An Introduction to Metaphysics

“Chapter One — The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics”

From: http://archive.org/stream/MartinHeidegger-IntroductionToMetaphysics/Heidegger-Introduction_to_metaphysics_djvu.txt

1 Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? That is the question. Presumably it is no arbitrary question. "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" — this is obviously the first of all questions. Of course, it is not the first question in the chronological sense. Individuals as well as peoples ask many questions in the course of their historical passage through time. They explore, investigate, and test many sorts of things before they run into the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" Many never run into this question at all, if running into the question means not only hearing and reading the interrogative sentence as uttered, but asking the question, that is, taking a stand on it, posing it, compelling oneself into the state of this questioning.

And yet, we are each touched once, maybe even now and then, by the concealed power of this question, without properly grasping what is happening to us. In great despair, for example, when all weight tends to dwindle away from things and the sense of things grows dark, the question looms. Perhaps it strikes only once, like the muffled tolling of a bell that resounds into Dasein 1 and gradually fades away. The question is there in heartfelt joy, for then all things are transformed and surround us as if for the first time, as if it were easier to grasp that they were not, rather than that they are, and are as they are. The question is there in a spell of boredom, when we are equally distant from despair and joy, but when the stubborn ordinariness of beings lays open a wasteland in which it makes no difference to us whether beings are or are not — and then, in a distinctive form, the question resonates once again: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?

But whether this question is asked explicitly, or whether it merely passes through our Dasein like a fleeting gust of wind, unrecognized as a question, whether it becomes more oppressive or is thrust away by us again and suppressed under some pretext, it certainly is never the first question that we ask.

But it is the first question in another sense — namely, in rank. This can be clarified in three ways. The question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" is first in rank for us as the broadest, as the deepest, and finally as the most originary question.

The question is the broadest in scope. It comes to a halt at no being of any kind whatsoever. The question embraces all that is, and that means not only what is now present at hand in the broadest sense, but also what has previously been and what will be in the future. The domain of this question is limited only by what simply is not and never is: by Nothing. All that is not Nothing comes into the question, and in the end even Nothing itself — not, as it were, because it is something, a being, for after all we are talking about it, but because it "is" Nothing. The scope of

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1 See the discussion of Dasein in our introduction.
our question is so broad that we can never exceed it. We are not interrogating this being or that being, nor all beings, each in turn; instead, we are asking from the start about the whole of what is, or as we say for reasons to be discussed later: beings as a whole and as such.

Just as it is the broadest question, the question is also the deepest: Why are there beings at all ... ? Why — that is, what is the ground? From what ground do beings come? On what ground do beings stand? To what ground do beings go? The question does not ask this or that about beings — what they are in each case, here and there, how they are put together, how they can be changed, what they can be used for, and so on. The questioning seeks the ground for what is, insofar as it is in being. To seek the ground: this means to get to the bottom ("zu Grunde gehen"). What is put into question comes into relation with a ground. But because we are questioning, it remains an open question whether the ground is a truly grounding, foundation-effecting, originary ground; whether the ground refuses to provide a foundation, and so is an abyss; or whether the ground is neither one nor the other, but merely offers the perhaps necessary illusion of a foundation and is thus an unground. However this may be, the question seeks a decision with respect to the ground that grounds the fact that what is, is in being as the being that it is. This why-question does not seek causes for beings, causes of the same kind and on the same level as beings themselves. This why-question does not just skim the surface, but presses into the domains that lie "at the ground," even pressing into the ultimate, to the limit; the question is turned away from all surface and shallowness, striving for depth; as the broadest, it is at the same time the deepest of the deep questions.

Finally, as the broadest and deepest question, it is also the most originary. What do we mean by that? If we consider our question in the whole breadth of what it puts into question, beings as such and as a whole, then it strikes us right away that in the question, we keep ourselves completely removed from every particular, individual being as precisely this or that being. We do mean beings as a whole, but without any particular preference. Still, it is remarkable that one being always keeps coming to the fore in this questioning: the human beings who pose this question. And yet the question should not be about some particular, individual being. Given the unrestricted range of the question, every being counts as much as any other. Some elephant in some jungle in India is in being just as much as some chemical oxidation process on the planet Mars, and whatever else you please.

Thus if we properly pursue the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" in its sense as a question, we must avoid emphasizing any particular, individual being, not even focusing on the human being. For what is this being, after all! Let us consider the Earth within the dark immensity of space in the universe. We can compare it to a tiny grain of sand; more than a kilometer of emptiness extends between it and the next grain of its size; on the surface of this

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2 Zu Grunde gehen (literally, "go to the ground") is an idiom meaning "to be ruined."

3 See seiend'm German-English Glossary.

4 "Allein, weil gefragt wird, bleibt often, ob der Grund ein wahrhaft gründender, Grundung erwirkender, Ur-grund ist; ob der Grund eine Grundung versagt, Ab-grund ist; ob der Grund weder das Eine noch das Andere ist, sondern nur einen vielleicht notwendigen Schein von Grundung vorgibt und so ein Un-grund ist."

5 "... daß das Sciende seiend ist als ein solches, das es ist."
tiny grain of sand lives a stupefied swarm of supposedly clever animals, crawling all over each
other, who for a brief moment have invented knowledge [cf. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in the
Extramoral Sense," 1873, published posthumously].

And what is a human lifespan amid millions of years? Barely a move of the second hand, a
breath. Within beings as a whole there is no justification to be found for emphasizing precisely
this being that is called the human being and among which we ourselves happen to belong.

But if beings as a whole are ever brought into our question, then the questioning does come into
a distinctive relation with them — distinctive because it is unique — and beings do come into a
distinctive relation with this questioning. For through this questioning, beings as a whole are first
opened up as such and with regards to their possible ground, and they are kept open in the
questioning. The asking of this question is not, in relation to beings as such and as a whole, some
arbitrary occurrence amid beings, such as the falling of raindrops. The why-question challenges
beings as a whole, so to speak, outstrips them, though never completely. But this is precisely
how the questioning gains its distinction. What is asked in this question rebounds upon the
questioning itself, for the questioning challenges beings as a whole but does not after all wrest
itself free from them. Why the Why? What is the ground of this why-question itself, a question
that presumes to establish the ground of beings as a whole? Is this Why, too, just asking about
the ground as a foreground, so that it is still always a being that is sought as what does the
grounding? Is this "first" question not the first in rank after all, as measured by the intrinsic rank
of the question of Being and its transformations?

To be sure — whether the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" is posed or
not makes no difference whatsoever to beings themselves. The planets move in their orbits
without this question. The vigor of life flows through plant and animal without this question.

But this question is posed, and provided that it is actually carried out, then this questioning
necessarily recoils back from what is asked and what is interrogated, back upon itself. Therefore
this questioning in itself is not some arbitrary process but rather a distinctive occurrence that we
call a happening.

This question and all the questions immediately rooted in it, in which this one question unfolds
— this why-question cannot be compared to any other. It runs up against the search for its own
Why. The question "Why the Why?" looks externally and at first like a frivolous repetition of the
same interrogative, which can go on forever; it looks like an eccentric and empty rumination
about insubstantial meanings of words. Certainly, that is how it looks. The only question is
whether we are willing to fall victim to this cheap look of things and thus take the whole matter

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6 In parentheses in the 1953 edition. Nietzsche's essay begins: "In some remote corner of the universe, glimmering
diffusely into countless solar systems, there was once a planet upon which clever animals invented knowledge. It
was the proudest and most mendacious minute in "world history"; but it was only a minute. After nature had
taken a few breaths, the planet grew cold, and the clever animals had to die' Someone could invent a fable like
that, and he still would not have adequately illustrated how wretched, how shadowlike and fleeting, how pointless
and arbitrary the human intellect appears within nature." Cf. The Portable Nietzsche, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New
York: Viking, 1954), 42.
as settled, or whether we are capable of experiencing a provocative happening in this recoil of
the why-question back upon itself.

But if we do not let ourselves be deceived by the look of things, it will become clear that this
why-question, as a question about beings as such and as a whole, immediately leads us away
from mere toying with words, provided that we still possess enough force of spirit to make the
question truly recoil into its own Why; for the recoil does not, after all, produce itself on its own.
Then we discover that this distinctive why-question has its ground in a leap by which human
beings leap away from all the previous safety of their Dasein, be it genuine or presumed. The
asking of this question happens only in the leap and as the leap, and otherwise not at all. [5]
Later, we will clarify what we mean here by "leap." Our questioning is not yet the leap; for that,
it must first be transformed; it still stands, un-knowing, in the face of beings. For now, let this
comment suffice: the leap 'Sprung') of this questioning attains its own ground by leaping,
performs it in leaping (er-springt, springend erwirkt). According to the genuine meaning of the
word, we call such a leap that attains itself as ground by leaping an originary leap 'Ur-sprung'): an
attaining-the-ground-by-leaping. Because the question "Why are there beings at all instead of
nothing?" attains the ground for all genuine questioning by leaping and is thus an originary leap,
we must recognize it as the most originary 'ursprunglich)' of questions.

As the broadest and deepest question, it is the most originary, and conversely.

In this threefold sense the question is the first in rank, first in rank in the order of questioning
within that domain which this first question definitively opens up and grounds, giving it its
measure. Our question is the question of all true questions — that is, of those that pose
themselves to themselves — and it is necessarily asked, knowingly or not, along with every
question. No questioning, and consequently no single scientific "problem" either, understands
itself if it does not grasp the question of all questions, that is, if it does not ask it. We want to be
clear about this from the start: it can never be determined objectively whether anyone is asking
— whether we are actually asking this question, that is, whether we are leaping, or whether we
are just mouthing the words. The question loses its rank at once in the sphere of a human-
historical Dasein to whom questioning as an originary power remains foreign.

