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Heidegger's Attentiveness to Language: A Question of Translation and "Original Contents"

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Heidegger's Attentiveness to Language: A
Question of Translation and "Original Contents"

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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I would like to take the opportunity to thank some of those most important figures that have helped me get to this point in my philosophical and academic career. On a technical note, I wish to thank Garry Hagberg, Ruth Zisman, and Daniel Berthold for serving as the board of this project. On a personal note, I would like to pay my respects to my parents. My appreciation for all that you have done, and for allowing me to pursue my education in whatever form I wanted it to take, is truly unfathomable. I cannot thank you enough.

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Sandy Moore

Contents

List of Abbreviations

Introduction: The Problem of Language and Translation in Heidegger's Thinking

1

I. The Logical-Grammatical Conception of Language: Assertion, Ontology, and the History of Metaphysics

12

II. The Leap from Metaphysical Language to Language as Poetic Saying

31

III. Translation and the "Original Contents" of Language

57

IV. Translation and the Greeks: an Analysis of "Anaximander's Saying"

73

Conclusion: Being, Language, and Translation

105

Works Cited

124

In what follows, when Heidegger is cited and the referenced work is not clear from the context, the English initials for the work and the page number from the volume it has been cited from will be given. E.g., when citing an essay from Heidegger's *Basic Writings*—let's say, the first line of the "Letter on Humanism"—the page number in that volume and the abbreviation of the title—*LH*—will be given: (*LH* 217). The list of abbreviations is as follows:

AS – "Anaximander's Saying"

AWP – "The Age of the World-Picture"

BT – *Being and Time*

BPP – *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*

EF – "The Essence of Freedom"

EP – *The End of Philosophy*

EPTT – "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking"

HEP – "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry"

HHdI – *Hölderlin's Hymn: Der Ister*

IM – *Introduction to Metaphysics*

L – "Language"

LH – "Letter on Humanism"

MHiC – "Martin Heidegger in Conversation"

NIII – *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*

NIV – *Nietzsche: Nihilism*

OTB – *On Time and Being*

OWA – "The Origin of the Work of Art"

PMD – "...Poetically Man Dwells..."

PR – *The Principle of Reason*

QCT – "The Question Concerning Technology"

WhD? – *Was heisst Denken?*

WL – "The Way to Language"

Sage mir, was du vom Übersetzen hältst, und ich sage dir, wer du bist.

Tell me what you think of translation, and I'll tell you who you are.

—Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*

Introduction: The Problem of Language and Translation in Heidegger's Thinking

Two days after his 80th birthday Martin Heidegger sat down for a television interview with Richard Wisser.¹ The year was 1969, far past his early years in Marburg, the publication of *Being and Time*, and the “turn” of the 1930’s. With the trajectory and development of his thinking having now become more or less defined, Wisser was well aware that Heidegger’s principal concern was to arrive at a new kind of “thinking” that would move beyond the metaphysical essence he attributes to philosophy since the days of Plato. This essence, shown most clearly with the advent of Descartes, fixes the discipline of philosophy around the rational subject, the thinking I, and asserts that the power to know lies in a particular authority of the I that represents objects in the world to itself. A thinking beyond this subjectivity would thus dethrone the subject’s authority, bringing about an “ecological” sense of man—a sense of man not as the lord of beings, but as amidst and concerned with beings, or more importantly, Being itself. Hence thinking would not be the result of some kind of cognitive development or the invention of a new discipline, but only—so Heidegger believes—if man and how he relates to the world around him go through a fundamental transformation. In this context we listen to Wisser’s concluding question and Heidegger’s response.

Evidently for you, everything depends upon [...] the experience of ‘*Da-sein*’ in which man realizes himself as a being who is open to Being, and to whom Being presents itself as unconcealment. You have dedicated your complete work to proving the necessity for such a change in humanity through the experience of ‘*Da-sein*.’ Do you see any indications that what you have thought necessary will become a reality?

¹ See Heidegger’s chronology on <http://www.beyng.com/href.html>.

Heidegger responds slowly, stating that “no one knows what the destiny of thinking will be.” He continues, citing the lecture “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” saying that the thinking he envisions is “much simpler” than that encountered in metaphysics, “but, precisely because of its simplicity, it is much more difficult to accomplish” (*MHiC* 46-7). Attending to such a difficulty, Heidegger concludes, “requires *a new attentiveness to language*, not the invention of new terms, as I once thought; rather it requires *a return to the original contents of our own language* as it has been conceived, which is constantly *decaying*” (*PR* viii, italics added).

While Heidegger had identified this modern decadence of language as early as the mid 1920’s, it is only during the 1930’s and 40’s that he began to give it the attention he always knew it deserved. In the “Letter on Humanism” (1947), Heidegger tells us that our modern age is witness to a “widely and rapidly spreading devastation of language.” Such devastation has occurred insofar as language, “under the dominance of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity,” “almost irremediably falls out of its element” and thus “denies us its essence.” As “out of its element,”

...language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings. Beings themselves appear as actualities in the interaction of cause and effect. We encounter beings as actualities in a calculative businesslike way, but also scientifically and by way of philosophy, with explanations and proofs (*LH* 223).

The most direct goal of the “*neue Sorgfalt*” Heidegger advocates—the new attentiveness to or care for language—is thus, in the shortest of terms, to put language back on track. Through such attention we are to relinquish the idea that language is simply a tool to be used for human progress, a matter of the calculations, assertions, and proofs grounded in the authority of the rational subject, and see language rather as one of

the ways man essentially exists in his world. As Heidegger says, it is not a matter of gaining “scientific and philosophical information about language,” but of “undergoing an experience with language,” experiencing how language “befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us” (*NL* 59, 57). The proper response to language’s devastation is not the abandonment of it and the arbitrary invention of a “new language,” but exactly the opposite: a revival of those “primordial experiences,” those primordial ways of speaking, the “*elemental words* in which Dasein expresses itself” (*BT* 220), “in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since” (*BT* 22).² If we can do this—if we can find a “way to language”—we will not only learn to speak in a new way, but to *be* in a new way. For Heidegger, the question of the essence of language is not “just semantics”: it is a question that “[touches] the innermost nexus of our existence” (*NL* 57).

The goal of the present project is to come to terms with this odd imperative Heidegger gives thinking “at the end of philosophy.” We will ask what such attentiveness to language looks like, and how we ourselves, with Heidegger, are to carry it out. To do this, we must understand both why metaphysics brings language out of its element and how Heidegger believes it can be brought back. For how are we to return to the “original contents” of our own language, and why does originality/primordially represent the right track for language? And finally, if we succeed in bringing language back to its element, how is such a process to affect man?

Such questions yield no simple answers. For as I will show throughout this paper, attending to Heidegger’s “philosophy of language” necessarily entails confronting the

² All references to *Being and Time* will use the “H” page numbers; all other citations will refer to the specific publication cited.

entire constellation of Heideggerian thought. Isolating this area of questioning as if it was simply one path among others is not an option, for the attentiveness Heidegger calls for cannot come about solely through the study of words: it is as much a linguistic affair as it is an ontological, existential, aesthetic, and political/historical one. Therefore, what follows will not be what one might expect from a paper about the philosophy of language. We will talk far more about metaphysics, the ancient Greeks, and poetry than about different questions and theorists that make up a philosophical discipline. For the only way to get at what Heidegger is trying to do with language is by refusing to set him against the relief of a pre-established domain and instead follow how the problem of language arose organically out of the different dimensions of his thinking. For nothing in Heidegger is isolated. Each question he asks cascades forth into a series of other questions, answers, ideas and ambiguities. To address the question of technology we must look back to the Greek meaning of *technē*; to find the meaning of a work of art we must first work towards finding the essence of truth; to analyze a hymn by Hölderlin we must turn to the choral ode in Sophocles' *Antigone*. Such a list could go on endlessly—and this fact alone is, in my eyes, enough to prove the necessity of de-isolating Heidegger's "philosophy of language" from his "philosophy of" Being, history, or existence.

Like almost all aspects of Heidegger's thought, there is no lack of scholarship when it comes to the question of language. Some scholars choose to focus on the earlier Heidegger, specifically what he says in *Being and Time* and its connection to the phenomenological tradition whose origin is credited to Heidegger's mentor, Edmund Husserl. Others have looked to the 1930's and 40's at what might be dubbed Heidegger's

“experiments” with language, especially the notoriously difficult *Contributions to Philosophy* and *The Event*. Still more have honed in on Heidegger’s ceaseless preoccupation with poetry, pointing to his lectures on Hölderlin, Rilke, Trakl, and George as the key to his interest in language.

While all of these retain their significance in what follows, this project wishes to look at another issue that has been somewhat left in the dark, an issue we will find to be intimately related with Heidegger’s words to Wisser: translation. The book of essays *Heidegger, Translation, and the Task of Thinking* has done a fine job of breaching the problem, but its principal concern lies with how we should translate important German terms of Heidegger (*Dasein*, *Ereignis*, etc.) into English. What follows turns its attention instead to what Heidegger himself said concerning translation, and perhaps more importantly, the question of how the role his “method” of translations, as well as those translations themselves, play a defining role in shaping his ideas on language—and thus his philosophy as a whole. What I wish to put forth is the idea that, although the attentiveness to language Heidegger calls for is exemplified in all the topics mentioned above, it is encountered in a distinctively integral way in how he encounters and translates philosophic and poet works, especially those written in ancient Greek and Latin. More specifically, I will argue that what is most at stake in Heidegger’s philosophy of language—a return to language’s “original contents”—is brought forth most effectively in Heidegger’s philosophy of translation.

The difficulty of this endeavor is to do justice both to the specificity of the issue just laid out and the fact that Heidegger’s philosophy of language must necessarily be seen in light of other key dimensions of his thinking. Given this state of affairs, we will

appeal to these other areas of Heideggerian thought to serve as lenses, perspectives, ways of characterizing what is thought-worthy in his conception of language. The aim of the first half of the project will be to show how and why Heidegger's ideas concerning language must be seen as *ontological* (having to do with the question of Being), *existential* (having to do with the essence of man), *aesthetic* (having to do with poetry and the work of art), and *political/historical* (having to do with nationality and a *Volk*, as well as the question of history). We will begin by introducing the role of language in *Being and Time*, looking specifically at how Heidegger defines language in opposition to the paradigmatic example of metaphysics, the assertion or proposition.³ We will then jump into the 1930's to see how Heidegger tries to turn us away from this understanding of language towards a "poetical" one, and how the issue of whether we turn with him is of the utmost significance for the future of mankind. Finally, we will give credence to the political implications of Heidegger's thoughts on language by looking at his conception of the German *Volk* and the particular virtuosity of the German language.

In the second half of the project we will move from Heidegger's love of the German language to his absolute infatuation with the Greek language. This will open up an opportunity to look at the issue of the plurality of languages, the fact that language is not universal but varies across space and time. For when it comes to the task of translation, what is essential for Heidegger is that one accomplishes "the transition from the *spirit* of one language into that of another" (*HHdI* 62, italics added). To see why this is essential and how it can be accomplished, we will look first at some general remarks on translation contained in the lecture *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* From here, before

³ It is important to note that these two words are used interchangeably.

moving to the issue of translation “proper,” we will take a slight detour through the lecture series *Was heisst Denken?* (*What is Called Thinking?* or *What Calls for Thinking?*) in order to see one of the two main ways in which the “original contents” of language are dealt with in Heidegger’s thinking (as well as translation’s role therein). In our fourth and last chapter, we will move to the issue of translation in the context of the Greeks, attempting to understand their centrality in Heidegger’s thinking as well as giving a detailed analysis of “Anaximander’s Saying,” an essay in which we are afforded a view of the process of translation in action. Finally, in our conclusion, we will try to bring together all that has been said, showing how it has helped us understand the quotation that prompts our present endeavor:

...it requires *a new attentiveness to language*, not the invention of new terms, as I once thought; rather it requires *a return to the original contents of our own language* as it has been conceived, which is constantly *decaying*,” (PR viii, italics added).

Before we begin, let me expand slightly on each of the four chapters that make up the two halves just mentioned. The first chapter begins with a brief analysis of a few sections on language in *Being and Time*, outlining an “early” Heideggerian understanding of language as discourse. From discourse we will move to Heidegger’s understanding of the assertion, both in how it stands as the paradigmatic example of language for metaphysical thinking and in how it originated in the thinking of the Greeks, thus imbued with their ontology. To understand the potentially harmful consequences of understanding language in terms of the assertion, we will attempt to outline the role it plays in metaphysical thinking, what metaphysical thinking itself means for Heidegger, and the way such thinking, in the form of consummate subjectivity, seeks to assert the domination of man over the entire globe. In opposition to this, we will sketch a version of

Heidegger's ontological views that breaks ontology into three separate tiers, each of which must be approached differently than the way they have been (or simply have not been) approached by metaphysics. Finally, on the basis of this thinking, we will point to the eventual "turn" Heidegger took away from *Being and Time* in the 1930's, a turn towards a new way of approaching language on the basis of poetry.

In our second chapter, we will move from the ontological (and, by extension, existential) background of Heidegger's thoughts on language to the way it is rethought on aesthetic grounds, particularly that of poetry. Beginning with "The Origin of the Work of Art," we will work our way from out of the logical-grammatical interpretation of language (language understood in terms of the assertion) to Heidegger's notion of language as poetic saying by seeing how he rethinks the essence of language both aesthetically and in line with his three-tiered ontology. In art and poetry we will see a way of relating to beings outside of the scientific pursuits met with by means of assertive logic, a way of relating that lets beings manifest themselves rather than casting them in the shadow of the representational subject. Pushing this vision further, we will see how Heidegger begins to think of poetic language as that which "alone gives presence to the thing," that which, first and foremost, grants Being to things (*NL* 62). In this new, cryptic, perhaps even mystical approach to language, where it is man who listens and language who speaks, where language occurs as "an event" (*das Ereignis*) in which beings are named and brought to presence, we will attempt to highlight Heidegger's philosophical motivations insofar as they are tied to his goal of overcoming metaphysics and dethroning the sway of subjectivity.

From here, after we have ventured into the challenging essays of the 1950's ("The Nature of Language," "The Way to Language," "Language"), we will return to Heidegger's preoccupation with poetry, in particular, the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin. In this figure, verging on that of prophetic, Heidegger sees a man who not only "poeticizes the essence of poetry" and thus provides unending stimulus for a thinking attempting to move away from metaphysics (Biemel 78), but also a man whose work "confronts the Germans as a test" (*OWA* 203). This test, a test of the historical destiny of the German people, helps us to understand the political background and consequences of Heidegger's thoughts on language, at least during the 1930's and early 40's. Here, we will encounter the notorious issue of Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism, an inexcusable involvement that was nonetheless vehemently philosophically justified (or "interpreted"). While many of these justifications can simply be discarded on the grounds of nationalist sentiments, we will find that one of its most important premises—the philosophical and poetic superiority of the German language—is grounded on something worthy of our thought: namely, the plurality of languages, the fact that each language has its own "historical spirit," to use Heidegger's words (*HHdI* 62).

In our third chapter, taking the plurality of languages as our cue, we will begin our study of translation. The 1942 lecture *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* will provide us with key ideas about how Heidegger thought about translation, specifically the fact that Heidegger saw translation not as a technical enterprise, but rather as a kind of thoughtful meditation on and a faithful mediation between one's own language and the foreign language. In this process, one is not only forced to enter into a new language (and with it, its own way of thinking), but even more so, one's thoroughly common and familiar

relationship with one's *own* language is shaken, unsettled, and reckoned with. With this idea, we move into the lecture series *Was heisst Denken?*, getting a view of how Heidegger begins to unsettle *his* relationship with German (specifically with the word “thinking” [*Denken*]) by trying to return to its more “original contents.” Here, we will see a central idea that underlies the way Heidegger thinks about translation: namely, his distinction between words (*Worte*) and terms (*Wörter*). This idea, harkening back to our discussion of the metaphysical conception of language (here thought of as how it sees language as terms), will further aid us in understanding how his “method” of translation privileges being faithful to the spirit of the foreign language over being literal in one's choice of words.

In our fourth and final chapter we will think translation in the context of the Greeks. Returning to the idea of the “original contents of our language,” we will see the second main way in which this idea is at stake in his thinking (namely, its bearing on translation). Here, Heidegger tries to develop a “way” of translating that is up to the task of preserving the original meaning these words had to the thinkers that uttered them. We will see that such preservation is necessary given Heidegger's understanding of history and tradition, as well as the superiority—the greater “proximity to Being” (Cassin 10)—of early Greek thinking (that is, those before Plato) and, in consequence, the Greek language. In response to the disastrous consequences Heidegger recognizes in the Latin (Roman) translations of Greek philosophical terms, Heidegger's approach to translation must accomplish what seems to be impossible: overcome tradition and our historical thrownness by preserving a totally foreign way of thinking in our own metaphysically conditioned thoughts and words (what the Romans failed to do). As we will see, in more

“practical” terms, Heidegger’s “method” of translation is meant to accomplish this in two ways: first, by means of etymological considerations (considerations that often reinterpret a word based on the meaning of its roots or its archaic form and function—its “original contents”), and second, by means of comparative analysis (comparing instances where the word is used by other thinkers to help determine how it was understood historically). Naturally, our final question will thus be how translation, given Heidegger’s own terms, can in fact be accomplished—a possibility that must exist, given that it is that on which the fate of thinking—and thus humanity itself—rests.

However, things are not as simple as determining exactly “how” translation *à la* Heidegger is possible, as if we could determine this objectively, according to a strictly logical basis. In our conclusion, we will see that given Heidegger’s understanding of *thinking* itself, the question of language and the question of translation are not the kind of questions that can be determined by coherent arguments and proofs. The way of thinking required to respond to them thoughtfully is not a straight line towards an answer, but as Heidegger understands the term “way” (*Weg*) itself, a kind of continual circling back, a constant being underway (*Unterwegs*). Through all of the “answers” we may come to over the course of this project, despite any results and questions of practical applicability, the sole thing that remains essential is that we get underway—that we treat these questions as they deserved to be treated, with a thinking that always remains on the way (hence the title of one of Heidegger’s works, *On the Way to Language*). While it may seem strange to ask questions we are not assured we can answer, this is what is required. With that said, let us get underway.

I. The Logical-Grammatical Conception of Language: Assertion, Ontology, and the History of Metaphysics

Insofar as we are to heed both the holism of Heidegger's thinking as well as the development of that thinking over the course of his career, we will begin with a brief study of the role of language in *Being and Time*. This is best not only because the understanding of language advanced here is Heidegger's first concrete attempt at a "definition" of language, but even more importantly, because it establishes a foundation upon which Heidegger's latter thoughts can be seen as extensions and modifications.

The topic of language arises here explicitly in section 34, "Being-there and Discourse. Language" (160), but it also plays an important role in the preceding section ("Assertion as a Derivative Mode of Interpretation," 153). For our purposes, we shall proceed by outlining what I take to be the three most fundamental things Heidegger says about the nature of language in these sections. First, that "*the existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk [Rede]*" (161); second, that language "has its roots in the existential constitution of Dasein's disclosedness" (160); and third, that all philosophy, as Richard Polt puts it, takes "assertions as the paradigmatic expression" of language and thinking (66).

To extract this first point from Heidegger's early terminology, we can say that language is characterized fundamentally by discourse. Language is something we speak

and hear—it is, as was said in the previous section, “communication” (155). The meaning⁴ of this discourse or communication is that it is “the Articulation of intelligibility.” In other words, discourse “is the way in which we articulate ‘significantly’ the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world” (161)—it is the way that we utter or express what has been previously given to our understanding. Polt, again, describes this succinctly. “Discourse is the tendency of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world to get articulated.” Through language, “our lives and environs emerge,” and “a network of significance and purpose—a world—becomes apparent to us in our operations. As we do things, things become meaningful articles in an articulated whole” (64).

Language as we would think of it in terms of everyday usage—“a vocabulary and a grammar” (64), or as Heidegger says, a set of “word-Things which are present-at-hand” (*BT* 161)—is thus “rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein’s disclosedness”: it is a derivative form of the more basic tendency of human beings not only to bring things to light and disclose them as they are (think of the impulse towards religion or science), but to infuse meaning into things and create a diverse world and a rich history. While on the one hand discourse can simply be “talk about something” and thus a “making-known” (161-2), it has the ontological and existential significance of disclosing Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, of disclosing that it is-there (*Da-sein*). Language (as discourse) is that which not only can point things out and create meaning, but also that which expresses Dasein’s state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*), its experiences, its understanding, and its Being-

⁴ It is important to note the use of the word meaning rather than function (of discourse). If we speak of the function of discourse, we are already treating it as a tool, something we simply “use,” a mere means to an end. As we have and will continue to see, this is not what Heidegger has in mind.

with others in a “*shared*” community (BT 162)—in short, its world and what it means to be-there.

Now, while Heidegger intends language to be understood in the more ontological sense of Being-in-the-world and disclosedness, he knows that it has been and generally is understood through the paradigm of the assertion or proposition. Assertions are what the symbolic logic teacher is dealing with when he tells us on the first day of class that “All humans are mortal. All Greeks are humans. All Greeks are mortal.” While he would go on to speak of major and minor premises, conclusions, and universal propositions, Heidegger’s explanation, oddly enough, seems much simpler. At the ontologically most basic level, Heidegger says that each proposition points something out (mortality) about something (all humans). This pointing out takes the form of a predicating: “the ‘subject’ is *given a definite character* by the ‘predicate’” (154). Finally, because an assertion is generally a public matter, it is characterized by communication, by “letting someone see with us what we have pointed out through predication” (155). And so, in the typical style of *Being and Time*, we can say that an assertion is “*a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates*” (156).

So, we might ask, why does Heidegger find the fact that we (philosophers) take this form of language as the paradigm so disturbing? There are two answers we could give to this question. On the one hand, the problem with the assertion is that it stands in as the paradigm of language, and in so doing discounts all other forms of discourse—be they performative (like a silent nod, the shrug of a shoulder, or as Heidegger’s examples go, hearing and keeping silent) or simply more profound or genuine than the assertion (for Heidegger, great poetry). But there is another reason why Heidegger finds the

assertion so problematic that gets to what the assertion does in an ontological and existential sense. For while he does not hold the assertion to be incorrect or unintelligible, Heidegger does feel that the assertion solidifies a way of understanding the world that poses a “threat to the essence of humanity” (*LH* 222). Thus while metaphysics is at fault, on the one hand, simply because it takes the assertion to be the *essence* of language, rather than a merely derivative mode, it is also at fault because of the way the assertion propagates the authority of a subject (the subject of the sentence) over a world of objects (predicates). As Heidegger’s narrative tells us, the seemingly harmless act of understanding language as a linking of subjects and predicates would have disastrous historical consequences, as it slowly propels man to the status of “the lord of beings,” an existence in no way suited for authentic Dasein. To see why this is so we must follow the history of philosophy (for Heidegger, metaphysics) from its original emphasis on the assertion to its modern day form of “absolute and consummate subjectivity” (*NIII* 225), our goal being to arrive at a point where we can begin to differentiate language in its inauthentic mode and in its authentic mode (what Heidegger calls “poetic saying”).

