatever is a thing's "own," that is, whatever shows itself when language lets a being advance under its own power, or lets it withdraw into concealment and abide on its own; and finally, *das Eigentümliche*, what is "peculiar" to language proper. By far the most important and complex of these words is *Ereignis*, often written *Er-eignis*, and its verb *sich ereignen*. Customarily translated as "event," Ereignis is here rendered as "propriation" in an effort to save the sense of "owness," Latin *proprium*, French *proprié*. Yet we should keep an eye on all such renderings. (See p. 414, below.)

It will not be possible to say quickly why owning and appropriating become key words (along with *saying* and *showing*) of an essay on the way to language. For that would be to ignore the final turn of Heidegger's tripartite essay—his recognition that the way to language is never finished, never put behind us, but is itself always under way. Perhaps two remarks on owning and appropriation are in order. First, a warning. The most treacherous turn on the way to language occurs when we first hear talk of appropriation. Because appropriation smacks of property and appropriation, we can easily misunderstand it as one aspect of man's assault on being—as an element of the aggrandizing essence of technology. To be sure, appropriation does bear a special relation to the essence of technology. Yet appropriation is not subject to human calculation; it is rather what is sent as the historical destiny of mortals. The hardest lesson to learn is that the owning is not ours, except perhaps in one sense. Here—second and last remark—the English word *to own* offers food for thought.

To own is not only to appropriate, but also to recognize and acknowledge an other, to declare or make manifest one's acceptance or affirmation of some other thing, to confess or profess something as true, and even as holding sway over us. Such owning would involve not a commandeering of language but a responding to it. While under way to it.

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THE WAY TO LANGUAGE

At the outset we shall hear some words of Novalis. They stand in a text he entitled *Monologue*. The title directs us to the mystery of language: language speaks solely and solitarily with itself. One sentence in the text goes as follows: "Precisely what is peculiar to language—that it concerns itself purely with itself alone—no one knows."

If we grasp what we shall now try to say as a sequence of assertions about language, it will remain a concatenation of unverified and scientifically unverifiable claims. If on the contrary we experience the way to language in terms of what transpires with the way while we are under way on it, then a kind of surmise could awaken, a surmise by which language would henceforth strike us as exceedingly strange.

The way to language: it sounds as though language lay far afield, at some place toward which we would first of all have to set out on our way. However, do we really need a way to language? According to an ancient pronouncement, we ourselves are those creatures who can speak and who thus already possess language. Nor is the capacity to speak merely one capability of human beings, on a par with the remaining ones. The capacity to speak distinguishes the human being as a human being. Such a distinguishing mark bears in itself the very design of the human essence. Man would not be man if it were denied him to speak—ceaselessly, ubiquitously, with respect

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Reading X is a new translation of the final essay of Heidegger's *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Tübingen: C. Neske, 1959). "Der Weg zur Sprache," made especially for these *Basic Writings* by the editor. I am grateful to have had the earlier translation by Peter Hertz, in *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), for purposes of comparison.
to all things, in manifold variations, yet for the most part tacitly—by way of an "It is." Inasmuch as language grants this very thing, the essence of man consists in language.

Thus we are within language, at home in language, prior to everything else. A way to it is superfluous. Moreover, the way to language is impossible, if indeed we are already at the place to which it is supposed to lead us. Yet are we there? Are we within language in such a way that we experience its essence, thinking it as language by apprehending and listening to what is proper to it? Do we already linger in nearness to language, without our having to take any trouble concerning it at all? Or does the way to language as language constitute the farthest stretch for our thought? Not only the farthest, but also one that is beset with obstacles, obstacles that arise from language itself: the moment we try to suspend every type of diversion and follow its trail into what is purely its own?

In this regard we shall risk something strange, something we might adumbrate in the following way: To bring language as language to language. That sounds like a formula. It is to serve us as a guideline on the way to language. The formula employs the word language three times; each time it says something different, though nonetheless selfsame. The selfsame is what conjoins all that is held apart, conjoins it on the basis of that one thing in which the peculiarity of language consists. To be sure, the formula directs us in the first place to a weft of relations in which we ourselves are already interwoven. Our proposed way to language is woven into a speaking that would like to liberate nothing else than language, liberate it in order to present it, giving utterance to it as something represented—which straightway testifies to the fact that language itself has woven us into its speaking.

The weft announced by our path's formula designates the predetermined realm in which not only this lecture series but also the whole of linguistics, all theory of language and philosophy of language, and every attempt to follow the trail of language must reside.

A weft compresses, tightens, and thus obstructs any straightforward view into its mesh. Yet at the same time the weft designated by our path's formula is language, language for its own sake. We therefore dare not divert our gaze from this weft, even if it seems to draw everything together into an inextricable tangle. Rather, the formula must compel our meditation to try, not of course to eliminate the weft, but to loosen it in such a way that it grants a view upon the unconstrained cohesion of the various elements designated in the formula. Perhaps the weft is permeated by a bond that unbinds language to what is peculiar to it, albeit in a way that is passing strange. It is a matter of experiencing that unbinding bond in the weft of language.

The lecture which undertook to think language as information, and which in turn had to think information as language, called this self-reverting relation a circle, indeed an unavoidable though meaningful circle.* The circle is a special case of the weft to which we have referred. The circle possesses meaning because the direction and the manner of language's circling are determined by language itself; that is, by a movement within language. We would like to experience the character and scope of this movement in terms of language itself by seeking an entry into the weft.

How might such an effort succeed? By means of a relentless pursuit of whatever it is that our path's formula indicates when it says: To bring language as language to language.

The more clearly language itself shows itself in what is its own, the more significant the way to language becomes for itself while under way, and the more decisively the sense of the formula is transformed. It loses its formulaic flavor, imperceptibly passing over into a soundless intimation, an intimation that enables us to hear the faint ring of what is peculiar to language.

