Language Speaks: Heidegger's Understanding of Language

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Language Speaks: Heidegger On Language

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Language Speaks: Heidegger on Language

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Abstract

The central task of my thesis, entitled “Language Speaks: Heidegger on Language,” is to bring to light an understanding of language found in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). This understanding was rendered by a textual exegesis of three difficult texts from Heidegger’s corpus: *Being and Time* (1929), “On the Essence of Truth” (1930), and “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” (1936). The reading of *Being and Time* (up to section 34) provided the grounding for the discussions on truth and language by situating Heidegger with regard to the problem of Being and language, articulating Heidegger’s foundational thought, and identifying key concepts and terminology. The distilled results of my exegetical work are: *Being and Time* shows Being as the process of coming to presence (or, as ‘presencing’); “On the Essence of Truth” shows truth as the process of concealment/unconcealment (or *aletheia*); “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” shows language as that through which beings come to unconcealment. In the final analysis, we come to understand that the origination of truth is the process of language as Saying (i.e., as poetry)—language answers the “how” of coming to presence (Being), of coming to unconcealment (truth).
Part I: The Ontological Foundations of Language From *Being and Time*

In trying to bring to light Heidegger’s philosophy of language to some degree, our analysis will move from a consideration of the ontological foundations of language (from *Being and Time*) to considerations which deal with two of Heidegger’s later essays—“On the Essence of Truth” and “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry”—wherein the fundamental thought on language becomes more complex. In Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism”—which engages in rich considerations about language throughout—the author makes many references to *Being and Time*.\(^1\) In doing so, Heidegger is affirming that *Being and Time* provides much of the thoroughly treated groundwork for what he says in writings thereafter (despite the changes which Heidegger will come to embrace about some of the issues which constitute this groundwork). Therefore, in beginning with a look at some of that seminal work in preparation for our discussion of language, we are heeding Heidegger’s good counsel. Because *Being and Time* provides the foundational thought upon which the remainder of Heidegger’s writings about Being and hence the present treatment of language rest, we must begin with a skeletal overview of the sections in *Being and Time* which progress in a cumulative fashion to section 34 which deals primarily with language.*Being and Time* opens by reminding us that the question of Being

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\(^1\) Of particular import to the present paper, is Heidegger’s reference to *Being and Time* with specific regard to language: “*Being and Time* (section 34) contains an essential reference to the essential dimension of language and touches upon the question as to what mode of Being language as language in any given case has” (“Letter on Humanism” 222).
has been forgotten. Since the ancient Greeks, the question has become trivialized because we think we know what Being means. According to Heidegger, philosophical work has, throughout the centuries since the ancients, generated and held firmly to presuppositions which have not only served in keeping Being out of sight but have brought about the forgottenness and thus the oblivion of Being.

Heidegger’s interest in the problem of Being was sparked by his reading of Franz Brentano’s dissertation, On the Manifold Sense of Being According to Aristotle (1862). In this work Heidegger began to see the obscurity enshrouding the word “is”—a word that pervades all human speech and applies to everything yet which reposes within a unity that can be thought of as Being itself, or that which encompasses all beings and thus makes all “is” possible. Heidegger’s interest, then, lies in understanding the meaning of Being itself (Being qua Being). If traditional metaphysics tries to investigate beings as beings—as Aristotle did—then Heidegger’s task in Being and Time is not primarily metaphysics (though as emerging from the metaphysical tradition, he remains well within the confines of the language characteristic of metaphysics) but one of fundamental ontology. This means that Heidegger is trying to render an analysis of that by virtue of which beings show themselves as beings, or the light which allows beings to be unconcealed (unverborgen). This light, then, is prior to metaphysics in the sense that it first makes metaphysics possible. The problem becomes obviously more complex because this ‘that which renders beings unconcealed,’ as the source which provides the sense and

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2 I will use “Being” throughout as Being qua Being which designates its verbal form and means the process of coming to presence, or ‘presencing’. This is to be distinguished from “being” which will also appear as “entity,” “essent,” or “existent” which means that which in any way is.
ground of beings, is not itself unconcealed but lies hidden. Being, as a bringing to light (of beings), or presencing, itself remains veiled; Being hides as it reveals. We will come to understand this more clearly as the unified process of truth where truth is understood as *aletheia*, or, literally, non-concealment, when we discuss the essay “On the Essence of Truth.”

The Being of entities is thus not itself an entity, but that by virtue of which beings are brought to light as unconcealed. We are alluding here to what Heidegger calls the “ontological difference,” which designates the ambivalence in the word “being.” For, being, grammatically, is a participle (or, and infinitive in German), which means it shares both a sense as a noun (that which is manifest) and a verb (the process of manifesting). The ontological difference amounts to the difference between Being and beings. Being must therefore not be investigated as an entity but in its own way. However, there is no Being without entities—i.e., Being is always manifest as entities; we do not come across Being as we might come across a person, place, or thing. Since we cannot lay hold of Being itself, since we must experience Being through entities, we must interrogate the entities themselves if we are to lay bare the meaning of Being itself. It should be made explicit, however, that in considering entities as our point of departure for considering Being, we are not primarily seeking to understand the Being of entities, as has been the tradition since Aristotle, but Being *qua* Being. Itself not a being, Being must be investigated in its own way—a method called phenomenology in the sense in which Heidegger interprets the word in Introduction II to *Being and Time*. Achieving an

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3 Heidegger will, however, come to institute new language in his thinking which is specifically not borrowed from the metaphysical tradition, because part of his ultimate goal is to overcome metaphysics.
understanding of this method will not only help to bring into view Heidegger's general task in *Being and Time*, but will also provide the sense with which he approaches truth and language.

Heidegger tells us that the term phenomenology is the joining of the two components “phenomenon” and “logos” which derive from Greek expressions (SZ 50). In recovering these terms in their primordial significations, Heidegger is also able to discount the multiplicity of meanings with which these terms have been invested throughout the history of philosophy. For “phenomenon” Heidegger recovers the meaning “that which shows itself in itself, the manifest” (51), and “a letting-something-be-seen” for “logos” (56). Hence, “phenomenology” is taken by Heidegger to mean “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (58). Yet, what does Heidegger intend to let be seen? What is this “that which shows itself . . . from itself”? Heidegger tells us:

Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself, but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground. (59)

And by this he means, the “*Being* of entities” (59). The idea of concealment and unconcealment which is alluded to here will become clearer when we move to discuss “On the Essence of Truth.”

This ‘new’ language, we will see, is borrowed from the poets whom he engages in his later writings.
Because Being underlies all that we talk about, all that we concern ourselves with in any way, all that we are, the question arises: which entity, or which phenomenon, is the proper subject of an analysis with regard to the Being of beings?

The Heidegger of *Being and Time* finds that the inquirer—the human—is the entity which needs to be the subject of inquiry as well as the inquirer if we are to gain access to the illumination of Being. Heidegger envisions the human as the only being for whom Being itself is an issue (68). Heidegger calls the human—*Dasein*. But "Dasein" is not just another name which means "the human." The term *Dasein* is central in that it expresses the very essence or nature of the human. In bringing this essence into view, we can then understand why *Dasein* is here the proper being to be analyzed in letting Being itself be seen.

*Dasein* ek-sists. Heidegger, in using this expression to characterize the essence of *Dasein* as existence, stresses the etymological meaning of the word "exist": to ek-sist means to stand out. *Dasein* stands out there with the world. *Dasein* is the being who thus has a relationship *towards* Being, which means *Dasein* is the preeminent being insofar as its prerogative consists of an open-ness or exposure unto the illumination of Being. Conceived this way, ek-sistence can be called the "There" (*Da*) of Being; i.e., the 'place' in the midst of beings where Being is lit-up and comes to pass as presence in the sense of

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4 Although at the time in which *Being and Time* appeared Heidegger thought of the Human as the privileged entity through which Being might be disclosed, he later changed his mind. This does not mean that the human falls into insignificance in his later writings. Rather, Heidegger will consider, as we shall show, entities such as language, poetry, technology, and even truth itself (*aletheia*).

5 Following the example of John Macquarie and Edward Robinson, whose translation of *Being and Time* I will refer to throughout, I will leave "*Dasein*" untranslated. *Dasein* occupies a central place in Heidegger's corpus. Its etymological meaning is, literally, "Being-there."
what is unconcealed. This means that Being is disclosed to Dasein in that Dasein is always already given over to Being—Dasein is the There-being or Being-there. As exposed to the disclosure of Being, Dasein has some understanding of Being.

Dasein is the being who is the "there" among beings. In the "there" beings are brought to light and abide as manifest, then a relation of mutual interdependence holds between Dasein and beings. Dasein is itself a being and is always in relation to other beings. But beings are brought to light and rendered free for encounter as the beings they are through Dasein. This rendering, like bringing to light in the sense of disclosure, however, does not therefore mean that Dasein "creates" beings. Rather, Dasein reveals beings as the beings they are and so dis-covers (ent-denken) them.

Dasein comports itself toward the world, towards the entities within the world. To say that in every case Dasein is given over to the world is to say that whatever entity Dasein is perceiving, imagining, dreaming, talking about, or, in general, concerned with, Dasein stands out there with that entity. More precisely, Dasein is its "there"; this means that the Being of the entities disclosed is Dasein: "the Being of any such entity is in each case mine" (67). As such, Dasein, to some degree, "understands itself in its Being" (32). For example, if I happen to be thinking of a relative, though she be deceased, I am standing outside of myself with her and am understanding myself to some degree in terms of this comportment. Or, if I have a landscape in view—whether it be the landscape that constitutes my perception at the present moment or a landscape I may have observed years ago—I am standing out there with that landscape or any feature of it. As I read the morning paper, I am comporting myself towards international politics through the words

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6 "Disclosure"—Erschlossenheit—will, in Heidegger's writings as well as in this paper, apply exclusively
before me, I am with the scandals of local politicians, or I am with the war in some remote region of the world. Whatever I concern myself with or neglect becomes the term of my comportment for that moment. Dasein understands itself with reference to a world: we understand ourselves in terms of geographical location, occupation, interests, fears, desires, what we know and what eludes us, others with whom we interact—all those entities which are not Dasein (and yet in terms of which Dasein essentially understands who and what it is). We understand ourselves according to what we live from, what we live with, and what we live for. Dasein always “understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself” (33). By discovering entities, by comporting ourselves toward them, we disclose ourselves to ourselves. In raising the question of the meaning of Being and making it our concern via entities, we thus open the possibility of disclosing Being.

We have said that Dasein ek-sists in the primary sense of standing out with the world; in doing so, we have indicated only implicitly Dasein’s relationship toward the phenomenon of the world. This relationship, this primordial way in which Dasein is, which Heidegger calls “Being-in-the-world,” must now become explicit if we are to fully ground an understanding of language.

Being-in-the-world, as the a priori basic state of Dasein, must be seen as a “unitary phenomenon” (78). However, the constituent elements of this basic state, though they may not be divorced and held in isolation from the whole, may be emphasized and taken as themes for analysis, which Heidegger does at length in Being and Time, but which I will only crudely summarize.

to Being, Dasein, and the world. Disclosure is distinct from “discovery” which applies to entities.
Dasein, characterized as Being-in, exists not only toward the world but in the world. Being-in is not to be taken in a spatial sense which would amount to mere containment or spatial location to another present-at-hand entity. Through etymological work, Heidegger describes Being-in as “dwellling alongside‘ the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way” (80). Emmanuel Levinas, in his work Totality and Infinity, renders a similar sense of a world we inhabit with the phrase “chez soi” (having translated the Hegelian “bei sich”). This phrase translates roughly as being “at home with oneself” (Levinas 33). The feeling of being ‘at home,’ being familiar with a site which may or may not be an actual ‘home’ is, I think, partially what is meant by “dwelling alongside” a familiar world. Being-in is ontological, not ontical; hence, we must, as Heidegger does, take care at the outset to eliminate from our analysis the view which envisions Dasein in relation to the world in the Cartesian sense of subject to object.

