

# On the Essence of Truth

## Martin Heidegger and *die Kehre* (*The Turn*)

Introductory Material  
*for*  
Reading Group and two Half-Day Workshops

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### Introduction

Martin Heidegger's 1930 lecture *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (*On the Essence of Truth*) has long been recognised as a decisive event, both in the development of Heidegger's own work, and the development of how to interpret him. It was first delivered on Bastille Day, the 14th July, 1930, in Karlsruhe. William Richardson SJ, still today a towering influence in the Anglophone study of Heidegger, described the lecture as a "breakthrough": "Here (1930), Heidegger II emerges out of Heidegger I". Richardson immediately sounds a note of caution after his bold claim: "how new is the new?"<sup>1</sup> With that caution in mind, it is for an evaluation and careful qualification of that claim that this series is directed, in the light of the vastly richer resources available now available from Heidegger's writings. If there is a "Heidegger I" and a "Heidegger II", they cannot really be understood in the way Richardson suggested, a point that Heidegger had teasingly (but cryptically) made in his *Vorwort* to Richardson's master-work. In admitting that there might be a progression of a sort from Heidegger I to Heidegger II, Heidegger adds (in a remark to which Richardson makes no response): "but I only becomes possible if it is contained in II".<sup>2</sup> In 1962, only Heidegger himself could have understood fully the difference between Richardson's claim about the division in Heidegger's thought, and what form the division really took – hence his wry, almost impossible, words. But it is not as if nothing is to be gained from what Heidegger says here: even here we learn that Heidegger I

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Richardson SJ, *Through Phenomenology to Thought*, p. 243. New York NY: Fordham University Press, 2003 (1963).

<sup>2</sup> The *Foreword* was Heidegger's reply to two questions Richardson had put before Heidegger in preparation for publication of Richardson's book: the reply was included in full, in German and English (translated by Richardson), on pp. viii–xxiii. It appears in German only as 'Ein Vorwort: Brief an Pater William J. Richardson' in *Identität und Differenz* (GA11), p. 143–152, 152. "Aber I wird nur möglich, wenn es in II enthalten ist." Translation modified from Richardson's.

must be understood from what comes later: thus we read the earlier work of Heidegger not from “from out of its own preoccupations”, but in the light of the later Heidegger’s self-understanding, and even, from the present.

The division between Heidegger I and Heidegger II emerges out of an understanding of what Heidegger later came to name with the archaism *das Seyn*: more precisely, *Wahrheit des Seyns* (“truth of beyng”), and perhaps most originally, *das Anwesen*, “presencing”. This understanding is really only possible on the basis of a close engagement with material that made no significant appearance until after his death, the vast *Nachlaß* of sketches, volumes, notes, and notebooks that began with the publication of the 1936–38 volume *Contributions to Philosophy* (the first in a series of seven).<sup>3</sup>

## Background

There has, at times, been considerable excitement about the significance of the lecture *On the Essence of Truth*, and the year 1930, or “thereabouts”. In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger noted that “The lecture *On the Essence of Truth*, thought out and delivered in 1930 but only published in 1943, offers a certain insight into the thinking of the turning from ‘Being and Time’ to ‘Time and Being’.”<sup>4</sup> This turning had itself been named in §8 of *Being and Time*, as the title of what was to be the “third division” in a proposed second half of *Being and Time* that in fact never appeared.<sup>5</sup> Heidegger is careful to stress in the *Letter on Humanism* that *this* turning is not an alteration of standpoint, either of his own thought or in his previous work, and the projected, but unwritten volume confirms that point.

Perhaps too little care has been taken with the words “a certain insight”: in explanatory material both here and around the lecture itself, Heidegger remains tentative, suggesting that what is at issue are not “answers”, but a preparatory passage of thinking, one which, drawing the thinker on to the path of thinking itself, is a drawing away from a philosophising that culminates in metaphysics. Care should be exercised to note that in all this explanatory material the path chosen sets out “with the help of the language of metaphysics”, and *deliberately* so, and yet through it we find ourself in a thinking of, not metaphysics itself, but

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie: vom Ereignis* (GA65). The editor of the Heidegger *Gesamtausgabe*, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann has called this series (GA65–72, excluding GA68) the *Das Ereignis* series.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Brief über den Humanismus’ in *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 329. “Der Vortrag ‘Vom Wesen der Wahrheit’, der 1930 gedacht und mitgeteilt, aber erst 1943 gedruckt wurde, gibt einen gewissen Einblick in das Denken der Kehre von ‘Sein und Zeit’ zu ‘Zeit und Sein’.”