*See the bibliographical reference at the end of the book. [In these Basic Writings, see the Introduction to this essay—Ed.]. In the lecture series mentioned there, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker spoke on the theme "Language as Information."
Language: by it we mean speech, something we know as an activity of our own, an activity we are confident we can perform. Nevertheless, speech is not a secure possession. A human being may be speechless with astonishment or terror. He is altogether astonished, thunderstruck. He no longer speaks: he is silent. Someone else has an accident and loses the power of speech. He no longer speaks. Nor is he silent. He remains mute. Speech implies the creation of articulated sounds, whether we produce these, by speaking, or refrain from doing so, in silence, or are incapable of doing so, due to loss of speech. The creation of articulated sounds by the voice pertains to speech. In speech, language shows itself to be activation of the phonic instruments that we possess: mouth, lips, the “barricade of the teeth,” tongue, and larynx. That language has since ancient times been immediately represented in terms of these phenomena is evident in the very names Western languages have bestowed on language: 

*glōssa, lingua, langue, language. Language is tongue, and it works by word of mouth.

At the outset of a treatise later given the title *Peri hermēneias, De interpretatione*, or *On Utterance*, Aristotle says the following:

"Εστὶ μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ πῶς ἐν τῇ ὕφει παθημάτων σύμβολα, καὶ τὰ γραφόμενα τῶν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ καὶ ὀποῖον ἀδέ γράμματα πάντα τὰ αὐτά, αὐτὸ δὲ καὶ αὐτῷ ὑπὸ μεῖναι τοῦτα σημεῖα πρῶτον, ταῦτα πάντα παθήματα τῆς ὕφεις, καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦτο ὑμωομειτα πράγματα ἢ ἡπ τοῦτα.

Only a meticulous interpretation would permit an adequate translation of the text. Here a makeshift must suffice. Aristotle says:

Now, whatever it is [that transpires] in the creation of sound by the voice is a showing of whatever affections there may be in the soul, and the written is a

*Das "Gehge der Zähne." Presumably a reference to the familiar Homeric epithet, harkos odontēn. See, for example, The Odyssey, I, 64; V, 22; X, 328, etc.—Ed.*

showing of the sounds of the voice. Hence, just as writing is not identical among all [human beings], so too the sounds of the voice are not identical. However, that of which these [sounds and writing] are in the first place a showing are among all [human beings] the identical affections of the soul; and the matters of which these [the affections] form approximating presentations are likewise identical.

Our translation consistently understands the σήμεια (that which shows), the symbola (that which holds together), and the homoiōmata (that which approximates) in terms of showing; it understands showing in the sense of letting appear, which for its part depends on the ruling sway of revealing (αλήθεια). And yet our translation neglects the variety in the modes of showing that the text introduces.

Aristotle’s text contains the confident, sober saying that marks the classical construction, the construction that harbors language as speech. Letters show sounds; sounds show affections in the soul; affections show the matters that impinge on us.

The braces and supports of the construction are shaped and borne aloft by showing. In manifold ways, by unveiling or veiling, showing brings something to appear, lets what appears be apprehended, and enables what is apprehended to be thoroughly discussed (so that we can act on it). However, the kinship of the showing with what it shows never unfolds purely in terms of the kinship itself and its provenance. In subsequent periods, the kinship is transformed into the conventional relationship between a sign and its signified. Greek civilization at its acme experiences the sign on the basis of showing, the sign having been coined by showing for showing. From the Hellenistic (and Stoic) period onward, as the convention becomes sheer stipulation, the sign comes to be an instrument for designating; by means of such designation, representation is coordinated and directed from one object to another. Designation is no longer a showing in the sense that it lets something appear. The alteration of the sign—from that which shows to
that which designates—is based on a transformation in the essence of truth.*

Ever since the age of the Greeks, beings have been experienced as what comes to presence. Inasmuch as language is, coming as speech again and again on the scene, it pertains to what comes to presence. One represents language, having taken one's departure from speech, with a view to articulated sounds as bearers of meanings. Speaking is one form of human activity.

The representation of language that we have sketched here in rough outline has remained throughout manifold transformations the guiding and supporting one in Western European thought over the centuries. This way of looking at language, having commenced in Greek antiquity and ramifying along many different paths, gathers to a kind of summit in Wilhelm von Humboldt's meditation on language. That meditation assumes final form in the magnificent Introduction to his work on the Kawi language of Java. A year after his death, his brother, Alexander von Humboldt, published the Introduction separately under the title, On the Diversity of the Structure of Human Language and Its Influence on the Intellectual Development of Mankind (Berlin, 1836). Since that date, down to the present day, this treatise has shaped all subsequent linguistics and philosophy of language, whether tacitly or explicitly, whether through advocacy or refutation.

Every listener who is present at the lecture series we are attempting here would have to have thought through and have in mind the astonishing but scarcely penetrable treatise by Wilhelm von Humboldt. It is a treatise that vacillates in obscurity whenever it is a matter of fundamental concepts but that nonetheless never fails to stimulate. If that prerequisite were met, a shared vantage point for our view upon language would be made available to us all. Such a prerequisite is lacking. We shall have to make our peace with that lack. It will be enough if we avoid forgetting it.

"Articulated sound" is, according to Wilhelm von Humboldt, "the basis and the essence of all speech" (On the Diversity, section 10, p. 65). In section 8 of his treatise (p. 41), Humboldt coins those statements that are often cited but seldom considered, that is to say, seldom considered solely with a view to the manner in which they define Humboldt's way to language. The statements run as follows:

Language, grasped in its actual essence, is perpetually and at every moment something transitory. Even its preservation through writing is always a merely incomplete preservation, a kind of mummification, which is necessary if we are to try to render once again the delivery of the living word. Language itself is not a work (ergon), but an activity (energeia). Its true definition can thus only be a genetic one. For language is the eternally self-repeating labor of spirit to make articulated sound capable of being an expression of thought. Taken strictly and directly, this is the definition of every instance of speaking; but in the true and essential sense, one can also regard the totality of such speech only as an approximation to language.

Here Humboldt says that he sees the essential element of language in speech. Does he thereby also say what language viewed in this way is, as language? Does he bring speech as language to language? We leave the question deliberately without reply, but observe the following points.

