

On the Essence of Truth

Translated by John Sallis¹

[73] Our topic is the *essence*² of truth. The question regarding the essence of truth is not concerned with whether truth is a truth of practical experience or of economic calculation, the truth of a technical consideration or of political sagacity, or, in particular, a truth of scientific research or of artistic composition, or even the truth of thoughtful reflection or of cultic belief. The question of essence disregards all this and attends to the one thing that in general distinguishes every “truth” as truth.

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

No one can evade the evident certainty of these considerations. None can lightly neglect their compelling seriousness. But what is it that speaks in these considerations? “Sound” common sense. It harps on the demand for palpable utility and inveighs against knowledge of the essence of beings, which essential knowledge has long been called “philosophy.”³

[74] Common sense has its own necessity; it asserts its rights with the weapon peculiarly suitable to it, namely, appeal to the “obviousness” of its claims and considerations. However, philosophy can never refute common

¹ Third edition, 1954: Essence: (1) *quidditas* – the “what” – *τι οὐδὲν*; (2) enabling – condition of possibility; (3) ground of enabling.

sense, for the latter is deaf to the language of philosophy. Nor may it³ even wish to do so, since common sense is blind to what philosophy sets before its essential vision.

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

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

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

I. THE USUAL CONCEPT OF TRUTH

What do we ordinarily understand by “truth”? This elevated yet at the same time worn and almost dulled word “truth”^a means what makes^b a true thing true. What is a true thing? We say, for example, “It is a true joy to cooperate in the accomplishment of this task.” [75] We mean that it is purely and actually a joy. The true is the actual. Accordingly, we speak of true gold in distinction from false. False gold is not actually what it appears to be. It is merely a “semblance” and thus is not actual. What is not actual is taken to be the opposite of the actual. But what merely seems to be gold is nevertheless something actual. Accordingly, we say more precisely: actual gold is genuine gold. Yet both are “actual,” the circulating counterfeit no less than the genuine gold. What is true about genuine gold thus cannot be demonstrated merely by its actuality. The question recurs: what do “genuine” and “true” mean here? Genuine gold is that actual gold the actuality of which is in accordance [*in der Übereinstimmung steht*] with what, always and in advance, we “properly” mean by “gold.” Conversely, wherever we suspect false gold, we say: “Here something is not in accord”

^a First edition, 1943, and third edition, 1954: Truth, *Wahr-beit, -beit: die Heitere (das Heiternde)* [the bright (that which brightens)], that which clears [*das Lichtende*].

^b First edition, 1943, and third edition, 1954: Making – setting forth – letting emerge into the clearing.

[*stimmt nicht*]. On the other hand, we say of whatever is “as it should be”: “It is in accord.” The *matter* is in accord [*Die Sache stimmt*].

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

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

This dual character of the accord is brought to light by the traditional definition of truth: *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*. This can be taken to mean: truth is the correspondence [*Angleichung*] of the matter to knowledge. But it can [76] also be taken as saying: truth is the correspondence of knowledge to the matter. Admittedly, the above definition is usually stated only in the formula *veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem* [truth is the adaequation of intellect to thing]. Yet truth so conceived, propositional truth, is possible only on the basis of material truth [*Sachwahrheit*], of *adaequatio rei ad intellectum* [adequation of thing to intellect]. Both concepts of the essence of *veritas* have continually in view a conforming to . . . [*Sichrichten nach . . .*], and hence think truth as *correctness* [Richtigkeit].

Nonetheless, the one is not the mere inversion of the other. On the contrary, in each case *intellectus* and *res* are thought differently. In order to recognize this we must trace the usual formula for the ordinary concept of truth back to its most recent (i.e., the medieval) origin. *Veritas* as *adaequatio rei ad intellectum* does not imply the later transcendental conception of Kant – possible only on the basis of the subjectivity of the human essence – that “objects conform to our knowledge.” Rather, it implies the Christian theological belief that, with respect to what it is and whether it is, a matter, as created (*ens creatum*), is only insofar as it corresponds to the *idea* preconceived in the *intellectus divinus*, i.e., in the mind of God, and thus measures up to the *idea* (is correct) and in this sense is “true.” The *intellectus humanus* too is an *ens creatum*. As a capacity bestowed upon human beings by God, it must satisfy its *idea*. But the understanding measures up to the *idea* only by accomplishing in its propositions the correspondence of what is thought to the matter, which in its turn must be in conformity with