The world is always already discovered and, to some degree, understood. But it is not yet clear what world means as Heidegger thinks it. The phenomenon of the world is not primarily to be discussed ontically in terms of entities which show themselves within

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7 That which is “ready-to-hand” means that which we ‘see’ only circumspectively in our dealings with it. The entity “ready-to-hand” is merely used, not thematized or made explicit by our gaze. When an entity becomes explicit it is “present-at-hand.”

8 By “ontological,” a term deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition, Heidegger wishes to designate the underlying Being-structure of Dasein rather than any concrete characteristics. An ontological characteristic is one which underlies and goes beyond any particular entity to the very structure which constitutes the Being of beings, especially Dasein. These structural characteristics Heidegger calls “existentia.” In sharp distinction from “ontological” is “ontic.” Thus opposed, “ontic” refers to what is concrete and particular. Dasein is the being who is thrown among beings, always finding itself in some concrete, everyday situation with some concrete entities. “Ontic” characteristics—called “existentielle”—describe this particular dimension of Dasein's Being. We must keep in mind, however, that the two are always together; one always points to the other. Though they are unitary, Heidegger will often choose one or the other and emphasize it in his analysis.

9 Heidegger is careful to distinguish his conception of Dasein and the world from the subject-object conception. This latter, dominant conception, according to Heidegger, gives rise to the problem of how the subject connects, in some ‘knowing’ fashion, to the distinct object, the problem of bridging the subjective and objective realms. Cf. Being and Time pp. 122-134.
the world. Nor are we interested here in thinking the world in terms of Nature, or “Things of Nature,” for “Nature itself is an entity which is encountered within the world and which can be discovered in various ways at various stages” (Being and Time 91-92). To discuss the world in terms of things within the world or to interpret their Being already presupposes the phenomenon of the world. Heidegger chooses to discuss the world in terms of the “worldhood of the world as such” (92).

Although many meanings have accrued to the term ‘world,’ we may identify several significations which fail to characterize world most primordially, i.e., in its “ontologico-existential” sense of worldhood, yet which are interconnected and founded upon this basic ontological structure (93). World, primordially, is not an aggregate of entities occurring within the world. Even if we could generate a list containing the totality of all entities, we would not begin to approach the fundamental notion of world. Further, world can mean the realm of possible present-at-hand entities which, in their Being, might belong to a way of life—the entities which together constitute the ‘world’ of the artist, as entities that, because of their Being, are possible objects of art. This sense gets closer to what Heidegger indicates by the term worldhood in its most basic sense, but it, too, is limited and relative to particular humans rather than to Dasein as such. Finally, world can be thought as that wherein a particular Dasein is said to exist. Taking the artist again as an example, she dwells in a world which is dominated by a concern for art. The artist stands out in her world in such a way that those entities of her concern are emphasized (though not as by an act of will, but as what comes into the clearing) and connected while others recede and fall away from the illumination of that world. This final signification of world does indicate the sense in which Heidegger thinks world, but it remains on an
ontical level and so does not designate the deeper, ontological understanding of the world—the worldhood of the world.

Worldhood, thought phenomenologically, means the very interconnectedness of the entities in the final sense of world just described. Worldhood is the a priori Being-structure of the world. This ontological structure will be brought out more clearly, not by looking at the Being of entities with which we concern ourselves in a thematic, theoretical way, but by investigating the entities which receive our concern in an average, everyday (and thus pre-theoretical) way of experiencing the world. Heidegger believes that the preeminent example of such entities which we come across in concern are what we call equipment (Zeug).

An analysis of equipment reveals the Being structure of the world, its worldhood, because it is constituted by what Heidegger calls an ‘in-order-to’ ["um-zu"] structure (97). In our everyday dealings with the world, the entities we generally deal with, disregarding other Daseins for the moment, are equipment, tools, gear, ‘stuff’—Zeug. We use or deal with writing materials, computers, lights, appliances, clothing, shovels, farm implements; we deal with equipment in an everyday sort of way ‘in-order-to’ get things done, ‘in-order-to’ accomplish some work. The ‘in-order-to’ structure of equipment means that all items of equipment refer beyond themselves to total system of references; that is, this structure indicates an interconnectedness which Heidegger calls “assignment or reference” [Verweisung] (97). Any item of equipment essentially belongs to a totality of equipment; a piece of equipment refers or is assigned to other pieces of equipment in that totality, and it is in terms of this referential structure that any piece of equipment is as it is. The computer refers to keyboard, diskettes, printer, software, hardware, electrical outlets; the
hammer is assigned to nails which refer to lumber, and so on. All equipment immediately refers to other equipment. But in our daily dealings with equipment, we do not primarily grasp any equipment in a thematic way, we simply use it. We normally do not gaze thematically at the cup of coffee we drink from. The essence of equipment lies in its being “ready-to-hand” [Zuhandenheit] (98). We understand equipment when we just use it, without ‘thinking’ about that item of equipment or totality of equipment. When we just use equipment, we let it be what it is, i.e., ready-to-hand. This mere use is facilitated by what Heidegger calls “circumspection” [Umsicht] (98). Rather than looking at any specific piece of equipment, we understand equipment with reference to the whole task to be performed; we see the equipment in terms of the task at hand, and thus “look around” what is ready-to-hand. This does not mean that we use the equipment blindly because it remains non-thematic. Rather, we use it with circumspection, thus allowing equipment to come into its own. Indeed, our everyday dealings are not so much concerned with the equipment we employ as with the work to be produced, what the equipment is used for—the “towards-which” (99). Equipment also refers to the “whereof” of which it consists: from those ‘natural’ entities which appear as accessible without themselves being produced.

But all these circumspective dealings with the ready-to-hand already presuppose the phenomenon of the world, and in any encounter with these entities, the world is illumined to some degree. Dasein, therefore, always already has some understanding of the worldhood of the world if any entity is to appear as the entity it is. But this pre-ontological understanding of world is made explicit, the worldhood of the world is lit up, according to Being and Time, when Dasein experiences some deficiency in the Being of
the ready-to-hand. When an item of equipment is broken or somehow unsuitable for the work towards which it would be used, the ready-to-hand becomes present-at-hand and thus conspicuous. Only because we have some understanding of the referential contexts with which we concern ourselves circumspectively is it possible for equipment to be found conspicuous. The in-order-to structure of equipment is ‘blocked’ or disrupted, and the interconnectedness, the worldly character of equipment, announces itself. Also, when some piece of equipment is missing, when it is not ‘handy’ or is ‘unready-to-hand,’ the equipment becomes obtrusive in that we only encounter its reference, its ‘belongingness’ through absence. Or, if something “stands in the way of our concern,” if something has been left unattended to, the ready-to-hand reveals its present-at-hand character as something obstinate. We can see how deficiency brings into relief the involvement something has by thinking metaphorically in terms of harmony. If, for example, we listen to a musical performance such as a chorus, and a voice sings off key, harmony becomes discord, chorus momentarily becomes cacophony. Such deficiency makes explicit the otherwise harmonious involvement of that voice. In all of these deficient modes of equipment, the assignments are disturbed, the referential contexts are ruptured and the interconnectedness of the assignments and references thus becomes explicit; the Being structure of the world announces itself.

In any encounter with the ready-to-hand, the world is already there with it, though it is not brought to light thematically. The assignment and reference structure of the ready-to-hand itself points to the interconnectedness of the world as involvement and significance, the worldhood of the world. Thus far, however, worldhood has only been shown to be characteristic of the ready-to-hand, made visible through deficient modes.
The concept of worldhood must be more fully developed as involvement and significance through a closer look at reference and assignment: "To say that the Being of the ready-to-hand has the structure of assignment or reference means that it has in itself the character of having been assigned or referred" (115). Only when an entity has been assigned does it come forth into the light as something freed from obscurity for our concern, for the possibility of Dasein standing out with the entity. Entities are always assigned with reference to other entities, and are thus freed in this assigning into some context whence it thus phenomenally becomes the entity it is. The notion that an entity becomes what it is only in terms of the totality within which it appears can perhaps be understood more clearly by considering the Pythagorean thought which indicates that a thing is what it is only according to that which it is not but stands in some direct relation to. Music is a primary example. A single note is defined when limits are placed on an unlimited scale and is further defined, therefore, by the totality of musical notes which make it distinct as the note it is. In a symphony, a single note freed by a violinist becomes what it is—a note within a symphony—according to the other notes the violinist plays, according to the other strings, according to the brass, woodwinds, percussion and so on. The note is thus freed for its involvement in the symphony, for its involvement with the audience and enjoyment in their lives. Likewise, Madame Curie's discovery of radium freed, for the first time even though the entity had been in obscurity, this element for its involvement as an element among elements, as the object of concern in the chemists and physicists' 'worlds.' Entities, having been assigned are freed into a structure of involvement: when an entity has an involvement, "what involvement this is, has in each case been outlined in advance in terms of the totality of such involvements" (116). The ontical involvement
does, however, vary: a note freed for involvement in a symphony may also be freed for involvement with a small band and patrons of a tavern. The Being of such an entity as involvement within a totality of involvements, however, remains. We have seen that a totality of involvements itself “goes back ultimately to a ‘towards-which’ in which there is no further involvement: this ‘towards-which’ is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within the world; it is rather an entity whose Being is defined as Being-in-the-world, and to whose state of Being, worldhood itself belongs” (116). This ultimate ‘towards-which’ is the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ the whole equipment exists as equipment—Dasein. Dasein thus has worldhood as its kind of Being.

The freeing of entities for some involvement, the “letting something be involved,” may be accomplished as an ontical production as we have seen; primarily, however, this ‘letting be,’ this freeing, is ontological, as a “perfect a priori” letting be, as a previous freeing of entities within the world (117). Freeing an entity in this primordial, “perfect a priori” sense indicates the freeing of the world within which any ontical experience is possible. Previous freeing is thus the condition for the possibility of encountering anything ready-to-hand. Like Kant’s transcendental doctrines, this a priori freeing is itself not experienced but conditions the possibility of any experience. The world is always already there as any entity shows itself. Thus the worldly character of the world as involvement has always already been discovered before any entity in the world is discovered, and Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is thus disclosed. In seeing the interconnected world as involvement for its own sake, Dasein understands itself. Dasein’s a priori understanding of the world and thus of itself means that Dasein already enjoys a familiarity with and understanding of Being such that Dasein is granted access to the Being of beings. Any
entity which is discovered will be discovered only on the basis of the assignments which Dasein understands in terms of its own involvement in the world; all involvement is involvement oriented towards Dasein such that Dasein is the term of all references. Thus Dasein understands the world and itself according to the way in which Dasein stands out with the world. The totality of the relationships we have been considering “are bound up with one another as a primordial totality” which Heidegger calls “significance” and this significance, or total meaningfulness, “is what makes up the structure of the world” (120).

Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, always stands out there with the world in such a way that it “is in every case its ‘there’” (171). When one says, “I am here,” that ‘here’ is determined by a ‘there.’ The ‘there’ is the clearing in which entities are brought to light as manifest and in this way can be said to be the Being-structure which we have called worldhood. Dasein, in standing out there with the entities of its concern discloses those entities and brings about some disclosure of itself: “Dasein is its disclosedness” (171). If, as we have said, disclosure is to be understood as bringing out into the light, bringing into the clearing, then Dasein itself is this clearing, this lighting. But the Being of this Being-there must itself be brought to light. Dasein is its ‘there’ always as some “state-of-mind” and some “understanding” (171). The two are equiprimordial existentialia.