For example, anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth already has the answer to
the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" before it is even asked: beings,
with the exception of God Himself, are created by Him. God Himself "is" as the uncreated
Creator. One who holds on to such faith as a basis can, perhaps, emulate and participate in the
asking of our question in a certain way, but he cannot authentically question without giving
himself up as a believer, with all the consequences of this step. He can act only "as if" — . On
the other hand, if such faith does not continually expose itself to the possibility of unfaith, it is
not faith but a convenience. It becomes an agreement with oneself to adhere in the future to a
doctrine as something that has somehow been handed down. This is neither having faith nor
questioning, but indifference — which can then, perhaps even with keen interest, busy itself with
everything, with faith as well as with questioning.

[6] Now by referring to safety in faith as a special way of standing in the truth, we are not saying
that citing the words of the Bible, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth, etc.,"
represents an answer to our question. Quite aside from whether this sentence of the Bible is true or untrue for faith, it can represent no answer at all to our question, because it has no relation to this question. It has no relation to it, because it simply cannot come into such a relation. What is really asked in our question is, for faith, foolishness.

Philosophy consists in such foolishness. A "Christian philosophy" is a round square and a misunderstanding. To be sure, one can thoughtfully question and work through the world of Christian experience — that is, the world of faith. That is then theology. Only ages that really no longer believe in the true greatness of the task of theology arrive at the pernicious opinion that, through a supposed refurbishment with the help of philosophy, a theology can be gained or even replaced, and can be made more palatable to the need of the age. Philosophy, for originally Christian faith, is foolishness. Philosophizing means asking: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" Actually asking this means venturing to exhaust, to question thoroughly, the inexhaustible wealth of this question, by unveiling what it demands that we question. Whenever such a venture occurs, there is philosophy.

If we now wanted to talk about philosophy, giving a report, in order to say what it is in more detail, this beginning would be fruitless. But whoever engages in philosophy must know a few things. They can be stated briefly.

All essential questioning in philosophy necessarily remains untimely, and this is because philosophy either projects far beyond its own time or else binds its time back to this time’s earlier and inceptive past. Philosophizing always remains a kind of knowing that not only does not allow itself to be made timely but, on the contrary, imposes its measure on the times. Philosophy is essentially untimely because it is one of those few things whose fate it remains never to be able to find a direct resonance in their own time, and never to be permitted to find such a resonance. Whenever this seemingly does take place, whenever a philosophy becomes fashion, either there is no actual philosophy or else philosophy is misinterpreted and, according to some intentions alien to it, misused for the needs of the day.

But what is useless can nevertheless be a power — a power in the rightful sense. That which has no direct resonance (Widerklang) in everydayness can stand in innermost harmony (Einklang) with the authentic happening in the history of a people. It can even be its prelude (Vorklang). What is untimely will have its own times. This holds for philosophy. Therefore we cannot determine what the task of philosophy in itself and in general is, and what must accordingly be demanded of philosophy. Every stage and every inception of its unfolding carries within it its own law. One can only say what philosophy cannot be and what it cannot achieve.

A question has been posed: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" We have claimed that this question is the first. We have explained in what sense it is meant as the first.

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7 Philosophy, then, is not a kind of knowledge which one could acquire directly, like vocational and technical expertise, and which, like economic and professional knowledge in general, one could apply directly and evaluate according to its usefulness in each case.
Thus we have not yet asked this question; right away we turned aside into a discussion of it. This procedure is necessary, for the asking of this question cannot be compared with customary concerns. There is no gradual transition from the customary by which the question could slowly become more familiar. This is why it must be posed in advance, pro-posed vor-gestet, as it were. On the other hand, in this pro-posal of and talk about the question, we must not defer, or even forget, the questioning.

We therefore conclude the preliminary remarks with this session's discussions.

Every essential form of spirit is open to ambiguity. The more this form resists comparison with others, the more it is misinterpreted.

Philosophy is one of the few autonomous creative possibilities, and occasional necessities, of human-historical Dasein. The current misinterpretations of philosophy, which all have something to them despite their misunderstandings, are innumerable. Here we will mention only two, which are important for clarifying the situation of philosophy today and in the future.

One misinterpretation consists in demanding too much of the essence of philosophy. The other involves a distortion of the sense of what philosophy can achieve.

[8] Roughly speaking, philosophy always aims at the first and last grounds of beings, and it does so in such a way that human beings themselves, with respect to their way of Being, are emphatically interpreted and given an aim. This readily gives the impression that philosophy can and must provide a foundation for the current and future historical Dasein of a people in every age, a foundation for building culture. But such expectations and requirements demand too much of the capability and essence of philosophy. Usually, this excessive demand takes the form of finding fault with philosophy. One says, for example, that because metaphysics did not contribute to preparing the revolution, it must be rejected. That is just as clever as saying that because one cannot fly with a carpenter's bench, it should be thrown away. Philosophy can never directly supply the forces and create the mechanisms and opportunities that bring about a historical state of affairs, if only because philosophy is always the direct concern of the few. Which few? The ones who transform creatively, who unsettle things. It spreads only indirectly, on back roads that can never be charted in advance, and then finally — sometime, when it has long since been forgotten as originary philosophy — it sinks away in the form of one of Dasein's truisms.

Against this first misinterpretation, what philosophy can and must be according to its essence, is this: a thoughtful opening of the avenues and vistas of a knowing that establishes measure and rank, a knowing in which and from which a people conceives its Dasein in the historical-spiritual world and brings it to fulfillment — that knowing which ignites and threatens and compels all questioning and appraising.

The second misinterpretation that we mention is a distortion of the sense of what philosophy can achieve. Granted that philosophy is unable to lay the foundation of a culture, one says, philosophy nevertheless makes it easier to build up culture. According to this distortion, philosophy orders the whole of beings into overviews and systems, and readies a world picture
for our use — a map of the world, as it were — a picture of the various possible things and
domains of things, thereby granting us a universal and uniform orientation. Or, more specifically,
philosophy relieves the sciences of their labor by meditating on the presuppositions of the
sciences, their basic concepts and propositions. One expects philosophy to promote, and even to
accelerate, the practical and technical business of culture by alleviating it, making it easier.

[9] But — according to its essence, philosophy never makes things easier, but only more
difficult. And it does so not just incidentally, not just because its manner of communication
seems strange or even deranged to everyday understanding. The burdening of historical Dasein,
and thereby at bottom of Being itself, is rather the genuine sense of what philosophy can achieve.
Burdening gives back to things, to beings, their weight (Being). And why? Because burdening is
one of the essential and fundamental conditions for the arising of everything great, among which
we include above all else the fate of a historical people and its works. But fate is there only
where a true knowing about things rules over Dasein. And the avenues and views of such a
knowing are opened up by philosophy.

The misinterpretations by which philosophy remains constantly besieged are mainly promoted
by what people like us do, that is, by professors of philosophy. Their customary, and also
legitimate and even useful business is to transmit a certain educationally appropriate
acquaintance with philosophy as it has presented itself so far. This then looks as though it itself
were philosophy, whereas at most it is scholarship about philosophy.

When we mention and correct both of these misinterpretations, we cannot intend that you should
now come at one stroke into a clear relation with philosophy. But you should become mindful
and be on your guard, precisely when the most familiar judgments, and even supposedly genuine
experiences, unexpectedly assail you. This often happens in a way that seems entirely innocuous
and is quickly convincing. One believes that one has had the experience oneself, and readily
hears it confirmed: "nothing comes" of philosophy; "you can't do anything with it." These two
turns of phrase, which are especially current among teachers and researchers in the sciences,
express observations that have their indisputable correctness. When one attempts to prove that,
to the contrary, something does after all "come" of philosophy, one merely intensifies and
secures the prevailing misinterpretation, which consists in the prejudice that one can evaluate
philosophy according to everyday standards that one would otherwise employ to judge the utility
of bicycles or the effectiveness of mineral baths.

It is entirely correct and completely in order to say, "You can't do anything with philosophy."
The only mistake is to believe that with this, the judgment concerning philosophy is at an end.
For a little epilogue arises in the form of a counterquestion: even if we can't do [10] anything
with it, may not philosophy in the end do something with us, provided that we engage ourselves
with it? Let that suffice for us as an explication of what philosophy is not.

At the outset we spoke of a question: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" We
asserted that to ask this question is to philosophize. Whenever we set out in the direction of this
question, thinking and gazing ahead, then right away we forgo any sojourn in any of the usual
regions of beings. We pass over and surpass what belongs to the order of the day. We ask beyond
the usual, beyond the ordinary that is ordered in the everyday. Nietzsche once said (VII, 269): "A
philosopher: that is a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes, dreams extraordinary things . . .” Philosophizing is questioning about the extra-ordinary. Yet as we merely intimated at first, this questioning recoils upon itself, and thus not only what is asked about is extraordinary, but also the questioning itself. This means that this questioning does not lie along our way, so that one day we stumble into it blindly or even by mistake. Nor does it stand in the familiar order of the everyday, so that we could be compelled to it on the ground of some requirements or even regulations. Nor does this questioning lie in the sphere of urgent concern and the satisfaction of dominant needs. The questioning itself is out-of-order. It is completely voluntary, fully and especially based on the mysterious ground of freedom, on what we have called the leap. The same Nietzsche says: "Philosophy . . . means living voluntarily amid ice and mountain ranges” (XV, 2). Philosophizing, we can now say, is extra-ordinary questioning about the extra-ordinary.

In the age of the first and definitive unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, when questioning about beings as such and as a whole received its true inception, beings were called physis. This fundamental Greek word for beings is usually translated as "nature." We use the Latin translation natura, which really means "to be born," "birth." But with this Latin translation, the originary content of the Greek word physis is already thrust aside, the authentic philosophical naming force of the Greek word is destroyed. This is true not only of the Latin translation of this word but of all other translations of Greek philosophical language into Roman. This translation of Greek into Roman was not an arbitrary and innocuous process but was the first stage in the isolation and alienation of the originary essence of Greek philosophy. The Roman translation then became definitive for Christianity and the Christian Middle Ages. The Middle Ages translated themselves into modern philosophy, which moves within the conceptual world of the Middle Ages and then creates those familiar representations and conceptual terms that are used even today to understand the inception of Western philosophy. This inception is taken as something that we have left behind long ago and supposedly overcome.