What we refer to as inauthentic discourse can be viewed either from the everyday perspective, where it becomes *Gerede* or “idle talk,” or from the formal metaphysical perspective, where it is tied to the predication of beings and the question of truth (ideas which will become clearer later on). Beginning with the former, we note that *das Gerede*, the center of section 35, is the everyday Being of discourse. In our daily interactions with one another, we communicate this or that about what’s currently going on, what happened last week, or what we’re planning to do this afternoon. Such communication (remembering here that Heidegger links communication with the assertion) serves to

bring “the hearer to participate in disclosed Being towards what is talked about in the discourse,” to tell someone about something. However, within such communication “there lies an average intelligibility”—a basic way of understanding what is said without, so to speak, actually understanding what is said. As Heidegger puts it, “we do not so much understand the entities which are talked about; we already are listening only to what is said-in-the-talk as such. What is said-in-the-talk gets understood; but what the talk is about is understood only approximately and superficially” (168). “What the talk is about”—men and mortality—doesn’t become a point of inquiry; the particular substance or content of the assertion is rather leveled-off into the realm of average intelligibility, whether that be merely the propositional form or, as seems more in line with what Heidegger is saying, the basic or general way in which all of us understand what “men” and “mortality” mean without needing to push further into what these words and their combination in the proposition are truly about.

Further, because this kind of everyday discourse is simply the articulation of intelligibility—the putting into words of what one already understands—it “has lost its primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about” and instead communicates “by following the route of *gossiping* and *passing the word along*” (168). In this way, “what is said-in-the-talk as such”—the mere articulation as opposed to what the proposition is really about—“spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character. Things are so because one says so”—and no further inquiry is needed (168). Thus idle talk’s “initial lack of grounds to stand on becomes aggravated to complete groundlessness”; understanding things “for oneself” becomes a burden we no longer have to deal with, because *das Gerede* has presented us with a quite novel opportunity: “the

possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own" (the possibility of understanding everything without having to try to understand it; 169). As Heidegger would write decades later, "with a worn-out language everybody can talk about everything" (*WhD?* 127).

Such a line of reasoning allows Heidegger to show that the assertion, as a pointing out through predicating, holds within itself the possibility of being leveled-off to something we can simply pass around, a static presentation that, through time and word of mouth, rigidifies and then begins to decay. The original investigation and understanding required in order to form the assertion is left by the wayside, what is unique or peculiar in its presentation is cut away in favor of the average understanding, and eventually the assertion becomes a truism that, for all we know, might not even be true. Even further, this potential falsity might become so average, so wide-spread, and so common-sensical that, passed down from generation to generation, it gains the authority to, as Heidegger's biggest example goes, "[sanction] the complete neglect" of an inquiry into Being (*BT* 2). For as his narrative of the history of ontology tells it, the Greeks originally asserted that "Being is presence" (*ousia*), and the history of philosophy has merely been a "passing along" of this proposition which, rather than being grounded (explored, asked after, made intelligible), is left unexamined, assumed to be "the 'most universal' concept" and thus entirely "self-evident" (*BT* 3-4).

With our attention now directed towards the Greeks we move away from the everyday Being of discourse to the way that the assertion becomes embedded in philosophy as the paradigm of language. For the Greeks, language is conceived in terms of the *logos* (assertion), and such an assertion is seen as one amongst an infinite number

of present-at-hand beings (beings in the sense of a subject with accidental properties), yet one with a particularly important capacity. As Polt summarizes,

Heidegger's story then, is that for the Greeks, language or discourse (*logos*) was one present-at-hand entity among others, which could become the object of study. Language, however, is a distinctive present-at-hand entity, from the Greek point of view, because it has the power to attribute a present-at-hand predicate to a present-at-hand object by forming assertions.... Greek logic takes such assertions as the paradigmatic expression of thinking, where thinking is understood as theorizing, or ascertaining what is present-at-hand. Greek grammar, in turn, is dominated by Greek logic. In this way, our traditional interpretations of language are pervaded by the unquestioned ancient interpretation of Being as presence at hand (66).

Thus the very foundation of our language and the understanding of it that still rules today is indebted to Greek ontology's founding of the "logical-grammatical conception of language" (66). Being, taken as presence (as the "permanence in the sense of enduring (*ousia*)," *EP* 4), determines the Greek understanding of language and molds it in its own image. Said another way, "the whole logic that we know and that we treat like a gift from heaven is grounded in a very definite answer to the question about beings," an answer Heidegger finds problematic (*IM* 28). To see why, we must look a bit more at the way in which Heidegger tells the story of the history of philosophy.

"Philosophy proper"—that is, metaphysics—stands as the title of the Western philosophic tradition spanning from Plato to Nietzsche. According to Heidegger, this history is to be understood as a decline based in the neglect of the question of Being (what we will later be called the "*epoche*" and/or "oblivion" of Being," *AS* 254). "That which the ancient philosophers found continually disturbing as something obscure and hidden," Heidegger describes, "has taken on a clarity and self-evidence such that if anyone continues to ask about it he is charged with an error of method" (*BT* 2). By "reawakening an understanding for the meaning of this question," Heidegger wishes both

to bring the question of Being to the forefront of philosophical concerns and to reinvigorate it with the sense of supreme mystery and obscurity it had for the ancient Greeks (*BT* 1). For it is this sense of awe, wonder, and necessity that has slowly decayed as metaphysics has “progressed,” and with its decay—Heidegger believes—have come potentially fatal consequences.

Nonetheless, Heidegger does not wish to contest the Greek understanding of Being as presence. This, he believes, is simply an historical fact: Being is presence because that is what it was originally determined as. As he writes in the brief essay “On Time and Being,” “this character of Being has long since been decided without our contribution”—we are simply “bound to the characterization of Being as presencing” (6). Not wanting to contest this characterization, Heidegger instead wishes to look beyond it. As Mark B. Okrent maintains, Heidegger is searching for something “behind” Being as presence, for “the opening or clearing which allows Being as presencing to appear and manifest itself” (145). In a word, Heidegger wants to understand that which makes it *possible* for Being and beings to come-to-presence in the first place. He does not ask: “What is Being, since it isn’t presence?”, but rather “What is it that makes Being as presence possible? What accounts for the fact that beings and Being come-to-presence? What is the original domain in which Being as presence and beings as present can come to address us at all?” The answer to these questions, Okrent writes, is what Heidegger refers to as the “truth,” sense, or place “of Being” (145). We, however, will call this idea—using Okrent’s own description—the clearing (*die Lichtung*).⁵

⁵ I do not believe that Okrent is wrong to speak of the truth of Being in the way that he does. I believe it to be essentially analogous to the clearing. But, insofar as Heidegger

Given the schema that Okrent provides, we can see that there are three ontologically significant “tiers.” At the “bottom,” there are beings, any specific entity that is (whether it be as concrete as the laptop I am typing on or as abstract as the idea of beauty). Beings, however, *are* only insofar as they are grounded in Being—that is, insofar as they are present. Said differently, beings are possible only because of Being, because of presence in the first place. Even further, beings are possible as presence only because of something *more* original, more primordial that, as Heidegger says, grants presence. It is this original granting—the *Es gibt Sein* (there is, it gives Being)—that is of the utmost importance for Heidegger’s thinking after *Being and Time*, whether it be in the form of the truth of Being, the clearing, or the event (*das Ereignis*) that is itself the “it” that grants Being as presence.

If one is not familiar with Heidegger, this schema probably strikes them as either utterly confusing or mere ontological sophistry. To abate this reaction—a reaction often based in misunderstanding yet nonetheless wielded as a criticism—we will need to take the time to again expand on Heidegger’s general conception of metaphysics, the tradition Heidegger links to ontology (and thus relevant to the three-tier schemata), before looking at the “final tier” Heidegger is interested in. As we will see, metaphysics is most concerned with the bottom tier, casts a quick glance to the middle tier, and is completely oblivious to the final tier (the clearing).

“Philosophy,” Heidegger says unequivocally, “is metaphysics.”

Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole—the world, man, God—with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being. Metaphysics thinks beings as beings in the manner of a representational thinking that gives

explicitly rebukes his use of “the truth of Being” in his later years (instead always talking about the clearing), it seems far more appropriate to use the later.

grounds. For since the beginning of philosophy, and with that beginning, the Being of beings has shown itself as the ground (*arche*, *aition*, principle). The ground is that from which beings as such are what they are in their becoming, perishing, and persisting as something that can be known, handled, and worked upon. As the ground, Being brings beings in each case into presencing. The ground shows itself as presence. The present of presence consists in the fact that it brings what is present in each case in its own way to presence. In accordance with the given type of presence, the ground has the character of grounding as the ontic causation of the actual, the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of objects, the dialectical mediation of the movement of absolute spirit and of the historical process of production, and the will to power positing values (432).

Philosophy *is* metaphysics. That is, philosophy is that which “thinks beings as a whole—the world, man, God—with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being.” Being is for philosophy the ultimate factum, the fundamental principle—that which, as an enterprise whose essence consists in “giv[ing] grounds,” is the “deepest” of grounds, the ground that no longer needs to be further grounded. For what, metaphysics might ask, is more basic than the fact that something *is*? What is more fundamental to any being than its is-ness?

As something that can be “known, handled, and worked upon,” beings first and foremost *are*. As beings, the fact that they are present is the most fundamental fact. If presence lacks, so does Being. Yet the notion of presence itself, the Greek *ousia*, has taken on a variety of “type[s]” throughout its history, for “the present of presence [...] brings what is present in each case in its own way to presence.” Heidegger lists four “epochs” of this history and the ways in which presence showed itself: those of ancient Greek metaphysics following Parmenides, the period from Descartes through Kant, Hegel’s Science (and, vicariously, Marx’s dialectical materialism), and Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will to power. In each of these cases, the most fundamental aspect of beings showed itself in different lights, yielding vastly different understandings of the

world while still being based in the same basic thought (or so goes Heidegger's narrative). For Heidegger, however, what is most essential is that in each of these determinations of presence, the *Es gibt*—the original granting and clearing of Being—remains totally unthought.

“What characterizes metaphysical thinking, which seeks out the ground for beings, is the fact that metaphysical thinking, starting from what is present, represents it in its presence and thus exhibits it as grounded by its ground.” The issue is this: that metaphysical thinking “[starts] from what is present”—it starts with *this* being that is, and deduces from it as its most universal fact that it *is*, that it is present. Thus when Heidegger asks “does metaphysics think Being itself?”, he answers confidently: “No it never does.”⁶

By beginning with this or that being in particular and pointing to Being as such (presence) as its ground, the being is seen as grounded whereas Being itself has not even been thought about. The that-it-is of the being (the Greek proposition that Being is presence) is the most basic thing we might say about it, yet when metaphysics articulates it, the being is grounded and Being is left unheeded as the *causa sui* and *a priori*. Presence is appealed to, but only as the ultimate ground, and thus is never understood—in other words, the *possibility* of Being as presence never becomes an issue. “As long as the

⁶ “It thinks *the being* with a view to Being. Being is first and last what answers the question in which the being is always what is interrogated. What is interrogated is not Being as such. Hence, Being itself remains unthought in metaphysics, not just incidentally, but in accord with metaphysics' own inquiry. By thinking the being as such, the question *and* the answer necessarily think on the basis of Being; but they do not think about Being itself, precisely because in the most proper sense of the metaphysical question Being is thought as the being in its Being. Inasmuch as metaphysics thinks the being on the basis of Being, it does not think Being *as Being*” (NIV 207).

Being of beings is thought as the *a priori*, that determination itself prevents any reflection on Being as Being” (*NIV* 208).

It is metaphysics’ obsession with beings rather than Being (on top of the fact that it is oblivious to the issue posed by the clearing) that secures its downfall. Beginning with Plato and Aristotle, the spotlight shines solely on beings, and more importantly for our inquiry, the way these beings are talked about: true and false assertions. As was said earlier, “the whole logic that we know and that we treat like a gift from heaven is grounded in a very definite answer to the question about beings,” an answer that is problematic because it is not grounded in an answer to the question of the *possibility* of Being and beings (*IM* 28). As we know, this answer to the question about beings that shapes Greek logic also comes to dominate Greek grammar. Assertions thus became the paradigm example of language because they conform to the Greek understanding of beings. They are built around Greek ontology: they come in the form of a subject and a predicate because Greek ontology views beings as something present-at-hand (subjects) with present-at-hand properties (predicates).

The form of the assertion, then, makes perfect sense—because the Greek understanding of beings pervades our thinking. One of the first things that we learn about language is that it is made up of subjects and predicates; or, as we can now say, that Being is made up of beings and their properties. This is what it means to say that the Greek answer to the question about beings is cemented in our thinking, guiding it at all times, and hence allowing none of us to see any sense in looking beyond it.

However, in another sense, we *have* moved beyond the Greeks. While their initial logic and grammar might still pervade our thinking, their conception of subject and

predicates expanded, becoming the notion of subject and object, which sure enough caused modernity to be the age of “absolute [and] consummate subjectivity”—in other words, man’s total dominion over the world and all that’s in it (*NIII* 225). The Greeks simply provided the basic rubric that, through certain ontological and linguistic decisions during the course of history, has come to bolster a view of the world that Heidegger finds extremely problematic. To see why Heidegger views modernity so bleakly, we have to follow the history of the assertion from its Greek origin to its modern prevalence.

Heidegger’s account of the history of philosophy from Anaximander to Nietzsche (that is, from the first thinker to the last metaphysician) varies slightly depending on the time from which it comes. The general outline is that the Pre-Socratics had an original or primordial (and thus better) understanding of the nature of Being that was modified by Plato and Aristotle. With these two figures, thinking looked away from Being and turned its attention towards beings, especially one particular being: man. Philosophy in turn became successively more subjectivist, concerned not with Being but man’s (the subject’s) perception of beings. This way of thinking was solidified by Descartes, who grounded the possibility for any knowledge whatsoever on the human subject and his power of representation. Reality itself here becomes characterized solely as what can be represented by a subject (the *ego*, the “I”): beings come to presence because *I* represent them to myself. “Representation,” as Heidegger writes, “comes to be the tribunal that decides about the beingness of beings and declares that in the future only what is placed before it in and through representation and thus is secured for it may be considered a being” (*NIII* 219). Finally, the authority of representational thinking gets pushed far enough to hold that the representational subject itself “proclaims the law of Being,” that

man is “the lord of beings” and his will—as Nietzsche’s will-to-power—has “absolute dominion” as “pure self-legislation” (*NIII* 224).

This outline doubtlessly shaves Heidegger’s narrative down to an “average intelligibility,” but such is necessary to remain close to our central inquiry. What we should glean from this history is the fact that the logical-grammatical conception of language, based in Greek ontology, has been radicalized by the subjectivity established by Descartes. This progressive estrangement from the question of Being (and the clearing), alongside the increasing emphasis on the power of the rational subject, has led to an unprecedented state of affairs, according to Heidegger. The authority instilled in the subject has spread through the “public realm” and has come to be a “threat to the essence of humanity” (*LH* 222).

...because it stems from the dominance of subjectivity, the public realm itself is the metaphysically conditioned establishment and authorization of the openness of individual beings in their unconditional objectification. Language thereby falls into the service of expediting communication along routes where objectification—the uniform accessibility of everything to everyone—branches out and disregards all limits. In this way language comes under the dictatorship of the public realm, which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible (*LH* 221).

There can be seen an echo here of what we have learned about *das Gerede*, idle talk. Yet instead of speaking about gossiping, Heidegger is now speaking in terms of a technologically advanced society—not of passing the word along, but of “expediting communication.” In this sense, things have changed since *Being and Time*: World War Two had come and gone, Europe had witnessed more destruction at the hands of technology than had ever been seen in world history, and Heidegger was now thinking on a veritably apocalyptic scale. Language, addressed on a social and global level instead of the confines of the ontological analytic of Dasein, has “fallen out of its element” and has

begun to decay beyond the point of propositional logic as well as *das Gerede*—it is now merely a means of facilitating man’s unflinching command over nature and himself. Subjectivity (the authority of the subject) having been pushed to such an extreme, language has “[surrendered] itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of dominance over beings” (223). From the kernel of the Greek’s ontology and its influence on their language, through the entrenchment of the subject-object relationship and the representational ego *à la* Descartes, language has become simply one of the supreme ways of subject-ing beings to suit our modern and—assuredly during Heidegger’s time, and perhaps even more so during our own—disastrous purposes.⁷

Hence “the task of *liberating* grammar from logic” (*BT* 165). Grammar—the system and structure of any language—must be re-established “on foundations which are ontologically more primordial” (*ibid.*): they must be rethought in accordance with an answer to the question of Being that takes the clearing or the *es gibt* into account. The necessity of this rethinking stems from the progressive decay of language from the times of the Greek’s concern over the assertion to the modern trafficking and expediting of language. By finding its foundation not “in the ‘logic’ of this *logos*”—the assertion—but in a different “model” or “mode” of discourse, Heidegger believes language might be put back on track (*ibid.*). For as it stands, with language viewed only as a means for saying true things and expediting global communication in the most average of ways, it has lost even the possibility of saying something meaningful about Being, that which necessarily lies beyond average intelligibility. In this sense, Heidegger’s critique of our modern use of language is to say that it can no longer say anything of genuine meaning, it cannot pay

⁷ These “disastrous purposes” become clearer as the project continues. For a poignant example, see the discussion of “the Rhine” on page 42 (below).

heed to authentic experiences of an aesthetic, existential, or ontological nature. All it can do is pass along what makes sense to everyone without having to think much about it.

However, Heidegger's concern with re-founding grammar in *Being and Time* was to fade by the time of the "Letter on Humanism." For here he does not speak of the liberation of grammar from logic, but of "the liberation of language from grammar" (*LH* 218) What exactly this transition signifies, as well as what the difference between these two projects amounts to is hard to say. Perhaps this formulation is simply a symptom of the fact that, during these later years, Heidegger was much more comfortable talking directly about language (rather than speaking about it in terms of assertions and grammar). Or perhaps Heidegger realized that grammar was too deeply entrenched in Greek logic, and that only language "itself" could be salvaged. In either case, what is certain is the way this liberation is to be accomplished. Heidegger no longer wishes to find an "ontologically more primordial" foundation for language—for he has admitted that ontology itself is rooted in the "mistakes" of the Greeks. The liberation of language "into a more original essential framework" is now "reserved for thought and poetic creation" (*ibid.*) The duty of such thinking and poeticizing is to understand language as "the house of Being in which man ek-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of Being, guarding it" (237). Put another way, the duty of such thinking/poeticizing is to uncover the interrelatedness of the relation between language as the house of Being and the "truth of Being"—the third tier on our ontological scale, what we prefer to call the clearing.

Returning now to the idea of the clearing, it is likely that not only those of us unfamiliar with Heidegger have become skeptical. For there is indeed a sense of

mysticism creeping into Heidegger's thinking, a mysticism that will pervade his thinking on language and Being for the rest of his life. Whether it truly is "mystical" shall be decided later on, but for now, what is important to acknowledge is that this supposed mysticism is part and parcel of Heidegger's attempt to go beyond the metaphysical interpretations of language and Being. Man is not described as grasping or even understanding the truth of Being, but rather as belonging to it and guarding it. Language is not something man uses, but the place in which he dwells—and dwells not just in the sense of resides, but dwells in the sense of living, acting, thinking, belonging. Language is where man belongs—it is "the home of man's essence" (237). To *live* that essence, for Heidegger, means to guard the clearing, the original well from which Being as presence emerges and is granted to us (no longer as active subjects grasping beings, but as Da-sein, Being-there amidst the clearing).

Such thinking seems mystical to us, Heidegger might say, because what is intelligible has been predetermined by the tradition we have been thrown into. Thus the very fact that this thinking seems mystical (irrational) can serve to drive home our own embeddedness in the tradition Heidegger is attempting to overcome. Because this tradition determines what is intelligible, anything that tries to go beyond it will confront us as mysticism or irrationalism. Heidegger's hope is that in this supposed mysticism, we will find the possibility of distancing ourselves from the familiar enough to realize that intelligibility is not an objective state of affairs but an historically constructed *Weltanschauung*.

But how are we to find any truth in something that inherently seems foreign to us? How are we to see the "steps [that] were necessary in order to move into this new

position” when it seems as if “Heidegger simply jumped out of the tradition one day and forcibly started something new” with his ontological incantations (Biemel 66)?

Heidegger struggled deeply with these questions throughout the course of his life, coming up with various answers over the years. In the “Letter on Humanism,” looking back at *Being and Time* and its public reception, Heidegger talks about the difficulty of trying to express an entirely new way of thinking to an audience submerged in metaphysics.

In the poverty of its first breakthrough, the thinking that tries to advance thought into the truth of Being brings only a small part of that wholly other dimension to language. This language even falsifies itself, for it does not yet succeed in retaining the essential help of phenomenological seeing while dispensing with the inappropriate concern with ‘science’ and ‘research.’ But in order to make the attempt at thinking recognizable and at the same time understandable for existing philosophy, it could at first be expressed only within the horizon of that existing philosophy and its use of current terms.

In the meantime I have learned to see that these very terms were bound to lead immediately and inevitably into error. For the terms and conceptual language corresponding to them were not rethought by readers from the matter particularly to be thought; rather, the matter was conceived according to the established terminology in its customary meaning. The thinking that inquires into the truth of Being and so defines man’s essential abode from Being and toward Being is neither ethics nor ontology (*LH* 258-9).

The original hope that his use of familiar terms would be reinterpreted by readers according to the task of thinking—that they might form a bridge through which existing philosophy could “transcend” itself—did not become reality. Heidegger has since acknowledged the need of a change of strategy. Such a change comes in the form of the apparent “mysticism” we have been discussing, because Heidegger realized that the “bridge tactic” simply wouldn’t work for what he was attempting to do: “there is no bridge here—only the leap” (*WhD?* 8). The metaphor of a bridge or a ladder fails because there is no middle ground or intermediary rungs in the transition from metaphysics to “thinking.” The gap—an abyss—can only be crossed with a “leap.”

We could characterize this leap in many ways: as the leap from metaphysics to thinking; as the leap from man as the rational animal to man as Da-sein/Ek-sistence; as the leap from Being as presence to the clearing as the possibility of presence; as the leap from the logical-grammatical conception of language to language as poetic saying. All of these depictions go to show the all-embracing nature of the leap, the way in which it is a turn—thinking here of Heidegger’s infamous *Kehre*—in man’s relationship to Being, his relationship to himself, and his relationship to language; in short, his relationship with the world. Leading man to the precipice of the abyss—to the leaping point—is in this way the central aim of Heidegger’s thinking.