Dasein is the being who is already there; it finds itself to be an already existing fact, ineluctably standing there in disclosure with some entity, and, moreover, always already finds itself there in some way. This already having found itself there in some way, in some state of ‘feeling,’ Heidegger calls “Befindlichkeit” (172). Befindlichkeit indicates Dasein’s
general state of feeling or disposition.\(^{10}\) As an existential, as ontological, \textit{Befindlichkeit} is always manifest as some \textit{Bestimmung}, some ontical mood. Hence \textit{Befindlichkeit} underlies any concrete feeling of joy, sadness, or anxiety. Mood here, as \textit{Bestimmung}, means how one is ‘in tune’ or attuned to the world. We commonly ask “How are you?” or, more precisely in German, “How are you finding yourself?” \([\textit{Wie befinden-Sie sich?}]\). In doing so, we are trying to bring to light one’s \textit{Befindlichkeit} as some particular mood; we want to understand how someone is standing out with the world. We always already have some mood, we are always attuned to the world in some way. In describing one of Dasein’s basic modes of Being in terms of \textit{Befindlichkeit}, Heidegger is saying that the general disclosedness to which Dasein is exposed arises as much from our existential state of feeling (\textit{Befindlichkeit}) as it does from any kind of rational cognition or understanding. But we must bring into view precisely what is disclosed in Dasein’s basic disposition.

The import of \textit{Befindlichkeit} as some \textit{Bestimmung} in terms of Heidegger’s existential analysis is that the world and Dasein’s Being-in-the-world is disclosed to Dasein according to its mood. But what is thus disclosed moodwise is not something that can be apprehended through knowledge: “the possibilities of disclosure which belong to cognition reach far too short a way compared with the primordial disclosure belonging to moods, in which Dasein is brought before its Being as ‘there’” (173). Dasein’s mood, therefore, in determining how the world is disclosed, determines also what Dasein pays attention to, what \textit{matters} at any particular moment. But always finding oneself in a mood

\(^{10}\) Macquarrie and Robinson translate “\textit{Befindlichkeit}” as “state-of-mind.” \textit{Befindlichkeit} has no precise English equivalent, and state-of-mind gets close to capturing the German sense. However, “feeling” or “general state of feeling” (in terms of how one finds oneself) is perhaps a better translation so long as we dismiss from “feeling” its ontic connotations and take it in an ontological sense, and thus prior to any specific ontic manifestation (i.e., in some particular mood).
more than discloses the world and what matters; it also reveals to Dasein that it has been
“delivered over in its Being” (173). What does it mean to be delivered over in its Being?
Heidegger means that because Dasein always finds itself standing out there and always in
some mood, Dasein has been “thrown” into its Being—there in such a way as to reveal to it
“that it is and has to be” (173). Our ek-sistence is a fact not to be outstripped, yet our
origin and destiny remain veiled in obscurity: “The pure ‘that it is’ shows itself, but the
‘whence’ and ‘whither’ remain in darkness” (173). This characteristic of Dasein as
delivered over simply ‘to be’ knowing neither from whence it has sprung nor whither it is
destined, moving everyday hither and thither among moods which disclose its ‘there’—this
is “thrownness” [Geworfenheit].

Equiprimordial with Befindlichkeit as one of Dasein’s existentialia is
understanding (Verstehen). Thus, every mood has its understanding; Dasein always finds
itself there in some mood and with some understanding, “even if it merely keeps it
suppressed” (182). We have already said that Dasein is the being who, to some degree
understands or comprehends Being by virtue of its ek-sistent constitution through which
beings are rendered manifest and disclosed. Heidegger now takes up this understanding
explicitly in his analysis as one of Dasein’s basic modes of Being (182).

Heidegger first of all makes clear that the kind of understanding which he wishes
to bring into view is not merely “one possible kind of cognizing among others (as
distinguished, for instance, from ‘explaining’)” (182). Understanding must rather be seen
as the primordial understanding in general which helps to constitute the Being of the
“there” and thus grounds all other derivative kinds of cognition. But what is this primary
understanding to mean? To say that Dasein ek-sists is to say that Dasein is its “there”; and
this means that the world (in terms of involvement and significance) with which Dasein stands out in every case is thereby disclosed, "and this disclosedness we have called 'understanding'" (182).

Understanding, then, is not to be taken in the sense of being competent over something or able to handle something present-at-hand. Rather, Heidegger's use of understanding indicates a 'competence' over or potential for our existence in the sense that Dasein is possibility:

Dasein is not something present-at-hand which possesses its competence for something by way of an extra; it is primarily Being-possible. Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility.

(183)

Dasein does not have the kind of Being that something present-at-hand possesses; it is not the rock in the field which is complete in its being merely a rock. Dasein is not thrown into the world as something which merely is, but, as we have already said, is thrown as a 'that it is and has to be,' in the sense of something not-yet, or still to be achieved (186). This 'to be' suggests that Dasein ek-sists and so is its "there" and is what it stands out over with. However, Dasein stands out in such a way that it is never fully identified with the entities with which it stands. One may be there in a situation in which fear, joy, envy, or peace almost seems to envelop her; but the union is never complete. Her mood will shift, as the situation shifts, as attention shifts, and the distance between herself as possibility and any entity remains.\footnote{We recall, however, that this distance does not therefore conjure the notion of internal subject as opposed to external object(s); for, this is the notion which Heidegger wishes to dispel in his analytic of Dasein as There, as ek-sistence.} One may project himself upon the possibility of
becoming a farmer, a doctor, a soldier. The possibility is followed, and even when he is a farmer, he never is farmer—possibilities remain, and who Dasein is remains possibility. Dasein may find itself standing out with, delivered over to, projecting itself upon its possibilities, and in such an intimate way that we seem to become lost or enraptured by them. Nevertheless, Dasein always reaches beyond itself and thus what it stands out with, always becoming something more and different, always moving on.

This Being-possible thus indicates some distance between Dasein and the entities of its concernful comportment such that Dasein is never complete but always standing outside itself with this or that activity, with this or that entity, with this or that person, and so is possibility. Clearly, then, possibility is to be distinguished from the logical possibility of something "not yet actual and what is not at any time necessary" (183). Nor does possibility signify some liberty with which we approach a series of possible choices. As a result of thrownness, Dasein "has already got itself into definite possibilities" (183). Although Dasein may evade or embrace its possibilities, or may be unaware of itself as possibility explicitly, yet Dasein lives in some understanding of itself as possibility. Ultimately, Dasein lives in some understanding of its deepest possibility—the possibility of the impossibility of any possibility, namely, Death—which is evident in the ways in which we deal with other possibilities. If Dasein is possibility, then Dasein is competent over its own Being in the sense of ek-sisting, or, in Heidegger’s words, is “Being-free for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (183).
Not only has Dasein always got itself into definite possibilities, but always pushes ahead into new ones. Heidegger develops this notion into what he calls "projection,"\(^\text{12}\) a term which characterizes the way Dasein’s understands, or Dasein’s ‘Being-free for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being’ (185). Dasein understands and so projects itself upon “the worldhood of its current world” (185). Projecting here does not mean to propose a project or plan by which to direct one’s efforts and so bring about a way to secure the future. Rather, Dasein, by its very nature, is always already projecting itself upon its possibilities which are open upon the horizon of its interconnected world, “And, as thrown, Dasein is thrown into the kind of Being which we call ‘projecting’” (185). Thus, Dasein understands itself in terms of its possibilities upon which it projects itself; it walks in possibility as possibility and so understands that it is always more than it is—Dasein is a “to be” or “not yet” (186). To say that Dasein understands by projecting itself upon its possibilities, upon the world (as significance, and thus itself as the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ or the term of all relations), is to say that Dasein discloses or illuminates.

Understanding can be taken to mean the kind of sight (Sicht) that Dasein has (186). Sight, here, is not to be taken in a physiological sense, as optical reception of stimuli. Rather, in keeping with the philosophical tradition by employing this term, Heidegger designates by “sight” the disclosedness, the illumination or clearedness, of the “there,” or “a way of access to entities and to Being” (187). Dasein thus understands

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\(^{12}\) "Projection" (Entwurf) has the sense of ‘throwing something off’ or ‘forward’ (185). Dasein throws forward something which it already ‘has’—its familiarity with the world, and awareness and comprehension of how the world is interconnected as worldhood, how entities always point beyond themselves to a series of entities which thus constitute its meaning—the ‘meaningfulness’ of its own Being-in-the-world. Again, primarily and for the most part, this awareness remains implicit and may occasionally burst forth when this structure is ruptured by a deficiency.
itself in a way which can be called "transparency": in projecting itself, Dasein understands itself through all other entities and thus 'catches a glimpse' of Being itself.

_Befindlichkeit_ and understanding are primordial _existentialia_ and thus indicate how Dasein ek-sists and so sees itself in the world, disclosed as possibility. But to these primordial ways in which Being-in-the-world (as a unitary phenomenon) is brought to light, we must add "discourse" (_Rede_).\(^{13}\) To arrive at an understanding of discourse, however, we will need to follow Heidegger's thought as it moves through considerations of "interpretation" (_Auslegung_) and "assertion" (_Aussage_) as derivative modes of existential understanding which we have just been treating.

Dasein understands by projecting itself upon the interconnected world as significance and thereby illuminates that world and also brings to light itself as possibility. But this understanding can be developed, and "This development of the understanding we call 'interpretation'" (189). By developing, Heidegger means (1) that the connections among Dasein and the entities, which constitute the involvement of the world, can be made to shine explicitly; (2) that possibilities which Dasein projects in its understanding can be worked out—and these amount to seeing "something as something" (189). That which one looks through with circumspection (characteristic of the non-explicit ready-to-hand), e.g., from her room to see the commotion outside or whether the sun is shining, can be seen as window, e.g., if that through which she looks circumspectively is found broken or 'too dirty.' The 'that through which she looks' which was previously veiled in its unobtrusive readiness-to-hand (kept out of sight by usability), has become interpreted

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\(^{13}\) _Rede_, translated my Macquarrie and Robinson as "discourse" carries the meaning closer to 'speech', 'talking', 'what is being said', or 'giving a talk', than an exchange between people in the sense of a dialogue or discussion though it does encompass these ways of speaking.
and so made to stand out explicitly as window. But interpretation occurs even when 
things are working well and is not limited to the reduction of the ready-to-hand to 
something present-at-hand. In applying an abstract philosophical concept to some 
concrete situation, that concept gets interpreted, its involvement somehow worked out in 
such and such a way.

Interpretation, then, is articulating or appropriating what is primarily understood 
(and is therefore grounded upon understanding) by making some aspect of the world’s 
already understood Being-structure to show itself as something explicit and thus comes to 
be understood explicitly. This ‘as’ is precisely what characterizes explicitness, and it thus 
“constitutes interpretation” (189). Interpretation, however, can and does occur on a very 
basic level and need not be made into an assertion in which something interpreted is 
invested with a definite characterization: “Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-
to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets. . . . In the 
encountering of something, it is understood in terms of a totality of involvements; and 
such seeing hides in itself the explicitness of the assignment-relations (of the ‘in-order-to’) 
which belong to that totality” (189). Interpretation thus articulates what is understood by 
bringing it closer as something, but does so in a way that lies prior to any assertion. 
Making an assertion about what is thus interpreted only expresses this previously 
articulated ‘as something’ but does not bring it about (190).