But now we leap over this whole process of deformation and decline, and we seek to win back intact the naming force of language and words; for words and language are not just shells into which things are packed for spoken and written intercourse. In the word, in language, things first come to be and are. For this reason, too, the misuse of language in mere idle talk, in slogans and phrases, destroys our genuine relation to things. Now what does the word physis say? It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance — in short, the emerging-abiding sway.

Physis as emergence can be experienced everywhere: for example, in celestial processes (the rising of the sun), in the surging of the sea, in the growth of plants, in the coming forth of

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8 Beyond Good and Evil, §292. Heidegger’s references to Nietzsche cite the edition of his works published in Leipzig by C. G. Naumann, 1899-1905.
9 §3 of the preface to Ecce Homo.
10 See the discussion of Walten in our introduction.
11 The noun physis corresponds to the verb phuein.
animals and human beings from the womb. But phusis, the emerging sway, is not synonymous with these processes, which we still today count as part of "nature." This emerging and standing-out-in-itself-from itself may not be taken as just one process among others that we observe in beings. Phusis is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable.

It was not in natural processes that the Greeks first experienced what phusis is, but the other way around: on the basis of a fundamental experience of Being in poetry and thought, what they had to call phusis disclosed itself to them. Only on the basis of this disclosure could they then take a look at nature in the narrower sense. Thus phusis originally means both heaven and earth, both the stone and the plant, both the animal and the human, and human history as the work of humans and gods; and finally and first of all, it means the gods who themselves stand under destiny. Phusis means the [12] emerging sway, and the enduring over which it thoroughly holds sway. This emerging, abiding sway includes both "becoming" as well as "Being" in the narrower sense of fixed continuity. Phusis is the event of standing forth, arising from the concealed and thus enabling the concealed to take its stand for the first time.12

But if one understands phusis, as one usually does, not in the originary sense of the emerging and abiding sway but in its later and present meaning, as nature, and if one also posits the motions of material things, of atoms and electrons — what modem physics investigates as phusis—as the fundamental manifestation of nature, then the inceptive philosophy of the Greeks turns into a philosophy of nature, a representation of all things according to which they are really of a material nature. Then the inception of Greek philosophy, in accordance with our everyday understanding of an inception, gives the impression of being, as we say once again in Latin, primitive. Thus the Greeks become in principle a better kind of Hottentot, in comparison to whom modem science has progressed infinitely far. Disregarding all the particular absurdities involved in conceiving of the inception of Western philosophy as primitive, it must be said that this interpretation forgets that what is at issue is philosophy — one of the few great things of humanity. But whatever is great can only begin great. In fact, its inception is always what is greatest. Only the small begins small — the small, whose dubious greatness consists in diminishing everything; what is small is the inception of decline, which can then also become great in the sense of the enormity of total annihilation.

The great begins great, sustains itself only through the free recurrence of greatness, and if it is great, also comes to an end in greatness. So it is with the philosophy of the Greeks. It came to an end in greatness with Aristotle. Only the everyday understanding and the small man imagine that the great must endure forever, a duration which he then goes on to equate with the eternal.

What is, as such and as a whole, the Greeks call phusis. Let it be mentioned just in passing that already within Greek philosophy, a narrowing of the word set in right away, although its originary meaning did not disappear from the experience, the knowledge, and the attitude of

12 "Phusis ist das Ent-stehen, aus dem Verborgenen sich heraus- und dieses so erst in den Stand bringen." Heidegger is playing on the etymological connection between Entstehen (genesis, growth) and Stand (a stand, state, situation, condition). The phrase in den Stand bringen ordinarily means to enable.
Greek philosophy. An echo of knowledge about the originary meaning still survives in Aristotle, when he speaks of the grounds of beings as such (cf. Metaphysics G, 1, 1003a27).13

[13] But this narrowing of phusis in the direction of the "physical" did not happen in the way that we picture it today. We oppose to the physical the "psychical," the mind or soul, what is ensouled, what is alive. But all this, for the Greeks, continues even later to belong to phusis. As a counterphenomenon there arose what the Greeks call thesis, positing, ordinance, or nomos, law, rule in the sense of mores. But this is not what is moral but instead what concerns mores, that which rests on the commitment of freedom and the assignment of tradition; it is that which concerns a free comportment and attitude, the shaping of the historical Being of humanity, ethos*, which under the influence of morality was then degraded to the ethical.

Phusis gets narrowed down by contrast with techne*—which means neither art nor technology but a kind of knowledge, the knowing disposal over the free planning and arranging and controlling of arrangements (cf. Plato's Phaedrus)? u Techne* is generating, building, as a knowing producing. (It would require a special study to clarify what is essentially the same in phusis and techne.y 5 But for all that, the counterconcept to the physical is the historical, a domain of beings that is also understood by the Greeks in the originally broader sense of phusis. This, however, does not have the least to do with a naturalistic interpretation of history. Beings, as such and as a whole, are phusis—that is, they have as their essence and character the emerging-abiding sway. This is then experienced, above all, in what tends to impose itself on us most immediately in a certain way, and which is later denoted by phusis in the narrower sense: ta phusei onta, ta phusika, what naturally is. When one asks about phusis in general, that is, what beings as such are, then it is above all ta phusei onta that provide the foothold, although in such a way that from the start, the questioning is not allowed to dwell on this or that domain of nature—inanimate bodies, plants, animals—but must go on beyond ta phusika.

In Greek, "away over something" "over beyond," is meta. Philosophical questioning about beings as such is meta ta phusika; it questions on beyond beings, it is metaphysics. At this point we do not need to trace the history of the genesis and meaning of this term in detail.

The question we have identified as first in rank—"Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"—is thus the fundamental question of metaphysics. Metaphysics stands as the name for the center and core that determines all philosophy.

[14] [For this introduction, we have intentionally presented all this in a cursory and thus basically ambiguous way. According to our explanation of phusis, this word means the Being of beings. If one is asking peri phuseos*, about the Being of beings, then the discussion of phusis, "physics" in the ancient sense, is in itself already beyond ta phusika, on beyond beings, and is concerned with Being. "Physics" determines the essence and the history of metaphysics from the inception onward. Even in the doctrine of Being as actus purus (Thomas Aquinas), as absolute concept

13 "Now since we are seeking the principles and the highest causes [or grounds], it is clear that these must belong to some phusis in virtue of itself. If, then, those who were seeking the elements of beings [ton * ontorf] were also seeking these principles, these elements too must be elements of being [tou ontos], not accidentally, but as being. Accordingly, it is of being as being that we, too, must find the first causes." — Metaphysics G, 1, 1 003a26-32.
(Hegel), as eternal recurrence of the same will to power (Nietzsche), metaphysics steadfastly remains "physics?"

The question about Being as such, however, has a different essence and a different provenance.

To be sure, within the purview of metaphysics, and if one continues to think in its manner, one can regard the question about Being as such merely as a mechanical repetition of the question about beings as such. The question about Being as such is then just another transcendental question, albeit one of a higher order. This misconstrual of the question about Being as such blocks the way to unfolding it in a manner befitting the matter.

However, this misconstrual is all too easy, especially because Being and Time spoke of a "transcendental horizon". "Transcendental" meant there does not pertain to subjective consciousness; instead, it is determined by the existential-ecstatic temporality of Being-here. Nevertheless, the question about Being as such is misconstrued as coinciding with the question about beings as such; this misconstrual thrusts itself upon us above all because the essential provenance of the question about beings as such, and with it the essence of metaphysics, lies in obscurity. This drags into indeterminacy all questioning that concerns Being in any way.

The "introduction to metaphysics" attempted here keeps in view this confused condition of the "question of Being."

According to the usual interpretation, the "question of Being" means asking about beings as such (metaphysics). But if we think along the lines of Being and Time, the "question of Being" means asking about Being as such. This meaning of the expression is also appropriate both in terms of the matter at stake and in terms of language; for the "question of Being" in the sense of the metaphysical question about beings as such precisely does not ask thematically about Being. Being remains forgotten.

But this talk of the "oblivion of Being" is just as ambiguous as the expression "question of Being." One protests quite rightfully that metaphysics does indeed ask about the Being of beings, and [15] that therefore it is manifest foolishness to charge metaphysics with an oblivion of Being.

But if we think the question of Being in the sense of the question about Being as such, then it becomes dear to everyone who accompanies us in thinking that it is precisely Being as such that remains concealed, remains in oblivion — and so decisively that the oblivion of Being, an oblivion that itself falls into oblivion, is the unrecognized yet enduring impulse for metaphysical questioning.

If one chooses the designation "metaphysics" for the treatment of the "question of Being" in an indefinite sense, then the title of this lecture course remains ambiguous. For at first it seems as though the questioning held itself within the purview of beings as such, whereas already with the first sentence it strives to depart this zone in order to bring another domain into view with its questions. The tide of the course is thus deliberately ambiguous.

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14 Being and Time, 39 (according to the pagination of the later German editions).
The fundamental question of the lecture course is of a different kind than the guiding question of metaphysics. Taking Being and Time as its point of departure, the lecture course asks about the "disclosedness of Being" (Being and Time, pp. 21 f. and 37f.). Disclosedness means: the openness of what the oblivion of Being closes off and conceals. Through this questioning, too, light first falls on the essence of metaphysics, which was also concealed up to now.