the *idea*. If all beings are “created,” the possibility of the truth of human knowledge is grounded in the fact that matter and proposition measure up to the idea in the same way and therefore are fitted to each other on the basis of the unity of the divine plan of creation. *Veritas as adaequatio rei (creandae) ad intellectum (divinum)* guarantees *veritas as adaequatio intellectus (humani) ad rem (creatam)*. Throughout, *veritas* essentially implies *convenientia*, the coming of beings themselves, as created, [77] into agreement with the Creator, an “accord” with regard to the way they are determined in the order of creation.³

But this order, detached from the notion of creation, can also be represented in a general and indefinite way as a world-order. The theologically conceived order of creation is replaced by the capacity of all objects to be planned by means of a worldly reason [*Weltvernunft*] that supplies the law for itself and thus also claims that its procedure is immediately intelligible (what is considered “logical”). That the essence of propositional truth consists in the correctness of statements is thought to need no further special proof.⁴ Even where an effort is made – with a conspicuous lack of success – to explain how correctness is to occur, it is already presupposed as being the essence of truth. Likewise, material truth always signifies the consonance of something at hand with the “rational” concept of its essence. The impression arises that this definition of the essence of truth is independent of the interpretation of the essence of the Being of all beings, which always includes a corresponding interpretation of the essence of the human being as the bearer and executor of *intellectus*. Thus the formula for the essence of truth (*veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei*) comes to have its general validity as something immediately evident to everyone. Under the domination of the obviousness that this concept of truth seems to have, but that is hardly attended to as regards its essential grounds, it is considered equally obvious that truth⁵ has an opposite, and that there is untruth. The untruth of the proposition (incorrectness) is the nonaccordance of the statement with the matter. The untruth of the matter (nongenuineness) signifies nonagreement of a being with its essence. In each case untruth is conceived as a nonaccord. The latter falls outside the essence of truth. Therefore when it is a question of comprehending the pure essence of truth, untruth, as such an opposite of truth, can be put aside.

³ First edition, 1943: Not a double coming into agreement, but *one*, yet multiply articulated: Because of agreement with the Creator, there is also agreement [of beings] *among one another* (since what is created is in a certain way divine); “correspondence” in a more essential sense than that intended by the crude, unthought *analogia entis* adopted from Aristotle by the Scholastics.

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

2. THE INNER POSSIBILITY OF ACCORDANCE

We speak of accordance in various senses. We say, for example, considering two five-mark coins lying on the table: they are in accord with one another. They come into accord in the oneness of their outward appearance. Hence they have the latter in common, and thus they are in this regard alike. Furthermore, we speak of accordance whenever, for example, we state regarding one of the five-mark coins: this coin is round. Here the statement is in accord with the thing. Now the relation obtains, not between thing and thing, but rather between a statement and a thing. But wherein are the thing and the statement supposed to be in accordance, considering that the relata are manifestly different in their outward appearance? The coin is made of metal. The statement is not material at all. The coin is round. The statement has nothing [79] at all spatial about it. With the coin something can be purchased. The statement about it is never a means of payment. But in spite of all their dissimilarity the above statement, as true, is in accord with the coin. And according to the usual concept of truth this accord is supposed to be a correspondence. How can what is completely dissimilar, the statement, correspond to the coin? It would have to become the coin and in this way relinquish itself entirely. The statement never succeeds in doing that. The moment it did, it would no longer be able as a statement to be in accord with the thing. In the correspondence the statement must⁶ remain – indeed even first become – what it is. In what does its essence, so thoroughly different from every thing, consist? How is the statement able to correspond to something else, the thing, precisely by persisting in its own essence?