Heidegger emphasizes that in interpretation, Dasein does not bestow a signification 
upon the thing interpreted. The interpreted entity already belongs to a series of relations 
and connections, to a totality of involvements, which is already disclosed in Dasein’s 
understanding of worldhood (and thus of itself). Rather, “this involvement is one which
gets laid out by the interpretation” (191). Therefore, interpretation is grounded upon
what Heidegger calls a “fore-having” or a “fore-sight,” which is the understanding of
Being-in-the-world which Dasein always already has to some degree. In the projection of
the understanding, entities encountered get disclosed in their possible involvements. When
an entity is encountered and disclosed interpretively as something, we commonly say it has
a meaning. But, recalling our discussion of the worldhood of the world, what we
understand is not the meaning itself but the entity, and meaning, therefore, is “that wherein
the intelligibility of something maintains itself” or “that which can be articulated in a
disclosure by which we understand,” or finally, “the ‘upon-which’ of a projection in terms
of which something becomes intelligible as something” (192-193). What is already
understood in general, as a ‘fore-having’, which Heidegger has called ‘significance’ or
‘meaningfulness’, and this is what is articulated with some explicitness in interpretation.

Understanding, we now see, has the possibility of developing itself in
interpretation. Likewise, interpretation has the possibility of being developed more fully
by assertion, which now becomes Heidegger’s focus. Heidegger maintains that assertion
has a privileged position in fundamental ontology because the ancients, who saw the
beginning of ontology, had “logos” as their only way of access to Being and to beings.
Not only that, but assertion “has been accepted from ancient times as the primary and
authentic ‘locus’ of truth” (196). And truth, as we will see in the next section, has an
intimate relationship with Being:

The phenomenon of truth is so thoroughly coupled with the problem of
Being that our investigation, as it proceeds further, will necessarily come
up against the problem of truth; and it already lies within the dimensions of
that problem, though not explicitly. The analysis of assertion will at the
same time prepare the way for this latter problematic. (196)

Assertion has three predominant significations, and together they make up the full
notion of assertion which Heidegger wishes to bring into view; we will now consider these
significations briefly. First, assertion has the primary sense of “pointing out” (Aufzeigen),
or “letting an entity be seen from itself” (196). In pointing something out, we are letting
an entity be seen in a way that makes some of its involvement explicit. For example, the
assertion ‘The razor is dull’ brings the entity to mind as ready-to-hand (and, moreover, as
obtrusive). Second, assertion also means “predication” (196). Here, assertion predicates
by giving a definite character to some ‘subject’ and thereby restricting the content of
assertion in the first sense—this indicates that this signification arises from the first. The
entity manifest in the first sense is narrowed by way of the defining predicate, making it
“explicitly manifest in its definite character” (197). Finally, assertion means
communication by way of speaking forth. This third signification, then, is directly related
to the first and second. In this kind of assertion, we let another see and thus share with us
what we have pointed out in its definite character. This sharing makes common the entity
which is asserted toward which we both comport ourselves. What is shared on a more
fundamental level is Being-in-the-world: our standing out with the world to which we
point and predicate is thus expressed and made common.

The unitary view of “assertion” is: “a pointing-out which gives something a
definite character and which communicates” (199). And we recall that assertion, as
founded on understanding (and therefore derivative because even in the absence of the
utterance, interpretation continues to see something as something, especially in silent
circumspection), points out what has already been disclosed or discovered. Assertion thus
requires a fore-having of whatever has been disclosed; and this is what it points out by
way of giving something a definite character” (199).

Equiprimordial with understanding and Befindlichkeit, which, as existentialia,
constitute the Being of the “there” is discourse (Rede). The notions of saying and
speaking were alluded to in looking at assertion, and here language itself becomes
Heidegger’s focus. Language, Heidegger thinks, is founded upon discourse: “The
existential foundation of language is discourse or talk” (203).

When something is understood, it “has always been articulated, even before there
is any appropriative interpretation of it” (203). That is, what is understood is always
already languaged; possibilities are thus always languaged in order to be possibilities at all.
Discourse accomplishes this articulation of intelligibility, and only on the basis of
something understood as articulated can it be pointed out in a definite way and asserted.
What is thus articulated by discourse, and subsequently by interpretation and assertion,
Heidegger calls meaning or the “totality-of-significations” (204). The totality is taken
apart into significations which always have a meaning. In this taking apart, the world (the
totality of significations) is put into words. Heidegger points out—beautifully, simply—
“To significations, words accrue. But word-Things do not get supplied with
significations” (204).

Discourse is an existential state in which Dasein and thus the world are disclosed,
and is expressed as language. Language, at this point in Heidegger’s thought, amounts to
a totality of words, and can be said to have “a ‘worldly’ Being of its own” (204). (This
worldly character will be developed more fully as we move to our treatment of Hölderlin
in the final section.) In talking, we articulate to one another how we stand out in the interconnected world, how we dwell alongside it, how we understand our Being-in-the-world. Talking, in all of the ways in which it may happen, is always about something, "there is something said-in-the-talk . . . In this 'something said', discourse communicates" (205). Understood in its broadest sense, communication is not primarily giving information or conveying feelings and experiences, rather it is the articulation of Being-with one another in an understanding way. This means that what is shared and made common are the very phenomenal facts which make anything like 'commonness' or 'community' possible, and these are what Heidegger has been laying out in his existential analysis. We have said that there is always already an implicit understanding of Being-in-the-world as possibility with others, but in discourse, Dasein is able to express and make explicit that which it understands. This 'able to express and make explicit' is not an 'act' of Dasein, however (like the mere reporting of something already thought); Thinking and uttering occur only if that which is understood is already articulated (or languaged). This articulation itself is what Heidegger means by discourse. We have already seen that "logos" lets something be seen, and we can now understand that discourse (logos) lets-be-seen by way of language that which the understanding projects—that is, the significance or total meaningfulness which constitutes Dasein's world (and thus itself).

But thinking of discourse in terms of speech is not exhaustive; Heidegger proposes that in logos lie two of its modes which are commonly passed by: hearing and keeping silent (204). The former is the more important of the two for our purposes. By "hearing" Heidegger wishes to designate Dasein's existential openness to others, or the possibility of attending and listening to other Daseins; hearing is thus "constitutive for discourse" (206).
By listening to others, with whom Dasein always exists and who help constitute who Dasein is, Dasein lets its understanding be seen as one it shares with them. Hearing as Heidegger conceives it is not primarily the aural perception of tones and sounds; “What we ‘first’ hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling” (207). This shows that Dasein is already dwelling alongside its significant world which it understands and projects, already standing out with entities that have been opened by language: “Only he who already understands can listen” (208).

What we have said thus far with respect to logos and language must seem lacking. Indeed, it is. Heidegger himself has little to say at this point in his thinking about a fundamental phenomenon which founds Dasein’s very ek-sistence and makes possible any attempt to let be seen what shows itself at all. This is why much of his later writings grapples with language and push much deeper into its dimension, a dimension which he will come to call an abyss. To come under the sway of language as Heidegger later thinks it, we will first consider what Heidegger thinks of truth, which will give us a grounded understanding of the power of language and its relation to Being.

We end our glimpse at the foundational thought laid down in *Being and Time* with a lengthy excerpt that perhaps justifies our preparation for language by wending through much of this difficult text, keeping in mind that the “items” to which he here refers are those which we have just been considering:

Attempts to grasp the ‘essence of language’ have always taken their orientation from one or another of these items; and the clues to their conceptions of language have been the ideas of ‘expression’, of ‘symbolic
form', of communication as 'assertion', of the 'making-known' of experiences, of the 'patterning' of life. Even if one were to put these various fragmentary definitions together in syncretistic fashion, nothing would be achieved in the way of a fully adequate definition of "language". We would still have to do what is decisive here—to work out in advance the ontologico-existential whole of the structure of discourse on the basis of the analytic of Dasein. (206)
Part II: “On the Essence of Truth”

In the essay “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger’s primary concern is to critique the notion of truth as it has been developed by the Western philosophical tradition. This privileged conception of truth, which we will come to see as having been identified as “accordance,” is here called into question by Heidegger because of its apparent groundlessness. Heidegger’s critique involves tracing this notion back to a more original meaning which makes truth as accordance possible. This ‘genealogy’ of truth will bring to light that which is hidden, though tacitly implied, in the traditional notion of truth, its fundamental ground. From within this critique, then, will emerge Heidegger’s own understanding of truth as “aletheia” or “unconcealment” (BW 125).

In taking the tradition to task, Heidegger first sets out to determine what characterizes every type of truth as truth, its essence. Such a determination will bring into view precisely what the accepted understanding of truth means by ‘truth’ itself. However, Wesen—essence—for Heidegger, will come to take on a different, more fundamental meaning in his later works than it had in Being and Time. “On the Essence of Truth” can perhaps be seen as a threshold whereupon Heidegger’s use of Wesen begins to indicate that essence is a verb which has, over time, been covered up and hardened into a noun. This fixing of essence can already be seen in Aristotelian thought where it may be grasped as static, confined within the definition of an entity. The Latin quidditas—whatness—
governs the current understanding and usage of *essence*. However, Heidegger demands that we think historically or originally to the primordial meaning of truth prior to all transformation, prior to the epoch of metaphysics from which Heidegger thinks we are only now beginning to emerge. This means not only to trace meanings back to their etymological origin, but to undergo a transformation of thinking, to think in a way that restores primary meaning to the words by which we name truth, by which we attempt to name Being.

This historical thinking, for Heidegger, often involves thinking contemporary nouns—such as essence—as verbs, thus restoring to them their lost temporality. Heidegger’s usage of *essence* in the present essay is, for the most part, indicates the primordial ground upon which truth is what it is. However, as the essay progresses, *essence* takes on the more fundamental meaning of “essential unfolding,” or ‘essencing.’¹ Thought historically, *essence* as a verb indicates happening (though not by mere chance), unfolding, event, or advent (the latter two deriving from the Latin *venire*, meaning ‘to come’ or ‘to arrive’). Heidegger is ultimately concerned with the way in which truth comes to presence, the way truth whiles and wends its way in the world, the way it comes to us as an essential unfolding rather than with the fixed quiddity of an entity. This rethinking of essence will become clearer as we proceed in developing Heidegger's understanding of truth as distinct from its contemporary currency.

Before taking up the essay itself, it will help to delineate its structure. In chapters one through four, Heidegger is attempting to identify and understand the “usual” conception of truth—as correctness or accordance. In doing so, he tries to reveal the

¹ Cf. “The Question Concerning Technology.”
“inner possibility” of this notion of truth, the ontological ground which allows correctness to be a standard or measure of truth, for, curiously, the idea of accordance which holds sway under the aegis of truth rests on undiscussed ground. By pointing out the implications of the traditional understanding of truth as correctness, Heidegger reveals what is tacitly implied in this notion. In doing so, Heidegger will, as we have said, trace correctness back to the more original meaning of truth as unconcealment. Hence, some of the implications brought to light in his analysis of correctness will lend themselves to Heidegger’s own understanding of truth as *aletheia*, while others will be appropriated in terms of the rethinking of truth he tries to render in chapters five through eight. Again, it is important to remember that throughout his essay, what Heidegger is primarily rendering is the revelation of what underlies the traditional notion of truth; and, despite the accumulation and development of language characteristic to Heidegger’s thinking, his own philosophy only flashes subtly and emerges rather as an ellipsis in the final chapter.