Humboldt represents language as a particular "labor of spirit." Guided by this view of the matter, he pursues the sort of thing language shows itself to be, that is to say, what it is. Such what-being is called the essence. Now, as soon as we approach and delineate the labor of spirit with a view to its linguistic achievements, the essence of language thus conceived has to stand out in bolder relief. However, spirit lives—in Humboldt's sense as well—also in other activities and achievements. Yet if language is reckoned to be but one among them, speech is not experienced on its own—

*See "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," 1947, first published in Geistige Überlieferung, vol. II, 1942, pp. 66–124. [See Wagenuken, 1967, pp. 109–44. However, on this important matter see also Heidegger's later qualification, in these Basic Writings on p. 446.—Ed.]

†The following quotations derive from the anastatic reprint of von Humboldt's text, edited by E. Wasmuth, 1936.
terms of language—but is oriented in that very view to something else. Nevertheless, this “something else” is too significant for us who are meditating on language to be permitted to overlook it. What activity does Humboldt have in view when he conceives of language as the labor of spirit? Several statements at the outset of section 8 supply the answer:

One must not regard language as a lifeless product. It is far more like a reproducing. One must endeavor more keenly to abstract from the things it achieves by way of designating objects and mediating the understanding. As opposed to that, one must go back more meticulously to its origin, so tightly interwoven with the inner activity of spirit, and to their influence upon one another.

Humboldt here refers to the “inner linguistic form” described in section 11, a notion quite difficult to define in terms of his own conceptual apparatus. We get a bit closer to it when we ask: What is speech as the expression of thought; what is speech when we ponder it in accord with its provenance from the inner activity of spirit? The answer lies in a statement (section 20, p. 205) whose adequate interpretation would require a separate discussion: “Whenever the feeling truly awakens in the soul that language is not merely a medium of exchange for the sake of mutual understanding, but a true world, which spirit must posit between itself and objects by the inner labor of its own force, then it is on the true way to finding more and more in language and to investing more and more in it.” According to the doctrine of modern idealism, the labor of spirit is positing. Because spirit is grasped as subject and thus represented in the subject-object schema, positing (thesis) must be the synthesis between the subject and its objects. What is posited in this way affords a view upon the totality of objects. What the force of the subject elaborates, what it posits by means of labor between itself and the objects, Humboldt calls a “world.” In such a “view upon the world” a form of humanity brings itself to expression.

Yet why does Humboldt envisage language as world and view upon the world? Because his way to language is not so much determined by language as language; rather, it strives to depict by means of a history the entire historical-spiritual development of mankind as a whole, but also at the same time in its prevailing individuality. In a fragment toward an autobiography from the year 1816 Humboldt writes, “Precisely what I am striving for is a conception of the world in its individuality and totality.”

Now, a conception of the world that sets out in this fashion can draw from various wells, inasmuch as the force of spirit expressing itself is active in manifold ways. Humboldt recognizes and selects language as one of the principal sources. Language is of course not the only form of that view upon the world which human subjectivity elaborates; but to its prevailing imprinting power one must attribute a special status, as the standard by which the historical development of humanity can be measured. The title of Humboldt’s treatise now speaks more clearly with regard to his way to language.

Humboldt treats of “the diversity of the structure of human language” to the extent that “the intellectual development of mankind” stands under “its influence.” Humboldt brings language to language as one form and variety of the view upon the world that is elaborated by human subjectivity.

To what sort of language? To a series of assertions that speak the language of the metaphysics of his age. The philosophy of Leibniz contributes a definitive word to this language. This is most clearly announced in the fact that Humboldt defines the essence of language as energeia, understanding it however in a way that is foreign to the Greeks; he takes it in the sense of an activity of the subject, as Leibniz’s Monadology takes it. Humboldt’s way to language goes in the direction of man, passing through language on its way to something else: demonstration and depiction of the intellectual development of the human race.

However, the essence of language conceived in terms of such a view does not of itself show language in its essence: it does not show the way in which language essentially unfolds as language; that is, the way it perdures; that is, the way it remains gathered in what it grants itself on its own as language.
If we are on the trail of language as language, we have already abandoned the procedures that have long prevailed in linguistic study. We can no longer root about for general notions like energy, activity, labor, force of spirit, view upon the world, or expression, under which we might subsume language as a particular instance of this or that universal. Instead of explaining language as this or that, and thus fleeing from it, the way to language wants to let language be experienced as language. True, in the essence of language, language is grasped conceptually; but it is caught in the grip of something other than itself. If on the contrary we pay heed only to language as language, it demands of us that we begin by bringing to the fore all those things that pertain to language as language.

Yet it is one thing to collate the multiplicity of elements that show themselves in the essence of language, and another to gather one's gaze to what of itself unifies the coherent elements, unifies them insofar as its uniting grants to the essence of language the unity that is appropriate to it.

The way to language will now try to advance more strictly along the guidelines spelled out in our formulation—to bring language as language to language. It is a matter of getting closer to what is peculiar to language. Here too language initially shows itself as our speech. For the moment we shall heed all the things that speak along with us in our speech, always from the outset and in accord with the selfsame measure, whether we are aware of it or not.

To speech belong the speakers, but not as cause to effect. Rather, in speech the speakers have their presencing. Where to? Presencing to the wherewithal of their speech, to that by which they linger, that which in any given situation already matters to them. Which is to say, their fellow human beings and the things, each in its own way; everything that makes a thing a thing and everything that sets the tone for our relations with our fellows. All this is referred to, always and everywhere, sometimes in one way, at other times in another. As what is referred to, it is all talked over and thoroughly discussed; it is spoken of in such a way that the speakers speak to and with one another, and also to themselves. Meanwhile, what is spoken remains multifaceted. It is often only what is spelled out in so many words, something that quickly evanesces or in some way is retained. What is spoken can be long gone, but it can also be what has long gone on, as what is addressed.

