

Heidegger on Ontological Education, or: How We Become What We Are

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Heidegger presciently diagnosed the current crisis in higher education. Contemporary theorists like Bill Readings extend and update Heidegger's critique, documenting the increasing instrumentalization, professionalization, vocationalization, corporatization, and technologization of the modern university, the dissolution of its unifying and guiding ideals, and, consequently, the growing hyper-specialization and ruinous fragmentation of its departments. Unlike Heidegger, however, these critics do not recognize such disturbing trends as interlocking symptoms of an underlying ontological problem and so they provide no positive vision for the future of higher education. By understanding our educational crisis 'ontohistorically', Heidegger is able to develop an alternative, ontological conception of education which he hopes will help bring about a renaissance of the university. In a provocative reading of Plato's famous 'allegory of the cave', Heidegger excavates and appropriates the original Western educational ideal of Platonic *paideia*, outlining the pedagogy of an ontological education capable of directly challenging the 'technological understanding of being' he holds responsible for our contemporary educational crisis. This notion of ontological education can best be understood as a philosophical perfectionism, a re-essentialization of the currently empty ideal of educational 'excellence' by which Heidegger believes we can reconnect teaching to research and, ultimately, reunify and revitalize the university itself.

I. Introduction

Heidegger sought to deconstruct education. Rather than deny this, we should simply reject the polemical reduction of 'deconstruction' (*Destruktion*) to 'destruction' (*Zerstörung*) and instead be clear that the goal of Heidegger's deconstruction of education is not to *destroy* our traditional Western educational institutions but to 'loosen up' this 'hardened tradition and dissolve the concealments it has engendered' in order to 'recover' from the beginning of the educational tradition those 'primordial experiences' which have fundamentally shaped its subsequent historical development.¹ In fact, Heidegger's deconstructions are so far from being simple destructions that not only do they always include a positive as well as a negative moment, but this negative moment, in which the sedimented layers of distorting interpretations are cleared away, is invariably in the service of the positive moment, in which something long concealed is recovered. To understand how this double deconstructive strategy operates in the case of education, then, we need simply clarify and develop these two moments: What distortions does

Heidegger's deconstruction of education seek to cut through? And, more importantly, what does it seek to recover? Let us answer this second, more important, question first.

Through a hermeneutic excavation of the famous 'allegory of the cave' in Plato's *Republic* – the textual site where pedagogical theory emerged from the noonday shadows of Orphic mystery and Protagorean obscurity in order to institute, for the first time, the 'Academy' as such – Heidegger seeks to place before our eyes the most influential understanding of 'education' in Western history: Plato's conception of *paideia*. Heidegger maintains that aspects of Plato's founding pedagogical vision have exerted an unparalleled influence on our subsequent historical understandings of 'education' (its nature, procedures, and goals), while other, even more profound aspects have been forgotten. These forgotten aspects of *paideia* are what his deconstruction of education seeks to recover. Back, then, to our first question: What hermeneutic misconceptions or distortions stand in the way of this recovery and so must first be cleared away? Heidegger's focus here is on a misconception about education which also forms part of the legacy of Plato's cave, a distortion embodied in and perpetuated by those institutions which reflect and transmit our historical understanding of education.

Now, one might expect Heidegger's assessment of the future prospects for our educational institutions to be unremittingly pessimistic, given that his later 'ontohistorical' (*seinsgeschichtliche*) perspective allowed him to discern so presciently those interlocking trends whereby we increasingly instrumentalize, professionalize, vocationalize, corporatize, and ultimately *technologize* education. Heidegger's powerful critique of the way in which our educational institutions have come to express a nihilistic, 'technological understanding of being' will be developed in section II. But before assuming that this diagnosis of education amounts to a death sentence, we need to recall the point with which we began: Heidegger's deconstructive strategies always have *two* moments. Thus, when he seeks to recover the ontological core of Platonic *paideia*, his intent is not only to trace the technologization of education back to an ontological ambiguity already inherent in Plato's founding pedagogical vision (thereby demonstrating the historical *contingency* of these disturbing educational trends and so loosening their grip on us). More importantly, he also means to show how forgotten aspects of the original Platonic notion of *paideia* remain capable of inspiring heretofore unthought of possibilities for the *future* of education. Indeed, only Heidegger's hope for the future of our educational institutions can explain his otherwise entirely mysterious claim that his *paideia* 'interpretation' is 'made necessary from out of a future need [*aus einer künftigen Not notwendige*]',²

This oracular pronouncement sounds mysterious, yet I believe Heidegger's deconstruction of education is motivated entirely by this 'future need'. I submit that this future need is double; like the deconstruction mobilized in its

service, it contains a positive as well as a negative moment. These two moments are so important that the rest of this essay will be devoted to their explication. Negatively, we need a critical perspective which will allow us to grasp the underlying historical logic according to which our educational institutions have developed and will continue to develop if nothing is done to alter their course. As we will see in section II, Heidegger was one of the first to diagnose correctly what a growing number of incisive critics of contemporary education have subsequently confirmed: We now stand in the midst of an historical *crisis* in higher education. Heidegger's profound understanding of the *nature* of this crisis – his insight that it can be understood as a total eclipse of Plato's original educational ideal – reveals the ontohistorical trajectory leading up to our current educational crisis and, more importantly, illuminates a path which might lead us out of it.

This is fortunate, since the gravity of Heidegger's diagnosis immediately suggests a complementary, *positive* need: We need an alternative to our contemporary understanding of education, an alternative capable of favorably resolving our educational crisis by averting the technological dissolution of the historical essence of education. Heidegger's hope is this: Since an ambiguity at the heart of Plato's original understanding of education lent itself to an historical misunderstanding in which the essence of education has been obscured and is now in danger of being forgotten, the deconstructive recovery of this long-obscured essence of education can now help us envision a way to restore substance to the increasingly formal and empty ideals guiding contemporary education. It thus makes perfect sense that this need for a positive alternative leads Heidegger back to Plato's cave. Retracing his steps in section III, I reconstruct 'the essence of education' that Heidegger seeks to recover from the shadows of history, thereby fleshing out his positive vision. In section IV, I consider briefly how this re-ontologization of education might help us begin to envision a path leading beyond our contemporary educational crisis.

II. Heidegger's Ontohistorical Critique of the Technologization of Education

The first aspect of our 'future need' is for a critical perspective which will allow us to discern the underlying logic that has long guided the historical development of our educational institutions, a perspective which will render visible the developmental trajectory these institutions continue to follow. As intimated above, Heidegger maintains that his 'history of being' (*Seinsgeschichte*) provides precisely this perspective. As he puts it, 'the essence of truth and the kinds of transformations it undergoes first make possible [the historical unfolding of] "education" in its basic structures'.³ Heidegger means

by this that the history of being *makes possible* the historical development of our educational institutions, although to see this we must carefully unpack this initially puzzling reference to 'the essence of truth and the kinds of transformations it undergoes'.