By working through metaphysics we have taken the “negative” route. We have described Heidegger’s thoughts on language as they arise out of his ontologically based critique of metaphysics, the history of philosophy. While this might not always be the best path to get at what is unique in an idea, it has been necessary in order to pay heed to the very way in which Heidegger’s views on language formed. As I see it, one of Heidegger’s foremost concern with language is how it relates to the question of Being—of whether it is stuck merely describing beings with assertions or whether it can be appropriated in a new way, a way that would give words to Being (rather than continuing to leave it in the backdrop). Only now that we understand (to some degree) the inauthentic relationship to language can we begin to understand an authentic relationship to language—just as Heidegger thought that we could only understand authentic Dasein only by beginning from Dasein in its everydayness.

II. The Leap from Metaphysical Language to Language as Poetic Saying

My hope is that we have followed Heidegger closely enough to say that we now find ourselves on the precipice of metaphysical thinking. We have seen the problems Heidegger finds both in the ontology of the ancient Greeks and the way in which the assertion has come to embody the tendency of modern man to be seen as the lord of beings who possesses absolute dominion over the world. In what follows, we will try to take the leap with Heidegger into a new kind of thinking—that is, a new relationship to language—as it is encountered in his understanding of poetry. While this focus will take us beyond our earlier remarks concerning metaphysics, the logical-grammatical conception of language we are now familiar with will consistently remain the backdrop from which Heidegger’s new thinking—along with our own—is moving away from.

Our guiding aim is to come to terms with what Heidegger means by poetic saying, what we understand in the terminology of *Being and Time* as language in an authentic sense. To try to curtail the radical nature of the leap as it would appear if we went directly from *Being and Time* to the 1950’s and *On the Way to Language* (e.g.), we will begin by taking a developmental approach, working our way through the 1930’s and 40’s before discussing the altogether new approach to language Heidegger develops in the last few decades of his life. We will begin, with the help of Walter Biemel, with “The Origin of the Work of Art” and how poetry is defined in the mid-1930’s. This in turn will require a brief consideration of Heidegger’s work concerning truth as the Greek *alētheia* (unconcealment/*Unverborgenheit*), for poetry is defined in essence as “a distinctive way in which truth comes into being” (*OWA* 202). After getting an idea of the relationship

between poetry, language, and truth as unconcealment, we will then be prepared for the attempt to follow the way to language Heidegger develops in the late 40's and 50's. Finally, after doing this, the present chapter will conclude by returning to the 30's and 40's, looking at Heidegger's work on Hölderlin to get a sense of the political background of his thinking about language (at least during this period).

We have seen that after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger grew skeptical of the way in which he had approached his major question, the question of Being. The terminology he had used was “not rethought by readers from the matter particularly to be thought,” but rather only grasped through reducing them to the metaphysical distinctions they were (and, by extension, we are) familiar with (*LH* 259). In the admission that these terms “were *bound* to lead *immediately* and *inevitably* to error,” we see Heidegger affirm the need of a new approach. What this new approach consists in is the abandonment of the ontological analytic of *Being and Time* in favor of a new kind of writing and thinking that moves beyond merely reaffirming Being as presence and begins to uncover what lies behind it: the clearing. Thus both in the change of writing style or terminology and in the change of topic (from Dasein and temporality to the work of art, poetry, and truth as unconcealment), we see Heidegger attempting to move beyond the limitations he now recognizes in *Being and Time* to a new kind of speaking and thinking that is up to the challenge of understanding the clearing and man's belongingness therein.

“What comes to pass” in the work of art, and not the metaphysical treatise, is “the openness [*die Lichtung*] in whose open Being makes its appearance, shows itself” (Biemel 75). All art—which “is in essence poetry”—is thus “the saying of the

unconcealment of beings”: the founding of the clearing from which beings and Being come to presence (*OWA* 198). The work of art, thinking of poetry in particular but not exclusively, is here described in a somewhat similar fashion as discourse in *Being and Time*. Both serve as fundamental modes of disclosure, as modes of uncovering what beings are according to how they themselves manifest themselves (as opposed to how *I* represent them to *myself*). However, as we will see, the disclosure present in the work of art does much more than simply uncover beings: it uncovers a world, the vast web of connections and concerns that make Dasein what it is as *Being-in-the-world*. And, apparently even further, the poem in particular can *say* the unconcealment of beings (the clearing) itself.

To get closer to these modes of disclosure we turn to one of Heidegger’s examples. The first mentioned is a painting of a pair of peasant’s shoes by Van Gogh. Heidegger claims that this work is “about” the shoes as a piece of equipment, and that it conveys the being (essence, nature) of equipment as “reliability” (160). Thus when he says “the artwork lets us know what the shoes are in truth,” he means that the shoes, a piece of equipment, show themselves in unconcealment, manifest themselves in the clear light of day as essentially reliable. Such a showing or manifesting is, according to *Being and Time*, also what occurs in a true assertion: “The *Being-true (truth)* of the assertion must be understood as *Being-uncovering*,” as an uncovering of the entity spoken of “as it is in itself” (218). However, this connection soon fades when we understand what the work of art really does—it’s particular “mode” of Being-uncovering.

The work of art is not simply the uncovering of this or that being as it is; “Art is truth”—*alētheia*—“setting itself to work” (165). In the work of art, the being which

appears is secondary to the act of unconcealment itself, the “setting up” of a domain in which beings may appear as they are. The work of art discloses not only the being depicted but the world in which it dwells, the connections and associations it has for the wearer, the work and toil of the fields, the rhythm of manual labor. Simply put, “to be a work means to set up a world” (170). For Heidegger, such world-disclosure lies beyond the capacity of the assertion. The assertion, as a particular instance of uncovering a being, does not disclose a world; it is rather *based in*, derivative of, “*grounded* in the world’s disclosedness” and “possible only on the basis of Being-in-the-world” (BT 219-20). The work of art, on the other hand, is the instantiation (the setting up) of the “world’s disclosedness” itself.

Thus in the work it is truth, not merely something true, that is at work. The picture that shows peasant’s shoes, the poem that says the Roman fountain, do not simply make manifest what these isolated beings are as such—if indeed they manifest anything at all; rather, they make unconcealment as such happen in regard to beings as a whole (181).

Beyond unconcealing *something*, the work of art forces unconcealment itself to the fore. It brings truth away from the correctness of assertions and towards the open clearing in which beings can appear at all, the open clearing at the basis of Dasein’s world disclosure. Such openness is vital for Heidegger because “only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are. Thanks to this clearing, beings are unconcealed in certain changing degrees.”

“And yet,” Heidegger continues,

...a being can be *concealed*, as well, only within the sphere of what is cleared. Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presencing, in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a

concealment. The clearing in which beings stand is in itself at the same time concealment (178).

Hence Heidegger writes that “the clearing happens only in this double concealment”—and thus “the essence of truth, that is, of unconcealment, is dominated throughout by a denial” (179). This denial is “not a defect or a fault,” but rather an essential aspect of truth thought not as the logical correctness of a proposition, but as the clearing of unconcealment in which beings show themselves to us as much as they shirk away in darkness. Self-manifestation and hiddenness are two poles of a mutual “strife,” a perpetual push-and-pull that suspends man between truth and falsity (174). This “striving clearing” is a ““primal phenomenon,”” that which not only makes the truth of assertions (as correctness and correspondence) possible in the first place, but that which first grants beings as present and Being as presencing (*EPTT* 442).

Walter Biemel helps clarify this idea of making-possible. In the case of assertions, “in order for [them] to conform with the thing, the thing itself must be in the realm of the open, appear as something manifest, be present” (74). That is, the thing that is pointed out must have already been available to the speaker, must have revealed itself either in the sense of clear self-manifestation or in some kind of concealment. That “wherein” this being is manifested (the clearing) is akin to “a medium that at each time lets certain determinate traits come to the fore so that the being is able to show itself according to the openness that has been achieved” (74).

It is this medium, this strife, this clearing that is at issue in the work of art. Yet while this strife can be set up in a Greek temple or a painting, it is only addressed head on (made the central issue) in poetry. “What poetry, as clearing projection, unfolds of unconcealment is the open region which poetry lets happen”; poetry lets the clearing

happen, it allows the possibility of presence to manifest itself as openness, hiddenness, denial, and the other ways we have mentioned. Poetry, as “the saying of the unconcealment of beings,” is not only the happening of truth, but the “founding of truth,” the establishment of the clearing and *alētheia*, that which has remained unthought in philosophy (198-9).

Now, in returning to our central concern, we must note that poetry and its distinctive capability are only possible on the basis of language itself. “Language,” Heidegger writes amidst his description of poetry,

...by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings *to* their Being *from out of* their Being. Such saying is a projecting of clearing, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the open *as* (198).

Yet such saying, Heidegger continues, “is poetry:” it is the saying of openness and concealment, “the saying of the arena of their strife”—the saying of the clearing (198). What, then, is the relationship between poetry and language? Are they even distinguishable?

Language itself is poetry in the essential sense. But since language is the happening in which beings first disclose themselves to man each time as beings, poesy—or poetry in the narrower sense—is the most original form of poetry in the essential sense. Language is not poetry because it is the primal poesy; rather, poesy appropriates in language because language preserves the original essence of poetry (199).

In distinguishing between language, poetry, and poesy, Heidegger talks of originality and essentiality. There is what he calls an essential sense of poetry, which language is and which poesy is “the most original form of.” Heidegger tells us that the essence of poetry is “the founding of truth” (199). Thus language is, subsequently, the “preserving” of the founding of truth, and poesy the most original form of such founding.

As Biemel elaborates,

For poesy to be possible, man must move in the realm of language, must disclose to himself Being through the medium of language. Within this domain poesy occupies a privileged position; it is expressly and exclusively dedicated to the disclosure of Being. Poesy completes what is set up in language, that at which language aims. The arts which do not realize themselves in the realm of language presuppose the disclosure of Being through language. ‘Each of them is a special poeticizing within the clearing of Being, which, wholly unnoticed, already came to pass in language’ (77).

Thus although Heidegger characterizes language on the basis of poetry, it is language itself—as the disclosure of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world—that is the truly “primordial” occurrence. “Where there is no language, [...] there is also no openness”: for it is language that “alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time” (*OWA* 198). Language, as such an original presencing, is “poetry in the essential sense” because it is what originally makes possible the clearing, what brings-to-presence that which is the concern of poetry (the clearing). Without language, without words, there simply would be no world to speak of—there would be no Dasein, no beings, and hence no Being.

This “ordering” of language and poetry is further grounded in a discussion near the beginning of the essay “...Poetically Man Dwells...”. Here, poetry is not described as the founding of truth, but rather as the founding of “dwelling”—what for Hölderlin stands as “the basic character of human existence.” As Heidegger writes, the title of the essay “says: poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a dwelling place? Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building” (*PMD* 213). When we think dwelling in Hölderlin’s sense, this means that poetry, as a kind of building, is what allows humans to exist in the first place. Poetry is what lets man be who he is—hence he dwells poetically. “Poetry is

what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling”—into his essence (216).

However, this building still rests fundamentally on language. For “where do we humans get our information about the nature of dwelling and poetry?”—we “[receive] it from the telling of language.”

For, strictly, it is language that speaks. Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal. Among all the appeals that we human beings, on our part, may help to be voiced, language is the highest and everywhere the first. Language beckons us, at first and then again at the end, toward a thing’s nature.... The responding in which man authentically listens to the appeal of language is that which speaks in the element of poetry (214).

It is language then, as “the highest and everywhere the first,” that grants humans access to the founding capabilities of poetry. Poetry, as a letting-dwell and thus as a bringing man into his essence, is only possible as a *response* to the original speaking of language. For man to build (which means for man to allow himself to dwell, which means for man to bring himself to his essential nature), he must first and foremost listen to the call of language, hear what language requires of *him* to say. Language is not grounded in poetry; poetry is rather the authentic response *of* man *to* language.

In the attempt to bring both of our descriptions of language and poetry together, we might say that poetry is the authentic response to language *because* its essence is to found truth, to bring about the clearing. Language calls on man to establish the clearing through poetry, for only through such a clearing might it “beckon us toward a thing’s nature.” Because it is “only this clearing” that “grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are,” language requires poetry to found the clearing (*OWA* 178); but for poetry to found the clearing, “language *needs* and *uses* the speaking of mortals” (*L* 205). The clearing,

unconcealment, poetry, mortals—this is “the web of relations” that “language itself has woven us into” (*WL* 112).

Having brought the “web of relations” in which Heidegger demands language to be thought to the fore, we might stop to ask with Heidegger: “but is not all this unfounded mysticism or even bad mythology, in any case a ruinous irrationalism, the denial of *ratio*?” (*EPTT* 448). Perhaps. But to return to what we have said concerning mysticism thus far and allowing Heidegger the benefit of the doubt, we should note the anti-subjectivist “effect” of his writing on the work of art, truth, and *alētheia*. Beings do not come to presence, as Descartes might say, through the representation of the thinking ego, but within the clearing where they can show themselves just as well as they can remain hidden. Dasein, as one being amidst the clearing, does not lord over what it encounters—it does not have direct control over whether what confronts it shows itself from itself, shows itself only in its semblance, or refuses to show itself at all. With the ideas of the clearing and unconcealment, the authority of the rational subject is displaced in favor of what might be called, thinking of Charles Taylor’s essay “Heidegger, Language, and Ecology,” an ecological status of man: a view of man that does not put him above beings, but that finds him amidst them.

We might find objection to this de-authorizing of the subject insofar as Heidegger claims that language is that which first brings beings and Being to presence. For here, it seems that language is in control, and that language, as something man uses, allows him to maintain his absolute authority within this domain. Yet this objection quickly falls away when we remember that for Heidegger, language is *not* something man uses. As he writes in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” almost repeating the words of “Poetically Man

Dwells” verbatim, “man acts as though *he* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man” (348). For his part, “man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal” (*PMD* 214).

But now, though the objection has fallen away, we find ourselves back in the enigmatic and mystical way in which Heidegger approaches language after the “Origin of the Work of Art.” What would it look like to speak by listening to the appeal of language? Where does this appeal come from and how are we to hear it? What does it mean to say that “strictly, it is language that speaks” (*ibid.*)? Is language here anthropomorphized? And if it is, does this mean that language simply comes to stand in as Heidegger’s *causa sui*?

To try to make these cryptic remarks at all intelligible, we must attempt to enter into the web of language Heidegger has outlined. We must abstain from labeling this web as mystical or irrational prematurely in attending to the definitively strange approach Heidegger adopts in his later writings. Such attendance, however, will only go so far. For both at the heart and the fringes of Heidegger’s approach lie two “ideas” that, if looked at in detail, would take us too far from our focus and leave no time for our ensuing discussion of translation. These “ideas”—in quotation marks because they cannot be considered “concepts” in the philosophical sense—are the fourfold and *das Ereignis* (alternatively translated as Appropriation, Event, or Event of Appropriation). While these ideas are essential for Heidegger’s later thinking on language, for the sake of the current project, we will leave the fourfold completely to the side and only sketch *das Ereignis* in crude outline. What is most important for our purposes is, with this latter term as the limit of our investigation, to get a sense of how the relationship between language and man is

developed, as well as how language appears now even more radically anti-subjectivist than before.

In an essay titled “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger explains what he sees as the true relationship between language and man.

Being a means of making oneself understood does not constitute the essence of language.... Language is not merely a tool which man possesses alongside many others; rather, language first grants the possibility of standing in the midst of the openness of beings. Only where there is language, is there world.... Language is not a tool at man’s disposal, but that primal event which disposes of the highest possibility of man’s Being (*HEP* 56).

Thus as the clearing represents the possibility of Being, language represents the possibility of man. It is the “primal event” that allows him to be who he is in the most essential sense. “So that history may be possible,” Heidegger writes, “language has been given to man” (54). Man partakes in language, he is given language, but he does not own language. In a sense, he rents it. Language, as disclosing the world, also discloses history, the trajectory that has made that world what it is. Language, bringing beings to presence, allows us to encounter them, to be concerned with them, to let them surround us in the perpetual flux that is our world. Without language, man simply would not be who he is—for it is language, as poetry, that first allows him to dwell.

Yet as the master of language, he is also estranged from his essence. Language is proffered to him, not so he can grasp it and wield it as a weapon, but so that beings can become intelligible to him, so that the *world* can become intelligible and so that intelligibility can be articulated amongst a shared community, a people. When man sets upon language as if he were the master of it, the essentially founding character of language, the power of words and their way of making-present, is covered over, along with the essence of those things described. Take, for example, Heidegger’s discussion of

the Rhine in “The Question Concerning Technology.” On the one hand, this word can be experienced poetically, as it is in Hölderlin’s hymn of the same name. On the other hand, this word can be experienced “technologically” (that is, in a modern way), which Heidegger describes as follows:

The hydroelectric plant is set into the current of the Rhine. It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears to be something at our command (321).

When the word “the Rhine” is thought in this way, it is not allowed to come to language of its own accord: “what the river is now, namely, a water-power supplier, derives from the essence of the power station”—i.e., modern technology (ibid.). Modernity comes to define the river on its own terms, viewing it simply as something to be *utilized*, “set upon.” Our command over the word is now a command over the river. Its essential Being is reduced to the way it lends itself to our pursuit of earthly domination. All poetical experience of the word is expunged in favor of an experience that fits the orientation of modern man. In this way, the understanding of language as a distinctive mode of unconcealment is buried beneath technical or analytic interpretations of it as well as the global expediting of communication and the everyday passing-along of *das Gerede*. The only way to get back to it, so it seems for Heidegger, is to relinquish all sense of human authority and give the true weight of disclosure over to language, the master of man. Hence the invocation of language as an agent that speaks, and man as a being that must learn to listen.

But is language truly conceived of here as an agent? What does it mean to say that “*language speaks*” (L 188)? To answer this question, Heidegger proceeds in a way that is unique to his later writings. Reasonably enough, Heidegger says that to know what it means for language to speak, we must know what speaking is. But by elaborating the nature of speaking, Heidegger seems forced into drawing out a seemingly unending chain of further definitions: speaking is saying, saying is showing, showing is gathering, speaking as saying as showing as gathering is owning. And even this chain fails to do justice to all the twists and turns Heidegger takes on his way to language, skipping over hearing, responding, answering, calling, presencing, etc.! The list truly goes on and on—but it must be followed, Heidegger insists, if we are to truly see “the web of relations” that “language itself has woven us into.” Only such a path might allow us to see how “language itself brings itself to language”—how language manifests itself in unconcealment (NL 59).

Time does not allow us to follow these paths Heidegger walks in the essays “Language” and “The Way to Language” in their entirety. We must try to glean from them only what is essential in getting us from the idea of language speaking to the limits of our inquiry: *das Ereignis*.

In another typical move of Heidegger’s later writings, Heidegger begins “The Way to Language” with the idea he wishes to go against. This idea, originating with Aristotle and reaching its peak in the philosophy of Wilhelm von Humboldt, is the common view of language as speech. Speech is herein conceived as an activity of man, the way in which he goes about showing the inner content of his mind/soul by means of the motions of the tongue, lips, vocal chords, etc. Writing, in turn, is the solidification of

speech, a representation of it by means of phonetic signs. Hence “the classical architectonic structure” of language can be summarized with three points: “The letters show the sounds. The sounds show the passions in the soul, and the passions in the soul show the matters that arouse them” (115).

There is one element this conception of language and Heidegger’s have in common. Both hold that language, as speaking, is a type of showing: language “makes something come to light, lets what has come to light be perceived, and lets the perception be examined” (*WL* 115). However, the showing Heidegger is interested in is not a matter of the passions in the soul; this understanding of speech “as expression” is something Heidegger hotly contests. For here one “already presupposes the idea of something internal that utters or externalizes itself. If we take language to be utterance, we give an external, surface notion of [it]” rather than getting at its essence (*L* 190). The division between internal and external, as part and parcel of metaphysical subjectivity ushered forth by Descartes, must clearly be steered away from.

The showing that interests Heidegger is not an activity of man, but the saying of language itself. Saying, as showing, is the “*essential being of language*” (*WL* 123). When Heidegger says that “language speaks by saying, that is, by showing,” he means that language exists essentially as the “clearing projection” we mentioned earlier. The saying of language establishes the clearing of unconcealment by “naming” beings, by “calling” them, by bringing “the presence of what was previously uncalled into a nearness” (*L* 196). As the most primordial form of presencing, as “the keeper of being present” (*WL* 135), as that which “alone gives being to the thing,” language provides a realm in which beings can be at home (*NL* 62). Language allows beings to dwell, to exist. It is in this

light we must understand Heidegger's emphasis on the idea of language as "the house of Being" in his "Letter on Humanism" (236).

Because language is primordial presencing, the speaking of man must take the form of a listening. As Heidegger writes, "speaking is of itself a listening."

Speaking is a listening to the language which we speak. Thus, it is a listening not *while* but *before* we are speaking. [...] We do not merely speak *the* language—we speak *by way of* it. We can do so solely because we always have already listened to the language. What do we hear there? We hear language speaking (*WL* 124).

Through his prioritizing of listening, we should see Heidegger as attempting to instantiate a shift in emphasis. Given the need to displace the power invested in the subject if the dangers of technology and global domination are to be avoided, we might say that Heidegger is using a kind of mysticism or irrationalism in order to affect a change in thinking that he believes cannot be attained in degrees, but is only possible through a fundamental transformation of (a "leap" away from) the modern day perspective of what man and language mean.

This description, however, is slightly misleading. Heidegger does not simply "utilize" a shift in emphasis as some kind of stylistic "tool" to affect a certain mindset in his readers; rather, the shift is a philosophical statement "in itself." The shift, described above in terms of the leap, can be seen from many angles: as the shift from metaphysics to thinking; as the shift from man as the rational animal to man as Da-sein/Ek-sistence; as the shift from Being as presence to the clearing as the possibility of presence; as the shift from the logical-grammatical conception of language to language as poetic saying. The formulation "language speaks" is the attempted instantiation of such a shift. By listening to it, we hear a way in which man is not the master of language, in which language is not the *ex*-pression of something inner as something outer, in which man must listen and be

silent rather than speak and chatter. For with such views, “we close ourselves” off from a genuine relationship with our world. We identify *things*—a word Heidegger uses in his later career to mean beings encountered by humans in an “authentic” sense— “as context free objects, susceptible of scientific study,” or worse, as mere “standing reserve” at our disposal (Taylor 265). Such stances “abolish things” in the unique way that they are brought to light through the saying of language (*ibid.*). Given that these are our modern stances towards beings, human speech, as we said much earlier, must be brought back into its element. Speech must no longer be a tool for the subjugation of beings but rather a responding to what is said by language, a responding to what Charles Taylor calls the “*telos* of language.”

Language, through its *telos*, dictates a certain...way of formulating matters which can help restore thingness.... If we stop to attend to language, it will dictate a certain way of talking. Or, otherwise put, the entities will demand that we use the language which discloses them as things. In other words, our use of language is no longer arbitrary, up for grabs, a matter of our own feelings and purposes. Even, indeed especially in what subjectivism thinks is the domain of the most unbounded personal freedom and self-expression, that of art, it is not we but language which ought to be calling the shots. This is how I think we have to understand Heidegger’s slogan ‘*Die Sprache spricht*’ [*Language speaks*], rather than as a proto-Derridean invocation of a super(non)subject (266).