The conventional notion of truth as it has come to be understood in the Western tradition is correctness (*Richtigkeit*), adequation, or accordance. The ‘essence’ of this conception first appears in the writings of Aristotle where we find truth to be “the accordance (*homoiosis*) of a statement (*logos*) with a matter (*pragma*)” (120). Truth was later taken up in an attempt to justify its identification with accordance by the medievals, beginning with Avicenna. Rooted in the Christian theological tradition, truth was at this point expressed as the conformity of the human intellect to a created thing as it is conceived by the divine intellect: *veritas est aedaequatio intellectus ad rem* (118). The human understanding can conform to the idea of a thing as it is conceived in the mind of God only through propositions which accomplish the adequation of thought to the thing.
This notion of truth as correctness has its ground, therefore, in the divine conception. But because of the epistemological problems such a grounding poses, God has been replaced by a “world-order” or “worldly reason [Weltvernunft]” (119). Surrendered thus to a world-order, correctness becomes an “immediately intelligible” standard: “That the essence of prepositional truth consists in the correctness of statements needs no further special proof” (119). In this light, untruth, or the incorrectness of statements, is merely the obvious opposite of truth and can thus be left out of discussion. But Heidegger, of course, is not satisfied by what is here taken to be obvious and goes on to inquire into the conditions which render such correctness possible. Further, he will not accept the status of untruth as something irrelevant to the essence of truth but ultimately what is most essential.

In accordance, some relationship is posited. To explore this relationship, Heidegger first uses an example of two five-mark coins. When juxtaposed, we may say they are alike, they agree or correspond to one another in material likeness. When we make the statement, “This coin is round,” we understand the immaterial statement to be in accord with the material coin; but, Heidegger asks, “how is the statement able to correspond to something else, the thing?” (120-121). The statement places the thing before consciousness; it presents and holds an object before us (and thus opposed to us) as the object it is in some way. A judgment, here in the form of a statement, can only come into accord with its object if an object is first present to us as standing forth to us who are always out there in the world. Thus, it may be said that the object appears to us in “an open region” (121). The object as standing there opposed to us must traverse the open region toward us. Yet, in coming across the clearing (the open region), it must
maintain its opposed stance in order to remain an object. But the possibility of an object appearing to us in the clearing manifests some relation between the thing and consciousness. Thus the traversing is accomplished in an act of relating, the "bearing" (Verhältnis) (121). The way in which this bearing takes place is called comportment (Verhalten). If we are to experience an object we must bear an open stance so that it may show itself; this open stance, this way of open relating is comportment. Comportment itself can take place ontically in a variety of ways—working, viewing, using, or any way in which the human deals with entities. But comportment is only possible when it "adheres to something opened up as such" (122). That is, something must be manifest in the open, opened up. As manifest in the open, a thing is present for us to stand over there with it. Only if some entity is opened up, present, within the open can there be any kind of comportment, any way of relating at all. Only because entities stand, showing themselves within the open can they thus be capable of being said. Thus, a presentative statement is conditioned by an entity first showing itself within the open and through the "openness of comportment" (122). The statement, "this coin is round" is first made possible by an open comportment which lets the coin show itself within the open in such a way that the statement conforms to the thing present. Hence, "speech that directs itself accordingly is correct (true)" (122). Truth as correctness is thus made possible by the open comportment.

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2 The Open is an especially crucial term in Heidegger's writings. The Open, for Heidegger throughout his writings, is that space of light and shadow, clarity and darkness upon which every entity—and indeed Being itself—shows itself and which is opened up only by the way that we as humans (Dasein) stand out there in the world of entities and allow them to show themselves within that clearing created by our standing out over there in their midst.

3 Comportment includes all ways of relating, and thus may be thinking, imagining, viewing, manipulating, working, and even, as we will see, mere letting-be.
But this open comportment must itself be made possible only by our “being free for what is opened up in an open region” (123). Truth as accordance presupposes a freedom for what is opened up within the open, a freedom prior to any utterance about an entity. This openness toward the entities in the open is called freedom. “The essence of truth is freedom,” thinks Heidegger (123). But freedom is not ordinarily thought to be the ground of truth: “in the concept of freedom we do not think truth, and certainly not at all its essence” (123). Precisely. For, ordinarily, especially in contemporary culture, we have come to associate freedom with the freedom to choose among many possibilities or many possible truths. In this light, the essence of truth would amount to the liberty of the individual subject gradually amassing a composite system of truths from all the possible truths the world has to offer, just as a market shopper freely selects only the choicest meats for the larder. The freedom Heidegger is here indicating, however, is not the subjective freedom of the ‘I’ manifest as decision and choice; truth is not surrendered unto human caprice.

Freedom is the ground of the possibility of accordance only because it in turn receives its ground “from the more original essence of uniquely essential truth” (125). If freedom is not here regarded as a human possession, then the essence of the human must be reconsidered so that we may undergo a change in our way of thinking about freedom and truth. We have said that freedom is an open comportment toward that which is opened up within the Open (das Offene). Such an open comportment thus lets the entity opened up be what it is: “Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be” (125). But letting-be is not to be taken in a pejorative sense of “letting it alone, or renouncing it, of indifference and even neglect” (125). We may ordinarily speak of letting something be in
the sense of letting it go, of having no more to do with it. However, to let be here indicates a positive relating (open comportment) in the sense of an engagement with the open and thus with what is opened up in a way which lets the previously opened up being be as it is. This engagement is thus not a manipulative one, but one in which we respectfully withdraw in reticence before what is opened up. If a flower, blossoming before us, is to be engaged in a way that lets it be, we must not assume the behavior of a botanist—taking tissue samples from it for microscopic examination, classifying it, and in general thematizing it, as legitimate and even necessary as this might be at some point in the process of objectifying and studying the flower. Similarly, one would not normally lay hands upon a Seurat and scrutinize its individual dots of pigment to appreciate its effect, but stand back and submit to wonder. This letting be means that although we do not encroach upon the opened being, yet we have much to do with it. “To let be” here means “to let beings be as the beings which they are . . . to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand” (125). Freedom thus places the human (Dasein) ‘in the clearing’, in the open, where all entities show themselves. Hence, Dasein engages beings which have been freed within the open region only insofar as Dasein engages the open region itself. Freedom here means being free for what is freed in the open region; it is exposure to what is disclosed.

This open region was first conceived as ta aletheia or aletheia which can be translated as “truth” (125). However, Heidegger opts for a more literal and essential translation of aletheia as “unconcealment” (125). Aletheia as unconcealment allows a way to think “back to that still uncomprehended disclosedness and disclosure of beings” (125). Thus letting-be is an engagement which allows all comportment toward what is
opened up within the Open and thus points to the engagement or exposure to the Open itself. That is, letting-be is freedom which permits the exposure of comporting Dasein to what is unconcealed: “the essence of freedom manifests itself as exposure to the disclosedness of beings” (126). Dasein, by its very constitution is the being who, in its standing-out over there in the Open, is thus open or exposed (aussetzend) to the beings which show themselves within the Open. Dasein ek-sists, and is thus engaged with the disclosure or unconcealment of beings, engaged with the openness of the Open—which is its “there” (126). Dasein’s open stance with regard to beings indicates that Dasein itself is the being who frees, discloses, or illumines beings from concealment and renders them manifest in the Open by virtue of its ek-sistent constitution.

The notion of freedom has thus far been used in an ambiguous manner. But this is not the result of imprecise writing on Heidegger’s part, for freedom has here a twofold meaning. Freedom refers both to Dasein and to that with which Dasein stands out, what is present in its “there”—beings. We have seen that the inner possibility of truth as accordance is freedom. Considering that freedom has a dual nature, we can now understand this more clearly to mean: (1) that some being(s) must be freed in the sense of having been liberated from concealment and thus present in the Open; and (2) that, more fundamentally, freedom must so fully characterize the Being of Dasein (to the extent that it can be said that “freedom, ek-sistent, disclosive Da-sein, possesses man”) that Dasein is

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4 At this point in the essay, Heidegger, in revealing the hidden ground of truth as accordance, emphasizes Dasein’s exposure to what is unconcealed, to what is freed by Dasein’s ek-sistence. However, both in the latter sections of the present essay and in later writings, we will come to see that exposure to the disclosedness of beings is only possible by a more primordial exposure to the Open itself, to Being itself rather than to beings.

5 This exposure to the Open will soon be formulated by Heidegger as Dasein’s “attunement” to being as a whole, an attunement which makes possible the engagement with particular entities.
free for what is unconcealed in the sense of letting what has been freed be (127). In letting-be, Dasein thus accomplishes the freeing of entities in the first sense of freedom. Dasein's ek-sistent nature, as standing out in the Open, reveals beings. Dasein is fundamentally the freeing creature.

Dasein is engaged with the disclosure of beings as such. But this engagement points beyond itself, and so beneath itself in the sense of indicating a more primordial ground, to the relation Dasein always already has with the emergence of the structure of beings as a whole. This "as a whole" must not be thought merely in the sense of the totality of all the entities with which we are familiar. Recalling the themes from Being and Time, we can understand this more basic characteristic of Dasein by considering the worldhood of the world. In our previous analysis, we saw that an entity always emerges as the entity it is only in some greater interrelational context which Heidegger called involvement and significance or the worldhood of the world. This underlying Being-structure provides the backdrop or stage upon which any entity shows itself. Supposing the impossibility of this worldly emergence, entities would not show themselves at all. But what was left undiscussed in our treatment of Being and Time was the temporal dimension of worldhood, and therefore of truth.

The worldhood of the world is always historical. Factual, thrown Dasein ek-sists its possibilities in terms of history, and the entities that show themselves within the open horizon of the world, too, are historical. What we pay attention to or are concerned with (determined by our understanding and Befindlichkeit) allows the interconnected entities of our concern to emerge within the lighted clearing as unconcealed. At the same time, those entities with which we are not concerned fall away into concealment and remain hidden so
long as our attention does not encounter them. But clearly those factors which influence which entities we are concerned with are themselves in relation to an historical framework. All human existence takes place on the inexorable backdrop of time. Upon this permanent stage, entities emerge as interconnected, and by this involvement, they are invested with meaning. Thus, as connections are made and changed, the whole structure of involvement is thus altered, and in this way the very meaning of the entities themselves shifts.

To bring the implications of this historical dimension into view, we must consider some examples which show that the worldhood of the world manifests itself in its matrix of interrelations, that this structure influences to some degree which entities show themselves and which remain hidden, and that this worldhood reveals how those entities present for our possible concern show themselves. The way in which Aristotle, for example, was attuned to the world and how the worldhood of the world was disclosed to him are very different from contemporary science's stance toward the world. For Aristotle, things were composed of the four elements and behaved accordingly—earthy things, for example, possessed a natural tendency downward in order to come to rest at the lowest of the four elemental strata. Concealed to him, or not-yet-unconcealed to him, was a worldhood disclosed in terms of gravity, the periodic table, and subatomic theory. Considered another way, in the Open for the ancient Greeks stood the gods, and the world was disclosed with reference to them. Many phenomena were explained by the workings of the gods. Fear of their wrath drove morality. In present times, these gods stand in the Open, but in a much different way. Most of us do not fear being struck down by an arrow of Apollo or a thunderbolt from Zeus. These gods are unconcealed to us as mythos, of
beliefs long since cast off for new ones, for Christ or Allah. Concealed to us is the guiding force of this Olympian host. The Oracle at Delphi is no longer a voice speaking out of the belly of the earth to give ambiguous clarity to a human, but a voice to attract tourists.

Entities show themselves as the entities they are according to the historical Being structure of the world. Possibilities are unconcealed in terms of Dasein's historical thrownness. As thrown into the twentieth century, we are freed for possibilities. But the way in which we take up our past and project ourselves into the future is also restricted by the very same fact which frees us. The Miniver Cheevy of Edwin Arlington Robinson's poem finds himself sadly bound to an epoch which limits him and the possibilities he desires: born too late, he can only dream of Thebes and Camelot, he can only miss the medieval grace of iron clothing, musing on these possibilities past while he keeps on drinking. Finally, if we consider more general examples such as the notions of pain and suffering, sexuality, servitude, insanity, punishment and so on, we see that the way in which they are viewed in the twentieth century is dramatically different from the way in which they were taken up in the lives of women and men in earlier historical epochs. The differences are perhaps even more visible on a cultural level: cultures coexisting in the same epoch live these elements of the human experience in radically different ways, indicating that the worldhood of the world constitutes the meaning of the entities of human concern.