1. *From the Essence of Truth to the History of Being*

Heidegger's pronouncement that the essence of truth *transforms* sounds paradoxical; how can an essence *change*? This will seem impossible to someone like Kripke, who holds that an essence is a property an entity possesses necessarily, the referent of a 'rigid designator' the extension of which is fixed across all possible worlds.⁴ The paradox disappears, however, once we realize that Heidegger too uses 'essence' (*Wesen*) as a technical term, albeit quite differently from Kripke. To understand 'essence' in phrases such as 'the essence of truth' and 'the essence of technology', Heidegger explains, we cannot conceive of 'essence' the way we have been doing since Plato, as what '*permanently endures*', for that makes it seem as if by 'essence' 'we mean some mythological abstraction'. Instead, Heidegger insists, we need to think of 'essence' as a *verb*, as the way in which things 'essence' (*west*) or 'remain in play' (*im Spiel bleibt*).⁵ In Heidegger's usage, 'essence' picks out the extension of an entity unfolding itself in historical intelligibility. Otherwise put, Heidegger understands 'essence' in terms of *being*, and since being is not a real predicate (as Kant showed), there is little likelihood that an entity's 'essence' can be picked out by a single, fixed predicate or underlying property (as substance metaphysics assumes). Rather, for Heidegger 'essence' simply denotes the *historical* way in which an entity comes to reveal itself ontologically and be understood by *Dasein*.⁶ Accordingly, 'essence' must be understood in terms of the 'ek-sistence' of *Da-sein*, that is, in terms of 'being set-out into the disclosedness of beings'.⁷

In 'On the Essence of Truth' (1929), Heidegger applies this historical understanding of 'essence' to *truth*, contending famously (if no longer terribly controversially) that the original historical 'essence of truth' is not simply 'unforgottenness' (*Unvergessenheit*, a literal translation of the original Greek word for 'truth': *Alētheia* – the *alpha*-privative 'un-' plus *Lethe*, the mythological 'river of forgetting'), but phenomenological 'un-concealedness' (*Un-verborgenheit*) more generally. Historically, 'truth' first refers to *revealedness* or *phenomenological manifestation* rather than to accurate representation; the 'locus of truth' is not originally the correspondence of an assertion to a state of affairs, but the antecedent fact that there is something *there* to which the assertion might correspond. So conceived, the 'essence of truth' is a 'revealedness' fully co-extensional with *Dasein*'s 'existence', the basic fact of our 'standing-out' (*ek-sistere*) historically into phenomenological intelligibility. 'The essence of truth' thus refers to the way in which this

'revealedness' takes shape historically, namely, as a series of different ontological *constellations of intelligibility*. It is not surprising, then, that Heidegger first began to elaborate his 'history of being' in 'On the Essence of Truth'; for him 'the essence of truth' is 'the history of being'.

Of course, such strong claims about the radically historical character of our concepts (even cherished concepts like 'essence', 'truth', 'history', 'concept', and 'being') tend to make philosophers nervous. When Heidegger historicizes ontology by re-rooting it in the historical existence of *Dasein*, how does his account avoid simply dissolving intelligibility into the flux of time? Heidegger's answer is surprising; it is the metaphysical tradition that prevents intelligibility from dissolving into a pure temporal flux. Indeed, careful readers will notice that when Heidegger writes that 'ek-sistent, disclosive *Da-sein* possesses the human being so originarily that only it secures for humanity that distinctive relatedness to *the totality of beings as such* which first grounds all history', he is subtly invoking his account of the way in which metaphysics grounds intelligibility. Unfortunately, the complexity of Heidegger's idiosyncratic understanding of Western metaphysics as *ontotheology*, coupled with his seemingly strong antipathy to metaphysics, has tended to obscure the unparalleled pride of place he in fact assigns to metaphysics in the historical construction, contestation, and maintenance of intelligibility. Put simply, Heidegger holds that our metaphysicians' *ontological* understandings of what entities are 'as such' ground intelligibility from the inside-out (as it were), while their *theological* understandings of the way in which the 'totality' of beings exist simultaneously secure the intelligible order from the outside-in. Western history's successive constellations of intelligibility are thus 'doubly grounded' in a series of ontotheologically structured understandings of 'the being of beings' (*das Sein des Seienden*), understandings, that is, of both *what* and *how* beings *are*, or of 'the totality of beings as such' (as Heidegger puts it above).⁸

This account answers our worry; for although none of these ontotheological grounds has served the history of intelligibility as an unshakeable 'foundation' (*Grund*), nor have any of the major ontotheologies instantly given way like a groundless 'abyss' (*Abgrund*). Rather, each ontotheology has served its historical constellation of intelligibility as an *Ungrund*, 'a perhaps necessary appearance of ground', that is, as that point at which ontological inquiry comes to a rest.⁹ Because each ontotheology serves for a time as the point where 'the spade turns' (as Wittgenstein put it), the history of intelligibility has taken the form of a series of relatively durable, overlapping historical 'epochs' rather than either a single monolithic understanding of what-is or a formless ontological flux.¹⁰ Thus metaphysics, by repeatedly supplying intelligibility with dual ontotheological anchors, is able 'to hold back' (*epoche*) the floodwaters of intelligibility for a time – the time of an

'epoch'. It is this 'overlapping' historical series of ontotheologically grounded epochs that Heidegger calls *the history of being*.

2. *The History of Being as the Ground of Education*

With this philosophical background in place, we can now understand the reasoning behind Heidegger's claim that our changing historical understanding of 'education' is grounded in the history of being.¹¹ Heidegger defends a kind of *ontological holism*: By giving shape to our historical understanding of 'what *is*', metaphysics determines the most basic presuppositions of what *anything* is, including 'education'. As he puts it: 'Western humanity, in all its comportment toward beings, and even toward itself, is in every respect sustained and guided by metaphysics.'¹² The 'great metaphysicians' focus and disseminate an ontotheological understanding of what and how beings *are*, thereby establishing the most basic conceptual parameters and ultimate standards of legitimacy for their historical epochs. These ontotheologies function historically like self-fulfilling prophecies, reshaping intelligibility from the ground up. For as a new ontotheological understanding of *what* and *how* beings *are* takes hold and spreads, it transforms our basic understanding of what *all* entities are.¹³ Our understanding of education is 'made possible' by the history of being, then, since when our understanding of what beings *are* changes historically, our understanding of what 'education' *is* transforms as well.