Correspondence here cannot signify a thing-like approximation between dissimilar kinds of things. The essence of the correspondence is determined rather by the kind of relation that obtains between the statement and the thing. As long as this "relation" remains undetermined and is not grounded in its essence, all dispute over the possibility and impossibility, over the nature and degree, of the correspondence loses its way in a void. But the statement regarding the coin relates "itself" to this thing in that it presents [*vor-stellt*] it and says of what is presented how, according to the particular perspective that guides it, it is disposed. What is stated by the presentative statement is said of the presented thing in just such manner *as* that thing, as presented, is. The "such-as" has to do with the presenting and what it presents. Disregarding all "psychological" preconceptions as well as those of any "theory of consciousness," to present here means to let the thing stand opposed as object. As thus placed, what stands opposed must traverse an open field of opposedness [*Entgegen*]^a and nevertheless must maintain its stand as a thing and show itself as something withstanding [*ein Ständiges*]. This appearing of the thing in traversing a field of opposedness takes place within an open region, the openness of which [80] is not first created by the presenting but rather is only entered into and taken over as a domain of relatedness. The relation of the presentative statement to the thing is the accomplishment of that *bearing* [*Verhältnis*] that originally and always comes to prevail as a comportment [*Verhalten*].^b But all comportment is distinguished by the fact that, standing in the open region, it in each case adheres to something opened up *as such*.⁷ What is thus opened up, solely in this strict sense, was experienced early in Western thinking as "what is present" and for a long time has been named "being."

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

^a Third edition, 1954: The openness of a field of opposedness.

^b Third edition, 1954: Comportment: abiding [*sich aufhalten*] in the clearing (standing in [*inständig in*] the clearing) of the presence of that which is present.

^c Third edition, 1954: As standing in the openness.

^d Third edition, 1954: Show, come into place, come to the fore, presence.

itself accordingly is correct (true). What is thus said is the correct (the true).

A statement is invested with its correctness by the openness³ of comportment; for only through the latter can what is opened up really become the standard for the presentative correspondence. Open comportment must let itself be assigned this standard. This means that it must take over a pre-given standard for all presenting. This belongs to the openness of comportment. But if the correctness (truth) of statements becomes possible only through this openness of comportment, then what first makes correctness possible must with more original legitimacy be taken as the essence of truth.

Thus the traditional assignment of truth exclusively to statements as the sole essential locus of truth falls away. [81] Truth does not originally reside in the proposition. But at the same time the question arises as to the ground of the inner possibility of the open comportment that pre-gives a standard, which possibility alone leads to propositional correctness the appearance of fulfilling the essence of truth at all.

3. THE GROUND OF THE POSSIBILITY OF CORRECTNESS

Whence does the presentative statement receive the directive to conform to the object and to accord by way of correctness? Why is this accord involved in determining the essence of truth? How can something like the accomplishment of a pre-given directedness occur? And how can the initiation into an accord occur? Only if this pre-giving has already entered freely into an open region for something opened up that prevails there and that binds every presenting. To free oneself for a binding directedness is possible only by *being free* for what is opened up in an open region. Such being free points to the heretofore uncomprehended essence of freedom. The openness of comportment as the inner condition of the possibility of correctness is grounded in freedom. *The essence of truth, as the correctness of a statement,⁸ is freedom.*

But does not this proposition regarding the essence of correctness substitute one obvious item for another? In order to be able to carry out any act and therefore one of presentative stating and even of according or not according with a "truth," the actor must of course be free, i.e., unimpeded.⁹ However, the proposition in question does not really mean that an unconstrained act belongs to the execution of the statement, to its

³ Third edition, 1954: And this within the clearing.

pronouncement and reception; rather the proposition says that freedom^a is the *essence* of truth itself. In this connection "essence" is understood as the ground of the inner possibility of what is initially and generally admitted as known. Nevertheless in the concept of freedom we do not think truth, and certainly not at all its essence. The proposition that the essence [82] of truth (correctness of statements) is freedom must consequently seem strange.

To place the essence of truth in freedom – does not this mean to submit truth to human caprice? Can truth be any more radically undermined than by being surrendered to the arbitrariness of this "wavering reed"? What forced itself upon sound judgment again and again in the previous discussion now all the more clearly comes to light: truth is here driven back to the subjectivity of the human subject. Even if an objectivity is also accessible to this subject, such objectivity, along with subjectivity, still remains something human and at human disposal.