Dasein thus ek-sists its possibilities in terms of historical worldhood, and, as characterized by freedom in the sense of letting beings be, is exposed to the disclosure of beings, to the unconcealment of what is present in the Open. Truth is thus the historical unconcealment of entities and possibilities within the framework of Dasein's worldhood.
As ek-sistent, Dasein is free for what is unconcealed and lets what is thus disclosed be as it is. But we have yet to discuss what Heidegger has already indicated to be most essential in understanding the primordial notion of truth—untruth:

[B]ecause 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. (127)

By “nonessence” Heidegger does not mean what is irrelevant to the essence of truth. Rather, truth and untruth belong together, and only by considering untruth in such a way is a glimpse of the full essence of truth possible. Just as truth does not arise from the human, so, too, the nonessence of truth does not arise “from mere human incapacity and negligence,” equating to the incorrectness of judgments. If truth is freedom as standing in the openness of what is, truth is always in relation to what is not in the open, with what is hidden or concealed. Fundamentally characteristic of untruth, then, is not incorrectness or even deception, but concealment. Out of concealment arises the freeing of what is on the historical background of beings as a whole.

In moving to discuss concealment, we must bring into view more sharply what we have already discussed and indicate how Heidegger will treat the complex notion of untruth. The essence of truth is freedom in the sense of letting beings be, revealing them as the beings they are—this is unconcealment. The essence of freedom is thus ek-sistence; that is, Dasein’s constitution is such that it stands outside itself exposed to the Open, but always does so by an open comportment toward that which is revealed within the open, to beings as such. It must also be kept in mind that this orientation toward the Open, this
attunement to the emergence of beings and to being as a whole first grants the possibility of any entity to show itself within the Open. In our comportment to this or that readily available entity, in letting-be entities present in the Open and thus unconcealed, there also remains what is not let-be, or that which remains in concealment—namely, those beings which we are not letting-be, and, especially, beings as a whole itself. But this very fact that beings as a whole lies in concealment is itself veiled and, in general, a victim of forgottenness. Heidegger will call this forgetting the concealment of concealing "the mystery," and this mystery is one way in which the question of untruth can be answered. He will go on to discuss untruth in another way: as errancy. Together, the mystery and errancy make up the full non-essence of truth. Unconcealment and concealment in this dual sense of mystery and errancy, then, constitute the full essence of truth toward which Heidegger is working.

By virtue of Dasein's ek-sistence, Dasein enters into comportment with that which is open, illuminating or revealing it as it is. But this revealing ek-sistence is not limited to the particular comportment which, at any given moment, Dasein may take up in its daily dealings with the world. For, it must be remembered from our treatment of Being and Time that Dasein is the being who is thrown among beings and, as standing out in their midst, accomplishes the manifestation of beings and, at the same time, renders the disclosure of itself as well. In every particular comportment there is thus always already an attunement (Gestimmtheit)⁶ to beings as a whole (128). This attunement is not to be understood as simply having some emotional feeling for the world. As Heidegger

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⁶ Die Gestimmtheit (Stimmung) indicates both the kind of attunement that is produced by the tuning of a musical instrument, and the kind of attunement that characterizes Dasein's mood or disposition. (cf. Being and Time § 29.)
explained in *Being and Time*, attunement refers to Dasein’s total Being-in, which can be described in terms of mood, understanding, and discourse. Attunement denotes Dasein’s ontological standing out in the world, “i.e., ek-sistent exposedness to beings as a whole” (129). As exposed to beings as a whole, to a historical worldhood, Dasein is brought into accord with beings as interconnected.

This attunement, however, is only an intimation of Dasein’s ontological orientation. Ontically, in Dasein’s everyday dealings with the world, as we have said, this attunement remains vague and only indirectly taken up in Dasein’s awareness, if at all. Primarily and for the most part, Dasein’s modes of comporting are directed to this or that entity and thus occupied with and lost in the particular entities of its concernful dealings. The more Dasein is engaged with the particular, the more beings as a whole withdraws into obscurity and is forgotten:

Precisely because letting be always lets beings be in a particular comportment 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 Dasein a concealing of beings as a whole appropriates [ereignet sich]. Here there is concealment. (129-130)

This concealing, this non-revealing of beings as a whole, pervades all letting-be, all disclosure to such an extent that Heidegger can say that concealment *is*. Concealment and unconcealment, hiddenness and revealment, closedness and disclosedness—they belong together. Hence, if truth is unconcealment, untruth must be concealment. Although untruth seems to be the mere negation of truth, yet Heidegger thinks that untruth as
undisclosedness “is most proper to the essence of truth,” and so warrants a deeper understanding.

Since that which is revealed must have been brought to revelation from concealment, it stands that concealment is ontologically prior to unconcealment. Hence, the letting-be which illuminates and so discloses entities must take place within a horizon of obscurity, as a flashlight renders an illumined clearing within the encompassing darkness of the night, or as a spotlight allows an actor to stand in visual relief while the rest of the stage remains veiled and de-emphasized for good reason. Heidegger investigates concealment further:

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. (130)

That is, the very fact that the letting-be which at the same time reveals and leaves the remainder of beings as a whole concealed is itself concealed. When one reads a novel, for example, the narrative and its world are let be manifest, but the rest of the totality of beings remains concealed. But this fact is itself forgotten, for we do not think of what is concealed when we are fascinated by the unconcealed. Hence we may speak of a concealing of concealment, or what Heidegger has called “the mystery.” This mystery denotes the primordial obscurity which veils the very ek-sistence of Dasein; it conceals Being-there in general. Dasein, as ek-sistence, preserves this primal mystery and so “conserves the first and broadest undisclosedness, untruth proper” (130). Mystery then is
the proper nonessence of truth. But we must not think of nonessence in the sense of being inferior or irrelevant to the essence of truth. Rather, nonessence "remains always in its own way essential to the essence" (130-131).

The mystery which is preserved by Dasein is also forgotten. The human stands out in the world in such a way that its focus is turned to what lies readily before it, to the entities of its activities and concerns, its plans and projects. In so doing, Dasein is often absorbed and fascinated by the entities of the world with which it has to do:

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. (131)

Dasein holds fast to its everyday pre-occupations with the readily familiar and so forgets the mystery. But the mystery forgotten does not then dissolve; rather, it takes on "a peculiar presence [Gegenwart]" (132). The mystery abides and leaves man "in the sphere of what is readily available to him, leaves him to his own resources" (132). Humanity thus constantly refashions its "world" out of its most recent intentions and needs, fleshing out the world with designs and projects. On the basis of this ever reconstituted world, the human "continually supplies [itself] with new standards, yet without considering either the ground for taking up standards of the essence of what gives the standard" (132). Dasein
has come to take, for example, the 'truth' of its judgments as one such measure, a measure which rests on hitherto unconsidered ground. In clinging to the familiar, the mystery slips into forgottenness.

To be sure, Dasein ek-sists, standing out there in the open of beings as a whole; but at the same time and by virtue of its ek-sistence, Dasein has this propensity to hold fast to particular, readily available beings which Heidegger calls "insistence." The forgetfulness of the mystery is itself perpetuated by Dasein's ontological entrenchment in insistence: "As ek-sistent, Dasein is insistent" (132). Dasein thus turns toward what is readily available and so away from the mystery: "[Dasein'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" (133). The human errs because to ek-sist means to stand out, but Dasein must always stand out with something (insistence).

The forgetting of the mystery can now be thought in terms of errancy: "The concealing of the concealed being as a whole holds sway in that disclosure of specific beings, which, as forgetfulness of concealment, becomes errancy" (133). Errancy is thus the primordial negation, the "essential counter-essence" to the essence of truth (133). The human, moving hither and thither among readily available beings, moves thus in forgetfulness of the mystery—towards which, nevertheless, it has an ontological orientation or attunement—and thus is always caught in errancy. The human errs not merely in the sense of occasionally falling into error, of making some mistakes. Rather, the human is "always astray" because of its ek-sistent and thus in-sistent nature. Dasein always stands out with some specific entity. All the ways in which we stand out in the world have their modes of errancy, and the traditional notion of error as the incorrectness
of judgments “is only one mode of erring and, moreover, the most superficial one” (134).

The domain of errance “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” (133).

Dasein, as in-sistent ek-sistence, walks in errancy. Errancy dominates Dasein in that it always leads it astray. Dasein, as we have seen from Being and Time is possibility. But this means that everyday Dasein is engaged in some specific possibilities, leaving others closed off. As such, errancy which leads us one way or another “oppresses” Dasein and leaves him subjected to the mystery.

Heidegger provides an excellent summary paragraph:

The disclosure of beings as such is simultaneously and intrinsically 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. (134).

The notion of truth as the process of concealment/unconcealment not only grounds the traditional notion of truth as correctness, but characterizes Heidegger’s understanding of Being as the process of coming to presence. With this understanding, we can move to consider language as it is thought in “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry.”
Part III: Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry

"Let us attempt to regain the unimpaired strength of language and words; for words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are."

—Heidegger

We make our way to language by considering Heidegger’s essay “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry.” But have we not just said that language itself is our aim? Why then the detour through poetry, a mere mode in which language can be expressed?

Moreover, “Poetry is either rejected as a frivolous mooning and vaporizing into the unknown, and a flight into dreamland, or is counted as a part of literature” (PLT “Poetically Man Dwells . . .” 213). To heed what seems a mere playing with words, a preoccupation with aestheticizing is surely a poor path to the essence of language. Yet, again, we must take care to be deaf to the voice of common opinion on such matters as poetry. Poetry, for Heidegger, is nothing like whimsical, imagined musings and toying with words. And, we must not restrict our understanding of poetry to “poesy”—poetry in the narrow sense of what poets write. Heidegger will consider poetry’s etymological meaning—“to make”—and thus usher in a very broad sense of “poetry” as original saying of the unconcealment of beings (BW “Letter on Humanism” 198). This way of thinking about poetry springs from the understanding of Dasein and truth which we have tried to
secure. But much of this distilled statement remains in darkness and will need to be developed. Indeed, the Heidegger of *Being and Time* had very little to say about the essence of language. Although ineffable then, Heidegger’s strides in the domain of essential language made by his later writings (which engage poets such as Hölderlin, Rilke, Trakl, and George) bring the essence of language within his reach, and if we are followers of his steps, within ours.

We say that by this investigation, language may come within our reach. However, we are not seeking a universal concept of language—nor poetry; we do not wish to get anywhere by pinning down language in a generally useful way. We would only like to come within the realm of language and, as Heidegger will say, undergo an experience with language. We must undergo an experience with language, for language is difficult to bring into view:

 Yet at whatever time and in whatever way we speak a language, language itself never has the floor. Any number of things are given voice in speaking, above all what we are speaking about: a set of facts, an occurrence, a question, a matter of concern. Only because in everyday speaking language does not bring itself to language but holds back, are we able simply to go ahead and speak a language . . . . (OL 59).