For Taylor, “Heidegger’s slogan” should not be interpreted as the “subjectivizing” of language, as a way of making language an agent or super-subject (or even a “super(non)subject”). Instead, what the slogan accomplishes is a change in the way man is to relate to beings—and thus a change in the essence of man himself. This change is dictated by language. Language, in telling us what to say, tells us to restore beings to their thingness, in that it “beckons us [...] towards a thing’s nature” (*PMD* 214).

Language dictates that we attend to the unconcealment of beings, that we be “attentive to the way that language opens a clearing” (Taylor 263). Such attentiveness is not arbitrary,

but demanded by man's own essence. For the clearing, though "it is not our doing," "could not happen without us." We are, to invoke Heidegger's *Ereignis*, *appropriated* by language through "the part we play in the clearing coming to be" (ibid.). Called by language, bidden by language, even *owned* by language,⁸ man is not assigned "the major role that a creator would have, but a secondary one, helping it to happen, protecting and maintaining it. We have to 'take care' of Being, 'spare' it. The human agent is 'the shepherd of Being'" (ibid.).

Thus we see once again the existential significance of language. For it is language, and only language, that "releases human nature into its own" (*WL* 129). Such releasing does not couple language with man and render him the animal with *logos* (rational animal), but establishes his role in accordance with the clearing and things. Man is not a particular animal endowed with the capacity for speech; man is the one who listens to the dictates of language. Man acts only insofar as he listens, insofar as he opens himself up to the way language dictates the saying of things, insofar as he allows beings to show themselves in words according to their own nature. In this realm, it is first and foremost *das Ereignis* that holds sway.

Appropriation, in beholding human nature, makes mortals appropriate for that which avows itself from everywhere to man in Saying, which points toward the concealed. Man's, the listener's, being made appropriate for Saying, has this distinguishing character, that it releases human nature into its own, but only in order that man as he who speaks, that is, he who says, may encounter and answer Saying, in virtue of...the sounding of the word.... When mortals are made appropriate for Saying, human nature is released into that needfulness out of which man is used for bringing soundless Saying to the sound of language (*WL* 129).

⁸ Being called, bidden, and owned by language are all Heidegger's own words from "The Way to Language."

I do not pretend to know all that Heidegger is trying to say here. It hinges on the word-play, also present in the English, that occurs between the use of the noun “Appropriation” (*das Ereignis*), the verb “to appropriate” (*ereignen*), and the adjective “appropriate” (*eigen*), and even a few more (*die Vereignung, Er-äugen, vereignet*). These terms, though they may seem to come out of nowhere, are linked to another key term we are already familiar with: authenticity, *Eigentlichkeit*. This link not only affirms a vital connection between Heidegger’s earlier and later writings, but also sheds light on this odd term in Heidegger’s late lexicon. The Appropriation, described elsewhere⁹ as the *es gibt* (the German equivalent of “there is” in English or “*il y a*” in French, literally the “it gives” that we have mentioned earlier) that “gives” not only language but also Being and Time (or, as ordered at this time, Time and Being), is the “primal event” beneath/beyond the “primal phenomenon” of the clearing. It is the ultimate limit of thinking, that which nothing lies beyond. As such a primal event, it determines what is proper to man, what is his own, what he authentically is. What is determined is that man belongs to the Saying of language, that man is who he is as that which brings “soundless Saying to the sound of language” in the “sounding word.” What is determined is that man is not the lord of beings, nor the master of language, but the shepherd of Being, the one who takes care to bring language to the spoken word, and to restore beings to their thingness in the authentic saying of poetry.

With this “explanation” we have not overcome Heidegger’s “language mysticism.” We have rather tried to embrace it. We have tried to listen to Heidegger—but from this fact alone we can never really be sure if we have *heard* him. For even he admits

⁹ *On Time and Being*, 1962.

that trying to characterize speaking in opposition to vocal utterance is like trying to break a spell that has been cast over all of humanity (*L* 194). As Nietzsche might say, we simply do not have the ears to hear language in this way. Such ears need to be developed, and this is what Heidegger's later essays on language are supposed to accomplish. What matters most is moving us away from our "correct ideas about language"—that speech "is the audible expression and communication of human feelings," an "activity of man"—towards a "way to language" that does not see language as it is cast in the shadow of the rational animal, but simply and only "as language" (*L* 190-1).

For now, we shall leave the question of mysticism, along with the "true" meanings of Heidegger's slogan (language speaks) and *das Ereignis*, undecided. At this point, before moving to the issue of translation, we must turn back from the 50's and 60's to the 30's and 40's, where language was not only of ontological, aesthetic, and existential significance, but of political significance as well. With this chronological shift, as well as the mentioning of politics, the elephant in the room must finally be dealt with: Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism. As we will see, Heidegger's political involvement did indeed have an influence on his understanding of language during these years. How pervasive and lasting this impact was, however, we leave to be determined.

As Robert Bernasconi writes, and as we have already partially seen, Heidegger's approach to language throughout the 30's and 40's "was dominated by his relation to poetry." But even further, "his relation to poetry was dominated by one poet, Friedrich Hölderlin" (146). During these years (and spanning well beyond them), Hölderlin appeared to Heidegger as a sort of "prophet," as that poet on which the entire fate of humanity rested (147). There are a few reasons for this. For one, Hölderlin is "the poet

par excellence” because he not only poeticizes beings and the clearing, but “poeticizes the essence of poetry” itself (Biemel 78). In this respect, he represents a novel opportunity: he is the only poet who “can be questioned about” the essence of poetry (ibid.). Another reason, however, lies in his relationship with Germany and the German language. Heidegger indeed tells us in the “Origin of the Work of Art” that Hölderlin’s “work still confronts the Germans as a test” (203). Elaborating, Bernasconi writes that

Hölderlin was for Heidegger the poet who, if the Germans decided in his favor by listening to the language of his poetry, could lead them to another place, a place where Western metaphysics no longer held sway. This is why Hölderlin was for Heidegger not one poet among others but a destiny for philosophy (146).

Thus Hölderlin became a prophet both in what he revealed regarding the essence of poetry and in what he revealed about the German language and the German *Volk* (people). In short, Hölderlin was seen as a “destiny for philosophy” because what he was doing with poetry was what Heidegger was attempting to do with thinking: move it beyond metaphysics to another beginning—a *German* beginning.

To understand how Hölderlin might play such an historically revolutionary role we must look back to the “founding” nature of poetry/language. Now, because truth is for Heidegger not something universal and unchanging but rather an historical occurrence, the work of art not only grounds truth: it grounds history. In “the poetic projection of truth,” “truth is thrown toward the coming preservers, that is, toward a historical group of human beings” (*OWA* 200). This historical group draws its essence out of the founding—the “bestowing,” “grounding,” and “beginning”—the work of art accomplishes (199). In opening up a world, the work of art has the potential to create a new historical destiny.

This is seen most clearly in Heidegger’s example of the Greek temple. Such a temple is not a mere building, but the opening of the Greek world.

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. Only from and in this expanse does the nation first return to itself for the fulfillment of its vocation (167).

The Being of the Greek people opened itself up in the temple. The temple and what it stood for brought the Greek people together under a national identity, it established a culture. The work of art united an historical community, grounding everything from their daily affairs to their grandest concerns in the temple. Thus through the working of the temple, the Greeks came to be as a people. It is in this way that history, as “the transporting of a people into its appointed task,” as the assigning of a people’s essence, occurs in the work of art (200).

In the same way that the temple was essential for the Being of the Greeks, Hölderlin’s poetry—at least so Heidegger believes—is essential for the Germans. His work confronts the Germans as a test, a test of whether they can attain to the “appointed task” his work announces. The specifics of this task, however—what Hölderlin asks of the Germans and says concerning ideas like the *Vaterland*—are beyond our present concern. While we are familiar with ideas such as the German *Volk* and the *Vaterland* from their place within Nazi rhetoric, the exact implications of Heidegger’s political reading of Hölderlin are not entirely clear. While no one can deny that Heidegger endorsed many aspects of National Socialism, let it suffice it for us to say that what one finds upon a closer inspection of his involvement with Hölderlin is, as Richard Polt shows quite clearly, that his lectures are “engaged in an internal debate within National Socialism, siding against biological reductionism but still accepting the premise that a *Volk* needs a strong state, a state that establishes an ‘order of rank,’ rather than a liberal

society grounded on a social contract” (70). This reading is grounded in turn by the fact that, in 1939, Heidegger “renounced the terms blood, soil, *Volksstum*, and *Reich*,” stating that these had nothing to do with being German in the sense Hölderlin projected (Bernasconi 153). Thus while Heidegger’s reading was undoubtedly politically charged, it presented a certain kind of National Socialism that shunned recourse to biological reductionism, instead promoting a kind of “cultural/philosophical” superiority of the Germans, a superiority that was to be maintained by a “strong state” that could avoid what many Germans saw as the complete failure of the Weimar Republic.

Now, if this superiority was seen to be manifested most clearly in any one thing, it was the German language. In fact, Heidegger was to later justify his defense of Germany throughout the 1930’s by attributing it not to a defense of the Nazi regime but to a defense of the German language (Bernasconi 156). Thus to both repeat and expand, Heidegger’s argument for the superiority of the German people finds its most essential expression in what we might call the philosophical potential of the German language. As Heidegger had written in the early 30’s, “along with the German language, Greek (in regard to the possibilities of thinking) is at once the most powerful and the most spiritual of languages” (*IM* 62). It is interesting that even here, when the Greek language is the principal concern, it is described “along with” German, as if German held a superiority even over the Greek Heidegger was so infatuated with.

What accounts for such power and spirituality? Given Heidegger’s refusal to expand upon the meaning and justification of such attributes, it is fairly easy to see them merely as a product of the times, either as a reflection of Heidegger’s nationalistic sentiments or as a way of investing such sentiments with a philosophical significance.

The truth is that we will never know for sure whether Heidegger's views were simply fabricated in the effort to veil his political beliefs in philosophical profundity, or whether such views arose genuinely from thoughtful consideration. The motives of Heidegger's understanding of the plurality of languages aside, it is undeniable that he did come to understand such plurality as a hierarchy, a hierarchy whose means of measurement consists in a language's "proximity to Being," the particular way in which it is better suited for an inquiry into Being (Cassin 10). What constitutes greater or lesser proximity, however, is a far murkier issue. For as is typical of Heidegger's statements regarding particular languages, the claim of superiority comes as more of an assertion than as an argument. For example, to say that the Greek language is philosophical (i.e., as compared to languages which are less or not at all philosophical) is not to say "that Greek is loaded with philosophical terminology,"

But that it philosophizes in its basic structure and formation. The same applies to every genuine language, in different degrees to be sure. The extent to which this is so depends on the depth and power of the people who speak the language and exist within it. Only our German language has a deep and creative philosophical character to compare with the Greek (*EF* 36).

As the last sentence confirms, the final say as to the philosophical "level" of a particular language does not rest on an argument but on a claim of depth and creative potential. The only thing to ground this is the implicit claim that the German people—that which the German language depends on for its depth and power—are indeed deep and powerful. Thus we arrive back at the seemingly undeniable fact that Heidegger's hierarchy of languages depends on his particular political affiliations and nationalistic inclinations.

There is only one thing that speaks against this, that, in other words, provides an argument for Heidegger's hierarchy: namely, the claim that the philosophical capacity of a particular language does not lie in the amount of its philosophical terminology, but in its "basic structure and formation." But this, of course, leads directly to another question: how do we determine whether the structure and formation of a language is or is not philosophical? Heidegger responds to this question only indirectly. For example, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, philosophical capacity seems to lie in certain grammatical characteristics of Greek and German absent from other languages. In the context of Greek, such structural advantages appear to be rooted in what we have already seen: the fact that the Greek language is pre-determined by Greek ontology, a pre-determination that renders the Greek language uniquely suited to philosophical thinking. Given this, determining the philosophical potential of German would appear to require a lengthy linguistic investigation coupled with historical and philological research—a requirement we do not have the time or the means to heed.

Thus to conclude, we are left with two ways in which we could respond to Heidegger's claim as to the superiority of the German language. First, we could take the path just mentioned, embarking on a historical-philological quest through the German language. Second, we could take Cassin's diagnosis at face value, accepting that Heidegger's privileging of the German language is more or less a symptom of his political beliefs, evidence of "ontological nationalism"—"the worst kind of Heideggerianism, that is, Hellenico-Nazism" (10-11). Given the sheer impossibility of grounding Heidegger's "argument" according to his own writing (that is, given the fact that he never provides us with a means of substantiating his argument aside from our own

philological conjectures), as well as the unavoidable fact of Heidegger's nationalist sentiments, we will provisionally accept Cassin's claim. Unless another opportunity presents itself, we will acknowledge that Heidegger's favoring of the German language can be understood only as an expression of his nationalism, regardless of the philosophical considerations surrounding such expression.

Accepting that some of Heidegger's ideas about language can be understood through a political lens, however, does not entail throwing all that he says into doubt. As Cassin writes, Heidegger's view is indeed a "worst-case scenario." Still, it can only *be* a worst-case scenario by following a vital starting point in a wrong direction. Thus for our purposes, what is most important is that Heidegger begins with an assumption with which both Cassin and I agree: namely, that language is *plural*, that each language comes with its own "historical spirit," and thus that language is only truly encountered when it is seen in its inherent multiplicity (*HHdI* 62). As Cassin explains,

... We philosophize in languages with words and not universal concepts.... The philosophical point is that languages perform different worlds. The political point is not to see language as a simple means of communication—as when one language (English?) is seen as a universal language of communication. At that point it is no longer a language at all; it's no longer English. We philosophize in words and not in concepts: we have to complicate the universal with languages (11).

It is noteworthy that, while arguing against Heidegger's conclusions, Cassin explicitly echoes Heidegger's understanding of language. The points she wishes to make are exactly what we have already seen to be at the core of Heidegger's thinking: the affirmation of language as the disclosure of a world and the rejection of language as communication. The fundamental fact for Cassin—and, as I would argue, for Heidegger—is that "language is and is only through the difference between languages"

(249). If language is seen only as a tool, as a means for communication, then we risk missing the inherent plurality of language in favor of the mere utility of a universal language, what Cassin calls “Globish” (253). For Heidegger and Cassin, metaphysics and ontology represent a grave danger, if not the gravest danger, because their way of understanding language misses exactly what they see as most essential. The philosophical demand for the preservation of the “univocality” of language—for the fact that *this word* signifies *this thing* and nothing else (because only so can we come up with fully “clear and distinct” categorizations)—is nothing other than the demand that metaphysics deceives itself as to the true nature of language in order to preserve the possibility of clarity it has already established as its ideal (250). In short, metaphysics lies to itself about language in order for it to arise. In response, Heidegger and Cassin try to tell the truth about language, in order for a new kind of thinking to arise.

Given all of this, we who wish to follow Heidegger’s way to language should perhaps put our condemnation of ontological nationalism in brackets in order to see what the acknowledgment of a plurality of languages and historical spirits gave or could give rise to other than a hierarchy of languages. For our purposes, the most important consequence of acknowledging the plurality of languages is clear, a consequence thoroughly developed by Heidegger: the necessity of translation.

III. Translation and the “Original Contents” of Language

Before we get to translation, a reminder of our initial goals and intentions is called for. In our introduction, we said that our investigation into language is meant to clarify the imperative Heidegger gives Wisser in their interview. The imperative goes as follows:

And it requires a new attentiveness to language, not the invention of new terms, as I once thought, but rather a return to the original contents of our own language as it has been conceived, which is constantly decaying (*PR* viii).

At this point, while we may not have a procedural prescription for attending to language in the way Heidegger intends, we have at least a general sense of what he means. Such attentiveness signifies a new way of relating to language, a way that abandons the metaphysical definition in favor of a more humble (if not for that reason less difficult) stance, a stance that seeks to listen to language, to hear what it demands of us, and to *attend* to such demands. Uncertain of its exact orders, we at least know that one of them is *not* the invention of new terms, the establishment of a new terminology that somehow might bridge the gap between metaphysics and an entirely new kind of thinking. In other words, we know that approach developed in *Being and Time* is off of the table.

Furthermore, we have a general understanding of what Heidegger means by the decadence of language. Such decadence is found in the view of language that takes it as a tool for communication, a view that at its most extreme completely denies the plurality of languages in favor of harnessing the power of Globish and establishing total dominance over the world and all that is in it. In what we have learned in our first two chapters, it seems that the route to combatting such decadence comes in the form of Heidegger's

mystical demands to “listen to” and “speak from out of” language. Alternatively, there seems to be a way of curtailing the decline of language through a certain kind of attention to Being, an attention in line with the three ontological tiers we have discussed.

These routes, however, do not exist in opposition to each other. Rather they are united, inseparable; in fact, they are alternative descriptions of the *same* path, that which leads “beyond metaphysics.” In the last part of our original quotation that we have yet to consider, Heidegger gives us one more way of describing this path. Here, the way to combat the continually growing decadence of language is described as “the return to the original contents of our language as it has been conceived.” In combining these three descriptions, we may characterize the path to overcoming metaphysics as a return to the original contents of our language that, by listening to language and developing a new relation to Being, finally learns to “speak from out of language.” The way in which such a path is followed—in other words, the process in which all of these attributes are subsumed—is, we shall see, none other than the act of translation.

To begin understanding this act in Heidegger’s sense, let us look to a few remarks Heidegger makes about translation in a lecture on Hölderlin. Although the lecture is meant to provide an interpretation of one of Hölderlin’s hymns, we are struck fairly early on with what appears to be a massive digression as Heidegger sets about meticulously analyzing a section of the choral ode in Sophocles’ *Antigone*. The central term he identifies in lines 333-4 is the Greek *to deinon*, which he chooses to translate as “the uncanny” (*das Unheimliche*). “Yet who decides,” Heidegger asks, “and how does one decide, concerning the correctness of a ‘translation’?”

We ‘get’ our knowledge of the meaning of words in a foreign language from a dictionary or ‘wordbook.’ Yet we too readily forget that the information in a

dictionary must always be based upon a preceding interpretation of linguistic contexts from which particular words and word usages are taken. In most cases a dictionary provides the correct information about the meaning of a word, yet this correctness does not yet guarantee us any insight into the truth of what the word means and can mean, given that we are asking about the essential realm named in the word (*HHdI* 61-2).

To make sense of this last claim we must not only realize its ground in Heidegger's acknowledgment of the plurality of languages, but also understand the relevance of Heidegger's persistent separation of truth as correctness and truth as unconcealment. The definition of a word found in a dictionary is "correct": it is, from at least one angle, the "true" meaning of the word. But herein lies the problem: this correctness takes itself to be "an absolute authority," but is in fact only one way this word can be understood—merely one way it becomes intelligible given a specific and contingent "preceding interpretation of linguistic contexts" (*ibid.*).

This ambiguity of definition is quite familiar to us. Think, for example, of the English word "break": one can say "I broke my leg," or "Break a leg!," or "Let's take a break," or "What a lucky break!," and so on. In each of these phrases the word "break" means something totally different. Still, a dictionary can fairly easily handle such difficulty simply by listing all the definitions that are relevant. The words that Heidegger is interested in have a different kind of ambiguity, an ambiguity that seems to resist all attempts at translation. Good examples are words that a foreigner simply leaves untranslated in the foreign language. In English we sometimes use the French *ennui*, meaning a feeling of listlessness or melancholy. We leave this word untranslated, however, because the English words we use to make sense of it do not seem to fully reach "the essential realm named in the word." If a friend is unfamiliar with the term, the dictionary definitions of words like listlessness or melancholy may very well provide

them with “pointers as to how to understand [the] word,” but none of these pointers will truly capture what the French word *says* (ibid.). Rather, they will always be mere indications of how the French word is to be brought into the “conceptual domain” of the English language.

It is this last issue that Heidegger is concerned with. That is, the essential problem of translation is that “every translation must necessarily accomplish the transition from the spirit of one language into that of another” (62). For Heidegger, “there is no such thing as translation if we mean that a word from one language could, or even should, be made to substitute as the equivalent of a word from another language” (ibid.). The “essential realm named in the word” cannot be accessed by dictionary definitions, for definitions do not pay heed to the spirit of the language in which the word resides and becomes intelligible.¹⁰ The idea of a “literal translation” is, for Heidegger, a total fallacy: the essence of a word remains embedded in the specific way of speaking/thinking of an historical people (later, we will see this idea echoed in Heidegger’s distinction between words and terms).

It seems that we have two ways to respond to such a belief. Either we can dismiss it as an outgrowth of Heidegger’s controversial nationalistic and racial tendencies, or we can try to see whether we experience such a division between languages ourselves. While it is clear that this view could lend itself to radically racist sentiments, on a closer inspection of the deep-seated ambiguity of some words, one finds that it is also undoubtedly true. A somewhat superficial example can be found in the difference

¹⁰ The closest approximation of a definition can only come from a praiseworthy work like Cassin’s *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, an effort I believe Heidegger would (or at least should) have admired.

between the French *fraternité* and the English fraternity. While they appear as literal equivalents and have the same etymological roots, when a Frenchman hears this word, it resonates as a fundamental part of the French ethos, whereas when an American hears this word, the first thing that comes to mind is a college Frat House. A more profound yet also less explicit example might be that between the French *liberté* and English liberty: for both, the word signifies freedom from unjust rulers. But where the American might think of the freedom entailed in something like the Second Amendment, the Frenchman might imagine the Declaration of the Rights of Man, or more radically, the potential threat of a freedom that dissolves into a reign of terror.

What these examples show is that, as we have learned from Cassin, “different languages perform different worlds” (11). In acknowledging that language is both essentially *historical* and essentially *plural*, Heidegger and Cassin realize that the possibility of a literal equivalency between languages—a possibility translators and students of foreign languages often expect and rely upon (given different languages etymological cross-overs)—is barred from the start (Cassin 11). The point, then, is that our culture and tradition play an undeniable role in the way we think and the way we relate to language. So thoroughly embedded in the way of thinking/speaking that is familiar to us, we must admit that “all translating must be an interpreting” (ibid.). For Heidegger, when we translate a foreign word, we drag it into the realm of the familiar, into what is already intelligible (we interpret it).

Translation, as a venturing outside of where one feels at home, will always fail when one does not truly enter into the spirit of the foreign language, but merely steps outside to snatch the foreign word and quickly transport it to the shelter of familiarity.

When the foreign word is hoarded in this way, its meaning is lost: what is hoarded is not the foreign word at all, but rather a familiar interpretation. What is needed is the willingness to let oneself dwell in unfamiliar territory. As Heidegger writes, we must awaken an understanding of “the fact that the blind obstinacy of habitual opinion must be shattered and abandoned” if the essence of a word “is to unveil itself” (63).