This conclusion is crucial; not only does it answer the question that has guided us thus far, it positions us to understand what exactly Heidegger finds *objectionable* about our contemporary understanding of education (and the educational institutions which embody this understanding). For Heidegger, our changing historical understanding of what 'education' *is* has its place in an historical series of ontological 'epochs', holistic constellations of intelligibility which are themselves grounded in a series of ontotheological understandings of *what* and *how* beings *are*. In order fully to comprehend Heidegger's critique of contemporary education, then, we need to answer three interrelated questions: First, *what* exactly is the nature of our own ontological epoch? Second, in *which* ontotheology is our constellation of intelligibility grounded? And third, *how* has this underlying ontotheology shaped our present understanding of education? I will take these questions in order.

Heidegger's name for our contemporary constellation of intelligibility is, of course, 'enframing' (*das Gestell*). Heidegger chooses this polysemic term because, by etymologically connoting a *gathering together* ('*Ge-*') of the myriad forms of *stellen* ('to set, stand, regulate, secure, ready, establish', and so on), it succinctly conveys his understanding of the way in which our present 'mode of revealing' – a 'setting-upon that challenges forth' – forces the 'presencing' (*anwesen*) of entities into its metaphysical 'stamp or mold'

(*Prägung*).¹⁴ Yet this is not simply to substitute etymology for argument, as detractors allege. Heidegger uses etymology in order to come up with an appropriate name for our contemporary 'mode of revealing', but the argumentative work in his account is done by his understanding of metaphysics. This means that to really understand why Heidegger characterizes our contemporary epoch as *das Gestell*, we must take the measure of his claim that 'enframing' is grounded in an ontotheology transmitted to us by Nietzsche. On Heidegger's reading, Nietzsche's staunch anti-metaphysical stance merely hides the fact that he actually philosophized on the basis of an 'unthought' metaphysics. Nietzsche's *Nachlaß* clearly demonstrates that he conceptualized 'the totality of beings as such' *ontotheologically*, as 'eternally recurring will-to-power', that is, as an unending disaggregation and reaggregation of forces without purpose or goal.¹⁵ This Nietzschean ontotheology not only inaugurates the 'metaphysics of the atomic age', it *grounds enframing*: Our unthinking reliance on Nietzsche's ontotheology is leading us to transform all beings, ourselves included, into mere 'resources' (*Bestand*), entities lacking intrinsic meaning which are thus simply optimized and disposed of with maximal efficiency.¹⁶

Heidegger famously characterizes enframing as a *technological* understanding of being. As an historical 'mode of revealing' in which entities increasingly show up only as resources to be optimized, enframing generates a 'calculative thinking' which, like the mythic touch of King Midas, quantifies all qualitative relations. This 'limitless "quantification"' which absorbs all qualitative relations (until we come to treat 'quantity as quality') is rooted in enframing's *ontologically reductive* mode of revealing, whereby '[o]nly what is calculable in advance counts as being'. Enframing thus tends to reduce all entities to bivalent, programmable 'information', digitized data, which increasingly enters into 'a state of pure circulation'.¹⁷ Indeed, as Heidegger's phenomenological meditation on a highway interchange revealed to him in the 1950s – and as our 'information superhighway', the Internet, now makes plain – we exhibit a growing tendency to relate to our world and ourselves merely as a 'network of long distance traffic, paced as calculated for maximum yield'.¹⁸ Reading quotidian historical developments in terms of this ontohistorical logic, Heidegger believed our passage from Cartesian modernity to Nietzschean postmodernity was already visible in the transformation of employment agencies into 'human resource' departments. The technological move afoot to reduce teachers and scholars to 'on-line content providers' merely extends – and so clarifies – the logic whereby modern subjects transform themselves into postmodern resources by turning techniques developed for controlling nature back onto themselves.¹⁹ Unfortunately, as this historical transformation of subjects into resources becomes more pervasive, it further eludes our critical gaze; indeed, we come to treat ourselves in the very terms which underlie our technological

refashioning of the world: no longer as conscious Cartesian subjects taking control of an objective world, but rather as one more resource to be optimized, ordered, and enhanced with maximal efficiency – whether cosmetically, psychopharmacologically, or *educationally*.

Here, then, Heidegger believes he has uncovered the subterranean ontohistorical logic guiding the development of our educational institutions. But *how* does contemporary education reflect this nihilistic logic of enframing? In what sense are today's educational institutions caught up in an unlimited quantification of qualitative relations which strips beings of their intrinsic meanings, transforming them into mere resources to be optimized with maximal efficiency?

3. Education as Enframing

Heidegger began developing his critique of higher education in 1911 and continued elaborating it well into the 1960s, but perhaps his most direct answer to this question comes in 1929.²⁰ Having finally been awarded a full professorship (on the basis of *Being and Time*), the 39-year-old Heidegger gives his official 'Inaugural Lecture' at Freiburg University, the famous 'What is Metaphysics?' He begins boldly, directing his critical attention to the university itself by emphasizing philosophy's concrete 'existential' foundations (since 'metaphysical questioning must be posed from the essential position of the existence [*Dasein*] that questions'). Within the lifeworld of the university, Heidegger observes, 'existence' (*Dasein*) is determined by *Wissenschaft*, the knowledge embodied in the humanities and natural sciences. 'Our *Dasein* – in the community of researchers, teachers, and students – is determined by science or knowledge [*durch die Wissenschaft bestimmt*].'²¹ Our very 'being-in-the-world' is shaped by the knowledge we pursue, uncover, and embody. When Heidegger claims that existence is fundamentally shaped by *knowledge*, he is not thinking of a professoriate shifting in the winds of academic trends, nor simply arguing for a kind of pedagogical or performative consistency, according to which we should practice what we know. His intent, rather, is to emphasize a troubling sense in which it seems that we cannot help practicing what we know, since we are 'always already' implicitly shaped by our guiding metaphysical presuppositions. Heidegger's question thus becomes: What is the *ontological impact* of our unquestioned reliance on the particular metaphysical presuppositions which tacitly dominate the academy? 'What happens to us essentially, in the ground of our existence', when the *Wissenschaft* pursued in the contemporary university becomes our guiding 'passion', fundamentally shaping our view of the world and of ourselves?