Moreover, this experience we wish to undergo requires that we leave off what notions of language we already hold to. These conceptions, however, have fused themselves with our way of thinking, and have done so since Aristotle wrote about language in his text *De Interpretatione*. Nevertheless, we must approach Heidegger’s essay openly to be brought within the sway of language’s essence.
We recall from the previous section that by “essence” of poetry, Heidegger is not trying to bring about the universal concept of poetry which holds for and applies to every particular. This universal is “always the indifferent, that essence which can never become essential” (271). He is in search of the essential essence, and this will be glimpsed in the heart of the text itself. Moreover, Heidegger has chosen Hölderlin, seemingly one poet among many, to situate the essence of poetry rather than poets such as Homer, Shakespeare, or Goethe, in whose work the essence of poetry is realized, “and more richly even” (270). Hölderlin alone has been chosen because his poetry “was borne on by the poetic vocation to write expressly of the essence of poetry” making him “in a pre-eminent sense the poet of the poet” (271).

Heidegger, rather than undertaking an analysis of Hölderlin’s entire poetic corpus, poem by poem, selects “only five pointers” from Hölderlin’s writings which point the way to a disclosure of poetry’s essential essence:

1. Writing poetry: “That most innocent of all occupations.”

2. “Therefore has language, most dangerous of possessions, been given to man . . . so that he may affirm what he is . . . .”

3. “Much has man learnt. Many of the heavenly ones has he named, / Since we have been a conversation / And able to hear from one another.”

4. “But that which remains is established by the poets.”

5. “Full of merit, and yet poetically, dwells man on this earth.”
Pointer One at first dissimulates its real import, which will emerge only after discussing Pointer Two. For now, we must allow its dissembling. Of all activities, poetry is the most innocent. Its innocence lies in its remoteness from the ‘real’: “it appears in the modest guise of play” (272). As play which roams about and keeps to itself in the realm of imagination, it thus avoids the “seriousness of decisions,” the “seriousness of action” (272) Like children frolicking at a distance from the barbed fences of the factory, poets and their harmless speech seem ineffectual, beyond the domain of harsh reality. But poetry thought in this way does not approach its essence. Nevertheless, poetry must be sought in the realm of language (Sprache), out of which even “innocent” works are created, and so we turn to Pointer Two.

Pointer Two offers language as the “most dangerous of possessions” in opposition to what was just proposed: language as provider for the most innocent of all occupations. Heidegger will come to reconcile the conflict here by first addressing some preliminary questions: “1. Whose possession is language? 2. To what extent is it the most dangerous of possessions? 3. In what sense is it really a possession?” (273-274). Heidegger works out these questions by considering a sketch by Hölderlin, in which the poet describes who man is, as distinct from other natural beings. The sketch gives rise to these thoughts:

And who then is man? He who must affirm what he is. To affirm means to declare; but at the same time it means: to give in the declaration a guarantee of what is declared. Man is he who he is, precisely in the affirmation of his own existence. (274)
The human is the only being for whom Being is an issue and is unique in its self-affirmation. In affirming, the human comes into its own. The sketch goes on to say that what the human affirms is its belonging to the earth. We belong to the earth as heirs and learner of all things, things which are in conflict. To be heir and learner thus means to belong in such a way that the human holds together and yet simultaneously keeps things apart in opposition, a belonging which Holderlin calls “intimacy” (274). This intimacy (not only reminiscent of the Heraclitean “strife” but also of the distance which remains as Dasein stands out over with any entity or projects its understanding upon any possibility) shows itself as a world in the sense that Heidegger described in Being and Time. The world is the interconnectedness of all things, at once bound together and held apart. Thus the human belongs to the earth as intimacy, and its self-affirmation of belonging consists in “the creation of a world and its ascent, and likewise through the destruction of a world and its decline” (274).

To speak of the generation and corruption of worlds should not strike us as surprising; for, recalling what was seen in the previous sections, a world is historical in terms of what is open and unsealed and also in terms of the involvement (what connections and relations) that-which-is-open has as part of the significant world. The ancient Greek world, its mythos and ethos, its practices and customs, has long since declined, preserved now only through texts and ruins which are inauthentic in that they have an involvement in the present world radically different from the time from which they sprung. The significance or meaningfulness has shifted, and this shift is no less than the creation of a new world and the destruction of previous worlds. Giving rise to worlds and holding them together, made actual as history, however, can only occur through language:
“In order that history may be possible, language has been given to man. It is one of man’s possessions” (275).

Language is the most dangerous of possessions because “it creates the initially the possibility of a danger” (275). “Danger” here means “the threat to existence from what is existent”—namely, beings (275). This implies that only through language is Dasein first exposed to beings, that language makes things manifest. So that we may understand how language makes beings first manifest, we will need to leap ahead to the crucial element of “naming” discussed in Pointer Four.

The act of naming, Heidegger says, is not encapsulated in its essence by the notion of providing some already known thing with a name. Naming “does not hand out titles, it does not apply terms, but it calls into the word” (PLT “Sprache” 198). When naming occurs, the “essential word” is spoken, and this calls what is thus named to be present, manifest as what it is (EB 281). The word establishes being as beings. But naming does not fish things up out of obscurity by speaking arbitrary words. It bids and invites what was hitherto un-called, unnamed, into the “nearness” of presence (PLT 199). For something to be near as present does not mean that it be spatially close or ‘right here before me.’ Things named are present in the name though they be “sheltered in absence” (199). Being and Time led us to see that everything comes to us as languaged, already articulated. Naming brings what is articulated into word for the first time, establishing it as the being it is: “Language has the task of making manifest in its work the existent, and of preserving it as such” (EB 275).

Through words, then, beings are brought to presence and preserved. Where there are beings, there is danger. Language thus creates the possibility for danger. Language is
the most dangerous of possessions. The final preliminary question, however, remains: 

“In what sense is it really a possession” (274). The question gives rise to a common answer: language is one of the human’s possessions because it is at its disposal for communicating experiences and feelings, to give information. We have already seen Heidegger’s objection in the epigram above, which he now restates: “But the essence of language does not consist entirely in being a means of giving information” (276). Indeed, language can be seen as a tool for communicating, but this only indicates its effect. We are interested in the essential essence of language. We near this essence when we understand that “it is only language that affords the very possibility of standing in the openness of the existent. Only where there is language, is there world. . . . Only where world predominates is there history” (276). World shows itself through language, and by the event of language, Dasein can ek-sist. It remains to be seen, however, what makes language happen as a genuine event (Ereignis). Heidegger moves to investigate Pointer Three to bring into view how language becomes actual.

In Pointer Three, Hölderlin says: “Much has man learnt. Many of the heavenly ones has he named, / Since we have been a conversation / And have been able to hear from one another.” Carefully heeding the poet’s language, we see that the fragment says “We—[hu]mankind—are a conversation” (277). Language, as Sprache, is the ground of human ek-sistence, but it must become actual, and this happens in conversation (Gespräch) (277). Conversation, the actualization of language, is a difficult term which includes but also goes beyond the human faculty of speech and its exercise with others about something. Certainly, conversation in this narrow sense points to the kind of conversation which the author and the poet have in mind here, and we will do well to
consider an example. Two people engaged in conversation about events unfolding somewhere in the world—the rise of Jewish settlements in Palestine, for example—are brought together by being able to hear one another. The world as languaged is understood by these interlocutors, and they are united through what is common, on which they can agree. The same world is here agreed upon even if the interlocutors ‘disagree’ about the ethical issues involved with the Jewish settlements. To some degree, ‘having a homeland’, ‘Jew’, ‘Palestinian’, ‘settlement’, and so on are languaged notions already understood and shared. The world and is worldhood, interpreted and therefore languaged, unite the interlocutors, making any exchange of information and opinion possible.

More fundamentally, conversation itself is what is agreed upon, and, as such, provides the unity which supports ek-sistence. This unity indicates, as Hölderlin mentions, that we as humans are a single conversation and have been so in the sense that we always already are conversation. That Dasein understands and interprets the world with which it stands out—this shows how humankind is a conversation. This unity of conversation requires permanence, for only where there is some permanence can there be the event of conversation,

Yet permanence and perpetuity only appear when what persists and is present begins to shine. But this happens in the moment when time opens out and extends. After man has placed himself in the presence of something perpetual, then only can he expose himself to the changeable, to that which comes and goes; for only the persistent is changeable. (278-279)

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1 Hearing is not an accident of speaking, as we saw briefly in Being and Time: “The ability to speak and
We have already seen what allows the illumination of what is present and persistent—original naming. But what is made mention of here is not something merely present and preserved; this naming occurs when time first opens out, when what is perpetual is named. When permanence is named or ‘brought to light’, only then can anything be seen as transient and changeable. Time, then is both the transient, ever shifting, and the permanent. Only within the permanent can change be experienced. Heidegger, gathers what has just been discussed: “Both—existence as a single conversation and historical existence—are alike ancient, they belong together and are the same thing” (279).

The actualization of language as conversation means that the world has been brought to words, and that the gods have been named, “But again it should be noticed: the presence of the gods and the appearance of the world are not merely a consequence of the actualisation of language, they are contemporaneous with it” (279). These gods of which Heidegger and Hölderlin speak are not specific to any one religion, though the Olympian pantheon is perhaps the best example of what is indicated here. If we think of religion in its most basic sense, as that which binds (from the root ‘lig’ which means “to tie, to bind”) an historical people to the beyond, to what is eternal, in light of which mortality is understood, then this beyond can be called “gods.” Gods are actual in history as the God of Abraham, Zeus, Shiva, Allah, the Great Spirit, and the like. These gods claim us, and thus “the word which names the gods is always a response to such a claim” (279). The gods claim us in the sense of destiny to which we respond or for which we take responsibility. Once we understand that we have been thrown as possibility, we project ourselves upon our possibilities and pursue those possibilities by entering into the realm of

the ability to hear are equally fundamental” (EB 278).
decision. The possibilities we pursue, the fundamental decisions we make, are gauged by the gods and our responsibility for our destiny.

We can now understand more clearly Hölderlin's fragment: "Since the gods have led us into conversation, since time has been time, ever since then the basis of our existence has been a conversation" (281). The claim of the gods has initiated our primal response. Yet we must now ask, "[H]ow does this conversation, which we are, begin? Who accomplishes this naming of the gods?" (280). This we discover by considering Pointer Four.

Hölderlin writes, "But that which remains, is established by the poets" (280). This shows that poetry is the establishing of what remains by the word. We also understand that the permanent is what is established by the poet. To establish the permanent seems at first paradoxical:

Is [the permanent] not that which has always been present? No! Even the permanent must be fixed so that it will not be carried away, the simple must be wrested from confusion, proportion must be set before what lacks proportion. That which supports and dominates the existent in its entirety must become manifest. Being must be opened out so that the existent may appear. (281)

So that any utterance of the 'is' may occur with regard to any entity, Being, which underlies any entity in its totality and allows it to appear, must itself be established by and in the word, which opens it out into the realm of time (time which is permanent yet transitory). On a much smaller scale, we can think of an everyday situation: we want to explain something to someone but we find that the word escapes us; what we are trying to
explain thus slips away from us and also from any possible utterance so long as the word is fugitive or withholds itself. Likewise, the permanent itself would remain absent if not first established.

We have already discussed that the permanent, that which remains, is established only through naming. Now we may secure this in relation to the poet: “Poetry is the establishing of being by means of the word” (281). Being is not something established from beings (for, Being itself, we recall, is never a being). Rather this establishing is an allowing which lets some entity come into presence or come into the open for the first time. We must not be led to think that poetry “creates” Being, as if Being was not itself before the poets spoke. If we may continue to think of Being as the process of coming to presence (presencing), then poets do not establish this presencing or emergence itself, rather, they establish the foundation or Being-structure against which any entity must show itself. The worldhood of the world, meaningfulness, is allowed to come to presence (just as in our previous section, the human is free to let be an entity, which amounts to the disclosure of that entity as it is). Through the original naming of poets, the gods and the world are brought from concealment into the open of unconcealment. Upon this foundation, Dasein is freed for its ek-sistence.