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

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


4. THE ESSENCE OF FREEDOM

[83] However, indication of the essential connection between truth as correctness and freedom uproots those preconceptions – granted of course that we are prepared for a transformation of thinking. Consideration of the essential connection between truth and freedom leads us to pursue the question of the human essence in a regard that assures us an experience of a concealed essential ground of the human being (of *Dasein*), and in such

^a Third edition, 1954: Freedom and clearing of self-concealing sheltering (event of appropriation).

a manner that the experience transposes us in advance into the originally essential domain of truth. But here it becomes evident also that freedom is the ground of the inner possibility of correctness only because it receives its own essence from the more originary essence of uniquely essential truth. Freedom was initially determined as freedom for what is opened up in an open region. How is this essence of freedom to be thought? That which is opened up, that to which a presentative statement as correct corresponds, are beings opened up in an open compartment. Freedom for what is opened up in an open region lets beings be the beings they are. Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be.^a

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

However, the phrase required now – to let beings be – does not refer to neglect and indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is to engage oneself with beings.^b On the other hand, to be sure, this is not to be understood only as the mere management, [84] preservation, tending, and planning of the beings in each case encountered or sought out. To let be – that is, to let beings be as the beings that they are – means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself. Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as τὰ ἀλφειά, the unconcealed. If we translate ἀλφειά as "unconcealment" rather than "truth," this translation is not merely "more literal"; it contains the directive to rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of statements and to think it back to that still uncomprehended disclosedness and disclosure of beings. To engage oneself with the disclosedness of beings is not to lose oneself in them; rather, such engagement withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are, and in order that presentative correspondence might take its standard from them. As this letting-be it exposes itself to beings as such and transposes all compartment into the open region. Letting-be, i.e., freedom, is intrinsically exposing, ek-sistent.  Considered in regard to the

^a First edition, 1943: Letting be: (1) not in the negative sense, but granting – preservation; (2) not as an ontically oriented effecting. Heeding, taking heed of being as beyng.

^b First edition, 1943: Leaving that which is present its presencing, and not importing anything else into it in addition.

essence of truth, the essence of freedom manifests itself as exposure to the disclosedness of beings.

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

In *Da-sein* the essential ground, long ungrounded, on the basis of which human beings are able to ek-sist, is preserved for them. [85] Here "existence" does not mean *existentia* in the sense of occurring or being at hand. Nor on the other hand does it mean, in an "existentiell" fashion, the moral endeavor of the human being on behalf of his "self," based on his psychophysical constitution. Ek-sistence, rooted in truth as freedom, is exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such. Still uncomprehended, indeed, not even in need of an essential grounding, the ek-sistence of historical human beings begins at that moment when the first thinker takes a questioning stand with regard to the unconcealment of beings by asking: what are beings? In this question unconcealment is experienced for the first time. Beings as a whole reveal themselves as φύσις, "nature," which here does not yet mean a particular sphere of beings but rather beings as such as a whole, specifically in the sense of upsurgent presencing [*aufgebendes Anwesen*]. History begins only when beings themselves are expressly drawn up into their unconcealment and conserved in it, only when this conservation is conceived on the basis of questioning regarding beings as such. The originary disclosure of beings as a whole, the question concerning beings as such, and the beginning of Western history are the same; they occur together in a "time" which, itself unmeasurable, first opens up the open region¹¹ for every measure.

But if ek-sistent *Da-sein*, which lets beings be, sets the human being free for his "freedom" by first offering to his choice something possible (a being) and by imposing on him something necessary (a being), human caprice does not then have freedom at its disposal. The human being does not "possess" freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom, ek-sistent, disclosive *Da-sein*, possesses the human being – so originarily that only *it* secures for humanity that distinctive relatedness to beings as

a whole as such which first founds all history. Only the ek-sistent human being is historical.³ "Nature" has no history.

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

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

However, because truth is in essence freedom, historical human beings can, in letting beings be, also *not* let beings be the beings that they are and as they are. Then beings are covered up and distorted. Semblance comes to power. In it the nonessence of truth comes to the fore. However, because ek-sistent freedom as the essence of truth is not a property of human beings; because on the contrary humans ek-sist and so become capable of history only as the property of this freedom; the nonessence of truth cannot first arise subsequently from mere human incapacity and negligence. Rather, untruth must derive from the essence of truth. Only because truth and untruth are, *in essence*, *not* irrelevant to one another, but rather belong together, is it possible for a true proposition to enter into pointed opposition to the corresponding untrue proposition. The question concerning the essence of truth thus first reaches [87] the originary domain of what is at issue when, on the basis of a prior glimpse of the full essence of truth, it has included a consideration of untruth in its unveiling of that essence. Discussion of the nonessence of truth is not the subsequent filling of a gap but rather the decisive step toward an adequate posing of the *question* concerning the essence of truth. Yet how are we to comprehend the nonessence in the essence of truth? If the essence of truth is not exhausted

³ First edition, 1943: Inadequate; essence of history in terms of history as event of appropriation [*Ereignis*].

by the correctness of statements, then neither can untruth be equated with the incorrectness of judgments.