Heidegger's dramatic answer introduces his radical critique of the hyper-specialization and consequent fragmentation of the modern university:

The fields of science are widely separated. Their ways of handling the objects of their inquiries differ fundamentally. Today only the technical organization of universities and faculties consolidates this multiplicity of dispersed disciplines, only through practical and instrumental goals do they maintain any meaning. The rootedness of the sciences in their essential ground has dried up and died.²²

Here in 1929 Heidegger accurately describes the predicament of that institution which, almost half a century later, Clark Kerr would satirically label the 'Multi-versity': an internally fragmented *Uni*-versity-in-name-only, where the sole communal unity stems from a common grievance about parking spaces.²³ Historically, as the modern university loses sight of the shared goals which originally justified the endeavors of the academic community as a whole (at first, the common pursuit of the unified 'system' of knowledge, then the communal dedication to the formation of cultivated individuals), its members begin to look outside the university for some purpose to give meaning to lives of research. Since only those disciplines (or sub-disciplines) able to produce instrumentally useful results regularly find such external support, all disciplines increasingly try to present themselves in terms of their use-value. Without a counter-ideal, students too will adopt this instrumental mentality, coming to see education merely as a means to an increased salary down the road. In this way fragmentation leads to the professionalization of the university and, eventually, its deterioration into vocationalism. At the same time, moreover, the different disciplines, lacking any shared, substantive sense of a unifying purpose or common subject-matter, tend by the logic of specialization to develop internal standards appropriate to their particular object-domains. As these domains become increasingly specialized, these internal standards become ever more disparate, if not simply incommensurable. In this way, disciplinary fragmentation leaves the university without common standards – other than the now ubiquitous but entirely empty and formal ideal of *excellence*.

Following in Heidegger's footsteps, critics such as Bill Readings and Timothy Clark show how our contemporary 'university of excellence', owing to 'the very emptiness of the idea of excellence', is 'becoming an excellent bureaucratic corporation', 'geared to no higher idea than its own maximized self-perpetuation according to optimal input/output ratios'.²⁴ Such diagnoses make clear that the development of our educational institutions continues to follow the underlying metaphysical logic of enframing, the progressive transformation of all entities into mere resources to be optimized. Unfortunately, these critics fail to recognize this underlying ontohistorical logic, and so offer diagnoses without cures. Indeed, Readings' materialist explanation for the historical obsolescence of *Bildung* as the unifying ideal of the modern university (the result of an 'implacable bourgeois economic revolution') leads him to succumb to a cynicism in which future denizens of the university can hope for nothing more than 'pragmatic' situational

responses in an environment increasingly transformed by 'the logic of consumerism'.²⁵ While such critiques of the university convincingly extend and update aspects of Heidegger's analysis, they lack his philosophical vision for a revitalizing reunification of the university.

To see that Heidegger himself did not relinquish all hope for the future of higher education, we need only attend carefully to the performative dimension of his 'Inaugural Lecture'. On the surface, it may seem as if Heidegger, welcomed fully into the arms of the university, rather perversely uses his celebratory lecture to pronounce the death of the institution which has just hired him, proclaiming that: 'The rootedness of the sciences in their essential ground has dried up and died.' Yet, with this deliberate provocation Heidegger is not beating a dead horse; his pronouncement that the university is dead at its roots implies that it is fated to wither and decay *unless it is revived*, reinvigorated from the root. Heidegger uses this organic metaphor of 'rootedness' (*Verwurzelung*) to put into effect what Derrida (who will restage this scene himself) recognizes as 'a phoenix motif': 'One burns or buries what is *already dead* so that life will be reborn and regenerated from these ashes.'²⁶ Indeed, Heidegger begins to outline his program for a *renaissance* of the university in the lecture's conclusion: Existence is determined by science, but science itself remains rooted in metaphysics, whether it realizes it or not. Since the roots of the university are metaphysical, a reinstatement of the scientific lifeworld requires a renewed attention to this underlying metaphysical dimension. 'Only if science exists on the basis of metaphysics can it achieve anew its essential task, which is not to amass and classify bits of knowledge, but to disclose in ever-renewed fashion the entire expanse of truth in nature and history.'²⁷

What exactly is Heidegger proposing here? To understand his vision for a rebirth of the university, we need to turn to a text he began writing the next year: 'Plato's Teaching on Truth.'²⁸ Here, tracing the ontohistorical roots of our educational crisis back to Plato's cave, Heidegger (quite literally) *excavates* an alternative.

III. Heidegger's Return to Plato's Cave: Ontological Education as the Essence of *Paideia*

Plato seeks to show that the essence of *paideia* does not consist in merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were a container held out empty and waiting. On the contrary, real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it.²⁹

Our contemporary educational crisis can be understood as an ontohistorical dissolution of Plato's original conception of education, Heidegger contends, so the deconstructive recovery of this 'essence of *paideia*' is crucial to successfully resolving the crisis. A deeply resonant Greek word, *paideia* means 'civilization', 'culture', 'development', 'tradition', 'literature', and 'education'; thus it encompasses what to our ears seems to be a rather wide range of semantic frequencies.³⁰ Heidegger was deeply drawn to the word, not only because, thanks largely to Werner Jaeger, it served as a key term in that intersection of German academic and political life which Heidegger sought to occupy during the 1930s, but also because he had an undeniable fondness for what (with a wink to Freud) we could call the *polysemic perversity* of language, that is, the fortuitous ambiguities and unpredictable interconnections which help form the warp and weave of its semantic web. Recognizing that such rich language tends to resist the analyst's pursuit of an unambiguous exactness, Heidegger argued that 'rigorous' philosophical *precision* calls instead for an attempt to do justice to this semantic richness.³¹

Yet, as Gadamer and Derrida have shown, this demand for us to do justice to language is *aporetic* – a 'necessary impossibility' – since the holism of meaning renders the attempt ultimately impossible, not only practically (for finite beings like ourselves, who cannot follow all the strands in the semantic web at once), but also in principle (despite our Borgesian dreams of a *complete hypertext* which would exhaustively represent the semantic web, a dream even the vaunted 'world-wide web' barely inches toward realizing). This unfulfillable call for the philosopher *to do justice to language* is, nevertheless, *ethical* in the Kantian sense; it constitutes a regulative ideal, orienting our progress while remaining unreachable, like a guiding star. It is also, and for Heidegger more primordially, '*ethos*-ical' (so to speak), since such a call can be answered 'authentically' only if it is taken up existentially and embodied in an *ethos*, a way of being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the called-for comportment as *Ent-schlossenheit*, 'dis-closedness or re-solve'; later he will teach it as *Gelassenheit*, 'releasement or letting-be'.³² *Ent-schlossenheit* and *Gelassenheit* are not, of course, simply equivalent terms; releasement evolves out of resolve through a series of intermediary formulations and notably lacks resolve's voluntarism. But both entail a responsive hermeneutic receptivity (whether existential or phenomenological) and both designate comportments whereby we embody, reflexively, an understanding of what we *are*, ontologically, namely: *Da-sein*, 'being [the] there', a making intelligible of the place in which we find ourselves.