Yet how is it possible that the translation of the Greek *to deinon* as *das Unheimliche* does not force the Greek word under the obstinacy of habitual opinion or the spirit of the German language? Doesn’t the use of this word imbue the Greek with a host of unintended German connotations? To respond to these concerns we simply have to acknowledge the fact that for Heidegger, “translating does not only move between two different languages, but there is a translating within one and the same language” (62). In other words, the German word must not be understood according to what is customary, but rather be treated with the same attentiveness required of a word in a foreign language. Because “all translating must be an interpreting” and “every interpretation [...] is a translating,” what is required in both does not fall away with the appeal to a word of one’s mother tongue—for this language might in fact be as distant from our understanding as a foreign one.

Therefore, although Heidegger translates this word into German, he is still able to venture into the unfamiliar realm of the Greeks. Insofar as interpretation/translation is for Heidegger a creative and transformative act, simply leaving Sophocles’ word untranslated is not an option. By using the German *Unheimliche*, Heidegger “goes beyond what is expressed in the Greek”: this word does not simply reiterate the various meanings *to deinon* had and bind them together, but instead “grasps the concealed unity

of the manifold meanings of *to deinon*, thus grasping the *deinon* itself in its concealed essence.” Because of this, “the translation is incorrect”—not what was “literally” intended by the word in all of its various usages, nor what would be found in a Greek-German dictionary—yet also, “on that account,” “*more true*” (64, italics added).

Here is not the place to push further into why and how this translation is both incorrect and true, for much more would have to be said regarding Heidegger’s analysis of the choral ode in *Antigone* and Hölderlin’s *Der Ister* than is necessary given the goals of the present project. The two key lessons are, first, that translating a word from a foreign language into one’s own does not necessarily entail recourse to familiarity—that the essence of translation still exists in the process of attentively interpreting a word of one’s own language. Secondly, we learn that “translation is never merely a technical issue but concerns the relation of human beings to the essence of the word and to the worthiness of language” (ibid.). For Heidegger, translation is not a matter of pure calculation or philology (although philology often plays a role), but of who man is as an historical, cultural, and linguistic being. The meaning of “elemental words” cannot be reached with formal definitions, but can only come about when we “undergo an experience with language”—when we “let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into it and submitting to it.” Only then, when language truly “befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us,” will man be in a position to realize “the proper abode of his existence *in language*” (NL 57, italics added).

From our discussion of Heidegger’s lecture on Hölderlin, we have learned that translation is not simply a process of mediation between two languages, but a potentially vital source to shed light on one’s own language. Heidegger goes even further, saying

that although one essential aspect of translation is its ability to open up a foreign world and thus a foreign way of thinking, “translation is *more* an awakening, clarification, and unfolding of one’s *own* language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language” (65-6, italics added). In other words, through the process of translation, what comes to pass is a “clarification” of one’s mother tongue by means of *distancing* oneself from it. The translator, in thinking through the foreign language and what it is attempting to say, is forced to adopt a new position in regards to their own language, to take a step back from what is and has always been totally familiar. That is, the translator must not only leap *into* an entirely foreign way of thinking, but from here, leap *back* from the foreign word into their own language. If the translator is to translate “authentically”—if they are to preserve what is *unheimlich* in the foreign language—they must *struggle* to maintain this distance, to find a way of speaking the familiar language (of leaping back into it) in a profoundly *uncommon* and *unfamiliar* way.

If it has not already become clear, this distance from the familiarity of one’s own language that must be maintained in translation is not confined to this issue alone; in fact, it might be “defined” as the *essence* of Heidegger’s “style,” especially if we wished to identify an essence that spanned from his earliest years to his last. This “style” shows itself in the fact that almost everything he ever wrote takes as its title a few words that, even by the end of the “work,” have not been resolved in their essential meaning—even though this was the central goal. In this we see once again how deeply *fascinated* Heidegger was by words: by what they could say, by how they evolved, and by the unfathomable breadth of their sources and resources. For all that, he never wished to give “definitions”: words, for Heidegger—as we will see shortly—are “wellsprings,”

wellsprings that “are found and dug up in the telling, wellsprings that must be found and dug up again and again,” wellsprings “that easily cave in” (*WhD?* 130). For Heidegger, the essential path toward seeing words in this way entails neither arbitrary redefinitions nor the invention of new terms, but instead, as he told Richard Wisser, a return to words’ “*original contents*.”

On this note, remembering that our goal is not only to illuminate the role of translation in Heidegger’s thinking, but even further, to interpret and understand the quote with which we began, I believe it is necessary to take a slight detour before we turn to “Anaximander’s Saying” and the issue of translation “proper.” With the last part of Heidegger’s words to Wisser that we have come to encounter now our main concern, we must begin by recognizing that the “original contents of language” are not only at stake in the matter of translation or in regards to early Greek thinking, as if “original” were synonymous with “ancient.” For while there is a temporal element to Heidegger’s understanding of “original language,” and while it is intimately related with etymological and philological considerations, by telling Wisser that we must develop a new attentiveness to “the original contents of *our own* language” (*PR* viii, italics added), we must understand Heidegger to mean that *every* language has original contents: namely, its archaic roots, its antiquated spellings, its outdated (and thus superseded) meanings, etc.

Nonetheless, given our subject matter, it seems most appropriate to begin our discussion of the “original contents” of language in its German form. Some good alternatives to our exemplary text might be “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in which the German *Bauen* (building) and *Wohnen* (dwelling) are brought to language from out of their original contents, or *The Principle of Reason*, where the same occurs (although to a

lesser philological degree) with words like *Grund* (ground, reason) and *Satz* (principle, sentence, leap). Instead of these options, we choose *Was heisst Denken?*, and for two main reasons. The first is the ambiguity present in the title itself, an ambiguity that both propels the entire lecture series and has led to my decision to leave it untranslated. On the one hand, the title takes the form of the common German question *Was heit...?*, which asks after the meaning of the ellipses: “What is ... called?”; “What do we call by the name ...?”; “What does that which goes by the name of ... *mean*?” On the other hand, it may be rendered as “What calls for thinking?”, as in the question “What is it that calls on us to think?”; “*why* do we think?” The ambiguity met with in trying to translate the title into English is not lost on Heidegger (nor in German). In fact, he goes even further, elaborating the question in four distinct ways, all which let *Denken*—“thinking”— “[emerge] from different sources of its essential nature” (163). Thus from the title alone, we get a sense of the radical ambiguity of language, even when it is in the form of a seemingly simple, three-word question.

The second (and more important) reason we choose this lecture series comes from the (relatively) short (and thus more easily presentable and digestible) way in which what Heidegger means by original contents of language comes to the fore. In the third lecture of the second part (the lecture series took part over two semesters), Heidegger rather succinctly tries to show how thinking can be “better” understood—i.e., understood more originally—by thinking through its linguistic history (original contents). By putting “thinking” in dialogue with the “Old English *thencan*” and “*thancian*, to thank,” as well as a more original interpretation of “memory” (and its role in thinking), Heidegger

demonstrates what we are ultimately after: an *attentiveness* to the original contents of language.

As we said above, Heidegger parses out the title question into four separate questions. It is in the context of the first question—that which asks after what the word thinking *says* (“What is it to which the word ‘thinking’ gives a name?” 127)—that the original contents of the word “thinking” become significant. In typical Heideggerian style, the word is not simply restored to its original signification with a few strokes of the pen, but is meticulously sketched out against the background of key aspects of Heidegger’s understanding of language. Although some of what follows may seem repetitive, and although it may seem like we are taking a step back from the question of translation, this step is helpful and perhaps even necessary in the new light that it sheds.

In response to the question of what “thinking” names, Heidegger says, “what comes to our minds here is at first fleeting and blurred. Most of the time, we can leave it at that. It satisfies the demands of common speech in usual communication.” In the terms we have become familiar with, the most immediate and common understanding of words represents solely their “average intelligibility,” understandings that are both satisfactory for everyday communication and suited to the tendency of *das Gerede*, “idle talk.” Such communication, he continues, “does not want to lose time tarrying over the sense of individual words. Instead, words are constantly thrown around on the cheap, and in the process are worn-out”—in other words, they decay. As we have seen, this presents a particular advantage for everyday Dasein: for “with a worn-out language everybody can talk about everything” (127).

Behind this everyday communication and its “pitfalls” lies the traditional and metaphysically determined ways of speaking/thinking we have familiarized ourselves with in our first chapter. Here, language is seen as a tool, as a practical means of expression and communication by means of assertions (“common speech merely employs language,” 128). In this way, we think of words (*Worte*) as “terms” (*Wörter*), uttered sounds/written letters to which definitive meaning is accrued by the speaker (in other words, we view words in terms of sign and signified).¹¹ In the common view of language, words—as terms—“are like buckets or kegs out of which we can scoop sense,” canisters that are either full and meaningful or empty and irrational (129).

As we know, this understanding of words and language is the outgrowth of the initial contributions of the Greeks, specifically those of Plato and Aristotle. For them, speech (*logos*)—as embedded ontology of the present-at-hand—was seen through the paradigm of the assertion, i.e., language in terms of the grammar of subjects and predicates. In *Was heißt Denken?*, Heidegger adds that this understanding of *logos* determined how “thinking” was, has been, and still is understood as: “Logic, as the doctrine of the *logos*, considers thinking to be the assertion of something about something. According to logic, such speech is the basic character of thinking” (155).

Logic, however, rests upon the stability of its assertions, a stability affirmed through syllogistic reasoning (i.e., through other assertions). But as Heidegger is able to

¹¹ Both *Worte* and *Wörter* are plural forms of the German *Wort* (word). Using one over the other in spoken/written German is a matter of context. When the “words” referred to can be counted, and this numerical factor is of importance, *Wörter* (terms) is the right choice (e.g., “the essay must be 500 words [*Wörter*]). The philosophical point behind this practical distinction is that when words are seen only as terms (*Wörter*), they are merely as distinct numerical units, “atoms” of sense *à la* Bertrand Russell (e.g.). Still, as will be shown, the philosophical point Heidegger wishes to make goes much deeper.

show in a few sentences, even assertions that have since time immemorial appeared incontestable—e.g., “God is the Absolute”—are easily unsettled.¹² Thus opposed to the doctrine of the *logos*, Heidegger affirms that when “we say” assertions “*thoughtfully*,” they “do not stay fixed” (156, italics added). For such fixity, on its part, depends on the singularity of words as *Wörter*, an understanding of language that levels it off into commonness and average intelligibility. When taken as pitchers and kegs, *words* do not come to language, but merely terms—merely the most surface level, wide-spread, easily accessible reality of language. Thus Heidegger writes:

Words are not terms, and thus are not like buckets and kegs from which we scoop a content that is there. *Words are wellsprings* that are found and dug up in the telling, wellsprings that must be found and dug up again and again, that easily cave in, but that at times also well up when least expected (130, italics added).

Hence “to pay heed to what the words say is different in essence from what it first seems to be, a mere preoccupation with terms.” Getting over this latter preoccupation, Heidegger adds, “is particularly difficult for us moderns, because we find it hard to detach ourselves from the ‘at first’ of what is common; and if we succeed for once, we relapse all too easily” (130). Such habitual detachment and reliance on what is common is given a radical remedy: instead of always only taking the word “at first” glance, we must “go to the spring again and again,” each time tracing the word to its initial source, and each time trying to, once again, *keep* it there (130). In this tracing, we “must go back into the history of the word,” and in doing so, dig up its original contents (131).

¹² “The statement ‘God is the Absolute’ may serve as an example. The ambiguity that is here possible is foreshadowed by the difference in stress with which a statement of this kind can be pronounced: *God* is the Absolute—or, God is *the Absolute*. The first sentence means: God alone can claim the distinction of being the Absolute. The second sentence means: only by virtue of the absoluteness of the Absolute is God essentially God. The statement ‘God is the Absolute’ is shown to have several meanings. In appearance, the sentence is a simple proposition, a *logos* in the sense defined” (*WhD?* 156).

In the lecture proceeding what has just been cited, Heidegger attempts to show us how this can be done with the word “thinking.” With this word, “something has entered language—not just of late, but long ago. But though it entered language, it did not get through. It has gone back into the unspoken, so that we cannot reach it without some further effort” (133). But what is it that this word brought to language originally? Our answer can only come from listening to how Heidegger tries to retrieve it from the “unspoken.”

What is it that is named with the words ‘think,’ ‘thinking,’ ‘thought’? Toward what sphere of the spoken word do they direct us? A thought—where is it, where does it go? Thought is in need of memory, the gathering of thought. The Old English *thencan*, to think, and *thancian*, to thank, are closely related; the Old English noun for thought is *thanc* or *thonc*—a thought, a grateful thought, and the expression of such a thought; today it survives in the plural *thanks*. The ‘thanc,’ that which is thought, the thought, implies the thanks.

Thus while “a thought usually means an idea, a view or opinion, a notion,” Heidegger is able to claim that “the root or originary word [*thanc*] says: the gathered, the all-gathering thinking that recalls” (139). But even further, this originary word “is imbued with the original nature of memory: the gathering of the constant intention of everything that the heart holds in present being” (141). And this, in turn, helps us to better understand the idea of thinking as thanking:

In giving thanks, the heart gives thought to what it has and what it is. The heart, thus giving thought and thus being memory, gives itself in thought to that to which it is held. It thinks of itself as beholden, not in the sense of mere submission, but beholden because its devotion is held in listening (141).

Original thinking, as an original thanking, is nothing other than “the thanks owed for Being.” In its essential breadth, thinking does not simply take place in mental assertions, but occurs thankfully, in thanking Being and the *Es gibt* for our mortal dwelling. In heeding its gift, thinking takes place as a listening, a listening propelled by

the heart's "devotion" to give thought to what is, to let beings give themselves to us in thought rather than to represent them to ourselves in intuition. Through its gathering and recalling, the heart, in thinking, retains that which has been, investing the absent with presence, and in this way giving thanks to what was. Thinking opens itself up to the "intention" of "all that is in Being," to the way in which what is present—and presence itself—demands to come to presence of its own accord. Thinking accepts their gift, and responds by letting beings be (141).

Much more could be said concerning the way Heidegger attends to the original contents of thinking, just as much more could be said to "defend" his "interpretation." That, however, is somewhat beside the point. As he tells us in regards to the question of "correctness," "only this much is clear: what the words *thanc*, thought, memory, thanks designate is *incomparably richer in essential content* than the current signification that the words still have for us in common usage" (142, italics added). The decisive factor in returning to and restoring the original contents of words, then, is not some kind of objectively verifiable philological precision, but instead the richness in essential content that such considerations can bring to language, the way in which our "vision achieves an open vista into the essential" realm of the word "thinking" (ibid.). What is decisive is that, instead of treating "thinking" like a bucket out of which meaning must be scooped, Heidegger treats thinking as *einen Brunnen* ("a wellspring"): a *word*, a word whose depth and unfathomability (when *Brunnen* is translated as "well") is matched only by its force and uncontainability (when translated as a spring or fountain).

Further, in his work with the original contents of the word "thinking," we witness a demonstration of how an encounter with a foreign language can serve to clarify our own.

For it is only through recourse to the Old English *thanc* that the German *Denken* was allowed to be heard in a new and rich way. By contrasting the English with the German, and by bringing this contrast into dialogue with a more original understanding of memory, Heidegger shows how the mediation between the plurality of languages helps us to find new ways of thinking worn-out words, new ways of letting them show themselves from a way they once were manifested. Thus in short, without the aid of translation, Heidegger would have been unable to set “thinking” on a more original, essentially rich footing.

Unfortunately time does not afford us the opportunity to continue looking at how Heidegger brings “thinking” to language over the next hundred or so pages, turning his attention from the doctrine of the *logos* to an essential saying of Parmenides. Instead, from this discussion we now turn towards Anaximander, the Greeks, and the process of translation—the “other side” of Heidegger’s preoccupation with the original contents of language.

IV. Translation and the Greeks: an Analysis of “Anaximander’s Saying”

As we have acknowledged, there are two ways in which we must approach the idea of “original contents” and translation. The first, which we have now given a brief sketch of, is the way in which Heidegger works with the original contents of the German language. The second, to which we now devote our attention, is Heidegger’s work with the original contents of the Greek language. Naturally, translation here becomes a matter of the utmost significance.

But as has been said, translation is not only significant in regards to the kind of thinking it can (and must, if done adequately) engender, but also within the larger “project” of Heidegger’s thinking. In short, because overcoming metaphysics requires a return to the thinking of the early Greeks, and because such a return hangs on the possibility of translation, translation itself becomes “the key” in learning thinking and changing the course of modernity. But why, we should ask again yet perhaps more explicitly, is this return to Greek thinking so necessary, seemingly the only way beyond metaphysics?

Our answer must lie somewhere within the Greek language and way of thinking themselves, within the way in which those Greek thinkers before the rise of Plato “came closer” to thinking Being in its essential meaning through their words. Yet acknowledging this crucial aspect of Heidegger’s story of the history of philosophy only leaves us with more questions. What is it about their thinking that gives evidence of their attentiveness to language? How did they listen to language, what enabled them to speak from language? And finally, what is it about their language that makes it closer to Being,

better able to reveal it? Is its merit simply an extension of its originality, a by-product of coming chronologically before the onset of metaphysical thinking, or does it come from something apart from this negative advantage? And if it is truly worthy of our consideration, yet at the same time totally foreign to our (metaphysically conditioned) way of thinking, how will *we* be able to translate it?

What it is “exactly” that constitutes the superiority of this language is difficult if not impossible to say. What is certain, however, is that the historical position of the pre-Socratics is essential to who they were, how they thought, and how they spoke. For given Heidegger’s account of historicity and tradition, the fact that the pre-Socratics existed before the tradition we ourselves are a part of is significant. As is said in *Being and Time*, all thought is historically situated, bound by the thrownness of Dasein: the fact that we are born into a pre-existing culture with its own set of values and traditions, the fact that our freedom is constituted in part by the check put upon us by all that we have taken up passively through our indoctrination into society. As Heidegger writes, echoing what we have heard from our work with *Was heisst Denken?*, tradition “takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence.” Such a making-close does not serve to make the origins and basic meanings of our tradition clear; rather, “it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn” (BT 21). Through tradition, the original ways we answered the fundamental philosophical questions—the original ways we sought to make sense of and ground man’s position in the world—have been made a fixture of common-sense. What is closest in the sense of most our *own*, most essential, has fallen into another kind of proximity: that of self-evidence.

The historical privilege of the pre-Socratics, then, is the lack of such influence. Though this is described in negative terms, it is of vital importance. For they embody exactly the kind of thinking that Heidegger is so desperately searching for: a thinking *outside of* metaphysics. In the pre-Socratics, Heidegger believed he found a way of thinking outside of the logical-grammatical mode of metaphysics that has dominated thinking for millennia. What we find so common-sensical as to deem unworthy of thought (Being, e.g., the “most universal” and “emptiest” of concepts) served for them as the impetus to philosophize. What we take as indubitable had not yet been established; the limitations of tradition were entirely nonexistent. While the pre-Socratics surely were thrown into their own world, that world was fundamentally different from the one that we find ourselves in, the one Heidegger believes to be hurtling towards disaster.

Another element of Dasein’s historicity further determines the necessity of a return to Greek philosophy. Insofar as even authentic Dasein cannot escape its situation in time, the thinking that is to be met with beyond metaphysics cannot be some free-floating, a-historical ideal (met with through “the invention of new terms,” as Heidegger once thought), but must involve that resolute “*repetition* of a possibility of existence that has come down to us,” in which we are to “[go] back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there” (*BT* 387). Thinking is not the overcoming of the past, but its authentic repetition; it is neither the disavowal of our tradition nor a mere re-turning of the wheel, but a resolute transformation of what has come unto what will be. Such is why Heidegger’s own relationship towards the past—his planned *Destruktion* of the history of ontology—is not destructive in the ordinary sense. As he explains, it has “nothing to do with a vicious relativizing of ontological standpoints,” but rather intends to “stake out the

positive possibilities of that tradition,” and in doing so, “positively [make] the past our own” (21-22). As he writes in a never-given lecture on Nietzsche, the “other commencement”—i.e., of a new thinking/speaking—“does not leap outside” its “historical ground,” it “does not renounce what has been, but goes back into the grounds of the first commencement” (*NIII* 182). Overcoming metaphysics does not require us to reach higher and beyond what has come down to us, but rather to “climb back down” the history of metaphysics and come out “beneath” it (*LH* 254).

Given Heidegger’s understanding of historicity, a return to the Greeks—i.e., a return to the original contents of our language (by means of translation)—comes to represent the only possibility of an “other commencement.” The translation of Greek words confronts us as the only authentic possibility we are left with, the only way for us to once again engage with the question of Being in a fruitful way. Such translation, however, must be of a particular kind. Its aim is not to be faithful in the sense of literal, the mere reiteration of an antiquated position in one’s mother tongue. Such translation, like Heidegger’s *Destruktion*, must seek to make the past “positively [it’s] own” (*BT* 22)—to “[grasp] its tradition creatively” (*IM* 43). Such non-violent appropriation is the basic character of translation thought of in a Heideggerian sense (at least when it comes to translating ancient Greek), the way in which the constant decay of language might be reversed.

It is in this sense that I believe we should hear Heidegger’s rather infamous assertion that “we must understand the Greeks better than they understood themselves” (*BPP* 111). For the goal of an engagement with Greek thought is not simply to be able to reiterate what they said, but to rekindle a kind of thinking that was snuffed out far too

prematurely, a kind of thinking that might provide a new path for “the West.” To provide such a path, it is not enough to know what the Greeks thought—the manner of thinking itself must be made our own, for only so can it offer a truly *new* commencement. As one of Heidegger’s examples goes, we must not only “experience *alētheia* in a Greek manner as unconcealment,” but “above and beyond the Greeks, think it as the clearing of self-concealing” (*EPTT* 448)—we must, by thinking with the Greeks, think beyond them toward another commencement, our *own* commencement. If we only understood the Greeks as well as they understood themselves, who is to say metaphysics would not simply repeat itself?

Before looking more closely at the ways in which such appropriative translations might be performed, we should note another context in which translation plays a vital role. For another reason we must return to the Greeks is that, as Heidegger writes in the 1930’s, the true “rootlessness of Western thought” does not begin with them, but with their successors: the Romans (149). Here, translation is highlighted as the means by which Greek thought was usurped and obscured by Rome, insofar as the seemingly literal translations of Greek words served in fact to Latinize Greek thinking.

Beneath the seemingly literal and thus faithful translation there is concealed, rather, a *translation* of Greek experience into a different way of thinking. *Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally original experience of what they say, without the Greek word* (*OWA* 149).

Far from being literal, the Latin translations stamped Greek concepts with a distinctly Roman seal. In the Latin words, the Greek world no longer speaks.

With the Roman mode of translation we encounter the opposite of Heidegger’s method. The difference is captured nicely in a passage from Nietzsche on the topic of Roman translation.

