

Europe and German Philosophy¹

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Something shall here be said, for the moment, about German philosophy and thereby about philosophy in general.

Our historical Dasein experiences with increasing distress and clarity that its future is equivalent to the naked either/or of saving Europe or its destruction. The possibility of saving, however, demands something double: (1) the protection [*Bewahrung*] of the European *Völker* from the Asiatic, (2) the overcoming of their own uprootedness and splintering.

Without this overcoming that protection will not succeed. But in order to be accomplished [*bewältigt*], both demand a transformation of Dasein out of ultimate grounds and according to the highest standards. Such a transforming of historical Dasein can, however, never happen as a blind advance into an indeterminate future, but only as a creative debate with the whole of history until now – its essential forms and epochs.

In view of this task of our historical Dasein, it is no longer enough just to continue the cultivation of mere traditions – however valuable they might be – let alone simply to content oneself with them. But no less disastrous would be the opinion that such a historical transformation shall have been already completed through the creation of new institutions, or even adequately prepared.

Because everything *stands to be decided*: history, nature, the gods and idols, the station of human beings in the midst of beings; and the conditions, laws and standards of their steadfastness. Therefore all essential forces and areas of human industry must be set in motion with equal necessity and originality.

The political act, the work of art, the division of the *Volksordnung*, thought-

1. Lecture at the Kaiser-Wihlem Institute. Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, April 8, 1936. Reprinted in *Europa und die Philosophie*, Martin-Heidegger-Gesellschaft: Schriftenreihe, Band 2 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1993), 31-41. The Editors and Translator wish to thank Vittorio Klostermann Verlag and Dr. Hermann Heidegger for permission to publish this English translation. All notes are Heidegger's, except where indicated by TN.

ful knowing, the inwardness of belief – all this no longer allows itself to be tended to as mere regional tasks of a “culture;” it also no longer allows itself to be merely ordered in a present “culture-system.” This itself has become questionable – even the concept of culture in the sense of a realization of values. This questionability, which has not been experienced until now, does not yet necessarily signify barbarism – on the contrary, out of this questionability, those spheres of Dasein’s activity first create an essentiality that draws them out of the previous framework of mere culture-industry.

Thus something higher is now necessary: in the area of art, for example, it is not only that considerable works of art will continue to be produced, and with due timeliness. Rather it is necessary, first of all, for the work once more to win a new manner for art itself in the whole of futural Dasein, to force time under new standards and to set the truth of things in the work anew, and thereby to make their essence manifest [*offenbar*].²

All essential acting and creating will in each case first have to relate their new position to the whole of Dasein. Essentialities will thereby necessarily come into conflict with essentialities.

And the greatness of an historical Dasein consists in the following: that this conflict between acting and knowing, between work and belief, between knowing and work – that this conflict will not suffocate in equivalence and rash pacification; rather that the conflict will be preserved and endured, that the conflict will be truly waged. For where essentialities really come into conflict with essentialities, only one thing remains: something greater than they themselves shall come to *appearance*.

When a *Volk* accepts to endure this conflict of its essential activities, it engages in readiness for the nearness or distance of its God – and thereby a *Volk* first gets to know *what it is*.

Only through the force of the truth of this knowing does a *Volk* come into the nearness of its origin; from this nearness comes the ground [*Boden*] on which a standing and persisting, a *true autochthony* [*Bodenständigkeit*] is possible. Hölderlin says this:

With difficulty leaves
What dwells near the origin, the place.³

We consider then, *only* slowly and approximately, which expanse and which depth is demanded for our historical Dasein in order to prepare and introduce

2. TN, I have translated cognates of *offenbar* as ‘manifest’ or ‘open’ depending on context. Whenever helpful, I have tried to include the original.

3. Hölderlin, “Die Wanderung,” *Sämtliche Werke*, Edited by N. v. Hellingrath, Bd. IV (München and Leipzig, 1923), 167. TN: my translation.

the great shift of European history.

But what can and should philosophy do here? Already the question seems superfluous if we consider that philosophy has never yet immediately grounded and constructed an historical Dasein. It seems more like a supplement and a superfluousness and at the most like an *obstacle*. But in the end, precisely therein lies its vocation.

What then is philosophy in general? Instead of a forced conceptual delimitation, one that always initially says nothing, the memory of two stories shall be reawakened.

The first is told about the earliest Greek philosopher we know by name: *Thales*. As he wandered contemplatively observing the vault of heaven, he nearly [?] fell into a well. A Thracian girl laughed at him as someone who wanted to investigate the heavens and did not even see what lay immediately before his feet.