<sup>5</sup> *Sein und Zeit* was first published in 1927: it was not until publication of the seventh edition in 1953 that the words “first half” were removed from the title page. In reality Heidegger abandoned the attempt at a second half probably as early as 1929, but certainly by 1930.

what makes it possible. Too rarely has it been asked – why did Heidegger *deliberately* use the language of metaphysics? When, in and in what contexts, does he think himself *not* to be using this language? Even the *Letter on Humanism*, it would appear, makes deliberate use of this language. It is only in the *real* “Heidegger II” that the language of metaphysics can be said entirely to have been abandoned (this was the sharpness of Heidegger’s remark to Richardson: Richardson would have had no access to the material that explained this abandonment).

The 1930 lecture *On the Essence of Truth* was published by Heidegger in a revised version (the “first edition”) in 1943, with a second edition appearing in 1949 with substantial revision and addition to the final section (nine) of the earlier text (*Remark*), leaving the rest unchanged. The 1949 revision contains the first clear explanation in print of what Heidegger means when he speaks of *das Seyn*,<sup>6</sup> as well as the introduction of the phrase “the saying of a turning within the history of being”.<sup>7</sup> Heidegger himself made no further alterations to the published form of the text after that date.<sup>8</sup> He did, however, record marginal notes in his own copies, both to the original typescripts of the lecture, and to copies of the first and third (1954) editions, and these have appeared as notes in the *Collected Works* or *Gesamtausgabe* volumes containing versions of the lecture. One of the limitations of discussion of the lecture *On the Essence of Truth* has been the lack of attention paid to the extent to which Heidegger had, even by the publication of *Being and Time* already abandoned the “language of metaphysics”, especially the language of subjectivity and the subject-object distinction.<sup>9</sup> In short, if the lecture denotes a path to be traversed, perhaps there has been too little attention paid to what the lecture was on a path away *from*.

What evidence is there of a *Kehre*, a “turning”, in any of the versions of the lecture *On the Essence of Truth*? First we should recall that Heidegger’s initial discussion of truth,

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<sup>6</sup> The 1949 mention is in fact historically the second printed mention, the first occurring in an essay on Hölderlin published in 1943. The first mention of *das Seyn* in the extant texts of the *Gesamtausgabe* is from the opening paragraph of the 1932 lectures on Parmenides and Anaximander, published as volume 35 of the *Gesamtausgabe*. This may possibly be a later emendation, but Heidegger begins to use the word from around this date in other texts, mainly from his *Nachlaß*: see, for instance, Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II–VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938)* (GA94), p. 168 (from ‘Autumn 1932’) *et sequens*.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, third edition (1949) (= *Wegmarken* [GA9], p. 201), “Die Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Wesen der Wahrheit ist die Sage einer Kehre innerhalb der Geschichte des Seyns.”

<sup>8</sup> It is sometimes claimed that Heidegger made additional changes to the 1954, third, edition of the lecture, perhaps because of the rather confusing way the *Gesamtausgabe* edition of the lecture records Heidegger’s marginal remarks to his own works. An inspection of the 1954 edition reveals that it contains no additional notes or material alteration to the 1949 text.

<sup>9</sup> In the *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (GA65) there is a lengthy discussion in the section (V) *The Grounding*, beginning *The Essence of Truth*, punctuated by a discussion of *Time-Place as Non-Ground* and concluding with *The Essencing of Truth as Sheltering* (pp. 327–392). At the beginning of this discussion Heidegger points to a commentary on §44 of *Sein und Zeit* (GA2) in ‘Running Commentary on *Sein und Zeit*’ in *Zu eigenen Veröffentlichungen* (GA82), pp. 107–120. This commentary contains a long discussion of ‘Truth (Correctness) as Ground of the Subject-Object Relation’.

