

Preface¹

Dear Father Richardson:

It is with some hesitation that I attempt to answer the two principal questions you posed in your letter of March 1, 1962. The first touches on the initial impetus that determined the way my thought would go. The other looks for information about the much discussed “reversal” [in my development].

I hesitate with my answers, for they are necessarily no more than indications [of much more to be said]. The lesson of long experience leads me to surmise that such indications will not be taken as directions for the road of independent reflection on the matter pointed out which each must travel for himself. [Instead they] will gain notice as though they were an opinion I had expressed, and will be propagated as such. Every effort to bring what has been thought closer to prevailing modes of (re)presentation must assimilate what-is-to-be-thought to those (re)presentations and thereby inevitably deform the matter.

This preamble is not the lament of a man misunderstood; it is rather the recognition of an almost insurmountable difficulty in making oneself understood.

The first question in your letter reads: “How are we properly to understand your first experience of the Being-question in Brentano?” “In Brentano.” You have in mind the fact that the first philosophical text through which I worked my way, again and

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again from 1907 on, was Franz Brentano's dissertation: *On the Manifold Sense of Being in Aristotle* (1862). On the title page of his work, Brentano quotes Aristotle's phrase: *to on legetai pollachos*. I translate: "A being becomes manifest (sc. with regard to its Being) in many ways." Latent in this phrase is the *question* that determined the way of my thought: what is the pervasive, simple, unified determination of Being that permeates all of its multiple meanings? This question raised others: What, then, does Being mean? To what extent (why and how) does the Being of beings unfold in the four modes which Aristotle constantly affirms, but whose common origin he leaves undetermined? One need but run over the names assigned to them in the language of the philosophical tradition to be struck by the fact that they seem, at first, irreconcilable: Being as property, Being as possibility and actuality, Being as truth, Being as schema of the categories. What sense of Being comes to expression in these four headings? How can they be brought into comprehensible accord?

This accord can not be grasped without first raising and settling the question: whence does Being as such (not merely beings as beings) receive its determination?

Meanwhile a decade went by and a great deal of swerving and straying through the history of Western philosophy was needed for the above questions to reach even an initial clarity. To gain this clarity three insights were decisive, though, to be sure, not yet sufficient for the venture of analysing the Being-question as a question about the sense of Being.

Dialogues with Husserl provided the immediate experience of the phenomenological method that prepared the concept of phenomenology explained in the Introduction to *Being and Time* (§ 7). In this evolution a normative role was played by the reference back to fundamental words of Greek thought which I interpreted accordingly: *logos* (to make manifest) and *phainesthai* (to show oneself).

A renewed study of the Aristotelian treatises (especially Book IX of the *Metaphysics* and Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) resulted in the insight into *aletheuein* as a process of revealment, and in the characterisation of truth as non-concealment,

to which all self-manifestation of beings pertains. Only someone who is thinking superficially or, indeed, not thinking at all can content himself with the observation that Heidegger conceives truth as non-concealment. As if with *a-letheia* what is properly worthy-of-thought did not take merely a first approximate form.² The situation is not improved by proposing the translation “non-forgotten-ness” in place of “non-conceal-ment.” For “forgotten-ness” [too] must be thought in Greek fashion as withdrawal into concealment. Correspondingly, the counter-phenomenon to forgetting, [sc.] remembering, must receive a [genuinely] Greek interpretation which sees it as a striving after, an attaining to, the non-concealed. Plato’s *anamnesis* of the Ideas implies: catching-sight-once-again, [hence] the revealing, of beings, sc. in that by which they shine-forth.

With the insight into *aletheia* as non-concealment came recognition of the fundamental trait of *ousia*, the Being of beings: presence. But a literal translation, sc. a translation that thought draws out of the matter itself, is expressive only when the heart of the matter, in this case Presence as such, is brought before thought. The disquieting, ever watchful question about Being under the guise of Presence (Present) developed into the question about Being in terms of its time-character. As soon as this happened, it became clear that the traditional concept of time was in no respect adequate even for correctly posing the question concerning the time-character of Presence, to say nothing of answering it. Time became questionable in the same way as Being. The ecstatic-horizontal temporality delineated in *Being and Time* is not by any means already the most proper attribute of time that must be sought in answer to the Being-question.