What is spoken derives in manifold ways from the unspoken, whether in the form of the not yet spoken or of what has to remain unspoken—in the sense that it is denied speech. Thus the bizarre impression arises that what in manifold ways is spoken is cut off from speech and from speakers, and does not belong to them; whereas it alone holds up to speech and to the speakers those things to which they attend, no matter how they reside in the spoken elements of the unspoken.

In the essence of language a multiplicity of elements and relations shows itself. We enumerated these, but did not put them in proper sequence. In running through them—which is to say, in original counting, which is not a reckoning in numbers—a certain coherence announced itself. Counting is a recounting. It previes the unifying power in cohesion, but cannot yet bring it to the fore.

The incapacity of our way of seeing things that is here coming to light, the inability of our thought to experience the unifying unity in the essence of language, has a long provenance. That is why the unifying unity has received no name. The traditional names for what one means under the rubric language name this unity always only in one or other respect, as the essence of language proffers them.

Let the unity in the essence of language that we are seeking be called the rift-design.* The name calls upon us to descry more clearly what is proper to the essence of language. Riss [rift] is the same word as ritzen [to notch, carve]. We often come across the

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*Der Auftritt. See Reading IV, esp. pp. 188–89.—Eo.
word *Riss* in the purely pejorative form, for example, as a crack in the wall. Today when farmers speak in dialect about plowing a field, drawing furrows through it, they still say *aufreissen* or *umreissen* [literally, to tear up, to rend or rive, to turn over]. They open up the field, that it may harbor seed and growth. The rift-design is the totality of traits in the kind of drawing that permeates what is opened up and set free in language. The rift-design is the drawing of the essence of language, the well-joined structure of a showing in which what is addressed enjoins the speakers and their speech, enjoins the spoken and its unspoken.

Yet the rift-design in the essence of language remains veiled even in its most approximate adumbration as long as we fail to pay explicit attention to the sense in which we have been speaking all along of speech and the spoken.

Speech is, of course, the creation of sounds. It can also be taken as an activity of human beings. Both are correct representations of language as speech. Both will remain outside our purview here, although we do not intend to forget how long the sounding of language has been waiting for its fitting definition. For the phonetic, acoustic, physiological explanation of such sounding does not experience the provenance of sounding from the ringing of stillness; even less does it experience the attunement of the sounding in that stillness.

Yet how have speech and what is spoken been thought in our earlier, quite brief recounting of the essence of language? They showed themselves as the sort of thing through which and in which something comes to language, that is to say, comes to the fore *whenever something is said*. Saying and speaking are not identical. One can speak, speak endlessly, and it may all say nothing. As opposed to that, one can be silent, not speak at all, and in not speaking say a great deal.

Yet what is it we call *saying*? To experience this, we shall hold to what our language itself calls on us to think in this word. *Sagen*

means to show, to let something appear, let it be seen and heard.*

What we are showing here becomes obvious, though hardly pondered in its full scope, when we indicate the following. To speak to one another means to say something to one another; it implies a mutual showing of something, each person in turn devoting himself or herself to what is shown.† To speak with one another means that together we say something about something, showing one another the sorts of things that are suggested by what is addressed in our discussion, showing one another what the addressed allows to radiate of itself. The unspoken is not merely what is deprived of sound; rather, it is the unsaid, what is not yet shown, what has not yet appeared on the scene. Whatever has to remain unspoken will be held in reserve in the unsaid. It will linger in what is concealed as something unshowable. It is mystery. The addressed speaks as a pronunciation, in the sense of something allotted; its speech need not make a sound.

As saying, speech belongs to the rift-design in the essence of language. Various modes of saying and the said permeate the rift-design, modes in which what is present or absent says something about itself, affirms or denies itself—shows itself or withdraws. What pervades the rift-design in the essence of language is a richly configured saying, from various provenances. With a view to the concatenations of saying, we shall call the essence of language as a whole the *saying* [die Sage]. Even so, we have to admit that the unifying element in these concatenations is not yet in sight.

We are now accustomed to using the word *Sage* [saying, saga], like many other words in our language, for the most part in a dis-

*It is more difficult to show the connection in English between "saying" (Sagen) and "showing" (Zeigen). Yet the Latin *dico* brings both senses together: "I say" originally means "I show through words."—Es.

†The German text here (Unterwge zur Sprache, 1959, p. 253, II 2-3) is marred by two typographical errors that disrupt the sense. The lines should read as follows: *Zueinander sprechen heisst: einander etwas sagen, gegenseitig etwas zeigen, wechselweise sich dem Gezeigten zutrauen.*—Es.
paraging sense. A saying is taken to be sheer hearsay, as someone’s say-so, which may or may not hold water and which therefore leaves us incredulous. That is not the way we are thinking die Sage here. Nor are we referring to the admittedly essential sense that is intended when one invokes the “sagas of gods and heroes.” But perhaps we are thinking it as Georg Trakl’s “venerable saying of the blue font” [“die ehrwürdige Sage des blauen Quells”]. In accord with the word’s oldest usage, we understand the saying in terms of “to say” in the sense of “to show.” In order to name the saying on which the essence of language depends, we shall use an old, well-testified, but archaic word: die Zeige [the pointing]. What Latin grammar calls the “demonstrative pronoun” is often translated as “the little indicator” [“Zeigewörtlein”]. Jean Paul calls the phenomena of nature “the spiritual index finger” [“den geistigen Zeigefinger”].

What unfolds essentially in language is saying as pointing. Its showing does not culminate in a system of signs. Rather, all signs arise from a showing in whose realm and for whose purposes they can be signs.

However, in view of the well-joined structure of the saying, we dare not attribute showing either exclusively or definitively to human doing. Self-showing as appearing characterizes the coming to presence or withdrawal to absence of every manner and degree of thing present. Even when showing is accomplished by means of our saying, such showing or referring is preceded by a thing’s letting itself be shown.