“*Dasein*, disclosedness, and truth”, is to be found in §44 of *Being and Time*.<sup>10</sup> This is a systematic presentation of Aristotle’s ἐπιστήμη τις τῆς ἀληθείας,<sup>11</sup> “science of the essence (τις – “whatness”) of the ‘truth’,” which is also “philosophising” about it. The aim in §44 is to reach the “oldest”, even “pre-phenomenological” tradition of unhiddenness as ἀ-λήθεια, so that “being-true bespeaks being-uncovering”, as “a mode of being of *Dasein*”.<sup>12</sup>

*Being and Time* addresses the question of the truth of what is in being (*Wahrheit des Seienden*). However, already by 1930, and certainly by 1943, Heidegger is aware that, within his own thinking, this thought itself is not adequate to the question of the *essence* of truth. What *lets* what is true be true (lets truth come to be disclosed) is at the same time the truth, not so much of what is in being, what is present (*das Seiende*), as the *being* (*das Sein*), the very presencing and letting-be, of what is present (*das Sein des Seienden*). This much is already made clear in the *Remark* that concludes the 1943 publication of the lecture. That this will come eventually to be thought, and thought through, as *Wahrheit des Seyns*, “the truth of being as such”, which often comes to be truncated merely as *das Seyn*, becomes clear from how the *Remark* is later expanded and revised in the 1949 edition. A further addition to the 1949 *Remark* suggests that there was, already in 1930, to have been a second lecture to *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, with the reversed title of *Vom der Wahrheit des Wesens* (*The Truth of Essence*) – again, surely, a reference to a *Kehre* that the *matter itself* envisaged and demanded. No draft or preparatory material for this lecture has come into the public domain. The three earlier (1930s) versions of the lecture all place at the centre of the question of the essence of truth what is *binding* in what discloses itself as true, what is posited in knowing, and how it is *freely* that what is encountered as what is present *is* encountered, reveals *how* the essence of truth makes itself manifest.<sup>13</sup>

The reading group will proceed with care through the 1949 text, based on the German text in the *Gesamtausgabe* edition of *Wegmarken*, and the English translation of that text by John Sallis (edited by McNeill). The Workshop will consist of two seminars of an introductory paper followed by a discussion. The first will concentrate on Heidegger’s abandonment of metaphysics: the second will address the relation of the lecture to the “saying of the turning”,

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (GA2), pp. 282–305.

<sup>11</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* 993 b 20.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (GA2): p. 290, “Wahrsein (Wahrheit) besagt entdeckend-sein”; p. 291, “Wahrsein als entdeckend-sein ist eine Seinsweise des Daseins.”

<sup>13</sup> All three of the earlier versions of *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* delivered in 1930 make this question turn on the word *umgekehrt*: truth has been understood to have an essence in *one* way when in fact what makes this understanding possible is *the other way about*. See ‘Vom Wesen der Wahrheit’ (GA80.1): ‘1. Version’, p. 335; ‘2. Version’, p. 365; ‘3. Version’, p. 390 f; This is more fully developed in the 1940 version, ‘4. Version’, p. 418; and the 1943 publication, ‘Vom Wesen der Wahrheit’ (GA9), p. 190.

and make reference especially to what Heidegger understands by the phrase “Wahrheit des Seyns”, the “truth of being”, and suggest a substantial revision to the language of Heidegger I and Heidegger II.

### Versions of the Lecture

For some years typescripts of the version of the lecture from December 1930 given in Freiburg i. B. has circulated among Heidegger scholars. Tom Sheehan has paid noteworthy scholarly attention to the difference between the 1930 and 1943 texts, and Martin Weatherston produced a working translation of this 1930 text for private use around 1997. Finally, in 2016, four typescript versions of the text prior to 1943 appeared,<sup>14</sup> three delivered publicly (Versions 1–3), while the last (Version 4), prepared in 1940, is essentially a draft for the published version that appeared in 1943. While the 1943 publication has eight sections and an *Anmerkung* or concluding remark, these earlier versions quite different, unthematized, divisions. A fifth text included in the 2016 material “Supplement to the Fourth Version (Pentecost 1940)” supplies much of the text for the 1943 *Anmerkung* (see the appended translation below), but there are important differences. There was a fourth public delivery in the Summer of 1932 in Dresden, which is not mentioned in the material of 2016, and no separate text for it is supplied.<sup>15</sup>