Philosophy is that seeking and questioning at which servant girls laugh. And whoever is a real servant girl must have something to laugh at. That is to say: it would be a misunderstanding of philosophy, should one ever want to attempt to make it immediately understandable and to praise it as useful.

And the other story is told of a famous Greek wiseman in the time of Socrates. One called such people ‘sophists’ because they looked like philosophers but were not. One day, one such sophist came back to Athens from a successful speaking tour in Asia Minor and met Socrates there in the street. “So,” he said to Socrates, “you still hanging around in the street and talking the same stuff?” “Of course,” answered Socrates, “that I am. You however, with your continual novelties, are really wholly unable to say the same about the same.

Philosophy is that saying in which the same is always said of the same. And those thinkers who achieve this are the greatest and most essential. That means: the authentic history of philosophy is the history of a very few simple questions. And the apparent haphazard multiplicity of perspectives and change of systems is fundamentally only the simplicity of the singular and the selfsame, accessible to the real thinker.

And now, what is this One and the Same of which philosophy continually speaks in that thoughtful seeking that is never immediately compatible with so-called healthy human understanding? The answer to this question we likewise take from the first great epoch of Western philosophy. There we hear the oldest word that is directly handed down to us from the beginning of Greek philosophy, the word of Anaximander: ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὐσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεών· δίδοναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν.⁴ “But from whence the arising of beings is, to there also happens the decline, as is necessary; for beings ac-

4. Anaximander, Fragment 1. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, translated by H. Diels, edited by W. Kranz, Fifth edition, Berlin 1934.

comply justice [*Fug*] for themselves and reciprocal payment for injustice [*Unfug*] according to the order of time.⁵

What is asked about is that from which beings [*Seiende*] arise, and that to which they return – the ground and abyss of Beyng [*Abgrund des Seyns*].⁶ And it will be said of Beyng that it is thoroughly pervaded [*durchherrcht*] by injustice and justice, that one remains bound up in the other.

The questioning saying of philosophy directs itself toward Beyng, toward the fact that beings are at all and are not nothing. Philosophy emerged and ever again emerges in that moment where this becomes manifest in the stillness of a great wonder: that beings are and a Beyng abides [*wes*]. Beyng is that One and the Same, thanks to which all beings as beings are, that Same of which it is necessary to say, even itself, in its own essence – that which cannot be clarified through comparison with another, because outside it there is no possibility of comparison; so little that even the Nothing, in which Beyng finds its sole limit, itself belongs to Beyng. As itself, Beyng should become manifest from its ownmost ground and brought up into word and into knowing, so that the human being may protect all things in their essence and overcome their non-essence. *Philosophy is the questioning saying of the ground of Beyng as the Beyng of the ground of all things* [*Philosophie ist das fragende Sagen vom Grund des Seyns als dem Seyn des Grundes aller Dinge*].

This indicator of the essence of philosophy with the help of both stories and the oldest word is a remembrance of the beginning of philosophy. Subsequently, no philosophy has ever put this beginning behind it as something that is done with; on the contrary, every new beginning of philosophy *is* and *can* only be a repetition of the first – a questioning of the question, What are beings? – a saying of the truth of Beyng.

If we want to have some idea of the way of German philosophy, therefore, we must know something essential about the first beginning with the Greeks. Here, we understand the Greek beginning as the epoch of philosophy from Anaximander to Aristotle.

5. TN: “The things that are perish into the things out of which they come to be, according to necessity, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time,” Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* 24, in *A Presocratics Reader*, edited by P. Curd, translated by R.D. McKirahan, Jr. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 12.

6. TN: While *Seiende* is translated as either ‘a being’ or ‘beings,’ I have translated *Sein* as ‘Being’ and *Seyn* as ‘Beyng.’ This both retrieves an Old English spelling and leaves an orthographic mark of difference. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists, for example: 1340 Hampole, *Pr. Consc.* 17, “Als God in a [=one] substance and beyng With outen any bygynnyng;” and 1530 *Palsgr.* 197/1, “Beyng, *essence*.” P. Emad and K. Maly use ‘Be-ing,’ *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Bloomington: Indiana, 1999) xxii; and W. Richardson uses ‘Beon,’ *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), 554.

What form did the fundamental question of philosophy, the question of Beyng, take on in this epoch? We easily see: the moment in which something is to be said about what beings are, the *truth* of Beyng also already comes to language, and thereby the essence of truth itself comes into question. The question of truth is intimately tied up with the question of Beyng. In order to grasp this connection however, we must leave aside all later representations and concepts of Beyng and truth – in particular all that which the so-called “theory of knowledge” (a questionable construction of the 19th century) has contrived.