"Introduction to metaphysics" accordingly means: leading into the asking of the fundamental question. But questions, and above all fundamental questions, do not simply occur like stones and water. Questions are not given like shoes, clothes, or books. Questions are as they are actually asked, and this is the only way in which they are. Thus the leading into the asking of the fundamental question is not a passage over to something that lies or stands around somewhere; instead, this leading-to must first awaken and create the questioning. Leading is a questioning going-ahead, a questioning-ahead. This is a leadership that essentially has no following. Whenever one finds pretensions to a following, in a school of philosophy, for example, questioning is misunderstood. There can be such schools only in the sphere of scientific or professional labor. In such a sphere, everything has its distinct hierarchical order. Such labor also belongs, and even necessarily belongs, to philosophy and has today been lost. But the best professional ability will never replace the authentic strength of seeing and questioning and saying.

"Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" That is the question. To pronounce the interrogative sentence, even in a questioning tone, is not yet to question. We can already see this in the fact that even if we repeat the interrogative sentence several times over and over, this does not necessarily make the questioning attitude any livelier; on the contrary, reciting the sentence repeatedly may well blunt the questioning.

Although the interrogative sentence thus is not the question and is not questioning, neither should it be taken as a mere linguistic form of communication, as if the sentence were only a statement "about" a question. If I say to you, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" then the intent of my asking and saying is not to communicate to you that a process of questioning is now going on inside me. Certainly the spoken interrogative sentence can also be taken this way, but then one is precisely not hearing the questioning. The questioning does not result in any shared questioning and self-questioning. It awakens nothing in the way of a questioning attitude, or even a questioning disposition. For this consists in a willing-to-know. Willing — this is not just wishing and trying. Whoever wishes to know also seems to question; but he does not get beyond saying the question, he stops short precisely where the question begins. Questioning is willing-to-know. Whoever wills, whoever lays his whole Dasein into a will, is resolute. Resoluteness delays nothing, does not shirk, but acts from the moment and without fail. Open resoluteness is no mere resolution to act; it is the decisive inception of action that reaches ahead of and through all action. To will is to be resolute. [The essence of willing is traced back here to open resoluteness. But the essence of open resoluteness 'Entschlossenheit'...]

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15 "Erschlossenheit besagt: Aufgeschlossenheit dessen, was die Vergessenheit des Seins verschließt und verbirgt" This could also mean: "... of what does off and conceals the oblivion of Being."

16 Throughout this passage, Heidegger plays on the connection between Einführung, "introduction," and führen, "to lead." Etymologically, Einführung means "leading into," as do the Latin roots of the English "introduction."
lies in the de-concealment 'Ent-borgenheit) of human Dasein for the clearing of Being and by no means in an accumulation of energy for "activity." Cf. Being and Time §44 and §60. But the relation to Being is letting. That all willing should be grounded in letting strikes the understanding as strange. See the lecture "On the Essence of Truth," 1930.¹⁷]

But to know means to be able to stand in the truth. Truth is the openness of beings. To know is accordingly to be able to stand in the openness of beings, to stand up to it. Merely to have information, however wide-ranging it may be, is not to know. Even if this information is focused on what is practically most important through courses of study and examination requirements, it is not knowledge. Even if this information, cut back to the most compelling needs, is "dose to life," its possession is not knowledge. One who carries such information around with him and has added a few practical tricks to it will still be at a loss and will necessarily bungle [17] in the face of real reality, which is always different from what the Philistine understands by closeness to life and closeness to reality. Why? Because he has no knowledge, since to know means to be able to learn.

Of course, everyday understanding believes that one has knowledge when one needs to learn nothing more, because one has finished learning. No. The only one who knows is the one who understands that he must always learn again, and who above all, on the basis of this understanding, has brought himself to the point where he continually can learn. This is far harder than possessing information.

Being able to learn presupposes being able to question. Questioning is the willing-to-know that we discussed earlier: the open resoluteness to be able to stand in the openness of beings. Because we are concerned with asking the question that is first in rank, clearly the willing as well as the knowing are of a very special kind. All the less will the interrogative sentence exhaustively reproduce the question, even if it is genuinely said in a questioning way and heard in a partnership of questioning. The question that does indeed resonate in the interrogative sentence, but nevertheless remains closed off and enveloped there, must first be developed. In this way the questioning attitude must clarify and secure itself, establish itself through exercise.

Our next task consists in unfolding the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" In what direction can we unfold it? To begin with, the question is accessible in the interrogative sentence. The sentence takes a stab, as it were, at the question. Hence its linguistic formulation must be correspondingly broad and loose. Let us consider our interrogative sentence in this respect. "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" The sentence contains a break. "Why are there beings at all?" With this, the question really has been posed. The posing of the question includes: 1) the definite indication of what is put into question, what is interrogated; 2) the indication of that with regards to which what is interrogated is interrogated — what is asked about. For what is interrogated is indicated unequivocally: namely, beings. What is asked about, what is asked, is the Why — that is, the ground. What follows in the interrogative sentence — "instead of nothing?" — is an embellishing flourish; it is just an appendix that inserts itself, as if on its own, for the sake of an initially loose and introductory way of speaking, as an additional turn of phrase that says nothing more about what is interrogated and what is asked about. In fact, the question is far more unequivocal and decisive without the appended turn of phrase, which

¹⁷ This essay is available in Pathmarks.
just comes from the superfluity of imprecise talk. "Why are there beings at all?" But the addition "instead of nothing?" is invalidated not just because we are striving for a precise formulation of the question, but even more because it says nothing at all. For what more are we supposed to ask about Nothing? Nothing is simply nothing. Questioning has nothing more to seek here. Above all, by bringing up Nothing we do not gain the slightest thing for the knowledge of beings.  

Whoever talks about Nothing does not know what he is doing. In speaking about Nothing, he makes it into a something. By speaking this way, he speaks against what he means. He contradicts himself. But self-contradictory speech is an offense against the fundamental rule of speech (logos), against "logic." Talking about Nothing is illogical. Whoever talks and thinks illogically is an unscientific person. Now whoever goes so far as to talk about Nothing within philosophy, which after all is the home of logic, deserves all the more to be accused of offending against the fundamental rule of all thinking. Such talk about Nothing consists in utterly senseless propositions. Moreover, whoever takes Nothing seriously takes the side of nullity. He obviously promotes the spirit of negation and serves disintegration. Talking about Nothing is not only completely contrary to thought, but it undermines all culture and all faith.

Whatever both disregards the fundamental law of thinking and also destroys faith and the will to construct is pure nihilism. Given such considerations, we will do well to strike from our interrogative sentence the superfluous turn of phrase "instead of nothing?" and restrict the sentence to the simple and precise form: "Why are there beings at all?"

Nothing would stand in the way of this, if ... if in the formulation of our question, if in the asking of this question altogether, we had as much license as it may have seemed up to now. But in asking the question we stand within a tradition. For philosophy has con- stantly and always asked about the ground of beings. With this question it had its inception, in this question it will find its end, provided that it comes to an end in greatness and not in a powerless decline. The question about what is not and about Nothing has gone side by side with the question of what is, since its inception. But it does not do so superficially, as an accompanying phenomenon; instead, the question about Nothing takes shape in accordance with the breadth, depth, and originality with which the question about beings is asked on each occasion, and conversely. The manner of asking about Nothing can serve as a gauge and a criterion for the manner of asking about beings.

If we think about this, then the interrogative sentence pronounced at the start, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" appears far more suitable to express the question about

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18 Compare Heinrich Rickert, Die Logik des Prädikats und das Problem der Ontologie * Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung * , 1930, p. 205. ' Heidegger's note; present only in the Gesamtausgabe edition. Rickert writes: "With the help of the relative Nothing, we at best reach a distinctive alternative to the world, whose epistemic meaning does not seem to be essential for the Being of the world. On the one side of this alternative we have, then, the world that is, in its totality; on the other side, in contrast, we have only Nothing as the not-Being of the world. What does this alternative tell us as regards knowledge of the world? One will want to answer simply: nothing, and nothing other than just nothing! The world remains exactly what it was, and what it is, if we oppose Nothing to it as not-the-world." Rickert goes on to argue that there are, however, important logical points to be explored regarding the concept of Nothing. He concludes his book (226-236) with an analysis of Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" in which he identifies Heidegger's "Nothing" with "the Other of the knowable world" (229). In Rickert's reading of Heidegger, "the Nothing is the something for which we have no predicates" (231).
beings than the abbreviated version after all. Our introduction of talk about Nothing here is not a careless and overly enthusiastic manner of speaking, nor our own invention, but merely strict respect for the originary tradition regarding the sense of the fundamental question.

Still, this talk of Nothing remains contrary to thought in general, and leads to disintegration in particular. But what if both the concern for the proper respect for the fundamental rules of thinking as well as the fear of nihilism, which would both like to advise against talk of Nothing, rested on a misunderstanding? This is in fact the case. Of course, the misunderstanding that is being played out here is not accidental. Its ground is a lack of understanding that has long ruled the question about beings. But this lack of understanding stems from an oblivion of Being that is getting increasingly rigid.

For it cannot be decided so readily whether logic and its fundamental rules can provide any measure for the question about beings as such. It could be the other way around, that 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, and that consequently any thinking that simply follows the laws of thought of established logic is intrinsically incapable of even beginning to understand the question about beings, much less of actually unfolding it and leading it toward an answer. In truth, it is only an illusion of rigor and scientificty when one appeals to the principle of contradiction, and to logic in general, in order to prove that all thinking and talk about Nothing is contradictory and therefore senseless. "Logic" is then taken as a tribunal, secure for all eternity, and it goes without saying that no rational human being will call into doubt its authority as the first and last court of appeal. Whoever speaks against logic is suspected, implicitly or explicitly, of arbitrariness. This mere suspicion already counts as an argument and an objection, and one takes oneself to be exempted from further, authentic reflection.