5. THE ESSENCE OF TRUTH

The essence of truth reveals itself as freedom. The latter is ek-sistent, disclosive letting beings be. Every mode of open comportment flourishes in letting beings be and in each case is a comportment to this or that being. As engagement in the disclosure of beings as a whole as such, freedom has already attuned all comportment to beings as a whole. However, being attuned (attunement)¹² can never be understood as “experience” and “feeling,” because it is thereby simply deprived of its essence. For here it is interpreted on the basis of something (“life” and “soul”) that can maintain the semblance of the title of essence only as long as it bears in itself the distortion and misinterpretation of being attuned. Being attuned, i.e., ek-sistent exposedness to beings as a whole, can be “experienced” and “felt” only because the “human being who experiences,” without being aware of the essence of the attunement, is always engaged in being attuned in a way that discloses beings as a whole. Every mode of comportment on the part of historical human beings – whether accentuated or not, whether understood or not – is attuned, and by this attunement is drawn up into [88] beings as a whole. The openedness of beings as a whole does not coincide with the sum of all immediately familiar beings. On the contrary: where beings are not very familiar to humans and are scarcely and only roughly known by science, the openedness of beings as a whole can prevail more essentially than it can where the familiar and well known has become boundless, and nothing is any longer able to withstand the business of knowing, since technical mastery over things bears itself without limit. Precisely in the leveling and planing of this omniscience, this mere knowing, the openedness of beings gets flattened out into the apparent nothingness of what is no longer even a matter of indifference, but rather is simply forgotten.

Letting beings be, which is an attuning, a bringing into accord, prevails throughout and anticipates all the open comportment that flourishes in it. Human comportment is brought into definite accord throughout by the openedness of beings as a whole. However, from the point of view of everyday calculations and preoccupations this “as a whole” appears to be incalculable and incomprehensible. It cannot be understood on the basis of the beings opened up in any given case, whether they belong to nature or to history. Although it ceaselessly brings everything into definite accord, still it

remains indefinite, indeterminable; it then coincides for the most part with what is most fleeting and most unconsidered. However, what brings into accord is not nothing, but rather a concealing of beings as a whole. Precisely because letting-be always lets beings be in a particular comportment that relates to them and thus discloses them, it conceals beings as a whole. Letting-be is intrinsically at the same time a concealing. In the ek-sistent freedom of Da-sein a concealing of beings as a whole comes to pass [*ereignet sich*]. Here there *is* concealment.²

6. UNTRUTH AS CONCEALING

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

In letting beings as a whole be, which discloses and at the same time conceals, it happens that concealing appears as what is first of all concealed. Insofar as it ek-sists, Da-sein conserves the first and broadest un-disclosedness, un-truth proper. The proper non-essence of truth is the mystery. Here non-essence does not yet have the sense of inferiority to essence in the sense of what is general (κοινων. γένος), its *possibilitas* and the ground of its possibility. Non-essence is here what in such a sense would be a pre-essential essence. But “nonessence” means at first and for the most part the deformation of that already inferior essence. Indeed, in each of these significations the non-essence remains always in its own way essential to the essence and never becomes unessential in the sense of irrelevant. [90] But to speak of nonessence and untruth in this manner goes very much

² First edition, 1943: Between 5. and 6. the leap into the turning (whose essence unfolds in the event of appropriation).

against the grain of ordinary opinion and looks like a dragging up of forcibly contrived "*paradoxa*." Because it is difficult to eliminate this impression, such a way of speaking, paradoxical only for ordinary *doxa* (opinion), is to be renounced. But surely for those who know about such matters the "non-" of the originary non-essence of truth, as un-truth, points to the still unexperienced domain of the truth of Being (not merely of beings).