Decisive for understanding the beginning of Greek, and thereby Western philosophy in general, is a secure understanding of the words with which the Greeks name Beyng and truth; for here *naming* is still original coining and figuring, founding of that which is to be named itself.

The fundamental Greek word for Being reads φύσις. We usually translate it with “nature” and furthermore think of this nature as a determinate region of beings investigated by the natural sciences. Even today therefore, one names the first Greek thinkers “natural philosophers.” All this is an error. Then, with the apparent superiority of progress, one grandly excuses them as still very “primitive.” Yet all this about *natural philosophy* as the beginning of Greek philosophy is misunderstanding and error.

φύσις means: arising (like the blossoming of a rose), coming-to-appearance, self-showing, appearing; to appear – as when we say: a book has appeared, *it is there*. As a name of Beyng for the Greeks, φύσις means: standing-there in self-showing. Beings (i.e., *that looming standing-there in itself*, the statues of the Greeks and their temple), bring the Dasein of this *Volk* first to Being, to manifest and binding there-standing; such beings are neither copies nor expressions, but the foundational positing and law of their Being.

φύσις – the essence of Beyng as *self-showing there-standing*. Furthermore, the latest linguistic research has demonstrated that φύσις has the same root as φάος, light, lighting.

Because Being, according to its essence, is lighting there-standing, retreat into concealment therefore belongs to it. From this we understand the word of Heraclitus: φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ; “Being loves to conceal itself.”⁷ That is to say: its manifestness [*Offenbarkeit*] is wrested from it every time and is itself always hard won.

What a being is, what stands in the manifestness of itself, is the true. And what is truth? The Greeks say: ἀλήθεια, unconcealment; for the *beginning* of Greek philosophy, truth belongs to the essence of Beyng. Here truth is not merely (as later, and still today) a characteristic of assertion⁸ and the proposition

7. Heraclitus, Frag. 123 (Themistius, *Orations* 5.69b). TN: *A Presocratics Reader* translates the fragment as “Nature loves to hide,” 34.

8. TN: *Aussagen*, here translated as ‘to assert,’ can also mean: to speak out, ex-press, testify, bear witness, give an account, inform, reveal, predicate.

that the human being asserts and repeats *about* beings, but the fundamental happening of beings themselves, namely, that they come into the opening [*Offenbarkeit*] or are placed into the open; for example, as in art and its work. For art is the putting-into-work of truth, the opening of the essence of things.

How intimately Being and truth (φύσις and ἀλήθεια) are one, for the Greeks, we see from the oppositions in which Greek thinking placed Being from the beginning: *Being and becoming*; *Being and appearance*. Becoming is the non-standing, what in passing loses the standing-in-itself. Insofar as beings come-to-be and pass-away, insofar as they are grasped in change, they shows themselves as always other than they were before; insofar as beings appear so, they makes themselves into insubstantial appearances.

Because Being means self-showing and appearing [*Erscheinen*], seeming [*Schein*], δόξα, belongs to Being. Notice the ambiguity of the word: δόξα means first, the regard [*Ansehen*] in which one stands, that which one *is* in the open of the public [*Offenen der Öffentlichkeit*]; but simultaneously it means the mere *impression* [*Anschein*] that one offers, and accordingly the opinion [*Ansicht*] that another has of him.

All fundamental words for Being and truth, and correspondingly all questioning and saying about them, is thoroughly dominated by this original [*anfänglichen*] essential determination of Being in the sense of appearing-standing-in-itself, which simultaneously *abides as truth*, *unconcealment*.

Soon (and in fact already in the time of the Greeks) this was no longer grasped; hence arose a misinterpretation of the two great pre-Socratic thinkers, Heraclitus and Parmenides, a misinterpretation that is still not overcome today.

It is said that Parmenides teaches Being over and against becoming. But he only speaks of Being as One and the Same because he knows that it is constantly threatened by seeming, and that this belongs to it as its shadow.

It is said that Heraclitus teaches becoming over and against Being. But he only speaks of becoming in order to think it into the One of Being, which is in the essence of λόγος. Here, however, λόγος does not mean reason and speech, as later interpreters claim, but rather *gathering*, the *original gatheredness* of all conflict in One (λέγειν: to glean, to gather-together, wine-harvesting).

If ever two thinkers taught the same thing, *Parmenides* and *Heraclitus* – whom one likes to set out as textbook examples of the division of philosophical opinions – preserve and unfold, still whole, the first beginning of Western thinking.