One cannot, in fact, talk about and deal with Nothing as if it were a thing, such as the rain out there, or a mountain, or any object at all; Nothing remains in principle inaccessible to all science. Whoever [20] truly wants to talk of Nothing must necessarily become unscientific. But this is a great misfortune only if one believes that scientific thinking alone is the authentic, rigorous thinking, that it alone can and must be made the measure even of philosophical thinking. But the reverse is the case. All scientific thinking is just a derivative and rigidified form of philosophical thinking. Philosophy never arises from or through science. Philosophy can never belong to the same order as the sciences. It belongs to a higher order, and not just "logically," as it were, or in a table of the system of sciences. Philosophy stands in a completely different domain and rank of spiritual Dasein. Only poetry is of the same order as philosophical thinking, although thinking and poetry are not identical. Talking about Nothing remains forever an abomination and an absurdity for science. But aside from the philosopher, the poet can also talk about Nothing — and not because the procedure of poetry, in the opinion of everyday understanding, is less rigorous, but because, in comparison to all mere science, an essential superiority of the spirit holds sway in poetry (only genuine and great poetry is meant). Because of this superiority, the poet always speaks as if beings were expressed and addressed for the first time. In the poetry of the poet and in the thinking of the thinker, there is always so much world-space to spare that each and every thing — a tree, a mountain, a house, the call of a bird — completely loses its indifference and familiarity.
True talk of Nothing always remains unfamiliar. It does not allow itself to be made common. It dissolves, to be sure, if one places it in the cheap acid of a merely logical cleverness. This is why we cannot begin to speak about Nothing immediately, as we can in describing a picture, for example. But the possibility of such speech about Nothing can be indicated. Consider a passage from one of the latest works of the poet Knut Hamsun, The Road Leads On, 1934 translation, p. 464. The work belongs together with The Wayfarer and August. The Road Leads On depicts the last years and the end of this man August, who embodies the uprooted, universal knowhow of today's humanity, but in the form of a Dasein that cannot lose its ties to the unfamiliar, because in its despairing powerlessness it remains genuine and superior. In his last days, this August is alone in the high mountains. The poet says: "He sits here between [21] his ears and hears true emptiness. Quite amusing, a fancy. On the ocean (earlier, August often went to sea) something stirred (at least), and there, there was a sound, something audible, a water chorus. Here — nothing meets nothing and is not there, there is not even a hole. One can only shake one's head in resignation."

So there is, after all, something peculiar about Nothing. Thus we want to take up our interrogative sentence again and question through it, and see whether this "instead of nothing?" simply represents a turn of phrase that says nothing and is arbitrarily appended, or whether even in the preliminary expression of the question it has an essential sense.

To this end, let us stick at first to the abbreviated, apparently simpler and supposedly more rigorous question: "Why are there beings at all?" If we ask in this way, we start out from beings. They are. They are given to us, they are in front of us and can thus be found before us at any time, and are also known to us within certain domains. Now the beings given to us in this way are immediately interrogated as to their ground. The questioning advances directly toward a ground. Such a method just broadens and enlarges, as it were, a procedure that is practiced every day. Somewhere in the vineyard, for example, an infestation turns up, something indisputably present at hand. One asks: where does this come from, where and what is its ground? Similarly, as a whole, beings are present at hand. One asks: where and what is the ground? This kind of questioning is represented in the simple formula: Why are there beings? Where and what is their ground? Tacitly one is asking after another, higher being. But here the question does not pertain at all to beings as a whole and as such.

But now if we ask the question in the form of our initial interrogative sentence — "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" — then the addition prevents us, in our questioning, from beginning directly with beings as unquestionably given, and having hardly begun, already

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19 Heidegger refers to these novels by the titles of their German translations. Hamsun's "August" trilogy begins with Landstrykere (1927), translated into German as Landstreicher by J. Sandmeier and S. Ungermann (Munich: Albert Langen, 1928); Heidegger incorrectly calls the novel Der Landstreicher, in the singular. The most recent English translation is Wayfarers, by J. W. McFarlane (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969). The second novel is August (1930), translated as August Weltumsegler by J. Sandmeier and S. Ungermann (Munich: Albert Langen, 1930) and as August by Eugene Gay-Tifft (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931). The conclusion of the trilogy, Men Livet Lever (1933), was translated as Nach Jahrund Tag by J. Sandmeier and S. Ungermann (Munich: Albert Langen/Georg Muller, 1934) and as The Road Leads On by Eugene Gay-Tifft (New York: Coward-McCann, 1934); the passage in question appears on p. 508 of the Gay-Tifft translation. We have translated it here from the German.

20 This and the following parenthetical interpolation are by Heidegger. He also inserts the dash after "here" at the beginning of the next sentence.
moving on to the ground we are seeking, which is also in being. Instead, these beings are held out in a questioning manner into the possibility of not-Being. In this way, the Why gains a completely different power and urgency of questioning. Why are beings torn from the possibility of not-Being? Why do they not fall back into it constantly with no further ado? Beings are now no longer what just happens to be present at hand; they begin to waver, regardless of whether we know beings with all certainty, [22] regardless of whether we grasp them in their full scope or not. From now on, beings as such waver, insofar as we put them into question. The oscillation of this wavering reaches out into the most extreme and sharpest counterpossibility of beings, into not-Being and Nothing. The search for the Why now transforms itself accordingly. It does not just try to provide a present-at-hand ground for explaining what is present at hand — instead, we are now searching for a ground that is supposed to ground the dominance of beings as an overcoming of Nothing. The ground in question is now questioned as the ground of the decision for beings over against Nothing — more precisely, as the ground for the wavering of the beings that sustain us and unbind us, half in being, half not in being, which is also why we cannot wholly belong to any thing, not even to ourselves; yet Dasein is in each case mine.

[The qualification "in each case mine" signifies: Dasein is thrown to me so that my self may be Dasein. But Dasein means: care of the Being of beings as such that is ecstatically disclosed in care, not only of human Being. Dasein is "in each case mine"; this means neither that it is posited by me nor that it is confined to an isolated ego. Dasein is itself by virtue of its essential relation to Being in general. This is what the oft-repeated sentence in Being and Time means: the understanding of Being belongs to Dasein.]

Thus it is already becoming clearer that this "instead of nothing?" is no superfluous addition to the real question. Instead, this turn of phrase is an essential component of the whole interrogative sentence, which as a whole expresses a completely different question from what is meant by the question: Why are there beings? With our question we establish ourselves among beings in such a way that they forfeit their self-evidence as beings. Insofar as beings come to waver within the broadest and harshest possibility of oscillation — the "either beings — or nothing" — the questioning itself loses every secure foothold. Our Dasein, too, as it questions, comes into suspense, and nevertheless maintains itself, by itself, in this suspense.

But beings are not changed by our questioning. They remain what they are and as they are. After all, our questioning is just a psychospiritual process in us that, however it may play itself out, cannot concern beings themselves. Certainly, beings remain as they are revealed to us. And yet beings are not able to shrug off what is worthy of questioning: they, as what they are and how they are, could also not be. By no means do we experience this possibility as something that is just added on by our own thought, but beings themselves declare this possibility, they declare themselves as beings [23] in this possibility. Our questioning just opens up the domain so that beings can break open in such questionworthiness.

What we know about how such questioning happens is all too little and all too crude. In this questioning, we seem to belong completely to ourselves. Yet it is this questioning that pushes us into the open, provided that it itself, as a questioning, transforms itself (as does every genuine questioning), and casts a new space over and through everything.
It is simply a matter of not being seduced by overhasty theories, but instead experiencing things as they are in whatever may be nearest. This piece of chalk here is an extended, relatively stable, definitely formed, grayish-white thing, and, furthermore, a thing for writing. As certainly as it belongs precisely to this thing to lie here, the capacity not to be here and not to be so big also belongs to it. The possibility of being drawn along the blackboard and used up is not something that we merely add onto the thing with our thought. The chalk itself, as this being, is in this possibility; otherwise it would not be chalk as a writing implement. Every being, in turn, has this Possible in it, in a different way in each case. This Possible belongs to the chalk. It itself has in itself a definite appropriateness for a definite use. Of course, when we look for this Possible in the chalk, we are accustomed and inclined to say that we do not see it and do not grasp it. But that is a prejudice. The elimination of this prejudice is part of the unfolding of our question. For now, this question should just open up beings, in their wavering between not-Being and Being. Insofar as beings stand up against the extreme possibility of not-Being, they themselves stand in Being, and yet they have never thereby overtaken and overcome the possibility of not-Being.

Suddenly we are speaking here about the not-Being and Being of beings, without saying how what we call Being is related to beings themselves. Are they the same? The being and its Being? The distinction! What, for example, is the being (das Seiende) in this piece of chalk? Already this question is ambiguous, because the word "being" can be understood in two ways, as can the Greek to on. On the one hand, being means what at any time is in being, in particular this grayish-white, light, breakable mass, formed in such and such a way. On the other hand, "being" means that which, as it were, "makes" this be a being instead of nonbeing (nichtseiend f), that which makes up the Being in the being, if it is a being. In accordance with this twofold meaning of the word "being," the Greek to on often designates the second meaning, that is, not the being itself, what is in being, but rather "the in-being," beingness, to be in being, Being. In contrast, the first meaning of "being" names the things themselves that are in being, either individually or as a whole, but always with reference to these things and not to their beingness, ousia.

The first meaning of to on designates ta onta (entia), the second means to einai (esse). We have catalogued what the being is in the piece of chalk. We were able to find this out relatively easily. We could also easily see that the chalk can also not be, that this chalk ultimately need not be here and need not be at all. But then, as distinguished from that which can stand in Being or fall back into not-Being, as distinguished from the being — what is Being? Is it the same as the being? We ask this once again. But we did not include Being in our earlier catalogue of attributes — we listed only material mass, grayish-white, light, formed in such and such a manner, breakable. Now where is Being situated? It must after all belong to the chalk, for this chalk itself is.