Such considerations allow us to see that we *are* the place to which Heidegger is referring – in the epigraph above this section – when he writes that 'real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being [*Wesensort*] and

accustoming us to it'. As this epigraph shows, Heidegger believes he has fulfilled the ethical dictate *to do justice to language* by recovering 'the essence of *paideia*', the ontological carrier wave underlying *paideia*'s multiple semantic frequencies. Ventriloquizing Plato, Heidegger deploys this notion of the essence of *paideia* in order to oppose two conceptions of education. He warns first against a 'false interpretation': We cannot understand education as the transmission of 'information', the filling of the *psyche* with knowledge as if inscribing a *tabula rasa* or, in more contemporary parlance, 'training-up' a neural net. This understanding of education is false because (in the terms of *Being and Time*) we are 'thrown' beings, 'always already' shaped by a tradition we can never 'get behind', and so we cannot be blank slates or 'empty containers' waiting to be filled.³³ Indeed, this 'reductive and atrophied' misconception of education as the transmission of information reflects the nihilistic logic of enframing, that ontohistorical trend by which intelligibility is 'leveled out into the uniform storage of information'.³⁴ Yet here again we face a situation in which as the problem gets worse we become less likely to recognize it; the 'impact' of this ontological drift toward meaninglessness can 'barely be noticed by contemporary humanity because they are continually covered over with the latest information'.³⁵

Against this self-insulating but 'false interpretation' of education, Heidegger advances his conception of 'real or genuine education' (*echte Bildung*), the 'essence of *paideia*'. Drawing on the allegory of the cave – which 'illustrates the essence of "education" [*paideia*]' (as Plato claims at the beginning of Book VII of the *Republic*) – Heidegger seeks to effect nothing less than a re-ontologizing *revolution* in our understanding of education.³⁶ Recall Heidegger's succinct and powerful formulation: 'Real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming [*eingewöhnt*] us to it'. Genuine education leads us back to ourselves, to the place we *are* (the *Da* of our *Sein*), teaches us 'to dwell' (*wohnen*) 'there' and transforms us in the process. This transformative journey to ourselves is not a flight away from the world into thought, but a *reflexive* return to the fundamental 'realm of the human sojourn' (*Aufenthaltsbezirk des Menschen*).³⁷ The goal of this educational odyssey is simple but literally *revolutionary*: to bring us full circle back to ourselves, first by turning us away from the world in which we are most immediately immersed, then by turning us back to this world in a more reflexive way. As Heidegger explains, '*Paideia* means the turning around of the whole human being in the sense of displacing them out of the region of immediate encountering and accustoming them to another realm in which beings appear'.³⁸

How can we accomplish such an *ontological revolution* in education? What are the pedagogical methods of this alternative conception of education? And

how, finally, can this ontological conception of education help us overturn the *enframing* of education?

1. Ontological Education Against Enframing

In 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', Heidegger's exposition is complicated by the fact that he is simultaneously explicating his own positive understanding of 'education' and critiquing an important transformation in the history of 'truth' inaugurated by Plato: the transition from truth understood as *aletheia*, phenomenological 'unhiddenness', to *orthotes*, the 'correctness' of an assertion. From this 'ambiguity in Plato's doctrine', in which 'truth still is, at one and the same time, unhiddenness and correctness', the subsequent tradition will develop only the *orthotic* understanding of truth at the expense of the *aletheiac*.³⁹ In so doing, we lose 'the original essence of truth', the manifestation of beings themselves, and come to understand truth solely as a feature of our own representational capacities. According to Heidegger, this displacement of the locus of truth from being to human subjectivity paves the way for that *metaphysical humanism* (or *subjectivism*) in which the 'essence of *paideia*' will be eclipsed, allowing 'education' to be absorbed by enframing, becoming merely a means for 'bringing "human beings" to the liberation of their possibilities, the certitude of their destination, and the securing of their "living"''.⁴⁰

Despite some dramatic rhetorical flourishes, however, Heidegger has not entirely given up on 'education' (*Bildung*). He dismisses the modern understanding of *Bildung* (the deliberate cultivation of 'subjective qualities') as a 'misinterpretation to which the notion fell victim in the nineteenth century', yet maintains that once *Bildung* is 'given back its original naming power', it is the word which 'comes closest to capturing the [meaning of the] word *paideia*'. *Bildung* is literally ambiguous, Heidegger tells us; its 'naming force' drives in two directions:

What '*Bildung*' expresses is twofold: first, *Bildung* means forming [*Bilden*] in the sense of impressing a character that unfolds. But at the same time this 'forming' [*Bilden*] 'forms' [*bildet*] (or impresses a character) by antecedently taking its measure from some measure-giving vision, which for that reason is called the pre-conception [*Vor-bild*].

'Thus', Heidegger concludes, "'education" [*Bildung*]" means impressing a character, especially as guiding by a pre-conception'.⁴¹

Few would quibble with the first claim: education stamps us with a character which unfolds within us. But what forms the 'stamp' which forms us? *Who educates the educators?* According to Heidegger, the answer to this question is built into the very meaning of *paideia*; it is the second sense he

'restores' to *Bildung*. To further 'unfold' these two senses of 'education', Heidegger immediately introduces the contrast class: 'the contrary of *paideia* is *apaideusia*, lack of education [*Bildungslosigkeit*], where no fundamental comportment is awakened, no measure-giving preconception established.'⁴² This helpfully clarifies Heidegger's first claim: It is by awakening a 'fundamental comportment' that education stamps us with a character that unfolds within us. In the educational situation – a situation without pre-delimitable boundaries, indeed, a situation the boundaries of which Heidegger ceaselessly seeks to expand (for he holds that '*paideia* is essentially a movement of passage, from *apaideusia* to *paideia*', such that education is not something that can ever be *completed*) – the 'fundamental comportment' perhaps most frequently called for is not the heroic *Entschlossenheit*, nor even the gentler *Gelassenheit*, but rather a more basic form of receptive spontaneity Heidegger will simply call *hearing* or *hearkening* (*hören*), that is (as we will see), an attentive and responsive way of dwelling in one's environment. But whether the comportment implicitly guiding education is 'resoluteness', 'releasement', 'hearing', or that anxiety-tranquillizing *hurry* which generally characterizes contemporary life depends on the second sense of *Bildung*, which remains puzzling: From where do we derive the measure-giving vision which implicitly informs all genuine education?

Heidegger's answer is complicated, let us recall, by the fact that he is both elaborating his own philosophy of education (as it were) and performing a critical exegesis of Plato's decisive metaphysical contribution to 'the history that we *are*', the history of metaphysics. These two aims are in tension with one another because the education Heidegger seeks to impart – the fundamental attunement he would awaken in his students – is itself an attempt to awaken us *from* the ontological education that we have 'always already' received from the metaphysical tradition. For this generally unnoticed antecedent measure comes to us *from metaphysics*, from the ontotheologically conceived understanding of the being of beings. In short, Heidegger seeks to educate his students *against* their pre-existing ontotheological education. (He will sometimes call this educating-against-education simply 'teaching'.) The crucial question, then, is: *How* can Heidegger's ontological education combat the metaphysical education we have always already received?