They think Being together with appearance and becoming together with steadiness, just as already in the oldest word: δίκη and ἀδικία were thought in one. δίκη is justice [*Fug*], the justification [*Fügung*] in the structure [*Gefüge*] of law; ἀδικία, injustice [*Unfug*], stepping out of justice, the opposition of the non-essence of things that is equally as powerful as their essence.

But this beginning could not be held onto; for the beginning is not (as a

later misleading developmental explanation believes) the incomplete and slight, but the greatest in the closedness of its fullness.

And therefore the hardest thing is to protect the beginning. But the beginning of Greek philosophy could not be protected. That is to say: the essence of Beyng and truth experienced a transformation that, to be sure, presupposed the beginning but was no longer up to it.

We see the falling short of the beginning with Plato and Aristotle, a falling short that still remains great in its configurations.

The *fundamental word* of Platonic philosophy is the “idea.” ἰδέα – εἶδος means the look [*Aussehen*], the view [*Anblick*] that something offers; a thing *is*, *what it shows itself as*. The εἶδος, the look of a being – this is still entirely seen in the *perspective of* the fundamental determination of Beyng as φύσις, the arising-appearing standing-in-itself. And thereafter, insofar as εἶδος – ἰδέα – as the visualized comes to be posited in relation to vision and seeing, Being is no longer grasped in its independence but only in its aspect as an *object* for human beings.

This deviation from the self-reposing essence of Being has, however, the consequence that now the idea, which is supposed to show beings as what they are, is itself held-up and reinterpreted as *authentic* being [*Seienden*], ὄντως ὄν.

Beings themselves however, what we call things, sink down to appearance, μὴ ὄν. Thus to grasp a being in its Being can only happen insofar as its ἰδέα is *predicated* of it, *asserted* of it.

Assertion means λόγος, and this is the *fundamental word of Aristotle*. In assertion, something is asserted of something: the stone is hard. In the assertion the “*is*,” *Beyng*, comes to language. In order that something may be decided about Beyng, assertion must be questioned. From the multiple ways of asserting, the multiple ways of Being can be read off: substance, quality, quantity, relation. Assertion also means κατηγορεῖν. In every assertion, what is *authentically* said, is a determination of Beyng and is therefore called κατηγορία. The fact that, from Aristotle to today, ‘concepts of Being’ are called ‘categories,’ is an unmistakable sign of the transformation of the fundamental questions of philosophy that has been accomplished since the beginning. (The lying-at-ground [*Zum-Grunde-liegende*], ὑποκείμενον – οὐσία! The *steadily present*, but seen now from λόγος.)

Asserting, i.e., the fundamental act of thinking, and thereby *thinking as such*, has now become the *courthouse* of Being. The doctrine of λόγος, logic, becomes the explicit or secret ground of *metaphysics*.

And the essence of truth? In the beginning it was grasped as ἀλήθεια, unconcealment of beings, as a fundamental happening of Being itself in which human beings are situated in order to rule it and protect and lose it.

Now *truth* is a characteristic of *assertion* and means the correspondence of proposition with the thing. Everything is stood on its head. Previously, the

pressing and the superior power of the open [*Offenbaren*] was the realm from which word and saying sprang; now assertion is the place and site for deciding the truth about beings.

Through this transformation of the beginning is attained the basic orientation of Western philosophy that determined its fate in the coming centuries. Not only does the essential determination of Beyng as οὐσία, substance, and the essential determination of truth as correspondence of thinking with the thing, remain unshaken; above all, it becomes an ever more unquestionable certainty that *thinking* is the definitive *courthouse for the determination of Beyng*.

Indeed this fundamental opinion became the *decisive* presupposition for the configuration of *modern* philosophy. An essential characteristic of this is the predominance of the mathematical.

The essence of the *mathematical* is self-positing from the highest axioms, *out* of which and in accord with which every further positing necessarily follows. The mathematical is here to be taken so broadly and essentially that it as yet makes no reference to number and space. These first become domains of the mathematical in the narrower sense because they allow a certain sort of *mathesis* with respect to the quantitative. Because that which *is* determines itself from thinking, thinking (and the principle of saying and speaking, the law of non-contradiction) must become not only the law of deduction, but of the determination of Being.

Simultaneously, it belongs to the essence of the mathematical that it put together all determinations of thought in a unified sequence and ground itself as “*system*.” The pull of system, and the construction of systems in philosophy, first became possible when the mathematical became the highest principle of all determinations of Being, with Descartes. Neither Plato nor Aristotle had a system, much less their predecessors. Even Kant, who first in the *Critique of Pure Reason* pointed out the limits of thinking’s legitimacy, could not avoid the pull of system – precisely because finally and in spite of critique, thinking, *judgment*, remained even for Kant, unshaken as the *courthouse* of the determination of Being, i.e., of Being as objectivity of experience.