Only when we ponder our saying in this regard do we arrive at an adequate determination of what essentially unfolds in all speech. We know speech to be the articulate vocalization of thought by means of the instruments of speech. However, speech is simultaneously hearing. Speaking and hearing are customarily set in opposition to one another: one person speaks, the other hears. Yet hearing does not merely accompany and encompass speaking, such as we find it in conversation. That speaking and hearing occur si-multaneously means something more. Speech, taken on its own, is hearing. It is listening to the language we speak. Hence speaking is not simultaneously a hearing, but is such in advance. Such listening to language precedes all other instances of hearing, albeit in an altogether inconspicuous way. We not only speak language, we speak from out of it. We are capable of doing so only because in each case we have already listened to language. What do we hear there? We hear language speaking.

But then does language itself speak? How should it manage to do so, when it is not even equipped with the instruments of voice? Nevertheless, it is language that speaks. What language properly pursues, right from the start, is the essential unfolding of speech, of saying. Language speaks by saying; that is, by showing. Its saying wells up from the once spoken yet long since unspoken saying that permeates the rift-design in the essence of language. Language speaks by pointing, reaching out to every region of presencing, letting what is present in each case appear in such regions or vanish from them. Accordingly, we listen to language in such a way that we let it tell us its saying. No matter what other sorts of hearing we engage in, whenever we hear something we find ourselves caught up in a hearing that lets itself be told, a hearing that embraces all apprehending and representing. In speech, as listening to language, we reiterate the saying we have heard. We let its soundless voice advance, requesting the sound that is already held in reserve for us, calling for it, reaching out to it in a way that will suffice. With that, at least one trait in the rift-design of the essence of language announces itself more clearly, a trait that allows us to discern how language as speech is brought home into its own, thus speaking as language.

If speech as listening to language lets itself be told the saying, such letting can be given only insofar—and in so near—as our own essence is granted entry into the saying. We hear it only because we belong to it. However, the saying grants those who belong to it their listening to language and hence their speech. Such granting
perdures in the saying; it lets us attain the capacity of speech. What unfolds essentially in language depends on the saying that grants in this way.

And the saying itself? Is it something separate from our speech, something to which we must first span a bridge? Or is the saying the stream of stillness that conjoins its own two banks—the saying and our reiterating—by forming them both? Our customary representations of language hardly go so far. The saying: when we try to think the essence of language in terms of it, are we not in danger of hypostasizing language to a phantasm, a self-subsistent essence that is nowhere to be found as long as we remain sober and follow hard upon the trail of language? Language does remain unmistakably bound up with human speech. Certainly. However, of what sort is this binding? Whence and in what way does such binding hold sway? Language needs human speech and is nonetheless not the mere contrivance of our speech activities. On what does the essence of language rest; in what is it grounded? Perhaps when we search for grounds we pass on by the essence of language.

Might not the saying itself be what does the "resting," what grants the repose of cohesion to those elements that belong to the well-joined structure of the essence of language?

Before we think any further in this direction, let us once again pay heed to the way to language. By way of introduction we suggested that the more clearly language as such comes to the fore, the more decisively the way to it is transformed. Heretofore the way had the character of a passage that would lead us as we set out to follow the trail of language, a passage into that curious weft designated by our path's formula. We took our orientation from speech, in the company of Wilhelm von Humboldt, and tried first to represent the essence of language, then to ground it. Accordingly, it was a matter of recounting the elements that pertain to the rift-design in the essence of language. On the trail of the rift-design, we arrived at language as the saying.

With our recounting elucidation of the essence of language as the saying, the way to language has arrived at language as language and thus reached its goal. Our commemorative thought has left the way to language behind. So it seems, and so it is, as long as one considers the way to language to be the passage of a thinking that is on the trail of language. In truth, however, commemorative thought merely finds itself confronting the way to language that it seeks, and is but barely tracing it. For in the meantime something has shown itself in the essence of language, and it says: In language as the saying, something like a way unfolds essentially.

What is a way? The way lets us get somewhere. Here it is the saying that lets us get to the speaking of language, provided we listen to the saying.

The way to speech unfolds essentially in language itself. The way to language in the sense of speech is language as the saying. What is peculiar to language thus conceals itself on the way, the way by which the saying lets those who listen to it get to language. We can be those listeners only if we belong to the saying. The way to speech, which lets us arrive, itself derives from a letting-belong to the saying. Such letting-belong harbors what properly can be said to unfold essentially on the way to language. Yet how does the saying unfold essentially, so that it is capable of letting someone belong? If the essential unfolding of language is to announce itself explicitly at all, it should do so as soon as we have heeded with greater determination the things already yielded by the foregoing elucidation.

The saying is a showing. In everything that appeals to us; in everything that strikes us by way of being spoken or spoken of; in everything that addresses us; in everything that awaits us as unspoken; but also in every speaking of ours—showing holds sway. It lets what is coming to presence shine forth, lets what is withdrawing
into absence vanish. The saying is by no means the supplementary linguistic expression of what shines forth; rather, all shining and fading depend on the saying that shows. It liberates what comes to presence to its particular presencing, spirits away what is withdrawing into absence to its particular kind of absence. The saying joins and pervades the open space of the clearing which every shining must seek, every evanescence abandon, and to which every presencing and absencing must expose itself and commit itself.

The saying is a gathering that joins every shining of a showing. The showing, for its part, is multiple; everywhere it lets what is shown stand on its own.

Whence does the showing arise? Our question asks too much, and too quickly. It suffices if we heed what it is that bestirs itself in showing and brings its stirrings to a culmination. Here we need not search forever. The simple, abrupt, unforgettable and therefore ever-renewed gaze toward what is familiar to us suffices, although we can never try to know it, much less cognize it in the appropriate way. This unknown but familiar thing, every showing of the saying, with regard to what it stirs and excites in each coming to presence or withdrawing into absence, is the dawn, the daybreak, with which the possible alternation of day and night first commences. It is at once the earliest and the oldest. We can only name it, because it will deign no discussion. For it is the place [Ortschaft] that encompasses all locales and time-play-spaces. We shall name it by using an old word. We shall say:

*What bestirs in the showing of saying is owning.*

Owning conducts what comes to presence and withdraws into absence in each case into its own. On the basis of owning, these things show themselves, each on its own terms, and linger, each in its own manner. Let us call the owning that conducts things in this way—the owning that bestirs the saying, the owning that points in any saying’s showing—the propriating. Propriatingdispenses the open space of the clearing into which what is present can enter for a while, and from which what is withdrawing into absence can depart, retaining something of itself while all the while in withdrawal. What the propriating yields through the saying is never the effect of a cause, nor the consequence of a reason. The owning that conducts, the propriating, grants more than any effecting, making, or grounding can grant. What propriates is propriation itself—and nothing besides.* Propriation, espied in the showing of the saying, can be represented neither as an event nor as a happening; it can only be experienced in the showing of the saying as that which grants. There is nothing else to which propriation reverts, nothing in terms of which it might even be explained. Propriating is not an outcome or a result of something else; it is the bestowal whose giving reaches out in order to grant for the first time something like a “There is / It gives,” which “being” too needs if, as presencing, it is to come into its own.†

Propriation gathers the rift-design of the saying and unfolds it in such a way that it becomes the well-joined structure of a manifold showing. Propriation is the most inconspicuous of inconspicuous things, the simplest of simple things, the nearest of things near and most remote of things remote, among which we mortals reside all our lives.

The propriation that rules in the saying is something we can name only if we say: It—propriation—owns. When we say this, we are speaking in what is already our own spoken language. We hear some of Goethe’s lines, lines that use the verbs eignen and sich eignen [to own, to own itself] in proximity to sich zeigen and be-

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*See Identität und Differenz, 1957, pp. 28ff. [Even though Heidegger does not draw our attention to other similar wordings, it would be interesting to compare this formulation—"and nothing besides," "nothing else"—to Reading II, esp. p. 55, above.—Ed.]

†See Being and Time, 1927, section 44. [Discussed in the Introduction to Reading III. The pages of section 44 that are most relevant here are 226–30. On the phrase, "There is / It gives," Ex gibt, see Reading XI, esp. p. 449.—Ed.]
In order to catch a glimpse of this state of affairs in its full enormity, we would have to think the essence of mortals, in all their sordid connections, in a sufficiently comprehensive way. And of course, above all else, we would have to think propriation as such. Here a mere reference must suffice.\(^8\)

Propriation propriates the mortals by envisaging the essence of man.\(^9\) It does so by remanding mortals to that which in the saying advances from all sides in order to converge on the concealed, which thus becomes telling for man.\(^\dagger\) The remanding of human beings, the ones who hear, to the saying is distinctive in that it releases the essence of man into its own. Yet it does so only in order

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\(^8\) See *Vortrage und Aufsatze*, 1954, as follows: "The Thing," pp. 163ff. [in the translation by Albert Hofstadter in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 163–96], "Building Dwelling Thinking," pp. 145ff. [see Reading VIII]; "The Question Concerning Technology," pp. 13ff. [see Reading VIII]. Today, when half-baked thoughts, or things scarcely thought at all, are rushed into print in one form or another, many readers may be incredulous about the fact that the author has used the word *Ereignis* [propriation] in his manuscripts for the matter thought here for more than twenty-five years. This matter, albeit simple in itself, remains at first recalcitrant to thought. For thought must weary itself from the habit of lapping into the view that here "Being" ("das Sein") is being thought as propriation. Yet propriation is essentially other, other because richer than every possible metaphysical determination of Being. On the contrary, Being lets itself be thought—with a view to its essential provenance—from out of propriation.

\(^9\) Das *Ereignis erheben in seinem Er-augen des Menschenweens die Sterbliechen dadurch...*. The homophony and homology of *Ereignis*/*Eraugen* is lost in translation. Once again Goethe provides the fundamental clue. Where one would expect to find *ereigen* in *Faust* (e.g. I. 5917 and 7780) one finds instead *sich ergeben*, containing the root *auge*., *eye.*. Although the relation to *eigen* is "to own," cannot be denied, *Ereignis* also has to do with "bringing something before the eyes, showing." *Ereignis* is as much related to enunciation (Old High German *erogen*; Middle High German *erogenen*) as to enunciation.—Ed.

Continuing the above phrase... *dadurch, dass es sie dem vereignet, was sich dem Menschen in der Sage von überall her auf verborgenes hin zu-sagt.* The verb *vereignet*, here rendered as "to remind," is a neologism whose sense is extremely difficult to hear. Ver- has no fewer than seven different functions as a verbal prefix in modern German. The two that seem most relevant are these: *vereignet* could either be an enhancement and intensification of *eigen* or a negation, distortion, or transformation of it. That concealment here becomes telling somehow suggests *both* enhancement and negation of owning and eyeing. The reflexive sich zu-sagen, here rendered as "telling," more literally suggests that in the saying things are "said to" man, affirmed (*Zusage* means "acceptance"), precisely as concealed.—Ed.
that human beings—the ones who speak, and that means, the ones who say—go to encounter the saying; indeed, encounter it on the basis of what is proper to it. The latter is the sounding of the word. When mortals say, and thus encounter, they respond. Every spoken word is already a response—a reply, a saying that goes to encounter, and listens. The remanding of mortals to the saying releases the essence of man to that usage by which man is needed—needed in order to bring the soundless saying into the resonance of language.

In the remanding to usage, propiation lets the saying arrive at speech. The way to language pertains to the saying that is determined by propiation. On this way, which pertains to the essence of language, what is peculiar to language conceals itself. The way is propiating.

To clear a way—for instance, across a snowfield—is still today in the Alemannic-Swabian dialect called wégen [literally, “waying”]. This transitive verb suggests creating a way, giving shape to it and keeping it in shape. Be-wégen (Be-wégung) [cf. bewegen, Bewegung, to move, motion], thought in this way, no longer means merely transporting something on a way that is already at hand; rather, it means rendering the way to... in the first place, thus being the way.

Propiation propiates human beings for itself, propiates them into usage. Propiating showing as owning, propiation is thus the saying’s way-making movement toward language.