2. The Pedagogy of Ontological Freedom

Heidegger's suggestions about how the ontological education he advocates can transcend enframing are surprisingly specific. Recall that in Plato's allegory, the prisoner (1) begins in captivity within the cave, (2) escapes the chains and turns around to discover the fire and objects responsible for the

shadows on the wall previously taken as reality, then (3) ascends from the cave into the light of the outside world, coming to understand what is seen there as made possible by the light of the sun, and (4) finally returns to the cave, taking up the struggle to free the other prisoners (who violently resist their would-be liberator). For Heidegger, this well-known scenario suggests the pedagogy of ontological education. On his remarkable interpretation, the prisoner's 'four different dwelling places' communicate the four successive stages whereby ontological education breaks students' bondage to the technological mode of revealing, freeing them to understand what-is differently.

When students' ontological educations begin, they 'are engrossed in what they immediately encounter', taking the shadows cast by the fire on the wall to be the ultimate reality of things. Yet this 'fire' is only 'man-made'; the 'confusing' light it casts represents enframing's ontologically reductive mode of revealing. Here in this first stage, all entities show up to students merely as resources to be optimized, including the students *themselves*. Thus, if pressed, students will ultimately 'justify' even their education itself merely as a means to making more money, getting the most out of their potentials, or some other equally empty optimization imperative. Stage two is only reached when a student's 'gaze is freed from its captivity to shadows'; this happens when a student recognizes 'the fire' (enframing) as the source of 'the shadows' (entities understood as mere resources). In stage two, the *metaphysical* chains of enframing are thus broken. But *how* does this liberation occur? Despite the importance of this question, Heidegger answers it only in an aside: 'to turn one's gaze from the shadows to entities as they show themselves within the glow of the firelight is difficult and fails.'⁴³ His point, I take it, is that entities do not show themselves *as they are* when forced into the metaphysical mould of enframing, the ontotheology which reduces them to mere resources to be optimized. Students can be led to this realization through a guided investigation of the being of any entity, which they will tend to understand only as eternally recurring will-to-power, that is, as forces endlessly coming together and breaking apart. Because this metaphysical understanding dissolves being into becoming, the attempt to see entities as they *are* in its light is doomed to failure; resources have no *being*, they are 'constantly becoming' (as Nietzsche realized). With this recognition – and the anxiety it tends to induce – students can attain a negative *freedom from* enframing.

Still, Heidegger insists that 'real freedom', 'effective freedom' (*wirkliche Freiheit*) – the positive freedom in which students realize that entities are more than mere resources and so become *free for* understanding them otherwise – 'is attained only in stage three, in which someone who has been unchained is conveyed outside the cave "into the open"'. (Notice the implicit reference to someone doing the unchaining and conveying here; for

Heidegger, the educator plays a crucial role facilitating students' passage between each of the stages.) The open is one of Heidegger's names for 'being as such'; that is, for 'what appears antecedently in everything that appears and . . . makes whatever appears be accessible'.⁴⁴ The attainment of – or better, comportmental *attunement to* – this 'open' is what Heidegger famously calls 'dwelling'.⁴⁵ When such positive *ontological freedom* is achieved, 'what things are no longer appear merely in the man-made and confusing glow of the fire within the cave. The things themselves stand there in the binding force and validity of their own visible form'.⁴⁶ Ontological freedom is achieved when entities show themselves in their full phenomenological richness. The goal of the third stage of ontological education, then, is to teach students to 'dwell', to help attune them to the *being* of entities, and thus to teach them to see that the being of an entity – be it a book, cup, rose, or, to use a particularly salient example, *they themselves* – cannot be fully understood in the ontologically-reductive terms of enframing.⁴⁷

With the attainment of this crucial third stage, Heidegger's 'genuine', ontological education may seem to have reached its completion, since 'the very essence of *paideia* consists in making the human being strong for the clarity and constancy of insight into essence'.⁴⁸ This claim that genuine education teaches students to recognize 'essences' is not merely a Platonic conceit, but plays an absolutely crucial role in Heidegger's programme for a reunification of the university (as we will see in the conclusion). Nevertheless, ontological education reaches its true culmination only in the fourth stage, the *return to the cave*. Heidegger clearly understood his own role as a teacher in terms of just such a return, that is, as a struggle to free ontologically anaesthetized enframers from their bondage to a self-reifying mode of ontological revealing.⁴⁹ But his ranking of the return to the cave as the highest stage of ontological education is not merely an evangelistic call for others to adopt his vision of education as a revolution in consciousness; it also reflects his recognition that in ontological education, *learning culminates in teaching*. We must thus ask: What is *called* 'teaching'?

3. What Is Called Teaching?

The English 'teach' comes from the same linguistic family as the German verb *zeigen*, 'to point or show'.⁵⁰ As this etymology suggests, *to teach is to reveal*, to point out or make manifest through words. But to reveal *what*? What does the teacher, who 'points out' (or reveals) with words, point to (or indicate)?⁵¹ What do teachers teach? The question seems to presuppose that all teaching shares a common 'subject-matter', not simply a shared method or goal (the inculcation of critical thinking, persuasive writing, and the like), but something more substantive: a common subject-matter unifying the University. Of course all teachers use words to disclose, but to disclose a common

subject-matter? How could such a supposition *not* sound absurd to us professional denizens of a postmodern polyversity, where relentless hyper-specialization continues to fragment our subjects, and even re-unifying forces like interdisciplinarity seem to thrive only in so far they open new sub-specialties for a relentless vascular-to-capillary colonization of the scientific lifeworld? In such a situation, is it surprising that the Heideggerian idea of all teachers ultimately sharing a unified subject sounds absurd, or at best like an outdated myth – albeit the myth that founded the modern university? But *is* the idea of such a shared subject-matter a myth? What *do* teachers teach? Let us approach this question from what might at first seem to be another direction, attempting to *learn* its answer.

If teaching is revealing through words, then conversely, learning is experiencing what a teacher's words reveal. That is, to learn is actively to allow oneself to share in what the teacher's words disclose. But again, *what* do the teacher's words reveal? We will notice, if we read closely enough, that Heidegger answers this question in 1951, when he writes: 'To learn means to make everything we do answer to whatever essentials address us at a given time.'⁵² Here it might sound at first as if Heidegger is simply claiming that learning, as the complement of teaching, means actively allowing oneself to share in that which the teacher's words disclose. But Wittgenstein used to say that philosophy is like a bicycle race the point of which is to go as slowly as possible without falling off, and if we slow down, we will notice that Heidegger's words – the words of a teacher who would teach what learning means (in fact, the performative situation is even more complex)⁵³ – say more: *Learning means actively allowing ourselves to respond to what is essential in that which always addresses us*, that which has always already claimed us.