...Roman antiquity itself: how forcibly and at the same time how naively it took hold of everything good and lofty of Greek antiquity, which was more ancient! How they translated things into the Roman present! How deliberately and recklessly they brushed the dust off the wings of the butterfly that is called moment!.... Quickly, they replaced [the Greek] with what was contemporary and Roman. They seem to ask us: ‘Should we not make new for ourselves what is old and find ourselves in it? Should we not have the right to breathe our own soul into this dead body? For it is dead after all; how ugly is everything dead!’ They did not know the delights of the historical sense; what was past and alien was an embarrassment for them; and being Romans, they saw it as an incentive for a Roman conquest. Indeed, translation was a form of conquest...[done] with the very best conscience of the *imperium Romanum* (*The Gay Science* 137-8).

In considering the vast amount that is here shared by Nietzsche and Heidegger, we note that the only significant difference appears at the level of intention. For Nietzsche, the Romans explicitly translated as a form of conquest, consciously doing violence to the ancient Greek (“For it is dead after all; how ugly is everything dead!”) and using their words for their own purpose, “with the very best” Roman conscience. Heidegger’s account is more subtle: it is not a matter of one Roman’s purposeful conquest of one Greek poet (Nietzsche’s examples), but rather the unconscious imposition of a present communal spirit on an old one. Nonetheless, the basic outline is the same: for both, Roman thinking is seen as the Roman acquisition and usurpation of ancient Greece.

Heidegger’s method seeks the opposite effect: it hopes to *preserve* the historical spirit of the language and the world of the people who spoke it. Translation is neither a usurpation nor mere reiteration, but a *creative appropriation* that retains the world of the original while simultaneously going beyond it. To see how this is supposedly accomplished, we take our final step and enter into “Anaximander’s Saying.”

The goal of this essay is to offer an alternative translation of “the oldest saying of Western thinking” (*AS* 242), supposedly uttered by Anaximander of Miletus (610-546 BC) and preserved in a commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* written by the neo-Platonist

Simplicius. By following it, we are offered a view of Heidegger's method of translation in action, and through this model, a way of describing what might be called his "theory" of translation. Even further, through an explanation of his method and his theory, all of the various strands of thinking that we have become familiar with thus far—the threat of the assertion, the criticism of language as communication, the ideas that language speaks, that we speak only from listening to language, that language founds our historical existence, etc.—will come together in the essential role translation plays in Heidegger's thoughts on language and his philosophy as a whole.

In the essay, amidst discussions varying from the fate of the West to the "epoche of Being" and the history of Greek thought, Heidegger proceeds to meticulously formulate a new translation of the two sentences that make up Anaximander's saying (254). While the process often relies on philological and etymological deconstruction, Heidegger insists that his translations are "not based on etymological or lexical consideration" (278). Instead, reiterating the idea that "every translation must necessarily accomplish the transition from the spirit of one language into that of another" (*HHdI* 62), Heidegger explains that to translate Anaximander's saying "requires that we bring hither [*herübersetzen*] into our German language what is said in the Greek. To this end it is necessary that, before the translating, our thinking is translated [*übersetzt*] into what is said in the Greek" (248). For Heidegger, "only through a dialogue between thought and what this thoughtful saying says can it be translated," regardless of how "violent" ("incorrect," "unfaithful") its results may seem in the eyes of those seeking or expecting a merely "literal" translation (247-8). Before any adequate translation of the saying can occur, we must make a thoughtful leap into the unfamiliar realm of the Greeks, the realm

whose spirit supposedly speaks in the saying. Still, as Heidegger's word-play implies, this prior step is already itself a process of translation—the translation of thought necessary in advance of the translation of words.

But how, we should ask, can we access the thoughts contained in the saying if we do not have access to the saying in a language we understand? Heidegger's answer consists in the idea that the translation of thought can and must be accomplished by looking outside of Anaximander: "what is necessary before interpreting" (and thus translating) "the saying is to trans-late ourselves—at first without the help of the saying—to the place from which what is said in the saying comes" (255). The translation of Anaximander's words must be guided and "governed by the knowledge of what in early times was thought and thinkable in such terms—as distinct from the prevailing representations of later times" (256). We must "consciously set aside" such "inappropriate preconceptions," all of the traditional ways in which the words of philosophy have been understood and determined by metaphysics: for this way of thinking is completely foreign to the Greek experience that preceded it (250). What is essential is that we train our ears to hear Greek words in a Greek manner—that we learn to think in a Greek way.

The skeptic, however, is prepared with a rather simple retort: for even if one begins without the help of the saying, one must nevertheless begin with some Greek word through which to become acquainted with their way of thinking, and thus one who is not completely fluent in Greek must begin with translation. Following this line of thinking, translation becomes impossible, for the possibility of learning to think in a Greek way comes to hang on the existence of the translations it itself was to be the basis of.

Heidegger gives us little in the way of a response, which is no surprise given the fact that he never recognizes this skepticism as a potential problem. Instead, he simply proceeds to show us what he means by learning to think in a Greek way, apparently forgetting that his fluency in Greek and thorough knowledge of its etymology are what allows him to proceed in the first place. Perhaps, however, there is a rather simple way to overcome this apparent paradox. Perhaps Heidegger acknowledges that we must begin with translation, despite how “untrue” our first attempt assuredly is. Maybe it is only through such “tarrying with the negative” that we may come to think in a Greek way, the way necessary before our translation can move from merely *correct* to *true*. Whether or not the reader is convinced, we will take it to be the case, especially given the fact that Heidegger spends such a great amount of time with *wrong* translations before even beginning to formulate his own. Said differently, it is not a contradiction to assert the necessity of a prior translation of thought and to begin with “correct but untrue” translations, for only “true” or “authentic” translations depend on such a translation of thought.

Through these remarks we are afforded a view of the process of translation in Heidegger’s sense. This process, mirrored in the structure of the essay, begins with a diligent analysis of conventional translations, an analysis that turns into a critique as soon as the restoration of the “original sense” of the words contained in the quotation begins. Although this simultaneous critique/restoration occurs partially by means of philological considerations, Heidegger insists that it is only by consulting the “thinkers” that spoke this ancient language that we can get a sense of their words that is “governed by the knowledge of what in early times was thought and thinkable in such terms” (256). It is

this mixture of philology and the analysis of these terms as they come up in other thinkers that serves to bring about the transformation in thinking needed in order to furnish an adequate translation, i.e., one that conveys the foreign way of thinking that speaks in the saying in one's native tongue. Stated as concisely as possible, Heidegger's process of translation moves from conventional (untrue) translations back to the Greek terms, redefining them in light of philological considerations, on the hand, and by contrasting them with their sense one gets of them in their appearance in passages from other thinkers, on the other—in this way, finally arriving at a translation that *actually* “[brings hither] into our German language what is said in the Greek” (248).

But to get a better sense of the *general* method of translation, we must look at how it is enacted in the *particular* instance of “Anaximander's Saying.” As we have mentioned, the process of translation at the heart of this essay is interspersed with discussions about the fate of philosophy, ideas like “the eschatology of Being” (246) and “the *epoche* of Being” (254), and much, much more. To abate the possibility of becoming lost in the various trains of thought simultaneously at work in this essay, we will outline it only insofar as it allows us to understand the three most crucial terms in Heidegger's retranslation: *ta onta* (the beings/things/entities), *adikia* (injustice), *chreon* (necessity).¹³ The first term stands as the “subject matter” of the saying (249), the second represents “Anaximander's experience [of] the totality of the things that present” (his description of the subject matter of the saying, 266), and the third stands as “the oldest name in which thinking brings the Being of beings to language” (274) . The reason these three terms are

¹³ In what follows, transliterations of key Greek terms will be used instead of the original Greek script (the way it is found in the English translation of “Anaximander's Saying” here cited).

of the utmost importance is clear: they encompass an early Greek experience of Being. But, we must ask, what *is* this experience? *How* is Being thought in these words? What do they *say*—that is, what did they say *for* the Greeks?

Heidegger begins his essay with two translations, one from Nietzsche and one from Hermann Diels. The latter, he notes, “is in many respects the more literal”—“but if a translation is merely literal it cannot be assumed to be faithful. It only becomes faithful when its words are words that speak out of the language of the matter” (243). After this broad statement Heidegger adds that while both of these translations “arise from different impulses and intentions,” they are united in being guided by a specific conception of Anaximander. In other words, the translations that they reach are “wrong” for Heidegger because they are not oriented towards the matter of thought; instead, they get their bearing from what he calls the “implicit standard for explicating and judging the early thinkers”: Plato and Aristotle (243). These conventional translations are tainted by a particular way of understanding ancient Greek thought, a Platonic/Aristotelian lens, naturally conditioned by the fact that the quotation itself is presented and described by a neo-Platonist. By going against the necessity of “consciously [setting] aside ... inappropriate preconceptions,” these translations set early thinking in the relief of metaphysics, a way of thinking Heidegger believes to be totally foreign to Anaximander (250).

After announcing the need to move beyond all Aristotelian, Platonic, and Socratic lenses, Heidegger unleashes a series of questions regarding the possibility of being addressed by what is truly said in Anaximander’s saying, a saying separated from us by two and a half millennia. In response to those who doubt such a possibility, Heidegger

writes, “if we can manage, just once, to hear the saying it will speak to us no longer as a historically remote opinion” (247). The question of hearing brings Heidegger to the way of translation we have already described, finally resulting in the arduous and lengthy process of retranslation.

This process begins, according to our outline, with the presentation of the quotation “more literally translated”—that is, it begins with a “correct” translation.

But that from which things have their arising also gives rise to their passing away according to necessity; they give justice and penalty to each other for the injustice according to the ordinance of time (248).

What follows is a description of the “usual view” of Anaximander’s saying, that which is conditioned by Aristotle’s interpretation (248). This view holds that

the sentence speaks about the arising and decay of things. It specifies the nature of this process. Arising and decay return to the place from where they came. Things develop and then decay, exhibiting a kind of barter system in nature’s unchanging economy (248).

The usual view takes Anaximander’s words as a “beginner’s attempt at scientific research,” a vague description of a natural process (248). From this perspective, the “subject matter of the saying” is natural beings, things of nature, material bodies—things that, due to the primitive status of science during the time of Anaximander, are described inappropriately “in terms of those [things] familiar from the human sphere”; in other words, “moral and legal concepts infiltrate the picture of nature” (249). In sum, the common understanding of this saying takes it to be a crude statement about nature that uses moral and legal concepts as crutches.

As is no surprise, Heidegger wishes to advance a different understanding. In this context, his first translation-related correction consists in pointing out that the subject matter (*ta onta*, the beings) is not simply natural beings, but “the manifold being,” “the

multiplicity of beings as a whole”—all that about which we can say “it is” (249). As we have outlined Heidegger’s method of translation, the substantiation of this translation must come both from philological considerations and through comparing it with other passages in which the term plays a significant role. In this particular instance, Heidegger’s philological considerations come by means of “some preliminary remarks concerning the history of language” (i.e., concerning the etymology of *ta onta*, 259) and his point of comparison consists of a passage from Homer’s *Iliad* in which *ta onta* “comes to the fore in a more than merely lexical way. It is a passage, rather, in which what *ta onta* names is brought to language poetically” (259).

Beginning with the philological/grammatical side, let us quote Heidegger at length.

In Plato and Aristotle, *on* and *onta* confront us as conceptual words. The later terms ‘ontic’ and ‘ontological’ are formed from them. Linguistically, however, *on* and *onta* are presumably forms of the original words *eon* and *eonta* which have somehow become abbreviated. Only in the original words is the sound still preserved with which we say *eon* and *eonta*. . . . In contrast, *on* and *onta* look like rootless participial endings, as though, by themselves, they specifically designate what we must think in those word forms called by grammarians *metoke*, *participium*; in other words, those word forms which participate in the verbal and nominal sense of a word. Thus *on* says ‘being’ in the sense of *to be* a being; but *on* also names a being which is. In the duality of the participial signification of *on* there lies concealed the distinction between ‘being [*seiend*]’ and ‘a being [*Seiendem*].’ Thus represented, what is here set forth looks at first sight like a grammatical splitting of hairs. In truth, however, it is the enigma of Being (259-60).

Amongst the many noteworthy claims contained in these passages, perhaps the most radical (other than the last sentence, of course) is that the distinction Heidegger is thought to have introduced to the world in 1927 was in fact already present in the ancient Greek terminology. This difference between beings and Being is one we have already acknowledged to be central to Heidegger’s understanding of ontology, representing what

Heidegger comes to call the ontological difference. The use of *ta onta* thus must be distinguished from the later conceptual terms from which we derive the terms ontic and ontology, those that make up the Aristotelian/Platonic lens Heidegger wishes to discard. Hence the subject matter of the saying is not a conceptual term, not a metaphysical categorization, but something else entirely: “the manifold being” (249). For Heidegger, when Anaximander says *ta onta*, his meaning must be understood as if he had used *ta eonta*—the “archaic Greek” word common to Parmenides and Heraclitus—rather than the participial residue of the Platonic/Aristotelian notions of Being (259). For even within the grammatical construction of *ta onta* the overriding tendency of metaphysics is already at work, already fashioning the logical-grammatical conception of language, already defining the word according to its “verbal and nominal sense.”

George McCarthy helps us to articulate this crucial point regarding the evolution of Being from pre- to post-Platonic thought, a point we have already become familiar with.

In post-Platonic thought, scholasticism, and metaphysics, *eon* is transformed into a distinct entity with fundamental and essential characteristics defining its being as an entity. Heidegger, reacting to this anthropomorphism, defines Being not as an entity, but as a process in which entities come to light and are made visible. Being and becoming are part of this process of presencing (*einai*). ...As the philosophical fragment of Anaximander speaks to Heidegger, he considers the nature of Being in terms of coming (*genesis*) and passing away (*pthora*). Avoiding the pitfalls of juxtaposing an opposition between Being and becoming, Heidegger wishes to show the intimate connection between two distinct temporal elements of Being itself. The distinction between something as it comes to be and something that passes away is a process in which [a being]¹⁴ comes into ‘unconcealment’ (101).

¹⁴ McCarthy, instead of writing “a being,” writes “an object”—a formulation must avoid for obvious reasons (principally, the anti-subjectivist thrust of Heidegger’s understanding of language (101).

Here we see more clearly that fundamental point of Heidegger's "preliminary remarks concerning the history of language" is to reiterate what we referred to in our first chapter as the three ontological tiers (259). This in turn gives us a better sense of why Heidegger sees within the early Greek thinkers "the secrets to the notion of Being," a more "primordial" ontological "vision" (McCarthy 100). In Anaximander's fragment, Heidegger hears a way of thinking Being that aligns itself with his own attempted move beyond the ontology of metaphysics—the two are united in their status as *unmentaphysical* (one coming before, and one going beyond). However, we should not say that Heidegger finds in the Greeks a vision close to his own, but rather that this vision itself comes from the Greeks and his attempted return to their thinking. The early Greeks give Heidegger an initial push: they provide a flash of insight—a "lightening-glance," both in the sense of illuminating and in the sense of a lightening bolt's instantaneousness (*AS* 255)—into the way in which thinking might exist unmetaphysically.

In the specific instance of Anaximander's saying, our lightening-glance is granted by the description of the totality of beings as defined by coming to be and passing away. As we have said, Heidegger does not interpret this description as pertaining exclusively to natural beings and their physical presence and decay, but rather as the way in which beings can be defined in terms of unconcealment. Coming to be and passing away are not simply poetic ways of describing birth and death, but more importantly, ways in which beings can be defined *in terms of the clearing* ("coming to be" means coming to show itself in unconcealment; "passing away" means to return back to the hiddenness of concealment). In this sense, the saying goes about clarifying beings in the opposite direction of metaphysics: beings are defined from "out of" the clearing, from out

of Being itself. These words, so important for Heidegger, are here not neglected in favor of a greater attention to beings, but instead serve as a ground and foundation upon which the nature of beings can be explained. In the saying, Being—at least to some extent—finally comes to ground beings.

Hence the acknowledged grandiosity of the conclusion of these “brief” remarks:

We might say—in an exaggerated way which nevertheless touches upon the truth—that the destiny of the West rests on the translation of the word *eon*, given that the translation [*Übersetzung*] is a crossing over [*Übersetzung*] to the truth of what comes to language in the *eon* (260).

The world-historical significance of this word and how it has been translated (that is, following from the lecture on Hölderlin, how it has been *interpreted*) is clear enough from the veritable Heideggerian obsession with the question of Being and his unequivocal belief in its importance. But in the context of “Anaximander’s Saying,” it is important to note that such significance is grounded particularly in what Heidegger calls the “*epoche* of Being” (254). As simply as possible, this term denotes a particular way in which history is understood “[from] out of the oblivion of Being”—that is, from out of the fact that Being has remained unthought (insofar as “by revealing itself in the being, Being withdraws,” 254). From this perspective, historical periods are to be determined on the basis of how Being remained concealed, and in turn by how such concealment furnished a particular historical people with a definite way of understanding Being. The essential movement of history, given this perspective, thus consists of “errancy,” a perpetual distancing from Being reflected by a perpetual zooming in on beings (254).

In such errancy, Being “keeps to itself. This keeping to itself is the way it discloses itself early on. Its early sign is the *a-lētheia*” (254). Unconcealment is thus the first and last hint the West has received about Being. Through this hint, Being is

illuminated—but illuminated *as* a “keeping to itself with the truth of its essence” (254). The epoche of Being, then, is the history of the oblivion of this hint, the history of how this formulation went from a profound realization concerning the essence of what is to the mundane and lazy assertion that Being is “the emptiest and most universal concept” (264). Only this is “authentic world history”: what we might describe as the “base” on which the “superstructure” of “real history” occurs, the base which itself determines the way in which real historical events have played out (254). Therefore, by claiming that the destiny of the West depends on how *eon* has been interpreted and translated, Heidegger is claiming that Western history as we normally think of it is only a phantom or residue of the ever-exacerbated forgetfulness and oblivion of Being (thought in terms of the three ontological tiers of beings, Being, and the clearing/the *es gibt*).

In concluding our analysis of these remarks concerning the history of language, we must ask what McCarthy means when he says that “Heidegger wishes to show the intimate connection between two distinct temporal elements of Being itself” (101). To do this, we turn from these historical remarks to the second way in which Heidegger goes about determining the original Greek sense of *ta onto*: an appeal to Homer’s *Iliad*.

The specific passage under consideration consists of lines 68-72 of the first book of the *Iliad*, where the Achaeans, outside the walls of Troy, have been suffering through nine days of plague sent by Apollo. “At the assembly of warriors,” Heidegger explains, “Achilles commands Kalchas, the seer, to interpret the wrath of the god:”

Calchas, Thestor’s son, the wisest bird-interpreter
 Who knew what is, what will be or what once was,
 Who guided here before Troy the ships of the Achaeans,
 Through the prophetic spirit granted him by Phoebus Apollo (260).

In his description of the seer, Homer characterizes Calchas as the one “who knew what is, what will be or what once was.” That is, *eonta* does not only embrace what is present in the sense of temporally present (“here and now”), but also “what is past and what is in the future. Both constitute a way of being present being, namely, being an unpresently present being” (261). Beings that are no longer or not yet here are nonetheless said to be present—they still *are*, despite their (temporally present) absence. *Ta eonta*, then, “remains ambiguous”: it “means on the one hand the presently present, and on the other, however, both the presently present and unpresently present” (261).

Furthermore, “the ‘*gegen* [against]’ in ‘*gegenwärtig* [present]’ does not mean standing over against a subject, but rather the open region [*Gegend*] of unconcealment into and within which that which has arrived lingers” (261). The presencing of beings, though of in an early Greek manner, does not occur “over against a subject,” but rather amidst the clearing of *alētheia*. Beings come and go, lingering for a while in unconcealment only to slide back into the darkness of what is hidden. They are not brought forth through the representation of an ego, but rather manifest themselves in their own way of arising and passing away. Amidst the clearing, man does not occupy a privileged position, but rather dwells “alongside” those beings that show themselves and remain veiled (261). With early Greek thinking, man is seen in the “ecological” sense we mentioned in regards to Charles Taylor.

This completely un-subjectivist way of thinking (that, as we know, Heidegger is working towards) is captured in the description of the seer. Calchas stands “in the sight of what is present in unconcealment, which at the same time has illuminated the

concealment of the absent as the absent” (262). Through his vision the seer is “beside, outside, himself,” he “is away” (ek-static):

We ask: away to where? And from where? Away from the mere crush of what lies before us, of the merely presently present, and away to the absent... The seer is outside himself in the single breadth of the presence of that which is in every way present... For the seer, everything present and absent is gathered and preserved in *one* presencing (262).

Such preservation [*wahren*], Heidegger continues, must be thought of “as an illuminating-gathering sheltering” (262). The one whose duty it is to preserve presence in its temporal triad, whose essence consists in the “protection of Being,” is none other than “the shepherd of Being” (262). Thus Homer’s seer is, in fact, a description of authentic Dasein. For the seer, “the intimate connection between two distinct temporal elements of Being itself” is clear: all beings are bound together by presence, a process of coming to be and passing away that embraces the absent within itself (McCarthy 101). The metaphysical domain, in which beings are thought only in the sense of the constancy of their present presence—that is, thought in a static enough way as to be best suited for the ambitions of the lord of beings—is overcome through a vision of the temporal unity of Being. This vision allows the seer to overcome the obstinacy of Dasein’s everydayness, a way of Being blind to anything other than “the mere crush of what lies before us,” opening the seer’s eyes to the clearing of unconcealment, rekindling a way to reawaken the question of the meaning of Being.

The result of Heidegger’s analysis of Homer’s seer is a way of thinking *ta eonta* in an authentically Greek manner, as “presencing in unconcealment” (261). In this understanding, the temporal dimension of Being is subsumed in the process of presencing itself, determined as a movement leading to, arriving in, and following from

unconcealment. Thus the seer's vision lends us to a way of thinking beings on the basis of Being, a way of understanding beings on the basis of the movement of presencing itself. Being is not forgotten or neglected, but thought as the movement (the becoming) of unconcealment. Only on this basis are beings then understood—in other words, beings are explained according the essence of Being itself. Hence Heidegger can answer the question “whither have Homer's words trans-lated [*über-gesetzt*] us?” by stating simply “to the *eonta*.”

The Greeks experience the being as that which is present (whether presently so or not), present in unconcealment. Our use of ‘being’ to translate *on* is no longer obtuse; ‘to be’ as the translation of *einai* and the Greek word itself are no longer hastily employed code words for arbitrary and vague representations of indeterminate generality...*ta eonta*, the presently and unpresently present, is the inconspicuous name of that which comes expressly to language in Anaximander's saying. The word names that which, as the still unspoken—unspoken in thinking—addresses all thought. The word names that which, whether spoken or not, henceforth lays claim to all Western thinking (263-4).

Before looking more closely at what this particular act of translation has to contribute to our general discussion of translation and language, let us look at what I find to be the other two most important examples of translation in “Anaximander's Saying”: the translation of *adikia* (injustice) as “Dis-order” [*Un-Fug*] (269) and of *chreon* as “usage [*Brauch*]” (276).