Subsequently pure thinking as origin of Beyng broke through with even greater impact, and attained its deepest and most substantial systematic form in Hegel’s *Logic*. What Hegel named “logic,” as he well knew, is what one previously named metaphysics, ontology, the doctrine of Beyng.

With Hegel’s logic the way of Western philosophy since Plato and Aristotle completes itself, but not *from its beginning*. This remains unmastered [*unbewältigt*] and is retrospectively always only interpreted, i.e., misinterpreted, on the basis of the basic orientation that falls short of it.

Even Nietzsche – whom, together with Hölderlin and in another respect, we have to thank for a resuscitation of pre-Socratic philosophy – remains stuck

in the misinterpretations of the 19th century when it comes to a questioning of the fundamental question. And because he takes over his fundamental metaphysical concepts of Beyng and becoming precisely from the beginning of philosophy – but as misinterpreted – his own metaphysics comes to a dead-end in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. This is a powerful attempt to think Beyng and becoming co-essentially in one; but it is an attempt that moves in the groundless categories of the 19th century, and does not find its way back to an original questioning of the first question about Beyng.

And yet, this is precisely the most intimate self-concealed trait of German philosophy: along with the configuration of modern mathematical thinking in the systems of Idealism, it constantly desires to return to an original point of departure and ground of the first question about Beyng: *to the truth* that is not only a determination of assertion about things but essence itself; *to Beyng* that is not only object and idea but Beyng itself.

Meister Eckart and Jakob Böhme, Leibniz and Kant, Schelling and Hölderlin and finally Nietzsche repeatedly seek to get back to the ground of Beyng, which in the different interpretations becomes for each one of them an abyss.

One facetiously calls it “mysticism” and takes it as an objection against the rigor of philosophy. But one thereby assumes as already decided that the philosophical question of the essence of Beyng and truth have thinking as their first and only courthouse, whether in the sense of a simple principle, or in the sense of the three principles of dialectic.

But it is first necessary to put up and to bring up for decision the truth (i.e., untruth) of just *this presumption*; i.e., it is necessary to ask again the fundamental question of philosophy about the essence of Beyng in such an original way that thereby, at the same time and in the first place, one asks about the ground on which the essence of Being shall be grounded.

Being and thinking *or Being and time – that is the question.*

In asking the *fundamental question* of Western philosophy again, from a *more original* beginning, we only stand in the service *of that* task that we called the saving of the West. It can only be accomplished by winning back the original relations to beings themselves and by *grounding anew* all essential actions of the *Völker* on these relations.

Philosophical questioning is concerned with preparing a new knowing, and indeed a knowing of *Being*, not a cognition of this or that region of beings, let alone the *immediate* configuration of beings.

Seen from the perspective of everyday activities and pursuits, this knowing of Beyng is always and necessarily remote.

This knowing never carries an immediate existential demand [*Forderung des Daseins*], but it does place in the Dasein of human beings that essential *hesitation* thanks to which it can *reserve* itself [*innehalten*] in its forward attack, so as to test, in such restraint, if it is going forward on the way of essence or non-essence. It

is the restraint of that knowing in which all things remain silent.

But out of silence and being able to be silent [*Schweigenkönnen*], the essential word, indeed language itself, first arises.

This knowing does not conflict with the will. A great will of an individual and of a *Volk* is only as great as the *knowing* that guides it is deep and essential. True knowing is real will and vice versa. And misleading knowing will not thereby be overcome by refusing or denigrating knowing but, on the contrary, only by destroying it through a real and grounded knowing.

Wanting to know is the battle for the true. Essential to all that which is true is the *truth* itself. It is the battle in which essentiality stands against essentiality and non-essentiality, that battle in which both the essence and non-essence of things come to light simultaneously. That battle that makes up, according to the word of Heraclitus, the essence of all *Beyng*. Usually we know and name this word only incompletely. In its entirety however, it reads:

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς,
καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν
δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.⁹

Battle is indeed creator of all things, but of all things also protector; and indeed it lets some appear as gods, others as human beings; some it puts forward as bondsmen, but others as lords.

9. Heraclitus, Frag. 53; Hippolytus, *Refutation* 9.9.4; McKirahan translates: "War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as humans; some he makes slaves, others free," Frag. 79, 37.