Such way-making brings language (the essence of language) as language (the saying) to language (to the resounding word). Our talk concerning the way to language no longer means exclusively or even preeminently the course of our thought on the trail of language. While under way, the way to language has transformed itself. It has transposed itself from being some deed of ours to the propiated essence of language. Except that the transformation of the way to language looks like a transposition that has just now been effected only for us, only with respect to us. In truth, the way to language has its sole place always already in the essence of language itself. However, this suggests at the same time that the way to language as we first intended it is not superfluous; it is simply that it becomes possible and necessary only by virtue of the way proper, the way-making movement of propiation and usage. Because the essence of language, as the saying that shows, rests on the propiation that delivers us human beings over to releaseament toward unconstrained hearing, the saying’s way-making movement toward speech first opens up the path on which we can follow the trail of the proper way to language.

Our path’s formula—to bring language as language to language—no longer merely encapsulates a directive for us who ponder over language. Rather, it betells the forma, the configuration of the well-enjoined structure within which the essence of language, which rests on propiation, makes its way.

If we do not think about it, but merely string along with the string of words, then the formula expresses a weft of relations in which language simply entangles itself. It seems as though every attempt to represent language needs the learned knack of dialectic in order to master the tangle. However, such a procedure, which the formula formidable provokes, bypasses the possibility that by remaining on the trail—that is to say, by letting ourselves be guided expressly into the way-making movement—we may yet catch a glimpse of the essence of language in all its simplicity, instead of wanting to represent language.

What looks more like a tangle than a weft loosens when viewed in terms of the way-making movement. It resolves into the liberating motion that the way-making movement exhibits when propiated in the saying. It unbinds the saying for speech. It holds open the way for speech, the way on which speaking as hearing, hearing the saying, registers what in each case is to be said, elevating what it receives to the resounding word. The saying’s way-making movement to language is the unbinding bond, the bond that binds by propiating.

Thus freed to its own open space, language can concern itself solely with itself alone. That resembles the talk one hears about egoistic solipsism. Yet language does not insist on itself, is not a self-
mirroring that forgets everything else because it is so enamored of itself. As the saying, the essence of language is the propriating showing that in fact disregards itself in order to liberate what is shown into its own, into its appearance.

Language, which speaks by saying, is concerned that our speech, heeding the unspoken, corresponds to what language says. Hence silence too, which one would dearly like to subdue to speech as its origin, is already a corresponding.* Silence corresponds to the noiseless ringing of stillness, the stillness of the saying that propriates and shows. The saying that rests on propriation is, as showing, the most proper mode of propriating. Propriation is telling [sagens]. Accordingly, language speaks after the manner of the given mode in which propriation reveals itself as such withdraws. A thinking that thinks back to propriation can just barely surmise it, and yet can already experience it in the essence of modern technology, an essence given the still odd-sounding name Ge-Stell ['enframing'].† The enframing, because it sets upon human beings—that is, challenges them—to order everything that comes to presence into a technical inventory, unfolds essentially after the manner of propriation; at the same time, it distorts propriation, inasmuch as all ordering sees itself committed to calculative thinking and so speaks the language of enframing. Speech is challenged to correspond to the ubiquitous orderability of what is present.

Speech, when posed in this fashion, becomes information.‡ It informs itself concerning itself, in order to establish securely, by means of information theories, its own procedure. Enframing, the essence of modern technology that holds sway everywhere, ordains for itself a formalized language—that kind of informing by virtue of which man is molded and adjusted into the technical-calculate creature, a process by which step-by-step he surrenders his “natural language.” Even when information theory has to concede that formalized language must again and again revert to “natural language,” in order by means of nonformalized language to bring to language what the technological inventory has to say, this happenstance represents—according to the current self-interpretation of information theory—merely a transitional stage. For the “natural language” that perforce must be invoked here is posited from the outset as a language that, while not yet formalized, has already been ordained to formalization. Formalization, the calculative orderability of saying, is the goal and the standard. What is “natural” in language, whose existence the will to formalization finds itself compelled as it were to concede for the time being, is not experienced with a view to the originality of language. Such a nature is physis, which in turn rests on propriation, out of which the saying bestirs itself and surges upward. Information theory conceives of the natural as a shortfall in formalization.

Yet even if a long path should lead us to the insight that the essence of language can never be dissolved into a formalism and then tabulated as such; even if we should accordingly have to say that “natural language” is not formalizable language; even then “natural language” would still be defined purely negatively; that is to say, against the backdrop of the possibility or impossibility of formalization.

However, what if “natural language,” which for information theory remains but a disturbing remnant, drew its nature—that is, the essential unfolding of the essence of language—from the saying? What if the saying, instead of merely disturbing the devastation that is information, had already surpassed information on the basis of a propriation that is not subject to our ordering? What if propriation—when and how, no one knows—were to become a penetrative gaze [Ein-Blick], whose clearing lightning strikes what is and what

*See Being and Time, 1927, section 34. [This section, “Dasein and Discourse: Language,” in fact argued strongly that speech, talk, or discourse is “grounded in” silence, so that silence—not speech—is primordial. That thesis is not dropped here, but altered: not silence as such but Ent-sprechen, a corresponding that is quite literally an "un-speaking," is the focal point of "The Way to Language."—Eo.]
†See Vortrage und Aufsätze, 1954, pp. 51–52. [In these Basic Writings, see Reading VII, esp. pp. 324–28, including the explanatory note.—Eo.]
the being is held to be? What if propriation by its entry withdrew every present being that is subject to sheer orderability and brought that being back into its own?

Every language that human beings possess propriares in the saying. Every language is, as such, in the strict sense of the word, language proper, allowing for variations in the measure of its nearness to propriation. Every proper language, because it is allotted to human beings through the way-making movement of the saying, is sent, hence fateful.

There is no such thing as a natural language, a language that would be the language of a human nature at hand in itself and without its own destiny. Every language is historical, also in cases where human beings know nothing of the discipline of history in the modern European sense. Nor is language as information the sole language in itself. Rather, it is historical in the sense of, and written within the limits set by, the current age. Our age begins nothing new, but only brings to utter culmination something quite old, something already prescribed in modernity.

What is peculiar to language depends on the propriative provenance of the word; that is, on the provenance of human speech from the saying.