Subsequent to this tentative clarification of *aletheia* and *ousia*, the meaning and scope of the principle of phenomenology, “to the things themselves,” became clear. As my familiarity with phenomenology grew, no longer merely through literature but by actual practice, the question about Being, aroused by Brentano’s

² [Translator’s note. Possibly: “... As if [it were] not with *a-letheia* [that] what is properly speaking worthy-of-thought reached a first liminal appearance... .”]

work, nevertheless remained always in view. So it was that doubt arose whether the “thing itself” was to be characterised as intentional consciousness, or even as the transcendental ego. If, indeed, phenomenology, as the process of letting things manifest themselves, should characterise the standard method of philosophy, and if from ancient times the guide-question of philosophy has perdured in the most diverse forms as the question about the Being of beings, then Being had to remain the first and last thing-itself of thought.

Meanwhile “phenomenology” in Husserl’s sense was elaborated into a distinctive philosophical position according to a pattern set by Descartes, Kant and Fichte. The historicity of thought remained completely foreign to such a position (see the too little observed work of Husserl: “Philosophy as a strict Science,” which appeared 1910-11 in the review *Logos*, pp. 289 ff.).

The Being-question, unfolded in *Being and Time*, parted company with this philosophical position, and that on the basis of what to this day I still consider a more faithful adherence to the principle of phenomenology.

What a few strokes can thus sketch, in retrospect that verges constantly on *retractatio*, was, in its historical reality, a tangled process, inscrutable even to me.³ This process inevitably remained captive to contemporary modes of (re)presentation and language, and was accompanied by inadequate explanations of its own intentions.

Now if in the title of your book, *From Phenomenology to Thought*, you understand “Phenomenology” in the sense just described as a philosophical position of Husserl, then the title is to the point, insofar as the Being-question as posed by me is something completely different from that position. The title is fully justified, if the term “Thought” is shorn of that ambiguity which allows it to

³ [Translator’s note. We retain the Latin form *retractatio*, because: the English “retraction,” in the sense of “recantation,” is obviously incoherent with the author’s intention, which warrants rather the notion of “retouching” (“retreatment,” “rethinking”) suggested by the Latin; the translation “retouching,” though consistent with the metaphor contained in the text, fails to retain the apparently deliberate allusion to St. Augustin which *retractatio* contains.]

cover on the one hand metaphysical thought (the thinking of the Being of beings) and on the other the Being-question, sc. the thinking of Being as such (the revealed-ness of Being).

If, however, we understand "Phenomenology" as the [process of] allowing the most proper concern of thought to show itself, then the title should read "Through Phenomenology to the Thinking of Being." This possessive [*of* Being], then, says that Being as such (Beon) shows itself simultaneously as that which is to-be-thought and as that which has want of a thought corresponding to it.

This indication already brings me to touch upon your second question. It reads: "Granted *that* a 'reversal' has come-to-pass in your thinking, *how* has it come-to-pass? In other words, how are [we] to think this coming-to-pass itself?"

Your question admits of an answer only if first we make clear what "reversal" means, [or] more precisely, if one is ready to think through in becoming fashion what has already been said, instead of constantly circulating unwarranted assertions. The first time in my published writings that I spoke of the "reversal" was in the "Letter on Humanism" (1947, p. 71; separate edition, p. 17). The inference has thus been drawn that since 1947 Heidegger's thought has undergone "in-version," or even, since 1945, "con-version." No allowance whatever is made for reflection on the fact that a good number of years are needed before the thinking through of so decisive a matter can find its way into the clear. Perhaps the text cited below will serve to show that the matter thought in the term "reversal" was already at work in my thinking ten years prior to 1947. The thinking of the reversal is a change in my thought. But this change is not a consequence of altering the standpoint, much less of abandoning the fundamental issue, of *Being and Time*. The thinking of the reversal results from the fact that I stayed with the matter-for-thought [of] "Being and Time," sc. by inquiring into that perspective which already in *Being and Time* (p. 39) was designated as "Time and Being."

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The reversal is above all not an operation of interrogative thought; it is inherent in the very matter designated by the headings: "Being and Time," "Time and Being." For this reason, the passage cited from the "Letter on Humanism" reads: "Here

the Whole is reversed.” “The Whole”: this means the matter [involved] in “Being and Time,” “Time and Being.” The reversal is in play within the matter itself. Neither did I invent it nor does it affect merely my thought. Up to now I know of no attempt to reflect on this matter and analyse it critically. Instead of the groundless, endless prattle about the “reversal,” it would be more advisable and fruitful if people would simply engage themselves in the matter mentioned. Refusal to do so obliges one *ipso facto* to demonstrate that the Being-question developed in *Being and Time* is unjustified, superfluous and impossible. Any criticism of *Being and Time* starting in this fashion, however, must obviously first be set straight.