In a sense, then, learning means responding appropriately to the solicitations of the environment. Of course, Heidegger is thinking of the *ontological* environment (the way in which what-is discloses itself to us), but even ontic analogues show that this capacity to respond appropriately to the environment is quite difficult to learn. We learn to respond appropriately to environmental solicitations through a long process of trial and error. We must, in other words, learn how to learn. Here problems abound, for it is not clear that learning to learn can be taught. To the analytically minded, this demand seems to lead to a regress (for if we need to learn to learn, then we need to learn to learn to learn, and so on). But logic misleads phenomenology here; as Heidegger realized, it is simply a question of jumping into this *pedagogical circle* in the right way. Such a train of thought leads Heidegger to claim that if 'teaching is even more difficult than learning', this is only because the teacher must be an *exemplary learner*, capable of teaching his or her students to learn, that is, capable of learning-in-public, actively responding to the emerging demands of each unique educational situation.

Recall the famous passage:

Why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than learning. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they – he has to learn to let them learn. The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than his apprentices.⁵⁴

The teacher teaches students to learn – to respond appropriately to the solicitations of the ontological environment – *by* responding appropriately to the solicitations of his or her environment, which is, after all, the students' environment too. Learning culminates in teaching, then, because teaching is the highest form of *learning*; unlike 'instructing' (*belehren*), 'teaching' (*lehren*) is ultimately a 'letting learn' (*lernen lassen*). 'The true teacher is ahead of the students only in that he has more to learn than they: namely, the letting learn. (To learn [means]: to bring what we do and allow into a correspondence [or a suitable response, *Entsprechung*] with that which in each case grants itself to us as the essential.)'⁵⁵

This last assertion should remind us of Heidegger's earlier claim that 'the very essence of *paideia* consists in making the human being strong for the clarity and constancy of insight into essence'.⁵⁶ I said previously that this claim plays a crucial role in Heidegger's programme for a reunification of the university. By way of conclusion, let us briefly develop this claim and thereby further elaborate Heidegger's positive vision for the future of higher education.

IV. Conclusion: Envisioning a University of Teachers

How can Heidegger's understanding of ontological education help us restore substance to our currently empty guiding ideal of educational 'excellence', and in so doing provide the contemporary university with a renewed sense of *unity*, not only restoring substance to our shared commitment to forming *excellent* students, but also helping us recognize the sense in which we are in fact all working on the same project? The answer is surprisingly simple: By *re-essentializing* the notion of *excellence*. Heidegger, like Aristotle, is a *perfectionist*; he argues that there is a distinctive human essence and that the *good life*, the life of 'excellence' (*arete*), is the life spent cultivating this distinctively human essence. For Heidegger, as we have seen, the human 'essence' is *Dasein*, 'being-there', that is, the making-intelligible of the place in which we find ourselves, or, even more simply, *world disclosing*. For a world-disclosing being to cultivate its essence, then, is for it to recognize and

develop this essence, not only acknowledging its participation in the creation and maintenance of an intelligible world, but actively embracing its ontological role in such world disclosure. The full ramifications of this seemingly simple insight are profound and revolutionary.⁵⁷ We will restrict ourselves to briefly developing the two most important implications of Heidegger's re-essentialization of excellence for the future of the university.

Heidegger's ontological conception of education would transform the existing relations between teaching and research, on the one hand, and between the now fragmented departments, on the other. Thus, in effect, Heidegger dedicates himself finally to redeeming the two central ideals which guided the formation of the modern university: Teaching and research should be harmoniously integrated and the university community should understand itself as committed to a common substantive task.⁵⁸ How does Heidegger think he can help us finally achieve such ambitions? First, his conception of 'teaching' would reunite research and teaching, because when students develop the aforementioned 'insight into essence', they are being taught to disclose and investigate the ontological presuppositions which underlie *all* research, on Heidegger's view. For today's academic departments are what he calls 'positive sciences'; that is, they all rest on ontological 'posit's', ontological assumptions about what the class of entities they study *are*. Biology, for example, allows us to understand the *logos* of the *bios*, the order and structure of living beings. Nevertheless, Heidegger asserts, biology proper cannot tell us what life *is*.⁵⁹ Instead, biology takes over its implicit ontological understanding of what life *is* from the metaphysical understanding governing our Nietzschean epoch of enframing. (When contemporary philosophers of biology claim that life *is* 'a self-replicating system', they have unknowingly adopted the basic ontological presupposition of Nietzsche's metaphysics, according to which life *is* ultimately the eternal recurrence of will to power, that is, sheer will-to-will, unlimited self-augmentation.)⁶⁰ Analogously, psychology can tell us a great deal about how consciousness (the *psyche*) functions, but it cannot tell us what consciousness *is*. The same holds true for the understanding of 'the corporeality of bodies, the vegetable character of plants, the animality of animals, and the humanness of humanity' within physics, botany, zoology, and anthropology, respectively; these sciences all presuppose an ontological posit, a pre-understanding of the being of the class of entities they study.⁶¹ Heidegger's ontologically reconceived notion of teaching is inextricably entwined with research, then, because ontological education teaches students to question the very ontological presuppositions which guide research, thereby opening a space for understanding the being of the entities they study otherwise than in enframing's ontologically reductive terms. Heidegger's reconceptualization of education would thus encourage revolutionary transformations in the sciences and humanities by teaching students to focus on and explicitly

investigate the ontological presuppositions which implicitly guide research in each domain of knowledge.

Despite such revolutionary goals, Heidegger thought that his ontological reconceptualization of education could also restore a substantive sense of unity to the university community, if only this community could learn 'to engage in [this 'reflection on the essential foundations'] as reflection and to think and belong to the university *from the base of this engagement*'.⁶² From its founding, one of the major concerns about the modern university has been how it could maintain the unity of structure and purpose thought to be definitive of the 'Uni-versity' as such. German Idealists like Fichte and Schelling believed that this unity would follow organically from the *totality* of the system of knowledge. But this faith in the system proved to be far less influential on posterity than Humboldt's alternative 'humanist' ideal, according to which the university's unity would come from a shared commitment to the educational formation of character. Humboldt's famous idea was to link 'objective *Wissenschaft* with subjective *Bildung*'; the university would be responsible for forming fully-cultivated individuals, a requirement Humboldt hoped would serve to guide and unify the new freedom of research. Historically, of course, neither the German Idealists' reliance on the unity of research nor Humboldt's emphasis on a shared commitment to the educational formation of students succeeded in unifying the university community. In effect, however, Heidegger's re-ontologization of education would *combine* (his versions of) these two strategies. The university community would be unified *both* by its shared commitment to forming *excellent* individuals (where excellence is understood in terms of the ontological perfectionism outlined above) *and* by the shared recognition on the part of this community that its members are all committed to the same substantive pursuit: The ultimately revolutionary task not simply of understanding what *is*, but of investigating the ontological presuppositions implicitly guiding all the various fields of knowledge. Heidegger thus believed that ontological education, by restoring substance to the notion of excellence and so teaching us 'to disclose the essential in all things', could finally succeed in 'shattering the encapsulation of the sciences in their different disciplines and bringing them back from their boundless and aimless dispersal in individual fields and corners'.^{63,64}