We encounter beings everywhere; they surround us, carry and control us, enchant and fulfill us, elevate and disappoint us, but where in all this is the Being of beings, and what does it consist in? One could answer: this distinction between beings and their Being may at times have some

21 "... also nicht das Seiende selbst, was seiend 1st, sondern 'das Seiend,' die Seiendheit, das Seiendsein, das Sein."
22 The Greek noun ousia is formed from the present participle of the verb einai (to be). Normally meaning "goods, possessions," it is developed by Plato and Aristotle into a central philosophical concept, and is usually translated as "essence" or "substance." Heidegger's Seiendheit (beingness) corresponds directly to the grammatical structure of ousia.
linguistic importance, perhaps even some meaning; one can make this distinction in mere thought, that is, in re-presentation and opinion, without this distinction's corresponding to anything that is. But even this distinction made only in thought is questionable; for it remains unclear what we are supposed to think under the name "Being." Meanwhile, it is enough to be familiar with beings and to secure mastery over them. Distinguishing Being on top of this is artificial and leads to nothing.

We have already made some remarks about this popular question of what comes of such distinctions. Let us now simply reflect on our enterprise. We ask, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" And in this question we apparently restrict ourselves only to beings and avoid empty brooding about Being. But what are we really asking? Why beings as such are. We are asking about the ground for the fact that beings are, and are what they are, and that there is not nothing instead. We are asking at bottom about Being. But how? We are asking about the Being of beings. We are interrogating beings in regards to their Being.

But if we persevere in the questioning, we are really already asking ahead, about Being in regard to its ground, even if this question does not develop and it remains undecided whether Being itself is not already in itself a ground and ground enough. If we pose this question about Being as the first question in rank, then should we do so without knowing how it stands with Being and how Being stands in its distinction from beings? How are we even supposed to inquire into the ground for the Being of beings, let alone be able to find it out, if we have not adequately conceived, understood and grasped Being itself? This enterprise would be just as hopeless as if someone wanted to explain the cause and ground of a fire and declared that he need not bother with the course of the fire or the investigation of its scene.

So it turns out that the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" forces us to the prior question: "How does it stand with Being?"

We are now asking about something that we hardly grasp, something that is now no more than the sound of a word for us and that puts us in danger of falling victim to the mere idolization of words in our further questioning. So it is all the more necessary for us to get dear from the outset about how it stands for us at present with Being and with our understanding of Being. Here it is important above all to impress on our experience again and again the fact that we are not able to lay hold of the Being of beings directly and expressly, neither by way of beings, nor in beings — nor anywhere else at all.

A few examples should help. Over there, on the other side of the street, stands the high school building. A being. We can scour every side of the building from the outside, roam through the inside from basement to attic, and note everything that can be found there: hallways, stairs, classrooms, and their furnishings. Everywhere we find beings, and in a very definite order.

Where now is the Being of this high school? It is, after all. The building is. The Being of this being belongs to it if anything does, and nevertheless we do not find this Being within the being.

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23 "Wie steht es urn das Sein?" This expression could be translated more colloquially as "What is the status of Being?" or even "What about Being?" We have kept the German idiom in order to preserve Heidegger's various plays on "standing."
Moreover, Being does not consist in our observing beings. The building stands there even if we do not observe it. We can come across it only because it already is. In addition, the Being of this building does not at all seem to be identical for everybody. For us, as observers or passers-by, it is not what it is for the students who sit inside, not just because they see it only from the inside but because for them this building really is what it is and how it is. One can, as it were, smell the Being of such buildings, and often after decades one still has the scent in one's nose. The scent provides the Being of this being much more directly and truly than it could be communicated by any description or inspection. On the other hand, the subsistence of the building does not depend on this scent that is hovering around somewhere.

How does it stand with Being? Can we see Being? We see beings — the chalk here. But do we see Being as we see color and light and dark? Or do we hear, smell, taste, or touch Being? We hear the motorcycle roaring along the street. We hear the grouse flying off through the mountain forest in its gliding flight. Yet really we are only hearing the noise of the motor's rattling, the noise that the grouse causes. Furthermore, it is hard and unusual for us to describe the pure noise, because it is precisely not what we generally hear. We always hear more [than the mere noise]. We hear the flying bird, although strictly speaking we have to say: a grouse is nothing we can hear, it is not a tone that could be registered on a scale. And so it is with the other senses. We touch velvet, silk; we see them without further ado as such and such a being, and the one is in being distinctly from the other. Where does Being lie and in what does it consist?

Yet we must look around us still more thoroughly and contemplate the narrower and wider sphere within which we dwell, daily and hourly, knowing and unknowing, a sphere that constantly shifts its boundaries and suddenly is broken through.

A heavy thunderstorm gathering in the mountains "is," or — it makes no difference here — "was" in the night. What does its Being consist in?

A distant mountain range under a vast sky — such a thing "is." What does its Being consist in? When and to whom does it reveal itself? To the hiker who enjoys the landscape, or to the peasant who makes his daily living from it and in it, or to the meteorologist who has to give a weather report? Who among them lays hold of Being? All and none. Or do these people only lay hold of particular aspects of the mountain range under the vast sky, not the mountain range itself as it "is," not what its real Being consists in? Who can lay hold of this? Or is it nonsensical, against the sense of Being in the first place, to ask about what is in itself, behind those aspects? Does Being lie in the aspects?

The portal of an early Romanesque church is a being. How and to whom does Being reveal itself? To the art historian who visits and photographs it on an excursion, or to the abbot who passes through the portal with his monks for a religious celebration, or to the children who play in its shadow on a summer's day? How does it stand with the Being of this being?

A state — it is. What does its Being consist in? In the fact that the state police arrest a suspect, or that in a ministry of the Reich so and so many typewriters clatter away and record the dictation of state secretaries and ministers? Or "is" the state in the discussion between the Fuhrer and the English foreign minister? The state is. But where is Being situated? Is it located anywhere at all?
A painting by Van Gogh: a pair of sturdy peasant shoes, nothing else. The picture really represents nothing. Yet you are alone at once with what is there, as if you yourself were heading homeward from the field on a late autumn evening, tired, with your hoe, as the last potato fires smolder out. What is in being here? The canvas? The brushstrokes? The patches of color?

In everything we have mentioned, what is the Being of beings? Really, how is it that we can run around in the world and stand around with our stupid pretensions and our so-called cleverness?

Everything we have mentioned is, after all, and nevertheless — if we want to lay hold of Being it is always as if we were reaching into a void. The Being that we are asking about is almost like Nothing, and yet we are always trying to arm and guard ourselves against the presumption of saying that all beings are not.

But Being remains undiscoverable, almost like Nothing, or in the end entirely so. The word "Being" is then finally just an empty word. It means nothing actual, tangible, real. Its meaning is an unreal vapor. So in the end Nietzsche is entirely right when he calls the "highest concepts" such as Being "the final wisp of evaporating reality" (Twilight of the Idols VIII, 78). 26 Who would want to chase after such a vapor, the term for which is just the name for a huge error! "In fact, nothing up to now has been more naively persuasive than the error of Being . . ." (VIII, 80).

"Being" — a vapor and an error? What Nietzsche says here about Being is no casual remark, jotted down during the frenzy of labor in preparation for his authentic and never completed work. Instead, it is his guiding conception of Being since the earliest days of his philosophical labor. It supports and determines his philosophy from the ground up. But this philosophy remains, even now, well guarded against all the clumsy and trifling importunities of the horde of scribblers that is becoming ever more numerous around him today. It seems that his work hardly has the worst of this misuse behind it. In speaking of Nietzsche here, we want nothing to do with all this — nor with a blind hero worship. The task is much too decisive and, at the same time, too sober for such worship. It consists first and foremost in fully unfolding that which was realized through Nietzsche by means of a truly engaged attack on him. Being — a vapor, an error! If this is so, then the only possible conclusion is that we should also give up the question, "Why are there beings as such and as a whole instead of nothing?" For what is the point of the question anymore, if what it puts into question is just a vapor and an error?

Does Nietzsche speak the truth? Or is he himself only the final victim of a long-standing errancy and neglect, but as this victim the unrecognized witness to a new necessity?

Is it Being's fault that Being is so confused, and is it the fault of the word that it remains so empty, or is it our fault, because in all our bustling and chasing after beings, we have nevertheless fallen out of Being? What if the fault is not our own, we of today, nor that of our immediate or most distant forebears, but rather is based in a happening that runs through Western history from the inception onward, a happening that the eyes of all historians will never reach, but which nevertheless happens — formerly, today, and in the future? What if it were possible that human beings, that peoples in their greatest machinations and exploits, have a relation to beings but have long since fallen out of Being, without knowing it, and what if this were the
innermost and most powerful ground of their decline? [Cf. Being and Time, §38, especially pp. 179 f.]\textsuperscript{24}

These are not questions that we pose here casually, nor do we pose them on account of some predisposition or worldview. Instead, they are questions to which we are forced by that prior question, which springs necessarily from the main question: "How does it stand with Being?" — a sober question perhaps, but certainly a very useless question, too. And yet a question, the question:"is 'Being' a mere word and its meaning a vapor, or is it the spiritual fate of the West?"

This Europe, in its unholy blindness always on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in the great pincers between Russia on the one side and America on the other. Russia and America, seen metaphysically, are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average\textsuperscript{29} man. When the farthest corner of the globe has been conquered technologically and can be exploited economically; when any incident you like, in any place you like, at any time you like, becomes accessible as fast as you like; when you can simultaneously "experience" an assassination attempt against a king in France and a symphony concert in Tokyo; when time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from all Dasein of all peoples; when a boxer counts as the great man of a people; when the tallies of millions at mass meetings are a triumph; then, yes then, there still looms like a specter over all this uproar the question: what for? — where to? — and what then?