Although Heidegger and Hölderlin speak of naming the gods, we may also witness this original naming in the poetry of Wordsworth, Whitman, or Dickinson. These poets did not name the gods as such, but their poetry was original nonetheless, for they each brought to light interconnections (and thus that which constitutes the worldhood of the world) which had previously remained in concealment. Wordsworth established or allowed a re-birth of the natural world and its involvement to come to light. Nature
showed itself in a new light on the basis of his naming and establishing. Whitman established and celebrated the beauty of the common, the value of a diverse America, the richness of a democratic nation because of its diversity, and respect for the unadorned human body and sexuality. Dickinson brought into unconcealment a sense of threat to what is precious, thereby establishing also more firmly the preciousness of what was taken for granted or almost forgotten.

Thinking of poetry as establishing being through and in the word allows us to understand Hölderlin’s final pointer: “Full of merit, and yet poetically, dwells / Man on this earth” (282). By “Full of merit” we can understand that the human’s achievements and endeavors are “earned and deserved” (282). But the fruits of meritorious work are not enough to bring the human to “dwell” on the earth. Dwelling poetically, which refers to the “foundation of human existence,” means to stand before the gods among entities.

Dasein’s ek-sistence, then, is fundamentally “poetical” in that it is established by poetic naming of being. We cannot, therefore, think of poetry as a harmless play, ineffectual and evasive of the seriousness borne by decision and action, as Heidegger interpreted the way in which we think of “innocence” in Pointer One. Heidegger offers a helpful summary of what he has said thus far in an attempt to reconcile poetry’s innocence with the essence he has just been unfolding:

First of all it appeared that the field of action of poetry is language. Hence the essence of poetry must be understood through the essence of language.

Afterwards it became clear that poetry is the inaugural naming of being and of the essence of all things—not just any speech, but that particular kind which for the first time brings into the open all that which we then discuss
and deal with in everyday language. Hence poetry never takes language as
a raw material ready to hand, rather it is poetry which first makes language
possible. Poetry is the primitive language of a historical people.
Therefore, in just the reverse manner, the essence of poetry must be
understood through the essence of poetry. (283-284)

Poetry allows the conversation, which we as humans are and have been, to begin, or to
begin anew. Poetry is the original language which establishes the gods and brings the
interconnectedness of beings, as well as beings themselves, into the open.

Poetry is dangerous, creating the possibility of all danger by bringing Being to
word; yet it is the most innocent of all occupations in that poetry is cast off as harmless
word play (which, however, has enabled poetry to remain in spite of its true gravity). The
innocent visage of poetry conceals its danger:

Poetry rouses the appearance of the unreal and of dream in the face of the
palpable and clamorous reality, in which we believe ourselves at home.
And yet in just the reverse manner, what the poet says and undertakes to
be, is the real. (286)

Gathering together this dual character, we arrive at a fuller essence of poetry. If the full
essence of poetry is to be understood, we must consider what makes any establishment of
being at all possible, since poets do not simply peer into oblivion and somehow utter
words which, by command, create ex nihilo all that is. The poets, too, heed a directive.

What is the directive, received by the poets, which grants them the office of
establishing world and gods and thus ek-sistence? Heidegger tell us, “the poetic word
only acquires its power of naming, when the gods themselves bring us to language” (287).
The poets are led to naming by receiving the “signs” of the gods (the language of the gods) which are then passed on by word to an historical people. What does it mean to receive signs from the gods?

If we appeal to a later essay by Heidegger entitled “Language,” we hear the author say “language speaks” and that the human responds to its appeal (PLT 190). But how can the interception of the signs of gods be clarified by what seems a more enigmatic proposal? In that essay, Heidegger tells us that language speaks in the sense of a telling silence to which the poet responds by a fundamental saying. Saying, we discover most clearly from “The Nature of Language,” is “to say” which is related to the Old Norse “saga” which means “to show: to make appear, set free, that is, to offer and extend what we call World, lighting and concealing it” (OL 93).

The poet thus responds to the telling silence, receives the signs or language of the gods and says it. The poet can be seen as a herald of Being insofar as the poetic saying is the announcement of the arrival of Being coming to presence through the word. The poet’s original saying founds world, accomplishes the unconcealment of what comes to presence itself by a naming which gathers and draws it near. The poet then does not create Being (as presencing) but receives its grant and thus accomplishes it through the naming word. The signs of the gods are attended to and laid open in the Open as unconcealed by the naming, originating word. In the helpful essay “The Nature of Language” to which we have just referred, Heidegger engages a poem by Stefan George entitled “The Word” which ends with a line that runs: “Where word breaks off no thing may be” (82). This Heidegger interprets to mean where the word is lacking, nothing that
is in any way may be as unconcealed. The poetic word thus establishes Being as beings, accomplishes its presence.

Language can now perhaps be glimpsed in its essential essence as the process of saying (attending to and responding to what is thus heard by naming) through which the process of coming to presence comes to unconcealment. Language is that through which Being comes to unconcealment. Being arrives as beings through the word, through the announcement of the poet: "The word gives Being to beings" (OL 88).
Part IV: Conclusion

The elements of Heidegger’s thought which we have been exposed to in these texts must now be gathered, and by this synthesis we can perhaps render a succinct view of language in terms of Being, Dasein, and truth as *aletheia*. However, our ambitions must be tempered by Heidegger’s own humble and cautious approach to language; in 1959 (many years after the texts we have considered here), Heidegger composed an essay entitled “Language” ("Die Sprache") which gives the caveat:

> We do not wish to assault language in order to force it into the grip of ideas already fixed beforehand. We do not wish to reduce the nature of language to a concept, so that this concept may provide a generally useful view of language that will lay rest to all further notions about it. (PLT 190)

During the same period, Heidegger delivered a series of lectures, entitled “The Essence of Language” ("Das Wesen der Sprache"), in which he clearly states his intentions with regard to language:

> [These lectures] are intended to bring us face to face with the possibility of undergoing an experience with language. To undergo an experience with something—be it a thing, a person, or a god—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of ‘undergoing’ an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we
endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens. (OL 57)

The remarks that follow should be read in light of this counsel.

In our first section on Being and Time, we saw that access to Being could only begin, for Heidegger, with an analysis of the human as ek-sistence (Dasein). We were led to understand the Being of Dasein as Being-in-the-world, a unitary phenomenon which was viewed by emphasizing its constituent elements. Dasein is Being-in in the sense of dwelling alongside, or standing out There with, the world. The world was conceived of primordially as worldhood—that is, in terms of the interconnected Being structure which Heidegger called involvement and significance, or ‘meaningfulness’—upon which, or within which, any entity shows itself. In answer to how Dasein ek-sists as Being-in-the-world, Heidegger offered three equiprimordial existentialia: Befindlichkeit, understanding, and Discourse. Befindlichkeit designates Dasein’s ontological mode of being in terms of ‘feeling’ or general disposition. As ontological, Befindlichkeit always has its ontical counterpart; it is always manifest as some mood. In having a mood, Heidegger claimed, Being is brought to its “there.” Dasein’s mood helps to constitute the disclosure of the There; the world is disclosed according to Dasein’s mood.

Dasein always has some mood, and with it, some understanding of the world and thus itself as Being-in-the-world. The way in which Dasein understands is by projecting itself upon possibilities—Dasein has always already projected itself and got itself into definite possibilities. This projection which is constitutive for understanding enables Dasein; through projection, Dasein has competence over its ek-sistence, or Dasein understands. Dasein is in every case its possibilities—it is a ‘to be’ or a ‘not yet’. In
terms of this understanding, Dasein’s There is disclosed. Understanding, however, is not exhausted by such description: it has the possibility of developing itself in interpretation, which in turn can be further developed in assertion. Interpretation is the development of the understanding in that by it, possibilities are worked out, entities are seen as something—the world as meaning gets articulated. This as constitutes an interpreted entity’s involvement in the Being structure of the world and thus its ultimate relation to Dasein (the term of all relations of involvement as the “for-the-sake-of-which”). Thus, interpretation appropriates or articulates what is understood. Assertion, as a derivative mode of interpretation, points out the articulated meaning by giving it a definite character and communicates what is thus pointed out (or shown). Assertion brings what is already circumspectively understood and interpreted to definite expression.

Discourse, equiprimordial with Befindlichkeit and understanding, grounds the language through which any assertion is possible. Discourse or talk, Heidegger claimed, was the articulation of intelligibility, and thus more primordial that either interpretation or assertion. Hence, discourse is the fundamental articulation of meaning, where meaning is the totality of significations which constitute the worldhood of the world. Discourse thus amounts to putting the world of significations into words: “Discoursing or talking is the way in which we articulate ‘significantly’ the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world” (Being and Time 204).

Although we did not make room in our analysis for the temporal dimension of Being which Heidegger discusses at length in Being and Time, it will suffice to say that what he ultimately claims about Being is: the process of coming to presence, or ‘presencing.’
Having thus understood language in its ontological context, we moved to discuss Heidegger’s understanding of truth as *aletheia*, which he rendered by way of critiquing the traditional notion of truth as correctness. This critique showed much that was tacitly posited in the traditional notion. We saw that correctness presupposes the freedom of Dasein, in the sense of openness or open comportment toward an entity which must be disclosed, revealed or brought to light from concealment. Dasein itself, as ek-sistence, was seen to be this liberating site where beings are brought to un-concealment from concealment. When entities are disclosed or brought to un-concealment, the totality of beings as a whole rests in concealment. But this fact, too, lies concealed, a concealment of concealing which Heidegger called the mystery. Heidegger also showed that Dasein’s ek-sistent nature always brings with it in-sistence, or Being-there with this or that readily available entity. This dual character of standing out Heidegger called errancy. By the end of the analysis, we came to understand the full essence of truth as the process of concealment/unconcealment.

Truth as *aletheia* prepared the way for a grounded consideration of “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry.” By this point, we were familiar with Heidegger’s use of the word “essence” in its verbal, active form, and could anticipate the essence of language not as a universal concept applicable to every instance of language but as a process of some kind. This process was to be worked out in relation to the process of coming to presence (Being) and to the process of concealment/unconcealment (truth). To achieve this understanding, we chose an essay in which Heidegger considers the poetry of Hölderlin (the poet of poets because he wrote expressly on the essence of poetry itself). Immediately, the question arose: What is the relation of poetry to language? To answer
this question, we learned by way of the Five Pointers: (1) that poetry is the most innocent of all occupations in that it appears as a harmless play with words, remaining safely within the bounds of non-violence, for it does not take hold of the real directly and alter it as action does; (2) however, the domain of this innocent work is language, most dangerous of the human’s possessions, which creates any possibility of danger because it establishes beings (and thus establishes the real itself rather than subsequently taking hold and altering it, thus maintaining its own innocence); (3) that we as humans are united as a single conversation insofar as we ek-sist and thus stand out with a common world, making any communication (in the broad sense which we saw in *Being and Time*) possible; (4) that this conversation began by the poetic establishment of the world (as worldhood and interconnected entities), the establishment of the permanent and thus the transitory (time), and the establishment of the gods; (5) that the human dwells poetically on this earth insofar as it stands before the gods which poetry itself establishes—this establishment amounts to the founding of dwelling itself as ek-sisting Being-in-the-world through language.

Language can now be understood as that through which Being comes to unconcealment, as world and as entities. Language answers the “how” of coming to presence (Being), coming to unconcealment (truth). Thus the origination of truth is the process of language as Saying, or showing, which is a laying down as open in the Open. Being comes to beings through the poetic word.
Bibliography