One need only observe the simple fact that in *Being and Time* the problem is set up outside the sphere of subjectivism – that the entire anthropological problematic is kept at a distance, that the normative issue is emphatically and solely the experience of There-being with a constant eye to the Being-question – for it to become strikingly clear that the “Being” into which *Being and Time* inquired can not long remain something that the human subject posits. It is rather Being, stamped as Presence by its time-character, [that] makes the approach to There-being. As a result, even in the initial steps of the Being-question in *Being and Time* thought is called upon to undergo a change whose movement corresponds with the reversal.

And yet, the basic question of *Being and Time* is not in any sense abandoned by reason of the reversal. Accordingly, the prefatory note to the seventh unrevised edition of *Being and Time* (1957) contains the remark: [This] “way still remains even today a necessary one, if the question about Being is to stir our There-being.” Contrary [to what is generally supposed], the question of *Being and Time* is decisively fulfilled in the thinking of the reversal. He alone can fulfill who has a vision of fullness.⁴

⁴ [Translator’s note. The translation offered here is at best a reasonable facsimile of the *er-gänzen-Ganze* correlation in the German. Someone has suggested: “... is decisively whol-ified. He alone can whol-ify who has a view of the whole. ...” Very Heidegger, but not very English!]

This fulfillment likewise furnishes for the first time an adequate characterisation of There-being, sc. of the essence of man [as] thought in terms of the truth of Being as such (cf. *Being and Time* § 66). Accordingly, the first draft of the lecture course for the winter semester of 1937-38, which tries to analyse the necessity of the question of truth in the perspective of the question of Being, reads in part:

Over and over again we must insist: In the question of truth as posed here, what is at stake is not only an alteration in the traditional conception of truth, nor a complement of its current (re)presentation; what is at stake is a transformation in man's Being itself. This transformation is not demanded by new psychological or biological insights. Man here is not the object of any anthropology whatever. Man comes into question here in the deepest and broadest, in the genuinely fundamental, perspective: man in his relation to Being – sc. in the reversal: Beon and its truth in relation to man.

The “coming-to-pass” of the reversal which you ask about “is” Beon as such. It can only be thought *out* of the reversal. There is no special kind of coming-to-pass that is proper to this [process]. Rather, the reversal between Being and Time, between Time and Being, is determined by the way Being is granted, Time is granted. I tried to say a word about this “is granted” in the lecture “Time and Being” which you heard yourself here [in Freiburg] on January 30, 1962.⁵

If instead of “Time” we substitute: the lighting-up of the self-concealing [that is proper to] the process of coming-to- presence, then Being is determined by the scope of Time. This comes about, however, only insofar as the lighting-process of self-concealment assumes unto its want a thought that corresponds to it.

[The process of] presenc-ing (Being) is inherent in the lighting-up of self-concealment (Time). [The] lighting-up of self-concealment (Time) brings forth the process of presenc-ing (Being).

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⁵ [Translator's note. Awkward though it appears, this translation of *Es gibt* offers distinct advantages over the more natural “there is,” for reasons that appear in the lecture to which Professor Heidegger alludes.]

It is [due] neither [to] the merit of my questioning nor [to some] arbitrary decision of my thought that this reciprocal bearing reposes in a [mutual] ap-propriation and is called e-vent (cf. *Identity and Difference*, p. 30 ff.). The fact that what we thoughtlessly enough call “truth” the Greeks called *A-Létheia* – as well, indeed, in poetical and non-philosophical as in philosophical language – is not [a result of] their [own] invention and caprice. It is the richest endowment of their language, in which that-which-comes-to-presence as such attained non-concealment and – concealment. Without an eye for the granting of such a gift to man, without a sense for the e-mitting of such an e-mittance, one will no more comprehend what is said about the mittence of Being than the man born blind can ever experience what light and color are.

The distinction you make between Heidegger I and II is justified only on the condition that this is kept constantly in mind: only by way of what [Heidegger] I has thought does one gain access to what is to-be-thought by [Heidegger] II. But the thought of [Heidegger] I becomes possible only if it is contained in [Heidegger] II.

Meanwhile, every formulation is open to misunderstanding. In proportion to the intrinsically manifold matter of Being and Time, all words which give it utterance (like reversal, forgottenness and mittence) are always ambiguous. Only a [commensurately] manifold thought succeeds in uttering the heart of this matter in a way that cor-responds with it.

This manifold thought requires, however, not a new language but a transformed relationship to the essenc[-ing] of the old one.

My wish for your work – for which you alone bear the responsibility – is this: may it help set in motion the manifold thinking of the simple business of thought, which, by reason of its very simplicity, abounds in hidden plenitude.

Freiburg im Breisgau, early April, 1962

Martin Heidegger

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