The spiritual decline of the earth has progressed so far that peoples are in danger of losing their last spiritual strength, the strength that makes it possible even to see the decline [which is meant in relation to the fate of "Being"]\textsuperscript{29} and to appraise it as such. This simple observation has nothing to do with cultural pessimism — nor with any optimism either, of course; for the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the hatred and mistrust of everything creative and free has already reached such proportions throughout the whole earth that such childish categories as pessimism and optimism have long become laughable.

We lie in the pincers. Our people, as standing in the center, suffers the most intense pressure — our people, the people richest in neighbors and hence the most endangered people, and for all that, the metaphysical people. We are sure of this vocation; but this people will gain a fate from its vocation only when it creates in itself a resonance, a possibility of resonance for this vocation, and grasps its tradition creatively. All this implies that this people, as a historical people, must transpose itself — and with it the history of the West — from the center of their future happening into the originary realm of the powers of Being. Precisely if the great decision regarding Europe is not to go down the path of annihilation — precisely then can this decision come about only through the development of new, historically spiritual forces from the center.

To ask: how does it stand with Being? — this means nothing less than to repeat and retrieve 'wieder-holen'\textsuperscript{30} the inception of our historical-spiritual Dasein, in order to transform it into the other inception. Such a thing is possible. It is in fact the definitive form of history, because it has its onset in a happening that grounds history. But an inception is not repeated when one shrinks back to it as something that once was, something that by now is familiar and is simply to be

\textsuperscript{24} In parentheses in the 1953 edition.
imitated, but rather when the inception is begun again more originally, and with all the strangeness, darkness, insecurity that a genuine inception brings with it. Repetition as we understand it is anything but the ameliorating continuation of what has been, by means of what has been.

The question "How does it stand with Being?" is included as a prior question in our guiding question: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" If we now set out to pursue what stands in question in the prior question, namely Being, then Nietzsche's saying at once proves to be completely true after all. For if we look closely, what more is "Being" to us than a mere locution, an indeterminate meaning, intangible as a vapor? Nietzsche's judgment, of course, is meant in a purely dismissive sense. For him, "Being" is a deception that never should have happened. "Being" — indeterminate, evanescent as a vapor? It is in fact so. But we don't want to evade this fact. To the contrary, we must try to get clear about its factuality in order to survey its full scope.

Through our questioning, we are entering a landscape; to be in this landscape is the fundamental prerequisite for restoring rootedness to historical Dasein. We will have to ask why this fact, the fact that "Being" remains a vaporous word for us, stands out precisely today; we will have to ask whether and why it has persisted for a long time. We should learn to know that this fact is not as innocuous as it seems at first sight. For ultimately what matters is not that the word "Being" remains just a noise for us and its meaning just a vapor, but that we have fallen out of what this word is saying, and for now cannot find our way back; it is on these grounds and on no others that the word "Being" no longer applies to anything, that everything, if we merely want to take hold of it, dissolves like a shred of cloud in the sun. Because this is so, we ask about Being. And we ask because we know that truths have never yet fallen into a people's lap. The fact that even now one still cannot understand this question, and does not want to understand it, even if it is asked in a still more originary way, takes from this question none of its inevitability.

Of course, one can show oneself to be very clever and superior, and once again trot out the well-known reflection: "Being" is simply the most universal concept. Its range extends to any and every thing, even to Nothing, which, as something thought and said, "is" also something. So there is, in the strict sense of the word, nothing above and beyond the range of this most universal concept "Being" in terms of which it could be further defined. One must be satisfied with this highest generality. The concept of Being is an ultimate. And it also corresponds to a law of logic that says: the more comprehensive a concept is in its scope — and what could be more comprehensive than the concept "Being"? — the more indeterminate and empty is its content.

For every normally thinking human being — and we all want to be normal — such trains of thought are immediately and entirely convincing. But now the question is whether the assessment of Being as the most universal concept reaches the essence of Being, or whether it so misinterprets Being from the start that questioning becomes hopeless. The question is whether Being can count only as the most universal concept that unavoidably presents itself in all particular concepts or whether Being has a completely different essence, and thus is anything but the object of an "ontology," if one takes this word in its established meaning.
The term "ontology" was first coined in the seventeenth century. It designates the development of the traditional doctrine of beings into a philosophical discipline and a branch of the philosophical system. But the traditional doctrine is the academic analysis and ordering of what for Plato and Aristotle, and again for Kant, was a question, though to be sure a question that was no longer originary. The word "ontology" is still used this way even today. Under this title, philosophy busies itself with the composition and exposition of a branch within its system. But one can also take the word "ontology" "in the broadest sense," "without reference to ontological directions and tendencies" (cf. Being and Time, 1927, p. 11, top). In this case "ontology" means the effort to put Being into words, and to do so by passing through the question of how it stands with Being [not just with beings as such]. But because until now this question has found neither an accord nor even a resonance, but instead it is explicitly rejected by the various circles of academic philosophical scholarship, which pursues an "ontology" in the traditional sense, it may be good in the future to forgo the use of the terms "ontology" and "ontological." Two modes of questioning which, as is only now becoming clearer, are worlds apart should not bear the same name.

[32] We ask the question — How does it stand with Being? What is the meaning of Being? — not in order to compose an ontology in the traditional style, much less to reckon up critically the mistakes of earlier attempts at ontology. We are concerned with something completely different. The point is to restore the historical Dasein of human beings — and this also always means our ownmost future Dasein, in the whole of the history that is allotted to us — back to the power of Being that is to be opened up originally; all this, to be sure, only within the limits of philosophy's capability.

From the fundamental question of metaphysics, "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" we have extracted the prior question *Vor-frage*: How does it stand with Being? The relation between these questions needs to be elucidated, for it is in a class of its own. Usually, a preliminary question (Vorfrage) is settled in advance and outside the main question, although with a view to it. But philosophical questions are in principle never settled as if some day one could set them aside. Here the preliminary question does not stand outside the fundamental question at all but is, as it were, the hearth-fire that glows in the asking of the fundamental question, the hearth at the heart of all questioning. That is to say: when we first ask the fundamental question, everything depends on our taking up the decisive fundamental position in asking its prior question, and winning and securing the bearing that is essential here. This is why we brought the question about Being into connection with the fate of Europe, where the fate of the earth is being decided, while for Europe itself our historical Dasein proves to be the center.

The question ran: Is Being a mere word and its meaning a vapor, or does what is named with the word "Being" hold within it the spiritual fate of the West?

To many ears the question may sound forced and exaggerated. For if pressed, one could indeed imagine that discussing the question of Being might ultimately, at a very great remove and in a very indirect manner, have some relation to the decisive historical question of the earth, but by no means in such a way that from out of the history of the earth's spirit, the fundamental position and bearing of our questioning could directly be determined. And yet there is such a connection.

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25 In parentheses in the 1953 edition.
Because our aim is to get the asking of the prior question going, we now must show how, and to what extent, the asking of this prior question moves directly, and from the ground up, along with the decisive historical question. To demonstrate this, it is necessary at first to anticipate an essential insight in the form of an assertion.

[33] We assert that the asking of this prior question, and thereby the asking of the fundamental question of metaphysics, is a historical questioning through and through. But does not metaphysics, and philosophy in general, thereby become a historical science? After all, historical science investigates the temporal, while philosophy, in contrast, investigates the supratemporal. Philosophy is historical only insofar as it, like every work of the spirit, realizes itself in the course of time. But in this sense, the designation of metaphysical questioning as historical cannot characterize metaphysics but can only propose something obvious. Thus either the assertion says nothing and is superfluous, or it is impossible, because it mixes up fundamentally different kinds of science: philosophy and the science of history.

In reply to this it must be said:

1. Metaphysics and philosophy are not science at all, and furthermore, the fact that their questioning is at bottom historical cannot make them so.

2. For its part, the science of history does not at all determine, as science, the originary relation to history; instead, it always already presupposes such a relation. This is why the science of history can either deform the relation to history — a relation that is itself always historical — misinterpret it and reduce it to mere antiquarian expertise, or else prepare essential domains of vision for the already grounded relation to history and let history be experienced in its bindingness. A historical relation of our historical Dasein to history can become an object of knowledge and a developed state of knowledge; but it need not. Besides, not all relations to history can be scientifically objectified and become scientific, and in fact it is precisely the essential relations that cannot. The science of history can never institute the historical relation to history. It can only illuminate a relation once it is instituted, ground it informatively, which to be sure is an essential necessity for the historical Dasein of a knowing people, and thus neither merely an "advantage" nor a "disadvantage." It is only in philosophy — in distinction from every science — that essential relations to beings always take shape; and therefore this relation can, indeed must, be an originally historical one for us today.

But in order to understand our assertion that the "metaphysical" asking of the prior question is historical through and through, one must consider one thing above all: in this assertion, history is not [34] equivalent to what is past; for this is precisely what is no longer happening. But much less is history what is merely contemporary, which also never happens, but always just "passes," makes its entrance and goes by. History as happening is determined from the future, takes over

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26 With the terms "antiquarian," "advantage," and "disadvantage," Heidegger alludes to Nietzsche's "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life." Cf. Being and Time, §76. In the winter semester of 1938-1939 Heidegger gave a lecture course on this essay by Nietzsche.

27 Throughout this passage and elsewhere, Heidegger plays on Geschichte and geschehen ("history" and "happen").
what has been, and acts and endures its way through the present. It is precisely the present that vanishes in the happening.

Our asking of the fundamental metaphysical question is historical because it opens up the happening of human Dasein in its essential relations — that is, its relations to beings as such and as a whole — opens it up to possibilities not yet asked about, futures to come {Zu-künften}, and thereby also binds it back to its inception that has been, and thus sharpens and burdens it in its present. In this questioning, our Dasein is summoned to its history in the full sense of the word and is called to make a decision in it — and this is not a derivative, useful application of this questioning in terms of morality and worldviews. Instead, the fundamental position and bearing of the questioning is in itself historical, stands and holds itself in the happening, and questions on the ground of this happening and for this happening.