Of the three versions delivered to audiences in 1930, the first (delivered in July) is much shorter and least alike to the others. The third, delivered in December is very clearly a reworking of the second, delivered in October. The first contains material that does not get carried over into the later two, nor into the 1940 and 1943 versions. Dealing with questions that reappear in the 1937/38 lecture course (see note 20 below), ‘Version 1’ is more directly concerned with the character of what the one knowing the truth knows: a theme directly familiar from Heidegger’s confrontation with Kant and German Idealism.

In the 1949 (second) published edition of the 1943 text, the *Anmerkung* has retained its title, but has become a ninth numbered section, and the text has been revised. The 1949 version was included without annotation in the 1967 collected volume *Wegmarken*. In 1976

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<sup>14</sup> ‘X – Vom Wesen der Wahrheit’ in *Vorträge* (GA80.1), pp. 327–428. 1st Version, 14th July 1930, delivered in Karlsruhe, pp. 329–344; 2nd Version, ‘Erste Ausarbeitung’, 8th October 1930, delivered in Bremen, pp. 345–377; 3rd Version, 5th and 11th December 1930, delivered in Marburg and Freiburg i. B., pp. 379–405; 4th Version, ‘Überarbeitung an Pfingsten, 1940’, pp. 407–427; Beilage zur 4. Version (Pfingsten 1940), p. 428.

<sup>15</sup> The 1932 Dresden lecture is mentioned only in the section of the ‘Nachweise’ that refers to versions of the lecture in *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 482. There is no mention of the 1932 Dresden version in the ‘Nachweise’ to the 1967 “standalone” edition of *Wegmarken*, which simply remarks that the text had been delivered frequently in various versions since 1930. See *Wegmarken* (1967), p. 387.

Klostermann produced the *Gesamtausgabe* edition of *Wegmarken*, which included Heidegger's marginal handwritten remarks to his own copies of the first and third editions of the lecture, and altered the title to *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit (1930)*, although it is the still 1949 text which is reproduced here. The third (1996) non-*Gesamtausgabe* edition of *Wegmarken* incorporates these additions, and is paginated identically to the version in the *Gesamtausgabe*.<sup>16</sup> There are other, tiny, textual modifications, and these are carefully noted in the endnotes to the English edition (but, oddly, not the 1976 German text). It is entirely possible these minor revisions were made with Heidegger's approval, given that the preparatory work for this latter edition of *Wegmarken* took place in the last years of Heidegger's life.

### English Translations

No publicly available editions of any version of the lecture prior to 1943 currently exist. A version of the 1943 lecture was published by R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick in 1949.<sup>17</sup> A translation of the 1949 version was made by John Sallis (in fact based on the fourth edition of 1961),<sup>18</sup> first published in 1977 in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*.<sup>19</sup> This version was revised by Sallis and edited by William McNeill so that it is now based on the *Gesamtausgabe* version of 1976.<sup>20</sup> Martin Weatherston has kindly given us permission to make use of his translation of the third 1930 lecture: we will use the Sallis and McNeill version of the 1949 lecture.

### Additional Remark

The passage I have translated below, while forming the basis of the *Anmerkung* to the 1943 publication of *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, adds considerable background information

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<sup>16</sup> The only difference between the two texts is in the editors' 'Afterword', which is absent from the "standalone" edition.

<sup>17</sup> 'On the Essence of Truth', translated by R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick in Werner Brock (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Existence and Being*, pp. 292–324. Chicago IL: Henry Regnery, 1949.

<sup>18</sup> 'On The Essence of Truth', translated by John Sallis in David Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, pp. 113–141. New York NY: Harper & Row, 1977. A second, "revised and expanded" edition produces the translation unaltered at pp. 111–138. London: Routledge, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Essence of Truth' translated by John Sallis in David Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, pp. 115–141. San Francisco CA: Harper and Row, 1977. A second, "Revised and Expanded Edition" was published by Routledge in 1993.