Turning his attention from *ta onta* to *adikia*, Heidegger claims that this word, “literally translated” as “injustice,” represents the way in which Anaximander “[experiences] the totality of things that presence” (266). Leaving this statement unsubstantiated (perhaps because such substantiation can only come out of a thoughtful encounter with early Greek thinking, that is, the completion of the present process), Heidegger asks: “How is it that what presences, staying, stands in injustice? What is

unjust about the thing that presences? Does it not have the right to stay awhile, from time to time, and so fulfill its presencing?” (267).

Noting the need to “steer clear of our judicial-moral representations” (and thus also noting, by extension, that translations such as penalty or injustice are inappropriate), Heidegger begins the process with the most basic way we can understand the word in a Greek sense, building on this way of thinking until he reaches a more “thoughtful” translation. If “we stick to what comes to language, then *adikia* says that where it prevails, all is not right with things. That means, something is out of joint.” To be out of joint, he continues, entails a fundamental “jointure” that “belongs to presencing as such.” This jointure, he claims, is the “while” in which things stay for a time between coming to be and passing away, the “between” in which the presently present makes its stand in unconcealment between its coming into unconcealment and returning to concealment. “Presencing occurs in this jointure,” in this movement of arising and passing away, as this temporary stand “enjoined toward absence...in both directions” (267).

But if presence occurs in the jointure, why is it that beings are defined in their essence as “out of joint”? Put simply, because beings can refuse the movement of presencing.

What has arrived [in unconcealment] may even insist on its while, solely to remain more present, in the sense of enduring. That which stays persists in its presencing. In this way it takes itself out of its transitory while. It extends itself in a stubborn pose of persistence. It concerns itself no longer with the other things that are present. As though this were the way to stay, it becomes concerned with the permanence of its continued existence.... The dis-jointure consists in the fact that what stays awhile tries to have its while understood only as continuation. Thought from out of the jointure of the while, staying as persistence is insurrection on behalf of sheer endurance.... In this rebellious whiling, that which stays awhile insists on sheer continuation. It presences, therefore, without and against the jointure of the while (267-8).

The dis-jointure of beings stems from an impulse within these beings themselves to be understood in terms of sheer continuance, persistent presence in the sense of that which always lies before us, constantly “here now.” Said differently, there exists a drive common to all beings to continue in the kind of presence best suited for metaphysical inquiry (although not in the sense of having the intent to be best suited for metaphysics)—a drive to exist as *objects*. This drive, possible for every being, goes against the very movement of presencing: its stubbornness and obstinacy come as an “insurrection” against the natural temporal course of Being itself. Through this insistence, through going against the jointure in which presencing occurs, beings are in “dis-jointure.”

The picture is not so simple, however. For Anaximander “does not say that everything that presences loses itself in dis-jointure,” but rather quite the opposite: that they “[give] jointure” (268). Given the translation of *adikia* as dis-order, the translation of *dike* as order instead of the alternatives—penalty, punishment, fine, justice—is clear. Further, because we are not speaking of something that it paid (a penalty or a fine), the translation of *didonai* as give is far more accurate. But how can beings both be thought on the basis of disjointure *and* be thought to give jointure? Heidegger’s answer comes from thinking the word “to give” in a more “primordial” manner (269).

Giving is not only giving away. More primordial, is giving in the sense of conceding. Giving of this kind lets belong to another what properly belongs to him. What belongs to what presences is the jointure of the while which it enjoins in its arrival and departure. In the jointure, that which stays awhile keeps to its while. It does not strain to get away into the dis-jointure of sheer persistence. The jointure belongs to what stays awhile which, in turn, belongs in the jointure. The jointure [*Fuge*] is order [*Fug*] (269).

In this passage, we see that the drive towards dis-jointure is (or at least can be) checked by another essential trait of the presencing of beings: a giving that, as a conceding, “lets order”—Heidegger’s reinterpretation of his retranslation—“belong” (269). Rather than insisting on sheer continuance, another possibility of presencing is open to beings: “lingering.” Presencing in this way, beings “[do] not fall victim to dis-jointure,” but allow presence to occur according to its essence as enjoined to a two-fold absence. Through such lingering, a being “overcomes dis-order,” letting order belong, that is, letting order occur according to its essence. Beings linger by allowing presence its own way of presencing, instead of insisting on their own permanence; that is, instead of insisting on dis-order.

In addition to letting order belong, beings that linger also overcome dis-order by allowing “*Ruch* [reck]” to belong (271). The Greek word *tisis* here translated cannot, according to Heidegger, be thought of as “penalty,” for this translation “does not name the essential and original meaning of the word” (270). Instead, Heidegger asserts unflinchingly, “*tisis* is ‘esteem’” (270). This way of “paying heed,” he adds, is “better [captured]” in the word “consideration” (271). Such esteem or consideration becomes necessary because dis-order is not solely overcome through giving order (that is, a reorientation towards presence), but further requires a mutual letting-be of beings (that is, a reorientation towards that which presences). As we know, beings come to stand in dis-jointure by insisting on their continued presence: “as they while they tarry. They hang on...they cling to themselves” (270). In this way, concerned only “with permanent continuance,” “no longer [looking] to the order of the while,”

...Everything that tarries pushes itself forward in opposition to everything else. None heeds the lingering essence of the others. The things that stay awhile are

without consideration toward each other: each is dominated by the craving for persistence in the lingering presence itself (271).

Here, the “rebellious whiling” is rethought from the way in which it relates to presencing in general to the way in which it relates one being’s presencing to another’s. Instead of an insurrection against presencing, here we find an insurrection against others, an inconsiderate selfishness, a Hobbesian world of all-against-all. The overcoming of dis-order requires both a letting-be of order and a letting-be of one another. Beings not only must let order be as it is, but let others be what they are—a possibility blocked by the obstinacy of self-assertion. The word Heidegger chooses to encapsulate this way of orienting oneself towards others, coming from the “Middle High German ‘*ruoche*’” (“‘solicitude,’ ‘care’”), is “*Ruch*,” translated into English as “reck” (271)—another example of how Heidegger relies on thinking through the original contents of language.

From the idea of injustice and paying penalty we have moved through the idea of the jointure and arrived at a translation Heidegger believes to be in line with early Greek thinking. Now, instead of translating the current portion of Anaximander’s saying as “they pay each other punishment and penalty for their dastardliness,” or as “they must pay a penalty for their injustice” (242), we write: “they let order and reck belong to one another (in the surmounting of) dis-order” (280). It is clear, then, why Heidegger told us at the beginning that his translation would seem violent. Neither does it coincide with the other more literal translations nor does it come anywhere close to what a dictionary or common translator would provide. Nonetheless, Heidegger claims that his is the only translation that is truly faithful.

The final words at stake in Heidegger’s translation are, interestingly enough, the first words Heidegger believes to be attributable to Anaximander himself: *kata to chreon*,

“according to necessity” (273). “The grammatical form of [this] enigmatically ambiguous genitive,” Heidegger claims, “names a genesis, an origin of what is present from out of presencing” (274). “Hidden” within this origin is what remains to be thought in overcoming metaphysics, “the relation between presence and what presences”: the ontological difference (274). But before going on to offer a new translation of this word, Heidegger dives back into the *epoche* of Being.

From earliest times it has seemed as though presence and what is present are each something for themselves. Unintentionally, presence itself became something present. Represented in terms of something present it became that which is above everything else that is present and so the highest of beings that are present. As soon as presence is named, it is already represented as a present being.... The essence of presence together with the difference between presence and what is present remains forgotten. *The oblivion of Being is oblivion to the difference between Being and the being.*

But oblivion to the difference is by no means the result of a forgetfulness of thinking. Oblivion of Being belongs to that essence of Being which it itself conceals.... Oblivion to the difference with which the destiny of Being begins—so as to complete itself in such destiny—is not a deficiency. Rather, it is the richest and broadest event in which the world-history of the West achieves its resolution. It is the event of metaphysics (274-5).

Despite all of this, within Anaximander’s saying, in the words *kata to chreon*, there lies a hint to the nature of this difference, the relation between Being and beings; in fact, “the early word of Being, *to chreon*, names such a relation” (275). To get at what this word says (now a matter of utmost importance in multiple senses), despite Heidegger’s insistence on the fact that we cannot simply “[persist] with etymological dissection of the word,” he opts to begin with etymology—though an etymology with a clear Heideggerian stamp (276).

Heidegger says that the fact that *chreon* is “generally translated as necessity” is a “mistake.” Because *chreon* is derived from a set of words that “suggest” the Greek

word for hand, Heidegger argues that if we attend to these more archaic roots, we get a sense of *chreon* as “to place in someone’s hands, to hand over and deliver, to let something belong to someone” (276). From this, coupled with the fact that, given the context of Anaximander’s saying, *chreon* “can only name what is essential in the presencing of what is present,” Heidegger reasons that *chreon* “contains nothing of compulsion or ‘must’” implied by the translation of necessity. Instead, *chreon* is “the handing over of presencing” *itself*—“a handing over which hands out presencing to what is present, and therefore keeps it in hand, in other words, preserves in presencing, what is present as such” (276).

To capture this understanding, reminiscent of our discussion of *das Ereignis* and the “*Es gibt*,” Heidegger offers a translation that, while it “makes strenuous demands,” attributes “to the Greek word a meaning that is neither foreign to the word itself nor contrary to the matter discussed in the saying”: “usage [*Brauch*]” (276). In this final example of translation in the Heideggerian sense, the two aspects of his “method” align succinctly, and even further, provide us with an example of how Heidegger thinks through words according to their original contents.

To what extent is *chreon* usage? The strangeness of the translation is ameliorated by thinking our word more clearly. Generally, we understand ‘to use’ to mean to utilize and need within the area of that to the use of which we enjoy a right. As the translation of *chreon*, ‘usage’ is not to be understood in these customary but secondary meanings. Rather, we attend to the root meaning: to use is *bruchen* [to brook?], in Latin *frui*, in German *fruchten*, *Frucht* [to bear fruit, fruit]. We translate this freely as ‘to enjoy [*geniessen*]’ which, in its original form [*niessen*], means to take joy in something and so to have it in use. Only in its secondary meaning does ‘to enjoy’ come to mean to consume and gobble up. We encounter what we have called the root meaning of ‘to use’ as *frui* when Augustine says ‘Quid enim est aliud quod *dicimus frui*, nisi praesto

*habere, quod diligis?*¹⁵.... *Frui* contains: *praesto, habere. Praesto, praesitum* means in Greek...that which already lies before us in unconcealment, the *onta*, that which presences awhile. Accordingly, ‘to use’ says: to let something that is present come to presence as such. *Frui, bruchen*, to use, usage, means: to hand something over to its own essence and, as so present, to keep it in the protecting hand (277).

At play in Heidegger’s translation of *chreon* as “usage” [*Brauch*], then, are first, etymological considerations; second, a comparison with a thoughtful quotation in which it speaks “originally”; and finally, a thorough consideration of the “original contents” of language, “root meanings” of words as opposed to “secondary” or “derivative” ones. As Heidegger explains, we customarily understand usage and the verb “to use” in the sense of enjoyment, and enjoyment in the sense of the pleasure brought about in consuming and “gobbling up” (using). This, however, is only the familiar, “worn-out” meanings we attach to these words. If we attend to their root/original meanings, the words open themselves up in an entirely different way.

Heidegger shows this on multiple levels. First, he compares the German *brauchen* (to use, to need; compare with “usage,” *Brauch*) to the verb *bruchen*, a word that, as is shown by the question mark (“to brook?”), is of questionable philological tenacity. Setting this to the side, we note that Heidegger then compares *bruchen* to the Latin *frui*, and then to the German *fruchten* (to bear fruit). This Latin word is then “freely” translated back into German with *geniessen* (to enjoy), its common and “secondary” meaning then displaced through a reference to Augustine’s rhetorical question. In the end, this allows Heidegger to think *Brauch* “more clearly” as a kind of

¹⁵ “For what else do we mean when we say *frui* if not to have at hand something especially prized?”

handing “something over to its own essence, and, as so present, to keep it in the protecting hand” (as something “prized”).

Now, one way we could approach this “clarification” would be by looking more closely at the etymological steps Heidegger takes. Still, even if I were fluent in Latin, such an approach would be misguided. For as we already know, “this translation cannot be scientifically established: nor should we have faith in it on the basis of some kind of authority.” Anaximander’s words, in Heidegger’s mind, “will never speak to us so long as we explain [them] in a merely historical and philological manner” (*AS* 280). As opposed to this, Heidegger embraces translation (and etymology, for that matter) “freely,” in terms of its creative and appropriative potential. The only way that this translation can become “authoritative” is through “thinking through the saying” and nothing more (*ibid.*).

As we said during our discussion of *Was heisst Denken?*, what is central to Heidegger’s work with the original contents of language is not the question of “correctness,” but the fact that through such thinking, words become “incomparably richer in essential content” (142). This is exactly what occurs with Heidegger’s “clarification” of *Brauch*. Here, a common term and an ordinary verb (*brauchen*) come to manifest themselves in a far greater depth—they come to show themselves as wellsprings that can name an essential occurrence with beings, even Being itself. Whether his leap to the Latin *frui* is philologically tenable is of little to no consequence; what matters is that, “with the help of an encounter with the foreign language,” the German word comes to resound in an unfamiliar way, and for this reason, a more profound, richer, and more *thought worthy* way (*HHdI* 65-6). What about them makes them so worthy of thought,

however, can only be seen by how they enrich and enliven Anaximander's saying as a whole.

Proceeding from the "new" way of thinking what *Brauch* says (the last line of the above block quote) and linking it with the necessity of seeing it as "the oldest name in which thinking brings the Being of beings to language" (274), Heidegger tells us that "'usage' now designates the way in which Being itself presences as the relationship to what is present which is concerned and handles it as what is present" (277).

Disposing order and reck, usage releases the present being and delivers each to its while. By doing so, however, it places it in permanent danger that its tarrying in the while will petrify into mere persistence. Thus, at the same time, usage hands presencing over into dis-order.... For this reason what stays awhile in presence can come to presence only insofar as it allows order and reck to belong: to usage. What presences always presences *kata to chreon*, within the lines of usage. Usage is the disposing and preserving gathering of what presences always into its tarrying presence (278).

Through his etymological foray through German and Latin, Heidegger has allowed *chreon* to come to language not as the binding "must" of necessity, but rather as the "disposing preserving gathering," the original granting of presence, the *Es gibt Sein*. By engaging Anaximander as an early Greek thinker, a thinker who grappled and struggled with Being in a serious and thoughtful way (rather than as a premature scientist or a pre-Platonic/Aristotelian), he allows translation the freedom of arriving at its words solely through a thoughtful dialogue and encounter with the thinking Anaximander's saying tries to bring to language—as well as *language* itself.

To conclude this last chapter, we return to the question with which we began: *how* is the Greek experience *preserved* in the German translations? As it has both been described and seen in Heidegger's own writing, the process of translation consists in moving from a series of conventional translations back to the original (Greek) terms they

attempt to convey, from here arriving at an appropriate translation by means of etymology/philology and comparison with other instances in which we encounter it (in early Greek thinking). Through this process, Anaximander's saying evolved from a beginner's attempt to scientifically explain a natural process to a primordial experience of Being. Regardless of whether or not Heidegger's etymology and interpretation of Homer's seer are convincing, one cannot deny that they are intriguing—that they are “incomparably richer” in their “essential content.” Questions like whether it is appropriate to use moral-juridical concepts in scientific explanation have been replaced with questions about the history of metaphysics and the essence of presencing. In the end, Heidegger sees in the span of twelve words¹⁶ an entirely new way of thinking Being unfold, a way of thinking that refuses to be reduced to metaphysics, and thus a way that might provide a new path for thinking after the completion of metaphysics.

To address the question of whether or not an original Greek way of thinking is preserved in Heidegger's translations, it seems that we must go about finding a way of confirmation. Most obviously, this would consist of an historical inquiry into philosophical and historical texts from a certain period of Greek antiquity, an inquiry that might follow Heidegger's lead by comparing his translations with other instances key words come up in such texts. As far as Heidegger's own inquiry is concerned, however, the kinds of confirmation or proof such methods would result in are arbitrary if not totally irrelevant. For Heidegger, the Greeks are not a certain set of people existing between certain dates: “what is Greek is that dawn of destiny as which Being itself lights itself up in beings and lays claim to an essence of humanity” (253), perhaps what Heidegger refers

¹⁶ This number refers to the word count of the quotation Heidegger believes to be assuredly attributable to Anaximander.

to as the West or “the Evening-Land” (245). From this perspective (although Heidegger surely would not call it that), confirming whether Anaximander “truly” thought in the way Heidegger’s translation conveys can, as we have noted time and time again, come solely through a thoughtful dialogue with Anaximander’s saying itself (a dialogue that would result in a translation that, because it could only be a reiteration of Heidegger or go against Heidegger, would be inadequate according to his terms).

The question of confirmation takes on different meaning when we see translation as an act of creative appropriation. From this angle, whether Anaximander’s “true” thoughts correspond to Heidegger’s translation is irrelevant; instead, the question is whether his translation appropriates early Greek thinking “authentically”—whether the spirit of the Greek is not obscured or covered over but rather creatively brought into the German language. Such a “bringing hither [*Übersetzung*]” does not take as its measure the possibility of an exact equivalency between languages, for “there is no such thing as translation if we mean that a word from one language could, or even should, be made to substitute as the equivalent of a word from another language” (*HHdI* 62). Instead, acknowledging the need to forsake a desire for what is literal in favor of creativity, Heidegger’s method of translation embraces the prospect that translation only truly becomes *faithful* when it takes its bearing solely from “the language of the matter,” that is, solely from what Anaximander’s saying requires us to think (*AS* 243). For Heidegger, when we discard Platonic and Aristotelian lenses along with everything else that might hinder us from experiencing early Greek thought and truly take our bearing from a thoughtful engagement, what comes to language in the saying is nothing other than a primordial experience of Being, an example and a path for the future of thinking.

When we think translation as creative appropriation, and when we take our bearing from the matter of thought present in the saying (and perhaps this necessarily means the way in which the saying thinks Being), how are we to answer the question of whether or not the Greek experience is preserved in Heidegger's translations? Must we simply take his word that a truly thoughtful dialogue with Anaximander can lead only to this translation? Perhaps the strength of Heidegger's translation can only be seen on the basis of the thoughts it conveys. That is, perhaps its strength can only be determined by a thoughtful dialogue with it.

...along the line of usage; for they let order and reck belong to one another (in the surmounting) of dis-order (280).

If one were to come upon this translation out of context, utter confusion would immediately arise. Said this way, not only does the saying lose any sense of being a scientific statement about nature—it comes across as complete nonsense. We, however, who have followed Heidegger through his process, know that almost every word of this quotation is invested with a hidden wealth and richness, and that this quotation, when seen in its essential breadth, gives words to something meaningful: an experience of Being outside of the ways we are accustomed. Through these words, the clearing comes to language as the temporal dimensionality of Being, the realm in which beings make their stand in stubborn persistence or linger only momentarily, following the movement of presencing. Amongst this realm, beings are not objects at hand or ready to hand, nor is their reality confirmed on the basis of a subject's representation. Instead, beings, including even (or perhaps especially) man himself, are understood from out of an experience of Being, an experience that does not establish a hierarchy of beings but instead simply lets beings: be.

Conclusion: Being, Language, and Translation

As we near our end, let us once more return to the quote with which we began our way through Heidegger's thinking.

And it requires a new attentiveness to language, not the invention of new terms, as I once thought, but rather a return to the original contents of our own language as it has been conceived, which is constantly decaying (*PR* viii).

The future of thinking, as defined by the attempt to overcome metaphysics, requires a new attentiveness to language: a new way of hearing it and responding to it that remains open to beings in the way they demand themselves to be manifested. Such attentiveness allows beings to come to presence as things rather than objects, allows them to appear through thoughtful poetic description rather than the formulaic categorizations of science. This description is not achieved through the invention of new terms that might better serve to give word to beings, but through a return to the original contents of languages, the archaic forms and antiquated uses that have been buried over the course of time. For it is this burial and decay that has led language to forfeit its essential nature, whether this nature is seen as its potential to give words to beings as things, or whether it is seen as the essential abode of man's existence as *Dasein*—even the house of Being itself. The only way to combat this decadence of language is to develop a kind of thinking that occurs by returning to the original contents of our language, by de-subjectivizing our vocabulary and grammar through stripping away the layers of classification and specification that have divested words (*Worte*) of their essential breath—leaving us only with terms (*Wörter*)

Through his work with “thinking” and its relation to thanking and memory, Heidegger has shown us both how the original contents of words can help to give them a far richer, more diverse, and more disclosive power, and how our encounter with a foreign language might serve to bring about new and novel realizations about our own language, that which tends to ceaselessly level itself off in everydayness. Through his work with Homer and the way the words of Anaximander’s saying were understood in this pre-metaphysical time, and by working with archaic formulations and grammatical transformations, Heidegger not only shows us how to begin to think in a Greek (unmetaphysical) way, but further, shows us how the return to the original contents of a language can exist simultaneously with the process of translation. In fact, in the case of “Anaximander’s Saying,” it is translation that allows the original contents of Greek to be heard once more, now in an odd-sounding yet conceptually rich German appropriation.

Here, in the context of the Greeks, the return to and preservation of the original contents of language by means of translation gains an even greater significance: it becomes a potential source for the rekindling of the question of Being. Of course this is not to say that Being is cast aside in his work with the original contents of German, but rather that what is crucial to note is that, as far as the future of thinking is concerned, a place in which the return to the original contents of language, translation, and the question of Being become intimately intertwined seems especially worthy of our consideration. For here, many of the central strands of Heidegger’s thinking come to a head: the paths he treads do not diverge but come to coincide in a vibrant harmony.

One final context in which the return to the original contents of language and translation must be seen is in the transition Heidegger sees from Greek to Latin. For as

we have noted already in relation to “The Origin of the Work of Art,” beneath these “seemingly literal and thus faithful” translations lies concealed “a *translation* of Greek experience into a different way of thinking. *Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally original experience of what they say, without the Greek word*” (*OWA* 149). The Greek words—*ta onta*, *aidikia*, *alētheia*, etc.—are, together with “an original experience of what they say,” lost with their Latin translations: another reason for the imperative Heidegger gives thinking at the end of metaphysics. Here, the return—a process of re-translation, we might say—is required because of the potential for translation to exist “inauthentically.” Because of these translations’ historical consequence, by re-translating them, Heidegger is, in effect, rewriting history itself. Or, thought of another way, Heidegger is climbing back down history step-by-step, reaching the early Greek thinkers, and taking a back door he calls “thinking.”