But we still lack the essential insight into how far this asking of the question of Being, an asking which is in itself historical, intrinsically belongs to the world history of the earth. We said: on the earth, all over it, a darkening of the world is happening. The essential happenings in this darkening are: the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the preeminence of the mediocre.

What does "world" mean, when we speak of the darkening of the world? World is always spiritual world. The animal has no world ‘Welt t, nor any environment ‘Umaweli t. The darkening of the world contains within itself a disempowering of the spirit, its dissolution, diminution, suppression, and misinterpretation. We will try to elucidate this disempowering of the spirit in one respect, namely, the misinterpretation of the spirit. We said: Europe lies in the pincers between Russia and America, which are metaphysically the same, namely in regard to their world-character and their relation to the spirit. The situation of Europe is all the more dire because the disempowering of the spirit comes from Europe itself and — though prepared by earlier factors — is determined at last by its own spiritual situation in the first half of the nineteenth century. Among us at that time something happened that is all too readily and swiftly characterized as the "collapse of German idealism." This formula is like a shield behind which the already dawning spiritlessness, the dissolution of spiritual powers, the deflection of all originary questioning about grounds and the bonding to such grounds, are hidden [35] and obscured. For it was not German idealism that collapsed, but it was the age that was no longer strong enough to stand up to the greatness, breadth, and originality of that spiritual world — that is, truly to realize it, which always means something other than merely applying propositions and insights. Dasein began to slide into a world that lacked that depth from which the essential always comes and returns to human beings, thereby forcing them to superiority and allowing them to act on the basis of rank. All things sank to the same level, to a surface resembling a blind mirror that no longer mirrors, that casts nothing back. The prevailing dimension became that of extension and number. To be able— this no longer means to spend and to lavish, thanks to lofty overabundance and the mastery of energies; instead, it means only practicing a routine in which anyone can be trained, always combined with a certain amount of sweat and display. In America and Russia, then, this all intensified until it turned into the measureless so-on-and-so-forth of the ever-identical and the indifferent, until finally this quantitative temper became a quality of its own. By now in those countries the predominance of a cross-section of the indifferent is no longer something inconsequential and merely barren but is the onslaught of that which
aggressively destroys all rank and all that is world-spiritual, and portrays these as a lie. This is the onslaught of what we call the demonic [in the sense of the destructively evil]. There are many omens of the arising of this demonism, in unison with the growing perplexity and uncertainty of Europe against it and within itself. One such omen is the disempowering of the spirit in the sense of its misinterpretation — a happening in the middle of which we still stand today. Let us briefly describe four aspects of this misinterpretation of the spirit.

1. One decisive aspect is the reinterpretation of the spirit as intelligence, and this as mere astuteness in the examination, calculation and observation of given things, their possible modification, and their additional elaboration. This astuteness is a matter of mere talent and practice and mass distribution. This astuteness is itself subject to the possibility of organization, none of which ever applies to the spirit. The whole phenomenon of literati and aesthetes is just a late consequence and mutation of the spirit falsified as intelligence. Mere ingenuity is the semblance of spirit and veils its absence.

2. Spirit, thus falsified as intelligence, is thereby reduced to the role of a tool in the service of something else, a tool whose handling can be taught and learned. Whether this service of intelligence now relates to the regulation and mastery of the material relations of production (as in Marxism) or in general to the clever ordering and clarification of everything that lies before us and is already posited (as in positivism), or whether it fulfills itself in organizing and directing the vital resources and race of a people — be this as it may, the spirit as intelligence becomes the powerless superstructure to something else, which, because it is spirit-less or even hostile to spirit, counts as authentic reality. If one understands spirit as intelligence, as Marxism in its most extreme form has done, then it is completely correct to say in response that the spirit — that is, intelligence, in the ordering of the effective energies of human Dasein — must always be subordinated to healthy bodily fitness and to character. But this ordering becomes untrue as soon as one grasps the essence of spirit in its truth. For all true energy and beauty of the body, all sureness and boldness of the sword, but also all genuineness and ingenuity of the understanding, are grounded in the spirit, and they rise or fall only according to the current power or powerlessness of the spirit. Spirit is what sustains and rules, the first and the last, not a merely indispensable third element.

3. As soon as this instrumental misinterpretation of the spirit sets in, the powers of spiritual happening — poetry and fine arts, statescraft and religion — shift to a sphere where they can be consciously cultivated and planned. At the same time, they get divided up into regions. The spiritual world becomes culture, and in the creation and conservation of culture the individual seeks to fulfill himself. These regions become fields of a free endeavor that sets its own standards for itself, according to the meaning of "standards" that it can still attain. These standards of validity for production and use are called values. Cultural values secure meaning for themselves in the whole of a culture only by restricting themselves to their self-validity: poetry for poetry's sake, art for art's sake, science for science's sake.

In respect to science, which concerns us especially here in the university, the situation of the last few decades, a situation which remains unchanged today despite some cleansing, is easy to see. Although two seemingly different conceptions of science are now seemingly struggling against

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28 In parentheses in the 1953 edition.
each other — science as technical and practical professional knowledge and science as a cultural value in itself — nevertheless both are moving along the same decadent path of a misinterpretation and disempowering of the spirit. They are [37] distinct only in that the technical and practical conception of science as specialized science may still lay claim to the merit of open and clear consistency within today’s situation, whereas the reactionary interpretation of science as a cultural value, which is now again appearing, tries to hide the powerlessness of the spirit through an unconscious mendacity. The confusion of spiritlessness can even go so far that the practical, technical explanation of science confesses itself at the same time to be science as cultural value, so that both understand each other very well in the same dearth of spirit. One may wish to call the arrangement of the amalgam of the specialized sciences for purposes of teaching and research a university, but this is now just a name and no longer an originally unifying spiritual power that imposes duties. What I said here in my inaugural address in 1929 about the German university still applies today: "The regions of science lie far asunder. Their ways of handling their subject matters are fundamentally different. This disintegrated multiplicity of disciplines is still meaningfully maintained today only through the technical organization of universities and faculties and through the practical aims of the disciplines. Yet the rootedness of the sciences in their essential ground has atrophied" (What is Metaphysics? 1929, p. 8). 30

In all its areas, science today is a technical, practical matter of gaining information and communicating it. No awakening of the spirit at all can proceed from it as science. Science itself needs such an awakening.

4. The last misinterpretation of the spirit rests on the formerly mentioned falsifications that represent the spirit as intelligence, this intelligence as a tool serviceable for goals, and this tool, together with what can be produced, as the realm of culture. The spirit as intelligence in the service of goals and the spirit as culture finally become showpieces and spectacles that one takes into account along with many others, that one publicly trots out and exhibits as proof that one does not want to deny culture in favor of barbarism. Russian Communism, after an initially purely negative attitude, went directly over to such propagandistic tactics.

Against these multiple misinterpretations of the spirit, we determine the essence of the spirit briefly in this way (I choose the formulation from my Rectoral Address, because there everything is succinctly brought together in accordance with the occasion): "Spirit is neither empty acuity, nor the noncommittal play of wit, nor the understanding's boundless pursuit of analysis, nor even world reason, but rather spirit is originally attuned, knowing resolution [38] to the essence of Being" {Rectoral Address, p. 13}. 31 Spirit is the empowering of the powers of beings as such and as a whole. Where spirit rules, beings as such and in each case come more into being wird . . . seiendetK Asking about beings as such and as a whole, asking the question of Being, is then one of the essential fundamental conditions for awakening the spirit,
and thus for an originary world of historical Dasein, and thus for subduing the danger of the darkening of the world, and thus for taking over the historical mission of our people, the people of the center of the West. Only in these broad strokes can we make plain here to what extent asking the question of Being is in itself historical through and through, and that accordingly our question, whether Being is to remain a mere vapor for us or whether it is to become the fate of the West, is anything but an exaggeration and a figure of speech.

But if our question about Being has this essential character of decision, then we must above all proceed in full seriousness with the fact that gives the question its immediate necessity: the fact that Being is in fact almost nothing more than a word now, and its meaning is an evanescent vapor. We do not just stand before this fact as something alien and other, which we may simply ascertain as an occurrence in its Being-present-at-hand. The fact is such that we stand within it. It is a state of our Dasein, though certainly not in the sense of a property that we could simply exhibit psychologically. "State" here means our whole constitution, the way in which we ourselves are constituted in relation to Being. This is not a matter of psychology; instead, it concerns our history in an essential respect. If we call it a "fact" that Being for us is a mere word and a vapor, this is a very provisional formulation. With it, we are for once simply establishing and coming to grips with something that has still not been thought through at all, something that we still have no place for, even if it seems as if it were an occurrence among us, we human beings, "in" us, as one likes to say.

One would like to treat the particular fact that Being for us is now just an empty word and an evanescent vapor as a case of the more general fact that many words — indeed, the essential words — are in the same situation, that language in general is used up and abused, that language is an indispensable but masterless, arbitrarily applicable means of communication, as indifferent as a means of public transportation, such as a streetcar, which everyone gets on [39] and off. Thus everyone talks and writes unhindered and above all unendangered in language. That is certainly correct. Moreover, only a very few are still in a position to think through in its full scope this misrelation and unrelation of today's Dasein to language.

But the emptiness of the word "Being," the complete withering of its naming force, is not just a particular case of the general abuse of language — instead, the destroyed relation to Being as such is the real ground for our whole misrelation to language.

The organizations for the purification of language and for de- fense against its progressive mutilation deserve respect. Nevertheless, through such institutions one finally demonstrates only more clearly that one no longer knows what language is all about. Because the fate of language is grounded in the particular relation of a people to Being, the question about Being will be most intimately intertwined with the question about language for us. It is more than a superficial accident that now, as we make a start in laying out the above mentioned fact of the vaporization of Being in all its scope, we find ourselves forced to proceed from linguistic considerations.