<sup>20</sup> 'On The Essence of Truth (1930)', translated by John Sallis in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks*, pp. 136–154. New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

concerning the path of development toward the “saying of the turning”. In Heidegger’s *Foreword* to Richardson’s *Through Phenomenology*, Heidegger had made the cryptic suggestion (in relation to the *Humanismusbrief*) “that matter which was thought under the name ‘turning’ already exercised my thinking a decade before 1947”.<sup>21</sup> Almost certainly Heidegger is referring to the his lectures of 1937, where he reflects at length on the essence of truth, and speaks of how “the reflection on the truth of essence is [. . .] reflection on the essence of truth”.<sup>22</sup>

From *Vorträge*, vol. 1 (*Gesamtausgabe* vol. 80.1), p. 428. Material in square brackets indicates original words in the German text.

Supplement to the 4th Version (Pentecost 1940)  
Commentary on the Lecture “On the Essence of Truth”

The above question concerning the essence of truth was first delivered as a public lecture (autumn and winter 1930 in Bremen, Marburg a .L., Freiburg i. Br. and summer 1932 in Dresden). What in the lecture was enquired into, and what was taken from the context of a reflection on the truth of essence was then revised in the summer of 1932,<sup>23</sup> in the autumn of 1934,<sup>24</sup> in the Winter 1937<sup>25</sup> and Pentecost 1940 in the current version. The decisive question (Being and Time 1927) concerning the “meaning” (truth) of “being” [*das Sein*] (not of what is actual being [*das Seiende*]) remains intentionally un-unfolded. The thinking appears to hold to the path of metaphysics and nevertheless, completes, in its decisive steps from truth as correctness to *ek-sistent* freedom and from this to truth as concealment and error, a transformation in the questioning which is to be heard within the overcoming metaphysics.

The knowledge attained in the lecture does not exhaust itself in an alternative “concept” of truth, but comes to fulfil itself in the essential experience that only out of here-being [*Da-sein*] can a proximity to truth of being prepare itself for historical man. Every variety of “anthropology” and all subjectivity of man as subject is not only abandoned, as it had been already in “Being and Time”: thus the truth of being is not sought as “basis” of a transformed basic historical position. Rather, the attempt is now being made to think in terms of this other “basis” (here–being [*Da-sein*]). The inner movement of the lecture serves in no way to heighten the “liveliness” of the structure; the sequence of steps of the questioning is in itself the path of

<sup>21</sup> ‘Ein Vorwort. Brief an Pater William J. Richardson (1962)’, in Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (GA11), p. 149. See ‘Vorwort / Preface’ to William J. Richardson, *From Phenomenology to Thought*, p. xvi/xvii. Richardson translates the German somewhat differently. “Daß der unter dem Namen ‘Kehre’ gedachte Sachverhalt mein Denken schon ein Jahrzehnt vor 1947 bewegte”

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie* (GA45), p. 96. “Die Besinnung auf die Wahrheit des Wesens [. . .] ist Besinnung auf das Wesen der Wahrheit.”

<sup>23</sup> Lecture course Summer Semester 1932. Martin Heidegger, *Der Anfang der Abendländischen Philosophie: Auslegung des Anaximander und Parmenides* (GA35). Translated by Richard Rojcewicz as *Martin Heidegger: The Beginning of Western Philosophy*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> See the lectures given in the Winter Semester of 1933/34 under the title *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Wahrheit: 1. Die Grundfrage der Philosophie, 2. Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (GA36/37). Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt as *Being and Truth*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Lectures of the Winter Semester 1937/38. Martin Heidegger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte “Probleme” der “Logik”* (GA45). Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer as *Basic Problems of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1994.

a thinking that does not supply ideas and concepts, but is itself the experience and pursuit of a transformation of the relationship to being.

### **Schedule of Meetings**

Thursdays at 16.00 (British Summer Time = GMT+1) via Zoom in May and June.

The two half-day workshops will take place in September.