As letting beings be, freedom is intrinsically the resolutely open bearing that does not close up in itself.¹³ All comportment [*Verhalten*] is grounded in this bearing [*Verhältnis*] and receives from it directedness toward beings and disclosure of them. Nevertheless, this bearing toward concealing conceals itself in letting a forgottenness of the mystery take precedence and disappearing in such forgottenness. Certainly the human being takes his bearings [*verbält sich*] constantly in his comportment toward beings; but for the most part he acquiesces in this or that being and its particular openedness. Humans cling to what is readily available and controllable even where ultimate matters are concerned. And if the human being sets out to extend, change, newly assimilate, or secure the openedness of the beings pertaining to the most various domains of his activity and interest, then he still takes his directives from the sphere of readily available intentions and needs.

However, to reside in what is readily available is intrinsically not to let the concealing of what is concealed hold sway. Certainly, among readily familiar things there are also some that are puzzling, unexplained, undecided, questionable. But these self-certain questions are merely transitional, intermediate points in our movement within the readily familiar and thus not essential. Wherever the concealment of beings as a whole is conceded only as a limit that occasionally announces itself, concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgottenness.

[91] But the forgotten mystery of Dasein is not eliminated by the forgottenness; rather, the forgottenness bestows on the apparent disappearance of what is forgotten a peculiar presence [*Gegenwart*]. By disavowing itself in and for forgottenness, the mystery leaves historical human beings in the sphere of what is readily available to them, leaves them to their own resources. Thus left, humanity replenishes its "world" on the basis of the latest needs and aims, and fills out that world by means of proposing and planning. From these human beings then take their standards, forgetting beings as a whole. Humans persist in these standards and continually supply themselves with new standards, yet without considering either the ground for taking up standards or the essence of what gives the standard. In spite of their advance to new standards and goals, human beings go wrong as regards the essential genuineness of their standards. Human beings are all

the more mistaken the more exclusively they take themselves, as subject, to be the standard for all beings. The inordinate forgetfulness of humanity persists in securing itself by means of what is readily available and always accessible. This persistence has its unwitting support in that *bearing* by which Dasein not only ek-sists but also at the same time *in-sists*, i.e., holds fast to what is offered by beings, as if they were open of and in themselves.

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

7. UN-TRUTH AS ERRANCY

As insistent, the human being is turned toward the most readily available beings. But he insists only by being already ek-sistent, since, after all, he takes beings as his standard. However, in taking its standard, humanity is turned away from the mystery. The insistent turning toward what is readily available [92] and the ek-sistent turning away from the mystery belong together. They are one and the same. Yet turning toward and away from is based on a peculiar turning to and fro proper to Dasein. The human being's flight from the mystery toward what is readily available, onward from one current thing to the next, passing the mystery by – this is *erring*.¹⁴

Humans err. Human beings do not merely stray into errancy. They are always astray in errancy, because as ek-sistent they in-sist and so already stand within errancy. The errancy through which human beings stray is not something that, as it were, extends alongside them like a ditch into which they occasionally stumble; rather, errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the Da-sein into which historical human beings are admitted. Errancy is the free space for that turning in which in-sistent ek-sistence adroitly forgets and mistakes itself constantly anew. The concealing of concealed beings as a whole holds sway in that disclosure of specific beings, which, as forgottenness of concealment, becomes errancy.

Errancy is the essential counteressence to the originary essence of truth. Errancy opens itself up as the open region for every counterplay to essential truth. Errancy is the open site for and ground of *error*. Error is not merely an isolated mistake but the kingdom (the dominion) of the history of those entanglements in which all kinds of erring get interwoven.

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

of philosophy recognized as error, namely, incorrectness of judgments and falsity of knowledge, is only one mode of erring and, moreover, the most superficial one. The errancy in which any given segment of historical humanity must proceed for its course to be errant is essentially connected with the openness of Dasein. [93] By leading them astray, errancy dominates human beings through and through. But, as leading astray, errancy at the same time contributes to a possibility that humans are capable of drawing up from their ek-sistence – the possibility that, by experiencing errancy itself and by not mistaking the mystery of Da-sein, they *not* let themselves be led astray.