Let us at the end remember as we did at the outset these words of Novalis: “Precisely what is peculiar to language—that it concerns itself purely with itself alone—no one knows.” Novalis understands the word peculiar in the sense of the particularity that makes language exceptional. Through the experience of the essence of language as the saying, a saying whose showing rests on propriation, what is peculiar [das Eigentiümliche] comes into the proximity of owning [Eignen] and propriating [Ereignen]. There the peculiar receives its birth certificate, as it were; but this is not the place for us to think back to the primordial determination of such peculiarity.

The peculiar character of language, which is determined on the basis of propriation, lets itself be known even less than the particularity of language, if “knowing” means having by circumspection seen something in the entirety of its essence. The essence of language does not submit to our circumspection, inasmuch as we—we who can say only by reiterating the saying—ourselves belong within the saying. The monological character of the essence of language has its well-joined structure in the rift-design of the saying. The rift-design does not and cannot coincide with the Monologue that Novalis was thinking of, because he represents language dialectically in terms of subjectivity and within the purview of absolute idealism.

Yet language is monologue. This now says something twofold: it is language alone that properly speaks; and it speaks in solitude. Yet only one who is not alone can be solitary; not alone, that is to say, not in separation and isolation, not devoid of all kinship. On the contrary, precisely in the solitary [Im Einsamen] there unfolds essentially the lack of what is in common [der Fehl des Gemeinsamen], as the most binding relation to what is in common. The suffix -sam is the Gothic sama, the Greek hama. Einsam suggests the selfsame, in the unifying of things that belong to one another. The saying that shows opens the way for language to the speech of human beings. The saying needs to resound in the word. Yet man can speak only by listening to the saying, belonging to it; only by means of reiteration is he able to say a word. Such needing and reiterating rest on that lack mentioned above, which is neither a mere shortcoming nor anything negative at all.

We human beings, in order to be who we are, remain within the essence of language to which we have been granted entry. We can therefore never step outside it in order to look it over circumspectly from some alternative position. Because of this, we catch a glimpse of the essence of language only to the extent that we ourselves are envisaged by it, remanded to it. That we cannot know the essence of language—according to the traditional concept of knowledge, defined in terms of cognition as representation—is certainly not a defect; it is rather the advantage by which we advance to an exceptional realm, the realm in which we dwell as the mortals, those who are needed and used for the speaking of language.
The saying will not allow itself to be captured in any assertion. It demands of us a telling silence as regards the propriative, way-making movement in the essence of language, without any talk about silence.

The saying that rests on propriation is, as showing, the most proper mode of propriating. That sounds like an assertion. If we hear only that, it does not say what is to be thought. The saying is the mode in which propriation speaks. Yet mode is meant here not so much in the sense of *modus* or "kind"; it is meant in the musical sense of the *melos*, the song that says by singing. For the saying that propriates brings what comes to presence out of its propriety to a kind of radiance; it lauds what comes to presence; that is, allows it in its own essential unfolding. At the beginning of the eighth stanza of *Friedensfeier* ["The Celebration of Peace"], Hölderlin sings as follows:

> Viel hat von Morgen an,  
> Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander,  
> Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind aber Gesang (wir).  
> Much, from morning onward,  
> Since we became a conversation and hear from one another,  
> Have human beings undergone; but soon (we) will be song.

Language was once called the "house of Being."*" It is the guardian of presencing, inasmuch as the latter's radiance remains entrusted to the propriative showing of the saying. Language is the house of Being because, as the saying, it is propriation's mode.

In order to think back to the essence of language, in order to reiterate what is its own, we need a transformation of language, a transformation we can neither compel nor concoct. The transformation does not result from the fabrication of neologisms and novel phrases. The transformation touches on our relation to language. That relation is determined in accordance with the sending that determines whether and in what way we are embraced in propriation by the essence of language, which is the original pronouncement of propriation. For propriation—owning, holding, keeping to itself—is the relation of all relations. For this reason, our saying, as answering, constantly remains relational. The relation [Das *Verhältnis*, literally, our "being held"] is here thought always and everywhere in terms of propriation, and is no longer represented in the form of a mere relationship. Our relation to language is defined by the mode according to which we belong to propriation, we who are needed and used by it.

Perhaps we can in some slight measure prepare for the transformation in our kinship with language. The following experience might awaken: Every thinking that is on the trail of something is a poetizing, and all poetry a thinking. Each coheres with the other on the basis of the saying that has already pledged itself to the unsaid, the saying whose thinking is a thanking.

That the possibility of an appropriate transformation of language emerged in the complex of Wilhelm von Humboldt's thought receives eloquent testimony in his treatise, *On the Diversity of the Structure of Human Language*. Wilhelm von Humboldt worked on this treatise, as his brother writes in the Preface, "in solitude, in nearness to a grave," until his death. Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose deeply dark insight into the essence of language should never cease to astonish us, says:

> The application of already available phonetic forms to the inner purposes of the language . . . may be considered a possibility during the central periods of *language formation*. A people could through inner illumination and propitious external circumstances devise such a different form for the language it has inherited that it would thereby become a wholly different language, a new language.

*(Section 10, p. 84)*

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*See "Letter of Humanism," 1947. [In *Wegmarke*, 1967, see pp. 188–89; in these *Basic Writings*, see Reading V, p. 223.—Ed.]*
In a later passage we find the following:

Without changing the language phonetically, much less changing its forms and laws, time often introduces into it an enhanced power of thought and a more penetrating sensibility than it possessed hitherto, and it does so through the burgeoning development of ideas. It is as though a variant sense occupies the old husk, something different is given in the unaltered coinage, and a differently scaled sequence of ideas is intimated according to unchanged syntactical laws. Here we have one of the bounteous fruits of a people’s literature, and, preeminent in this domain, their poetry and philosophy.

(Section 11, p. 100)

XI

THE END OF PHILOSOPHY
AND THE TASK OF THINKING

We may venture the step back out of philosophy into the thinking of Being as soon as we have grown familiar with the provenance of thinking.