This pivotal position lends translation its vital significance: for only it can help us achieve the attentiveness to language required for the future of thinking. Such attentiveness, achieved through a meditation on and the process of translation, can be characterized as the acknowledgment of the four dimensions of translation and language (as ontological, existential, aesthetic, and political/historical). By seeing these four dimensions, the “world” of translation opens itself before us, showing itself as the possibility to rekindle the question of the meaning of Being, the possibility for man to fully become Da-sein, the possibility of restoring language to its poetic essence, and the possibility to forge a new political and historical path for thinking. Only through these essential possibilities does translation become what it truly is for Heidegger: a matter on which the destiny of mankind itself rests.

However, amidst all of the discussion of translation, the spirit of languages, and the plurality of languages that have led us to this point, we have yet to even acknowledge what may well be an integral question: where do *we* stand as English speakers/readers? In this context, a skeptic could ask us: have Heidegger's translations really given *us* access to the original thinking of the Greeks, when what we are working with is translations of Heidegger's translations? Can the original Greek way of thinking, supposedly preserved in Heidegger's German translation, be further preserved in an English translation? If we want an authentic English translation of Anaximander's saying, would it be better to set aside the German entirely and work solely between Greek and English? And if we pursued this, would the resulting translation really be any more authentic than that given by our translator?

Time does not afford the opportunity to tackle these questions in the depth they require. Instead, we can only note that the question of our position as English speakers is something we would have to reckon with if we were to push further in our investigation. Although it might be difficult to extrapolate answers from Heidegger's own writings, we can safely assume that given all that he finds necessary in the act of translation, if we really wished to preserve the original meaning of Anaximander's saying in an English translation, a lot of work would have to be done. Such an investigation would surely prove beneficial for those of us interested in the divide between our American heritage and Heidegger's complex but vital relationship with Germany, and would be perhaps even more interesting for those of us who wish to push the question of translation (as it is dealt with by Heidegger) even further.

Over the past few pages, we have done what is expected in a conclusion. Just as with a scientific article or an essay in any other branch of the humanities or social sciences, we have accumulated our results, summarized these findings, and tried to present them lucidly and succinctly. We have even provided a question for further research. All of this, however, has been very unHeideggerian. For in the same way that Hegel complicated the nature of introductions, Heidegger complicated the nature of conclusions. The role of a conclusion, when it comes to a *Weg* of thinking (path or way, the word Heidegger preferred to refer to his writings as opposed to “works” [*Werke*]), is quite different than that of an article in the social sciences—or even philosophy, especially as it is practiced today. For those of us who take part in modern academia, even those of us who call ourselves “philosophers,” our work consists of a certain kind of methodology that, through exegesis, interpretation, and argumentation, has as its conclusion a set of results to provide to the academic community. The end goal of amassing and presenting such results is, simply put, to restart the cycle; as Heidegger puts it, this kind of thinking “uses its results to direct itself toward new procedure”—in our terminology, academia uses its findings and arguments to stimulate more findings and arguments (*AWP* 63).

This methodology and focus on results, which Heidegger identifies as the essence of science and extends to all disciplines that crave the position of authority science has assumed, is the polar opposite of Heidegger’s thinking. As one finds when upon reading almost all of his pieces, the conclusion sometimes seems to assert itself prematurely, either circling back to where we began and/or ending with the questions that “thinking” is truly concerned with. We might respond by saying that asking further questions is a quite

normal aspect of academic works. But these kinds of questions still cling to the cycle of research: for they simply provide the stepping-stones for more research and results. The questions Heidegger often ends with are quite different. Instead of providing the next moves for scholarship, he takes a turn. Subverting our traditional understanding of what (“academic”) writing accomplishes, Heidegger can, for example, claim that after having discussed thinking rather thoroughly, “we all still need an education in thinking” (*EPTT* 449). Here we see that the didactic core of Heidegger’s thinking cannot be extrapolated by listing certain things that he said or wrote. Instead, it lies in the process, the movement, the circling back of these *Wege* themselves—much more like works of art than conventional philosophical treatises.

As we touch upon this essential aspect of Heidegger’s thinking, we should be reminded both of the stakes of Heidegger’s thinking and the question of his supposed “language mysticism.” As we have seen throughout the current project, the stakes are incredibly high: only if language is put back on track might man avoid the oblivion of our modern, technological, metaphysical, nihilistic identity. One way in which we have seen Heidegger himself try to develop a greater attentiveness to language (required to put language back on track) is the way in which he addresses language, specifically in the formulation “language speaks.” Here, we might note something rather peculiar: for Heidegger, when the stakes of our world have reached their peak, the proper response is a kind of thinking that eschews all desire for results (what we must imagine to be necessary for world-historical change) in favor of some peculiar form of rebellion against traditional philosophical methodology. This, of course, elicits a question we have asked

many times: how are we to believe that the thinking Heidegger proposes can “accomplish” all he seems to think it can—and must?

A quotation from the essay “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” is helpful here. Nearing the end of this *Weg*, Heidegger asks a question we have quoted earlier: “But is not all this”—“this” being a conversation about *alētheia* and the clearing—“unfounded mysticism or even bad mythology, in any case a ruinous irrationalism, the denial of *ratio*?” (448). To this, Heidegger eventually responds with the following:

As long as *ratio* and the rational still remain questionable in what is their own, talk about irrationalism is unfounded. The technological-scientific rationalization ruling the present age justifies itself every day more surprisingly by its immense results. But this says nothing about what first grants the possibility of the rational and the irrational. The effect proves the correctness of technological-scientific rationalization. But is the manifest character of what *is* exhausted by what is demonstrable? Does not the insistence on what is demonstrable block the way to what is? (448).

What assures us of the meaning of rational and irrational, as well as the divide between them? Is it not rationality that decides what is irrational, according to its self-prescribed, logically coherent laws? And rationality itself, of course, is the supposed cornerstone of metaphysics. Its closest companion, logic, is for Heidegger—as we have seen—not the universal absolute it is assumed to be. Its propositions and most basic axioms, preserved in the immaculate logical-grammatical assertion, are stamped by a definitive historical event: the dawn of Greek ontology with Plato. Thus, in other words, the criticism of irrationality is unsubstantial. It is a tool, wielded by a certain way of thinking to preserve itself from what is other, be it sophistry, poetry, religion, etc. These ways of thinking have their own “logic,” we could say. But this logic means nothing to rationality: for it only acknowledges what is able to match it on its own terms—a domain

in which it was born master. Further, its “immense results” entrench its pride, and convince us, the awestruck onlooker, that what is averagely intelligible is all that is intelligible.

“But is the manifest character of what *is* exhausted by what is demonstrable?”

Does the proof of existence hang on fulfilling certain rational obligations? Might there be things, perhaps even more important things, outside the microscope of the law of non-contradiction, cause and effect, and empirical verifiability? Might God defy even the greatest ontologist? Might justice elude every attempt at codification? Might some *words* defy every conceivable attempt at translation? In these contexts, “does not the insistence on what is demonstrable block the way to what is?”

With these questions I am reminded of a passage from Book V of Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*, “‘Science’ as a prejudice.” In the vein of the above quoted question, Nietzsche notes that “scholars...can never catch sight of the really great problems and question marks” (334). He goes on to ask emphatically, “What? Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this—reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians?”

Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its *rich ambiguity*: that is a dictate of good taste, gentlemen, the taste of reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon. That the only justifiable interpretation of the world should be one in which *you* are justified because one can continue to work and do research scientifically in *your* sense (you really mean, mechanistically?)—an interpretation that permits counting, calculating, weighing, seeing, and touching, and nothing more—that is a crudity and naiveté, assuming that it is not a mental illness, an idiocy. Would it not rather be probable that, conversely, precisely the most superficial and external aspect of existence—what is most apparent, its skin and sensualization—would be grasped first—and might even be the only thing that allowed itself to be grasped? A ‘scientific’ interpretation of the world, as you understand it, might therefore be one of the *most stupid* of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning. This thought is intended for the ears and consciences of our mechanists

who nowadays like to pass as philosophers and insist that mechanics is the doctrine of the first and last laws on which all existence must be based as on a ground floor. But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially *meaningless* world (335).

The overlaps and echoes that could be found between this passage and what we have heard from Heidegger above are far too numerous and divergent for us to expand upon in the detail we might like, from the echo of “rich ambiguity” in Heidegger’s discussions of truth, the Nothing, Being, and “the mystery,” to the similarity between Heidegger’s critique of demonstrability and Nietzsche’s attack on mechanics. Although Nietzsche’s vehemence and sarcasm are certainly not matched by Heidegger, they agree when it comes to the *stakes* of the matter at hand. For both, “science” is not wrong. It is perfectly correct; it has been “proven” by immense results. But for all its correctness and success, and despite all its influence on the way most of us think, there are some questions it cannot answer and thus cannot even acknowledge. In Heidegger’s case, many of these questions are not simply yet to be asked, but instead have had a rich history that has been eclipsed over time. The more we have become convinced of the success of rationality and its scientific incarnation, the more we, too, cannot answer these questions—because we, too, cannot even acknowledge them.

Of course, the assimilation with which we began—namely, that between the social sciences/humanities and the natural sciences—is, when taken to Nietzsche’s extreme, rather crude. But that is much less the case if we confine ourselves to Heidegger. For him, “philosophy is ending in the present age,” having reached its completion in the development of the “independent sciences” (*EPTT* 434). Philosophy “has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity,” having realized its goal of providing “ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art)” (435). In the end,

philosophy reaches its completion by disassembling itself: its questions answered, it hands itself down to the more specified pursuits of the natural and social sciences, its legitimacy superseded. Nothing demonstrates this better than the quickly vanishing place of philosophy in the universities, as well as the more everyday fact that when I tell someone that I am a philosophy major, they respond with a variation of the question: “but what are you actually going to do?”

In the modern age, where technology is taking on an ever-greater role in society, where what we refer to as “metaphysical questions” are seen as little more than the lingering curiosity of a child, and where the merit of thinking is determined on the basis of its demonstrable results, it is hard to deny that philosophy is coming to an end. How long will it be until “continental philosophy” is completely subsumed in “comparative literature” programs, even simply the category “literature” itself? How long will it be until computer science, mathematics, physics, neurology, neuroscience, etc. render “analytic philosophy” a rather archaic classification? Heidegger found these questions, or rather the root or kernel of these questions, imminently pressing in his own time. His worries would be far greater today.

But what does language have to do with all of this? And how can his supposed “language mysticism” do anything about it? Given that mysticism is associated with irrationality, and irrationality has now been put into question, we must (again) try to understand Heidegger’s phrase “language speaks” in another way. As we noted with the help of Charles Taylor, this phrase should not be interpreted “as a proto-Derridean invocation of a super(non)subject,” but rather as the demand for a new attentiveness to language, a way of relating to things with our words in accordance with the way those

things themselves—and language itself—demand to come to presence. For Heidegger, language “is no longer arbitrary, up for grabs,” but rather requires of us certain ways of speaking that can displace the logical-grammatical tradition of subjectivity and begin to “restore thingness” to things (Taylor 266), ways of speaking that simultaneously move away from the scientific and towards the poetic.

It may seem that such words like demand and requirement continue to anthropomorphize language, to think language as a kind of subject that wills in a certain way. But this, despite its sound, is not what Taylor and Heidegger mean. Instead, the words *language speaks* give voice to a turn in thinking: they do not name a subject that wills things to be a certain way, but a way of thinking language in its essential nature as something beyond our will, beyond our manipulation, beyond our beck and call. The way language exists is not the same as any idea or entity we are familiar with—language *is not*. It is not, because when we say the word is, what we mean is an entity present-at-hand, something we come into contact with, something with definite features and characteristics. When we ask, “what *is* language?”, we are already working in the realm of science and technology. We ask for what such thinking can supply: research, arguments, characteristics, results. Heidegger asks a different kind of question. Heidegger asks: *how is it with language?* His answer is: language speaks. As it exists essentially, it is not an entity present-at-hand nor an entity ready-to-hand, but rather a kind of showing, an illuminating, a clearing occurrence, a disclosure of our world and what it means to be there. “*Language speaks*”: this means that language *is* only as the perpetual possibility of the illumination of our existence and Being itself.

This is not mysticism in the ordinary sense. Nor is it necessarily irrational. Its “revolt” against our common, traditional way of thinking is not that of Hugo Ball and the Dadaists, nor of André Breton and the Surrealists, nor that of mystical religious traditions like Sufism. Heidegger did not write manifestos, nor was he motivated by political, social, religious, or even aesthetic ideals. Heidegger wanted something quite different—he wanted “thinking.” Such thinking occurs “outside of the distinction of rational and irrational”; it is “more sober-minded...than scientific technology, more sober-minded and hence removed, without effect, yet having its own necessity” (*EPTT* 449). It is “neither theoretical nor practical. It comes to pass before this distinction.” For such thinking “has no result. It has no effect. It satisfies its essence in that it is. But it is by saying its matter.” In saying its matter, “it is freer” than technology, science, and metaphysics: “for it lets Being—be” (259). While such descriptions are undoubtedly mysterious, ambiguous, and cryptic, it would be inaccurate to pejoratively discard them as mystical. With them, Heidegger—as Derrida and others have attempted—tries to stake a claim outside of the tradition, outside of our conventional apparatuses and terminology, beyond the axioms of proper speaking (think of Derrida’s *différance* and Heidegger’s *Seyn*), or perhaps even “beneath” them. The difference is not one of rational and irrational, but just that: a difference.

“Language,” Heidegger writes, “plays with our speech—it likes to let our speech drift away into the more obvious meaning of words.”

It is as though man had to make an effort to live properly with language. It is as though such a dwelling were especially prone to succumb to the danger of commonness. The place of language properly inhabited, and of its habitual words, is usurped by common terms. The common speech becomes the current speech. We meet it on all sides, and since it is common to all, we now accept it as the only standard (*WhD?* 118-19).

This drift of language towards commonness is mirrored in the scientific-technological drive for complete domination through the vehicle of average intelligibility. Because it would be inappropriate to speak in causal terms, we should imagine that the modern tendency of science is a kind of symptom or a symbol of our decaying relationship with language. It is our relationship to things, governed since the dawn of Greek philosophy by the way we *speak* about them (*logos*), that has conditioned the unfolding of the West as the move toward the unbridled manipulability of everything. Language, in its tendency to fall prey to what is common, aggravated by the falling of Dasein, has dragged thinking along with it. It has set the standard of speech and thought: commonality, average intelligibility, universal, unhindered access. Rationality and logic, along with the stability and seeming authority they represent, are in this sense the manifestations of, rather than the reasons for, the path language and thought have tread through the course of metaphysics. They coincide with the drift of language, because they provide a stability and semblance of authority that bolster and reinforce a common standard, a sense of security that allows what is not obvious to simply fall into the category of unintelligible.

Heidegger's thinking about language is meant to challenge this standard. In his writing, no word is spared from scrutiny; all that is obvious is flipped on its head and put into doubt as the most worthy of questioning. Self-evidence becomes the enemy, for "the familiar...always remains the real danger zone [for thinking]" (*WhD?* 154). We must challenge ourselves to think through the history and evolution of words, their transformations from language to language, and the inherent instability of language itself. The obvious is, as Nietzsche's writes, mere superficiality and externality. A mechanical

interpretation of language—what is longed for by many positivists and analytic philosophers—might for all its correctness prove herein to be “the poorest in meaning.” It might portray the shell of language, but it says nothing of how it is with language, nothing of how language concerns *us*, “befalls *us*, strikes *us*, comes over *us*, overwhelms and transforms *us*” (*NL* 57, italics added). With the analytic and scientific attitude towards language, *we* are left out of the picture entirely. Hence why this view lends itself so affectively to an understanding of language as a tool, something independent, self-sufficient, that we can pick up and wield when we please.

While we have seen the extreme effort it takes to be attentive to language in writings like “The Way to Language,” the complexity of what language demands is seen even more in the process of translation. In the translator’s attempt to leap from the spirit of one language into that of another, and in our attempt to follow Heidegger’s leap from German to Greek, perhaps we have even practiced the leap to thinking itself. Without overstating this, we can acknowledge that there exists a close affinity between trying to think outside of our “national” bubble and trying to think outside of our “metaphysical” bubble. Both tasks require the embrace of the *Unheimlich*, the uncanny, unfamiliar, unhomelike. Both demand that we experience words in a new way, not as absolute terms or singular concepts but as amorphous, historical, contingent ways of disclosing beings. And finally, both demand a new way of Being—a way of Being *with* language, rather than a way of Being *a being with* language (the rational animal).

In authentic translation, we rehearse the leap beyond metaphysics. Here, thinking occurs as the return to the original contents of language, both of the language to be translated and the language providing the translation. We immerse ourselves in words

and their histories, the way in which they spoke in times long forgotten, superseded by what comes most immediately to the fore. We engage and confront the matter of thought such words try to give voice to, and from such confrontation come to gain a greater appreciation of the plurality of language. In translation, the fact that “different languages perform different worlds” comes to the fore, and we are forced to mediate this unmediatable difference (Cassin 11). In the impossibility of a task we are determined to make possible, we are forced to develop a new attentiveness to language and languages, to their idioms, rhythms, and idiosyncrasies, to the richness veiled beneath what we have always taken to be quite obvious. Through this process, one thing becomes certain: “language is and is only through the difference between languages” (Cassin 249).

In translation, practiced in a Heideggerian way, we embark on a kind of thinking that does not end in results. Of course, the end goal of this process is to end at a “resulting” translation—but this is not a result in the scientific sense. The attentive thinking in translation neither deduces certain conclusions nor makes advances in a progressing discipline. The essence of translation is *preservation*. While creativity and appropriation must be involved, it is at the heart of translation to preserve the thinking present in the original, to bring to language what *it* was able to bring to language. Through such preservation, the translator, it might be said, “gains the essential poverty of the shepherd, whose dignity consists in being called by Being”—or in our case, language—“itself into the preservation of Being’s truth”—or in our case, language’s (plural) truth (*LH* 245). The translator, in translating, is called upon by language to preserve its plurality across the leap from the spirit of one language to another. The

translator is summoned to challenge, with Heidegger, the standard determined by what is common, and insist on the coexisting identity and difference of translation and translated.

As Heidegger writes in his lecture on Hölderlin's "Der Ister," "translation is never merely a technical issue but concerns the relation of human beings to the essence of the word and to the worthiness of language" (63). For Heidegger, translation is not "a kind of 'detour' in the circulation of language," a way of side-stepping a technical obstacle, but a "dialogue," a way of opening up what is said in how it is said (65). And although such a dialogue may grant us access to an entirely new way of thinking, "translation is more an awakening, clarification, and unfolding of one's own language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language" (65-6). In its preserving, translation unsettles our thoroughly self-evident and common relationship with the language we speak. The words we once thought we knew—e.g., "thinking" (*Denken*) or "usage" (*Brauch*)—shine in a new light, show themselves in a new way, confuse what we had always taken as clear. In translation, our relationship with what is most our own, the words we speak without a second thought as to their use or meaning, is put into question. In stumbling to find the right word in our language for what must be translated, we begin to realize the subtle complexities of our own language, its uniqueness and peculiarities, things we would have never seen if it were not for our encounter with the foreign language.

It is in this way that translation is an essential part of understanding what Heidegger is doing with his writing and thinking on language (and in general). Translation enables, or perhaps demands, that we learn to think in a foreign way, that we embrace the spirit of the foreign language. In this way, it helps us and requires us to pay heed to the plurality of languages, to the difference that pervades the universal concept

“Language” in all of its historical and national manifestations. Even more, translation allows us to look at our own language in a new way by distancing ourselves from it; it makes foreign what was once perfectly clear and unequivocal, it challenges our assuredness of our mastery over language. Finally, through all of these, translation brings us to reflect on the nature of language itself, its identity, its difference, its mystery.

Translation allows us to appropriate language for the first time, to make it our own through the struggle of finding the right word, and through the silence that prevails when our search fails. For language, Heidegger wrote in the 1950’s, only comes to “speak itself as language” when, “curiously enough,” “we cannot find the right word for something.” Here “we leave unspoken what we have in mind and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched us with its essential Being” (*NL* 59). In translation, where these moments strike us and befall us again and again, we learn “to rid ourselves of the habit of always hearing only what we already understand”—in other words, we learn to have a new relationship towards language (58). We learn how to really listen to it, to have open ears, to heed its call. In a word, we learn attentiveness.

Through the course of the present project, we have tried to develop such attentiveness. We have neither aimed at the amassing of results nor at conclusive and objectively verifiable conclusions. Instead, like Heidegger, we have tried to follow “the way” of thinking. As we have seen, following the way is much different than our normal philosophical and academic inquiries. An inquiry of this (common) kind, as Heidegger tells us in *Was heißt Denken?*, “aims straight for the answer. It rightly looks for the

answer alone, and sees to it that the answer is obtained. The answer disposes of the question. By the answer, we rid ourselves of the question” (158).

The question “*Was heißt Denken?*”, just like “what is language?” and “what is translation,” are “of a different kind” (158). They are meant to point towards a way, to encourage us to set off on a way: to become “underway (*Unterweg*).” To *think* through these questions, rather to answer them, is the goal.

The way of thinking cannot be traced from somewhere to somewhere like a well-worn rut, nor does it at all exist as such in any place. *Only when we walk it*, and in no other fashion, only, that is, by thoughtful questioning, are we on the move on the way. This *movement* is what allows the way to come forward (169, italics added).

For Heidegger, thinking (questioning) is not a path towards a destination (an answer). It is not a route that leads from point A to point B. Rather, like the country paths (*Feldwege*) Heidegger walked all his life, thinking rambles, wanders, and makes new paths, without “going anywhere.” Thinking is not a way in the sense of a “way to...”; instead it is simply—and for that reason, all the more difficult to understand—a way itself, a movement, a setting-forth without the need or the desire to “reach” or “achieve” something. Hence to respond to the question “what *is* language,” rather than to *answer* it, is the goal: “to answer the question...is itself always to keep asking, so as to remain underway” (169).

Thus in the end, whether the reader has become “convinced” of Heidegger’s “claims”—be they of the grandiose and world-historical scale, or be they more modest and less “ambitious”—is not of central importance. Our primary ambition has not been to give a “definitive” Heideggerian response to the question of language and translation, as if it were possible to reduce his thinking to a set of statements and propositions “about”

language. While this had to be done in part, we would be fooling ourselves if we now characterized what we have “accomplished” as outlining Heidegger’s “philosophy of language.” In this strict sense, Heidegger has no “philosophy of language”—no agenda or program through which language could be made fully intelligible, its opacity and ambiguity overcome. The point is rather that, in questioning, this opacity and ambiguity come to confront us, befall us, confuse us, and convince us that the questions we have been working with have no simple answers. Thus even if the reader comes away from this project completely unconvinced as to the merits of Heidegger’s approach, it has not necessarily “failed.” For as Heidegger writes, when it comes to a question like the question of language, “one thing and one thing only matters”: “*to make the question problematical*” (*WhD?* 159, italics added.) From this, I conclude by stating my only wish, which, at the same time, was Heidegger’s most fervent wish: that the questions we have asked have become *questionable*.

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