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

The disclosure of beings as such is simultaneously and intrinsically the concealing of beings as a whole. In the simultaneity of disclosure and concealing, errancy holds sway. Errancy and the concealing of what is concealed belong to the originary essence of truth. Freedom, conceived on the basis of the in-sistent ek-sistence of Dasein, is the essence of truth (in the sense of the correctness of presenting), only because freedom itself originates from the originary essence of truth, the rule of the mystery in errancy. Letting beings be takes its course in open comportment. However, letting beings as such be as a whole occurs in a way befitting its essence only when from time to time it gets taken up in its originary essence. Then resolute openness toward the mystery [*die Entschlossenheit zum Geheimnis*] is under way into errancy as such. Then the question of the essence of truth gets asked more originally. Then the ground of the intertwining of the essence of truth with the truth of essence reveals itself. The glimpse into the mystery [94] out of errancy is a questioning – in the sense of that unique question of what beings as such are as a whole. This questioning thinks the question of the *Being* of beings, a question that is essentially misleading and thus in its manifold meaning is still not mastered. The thinking of Being, from which such questioning originally stems, has

since Plato been understood as “philosophy,” and later received the title “metaphysics.”

8. PHILOSOPHY AND THE QUESTION OF TRUTH

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

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

However, what philosophy is according to the estimation of common sense, which is quite justified in its own domain, does not touch on the essence of philosophy, which can be determined only on the basis of relatedness to the original truth of beings as such as a whole. But because the full essence of truth contains the nonessence and above all holds sway as concealing, philosophy as a questioning into this truth is intrinsically discordant. Philosophical thinking is gentle releasement that does not renounce the concealment of beings as a whole. Philosophical thinking is especially the stern and resolute openness that does not disrupt the concealing [95] but entreats its unbroken essence into the open region of understanding and thus into its own truth.

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

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

With this essential interpretation of philosophy, Kant, whose work introduces the final turning of Western metaphysics, envisages a domain

that to be sure he could understand only on the basis of his fundamental metaphysical position, founded on subjectivity, and which he had to understand as the keeping of its laws. This essential view of the determination of philosophy nevertheless goes far enough to renounce every subjugation of philosophical thinking, the most destitute kind of which lets philosophy still be of value as an "expression" of "culture" (Spengler) and as an ornament of productive humankind.

However, whether philosophy as "keeper of its laws" fulfills the essence originally decided for it, or whether it is not itself first of all kept and appointed to its task as keeper by the truth of that to which its laws in each case pertain – this depends on the primordially with which the original essence of truth becomes essential for thoughtful questioning.

The present undertaking takes the question of the essence of truth beyond the confines of the ordinary definition provided in the usual concept of essence and helps us to [96] consider whether the question of the essence of truth must not be, at the same time and even first of all, the question concerning the truth of essence. But in the concept of "essence" philosophy thinks Being. In tracing the inner possibility of the correctness of statements back to the ek-sistent freedom of letting-be as its "ground," and likewise in pointing to the essential beginning of this ground in concealing and in errancy, we want to show that the essence of truth is not the empty "generality" of an "abstract" universality but rather that which, self-concealing, is unique in the unremitting history of the disclosure of the "meaning" of what we call Being – what we for a long time have been accustomed to considering only as beings as a whole.

9. NOTE

The question of the essence of truth arises from the question of the truth of essence. In the former question essence is understood initially in the sense of whatness (*quidditas*) or material content (*realitas*), whereas truth is understood as a characteristic of knowledge. In the question of the truth of essence, essence is understood verbally; in this word, remaining still within metaphysical presentation, Being is thought as the difference that holds sway between Being and beings. Truth signifies sheltering that clears [*lichtendes Bergen*] as the fundamental trait of Being. The question of the essence of truth finds its answer in the proposition *the essence of truth is the truth of essence*. After our explanation it can easily be seen that the proposition does not merely reverse the word order so as to conjure the specter of paradox. The subject of the proposition – if this unfortunate grammatical category

may still be used at all – is the truth of essence. Sheltering that clears is – i.e., lets essentially unfold – accordance between knowledge and beings. The proposition is [97] not dialectical. It is no proposition at all in the sense of a statement. The answer to the question of the essence of truth is the saying of a turning [*die Sage einer Kehre*] within the history of Beyng. Because sheltering that clears belongs to it, Beyng appears originally in the light of concealing withdrawal. The name of this clearing [*Lichtung*] is ἀλφεια.

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

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