NOTES

- 1 See Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, p. 44; *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1993), p. 22.
- 2 See Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 167/Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 3rd ed., *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 9 (Frankfurt a.M.: V. Klostermann, 1996) (hereafter GA9), p. 218. (On my translation of this title, see note 28 below.) I am aware that the preceding sentence

- ominously echoes the title of Nietzsche's politically compromised and deeply problematic early lectures 'On the Future of Our Educational Institutions' (which culminate with a call for a 'great Führer' [see Nietzsche, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, in O. Levy (ed.), *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1909), vol. 6; Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, ed. C. V. McDonald, trans. Kamuf and Ronell (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), p. 28]). I bracket such political connections here, but a complementary essay examines the darker side of Heidegger's philosophical critique of education, showing that it played a central role in his decision to join with the Nazis in the early 1930s; see my 'Heidegger and the Politics of the University' (forthcoming).
- 3 Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', *ibid.*, p. 167/GA9, p. 218.
- 4 See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1980). On Heidegger's distinctive understanding of 'essence', see my 'What's Wrong with Being a Technological Essentialist? A Response to Feenberg', *Inquiry* 43 (2000), pp. 429–44.
- 5 See Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 4; *ibid.*, pp. 30–31.
- 6 Cf. Feenberg's Hegelian misinterpretation of Heidegger's understanding of *essence* in 'The Ontic and the Ontological in Heidegger's Philosophy of Technology: Response to Thomson', *Inquiry* 43 (2000), pp. 445–50.
- 7 Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Truth', *op. cit.*, p. 145/GA9, p. 189.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 145–46 (my italics)/GA9, p. 190. I am of necessity simplifying Heidegger's complex account here, but see my 'Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's *Destruktion* of Metaphysics', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8 (October 2000), pp. 297–327.
- 9 See Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 3/*Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1953), p. 2.
- 10 See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), sect. 217, p. 85.
- 11 See also Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', *op. cit.*, p. 170/GA9, p. 222: 'The essence of "education" is grounded in the essence of "truth."'
- 12 See Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Nihilism*, ed. David Krell, trans. F. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 205/*Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), vol. II, p. 343.
- 13 Eventually, either a new ontotheology emerges (perhaps, as Kuhn suggests, out of the investigation of those 'anomalous' entities which resist being understood in terms of the dominant ontotheology), or else our underlying conception of the being of *all* entities would be brought into line with this spreading ontotheology. Although this latter alternative has never yet occurred, Heidegger calls it 'the greatest danger'; he is worried that our Nietzschean ontotheology could become *totalizing*, 'driving out every other possibility of revealing' by overwriting Dasein's 'special nature', our defining capacity for world-disclosure, with the 'total thoughtlessness' of a merely instrumental 'calculative reasoning'. See Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', *op. cit.*, p. 27; Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. J. Anderson and E. Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 56.
- 14 See Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', *ibid.*, pp. 16–20.
- 15 See esp. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 549–50. Here Nietzsche clearly conceives of beings *as such* as will to power and of the way the *totality* exists as eternally recurring. Nor can Heidegger's controversial reading be rejected simply by excluding this problematic text on the basis of its politically compromised ancestry, since Nietzsche's ontotheology can also be found in his other works.
- 16 Heidegger, 'Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being', *Nietzsche: Nihilism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 199–250.
- 17 See Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. P. Emad and K. Maly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 95/*Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom*

- Ereignis*), *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. F.-W. von Hermann (Frankfurt a.M., Vittorio Klostermann, 1989), vol. 65 (hereafter GA65), p. 137; *ibid.*, p. 94 (my emphasis)/GA65 p.135; Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', trans. W. Gregory, *Journal of Philosophical Research* 23 (1998), p. 136; Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, op. cit., p. 46; Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', p. 139; Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, trans. J. Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), p. 4. Baudrillard envisions a dystopian fulfilment of this dream, a 'grand delete' in which computers succeed in exhaustively representing meaning, then delete human life so as not to upset the perfectly completed equation. This dystopian vision stems from a faulty premise, however, since meaning can never be exhaustively represented. See below and Hubert L. Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).
- 18 See Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 152.
- 19 Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', op. cit., p. 18.
- 20 On the historical development of Heidegger's critique of higher education, see my 'Heidegger and the Politics of the University', op. cit.
- 21 Heidegger, 'What Is Metaphysics?', *Pathmarks*, op. cit., p. 82/GA9 p. 103.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83/GA9, pp. 103–4.
- 23 In 1962 Heidegger writes: 'The university... is presumably the most ossified school, straggling behind in its structure. Its name "University" trudges along only as an apparent title.... It can be doubted whether the talk about general education, about education as a whole, still meets the circumstances that are formed by the technological age.' (See Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', op. cit., p. 130.) As Charles Haskins explains: 'Historically, the word university had no connection with the universe or the universality of learning; it denotes only the totality of a group... an association of masters and scholars living the common life of learning'. See Haskins, *The Rise of Universities* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1923), pp. 14, 34.
- 24 See Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 152, 125; Timothy Clark, 'Literary Force: Institutional Values', *Culture Machine* 1 (November 1998), 'http://www.culturemachine.tees.ac.uk/CMach/Backissues/j001/articles/art_clar.html' (21 August 2000).
- 25 Readings, *The University in Ruins*, *ibid.*, pp. 132, 178. Readings calls for a (recognizably Heideggerian) refusal 'to submit Thought to the exclusive rule of exchange-value', but this is not a call he can justify in the materialist terms he adopts (see p. 178 and p. 222 note 10). Readings elegantly distinguishes three historical phases in the development of the modern university, characterizing each by reference to its guiding idea: 'the university of reason', 'the university of culture', and 'the university of excellence'. These distinctions are nice but a bit simplistic; for example, the university of reason existed for only a few fabled years at the University of Jena at the turn of the eighteenth century, where the greatest pedagogical and philosophical thinkers of the time – Fichte, Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, Schleiermacher, the Schlegel brothers, and others – developed the implications of German Idealism for education. Ironically, when this assemblage sought to formalize the principles underlying their commitment to the system of knowledge in order to inaugurate the University of Berlin, they inadvertently helped create the model of the university which succeeded their own: Humboldt's university of 'culture' (or better, *Bildung*, that is, a shared commitment to the formation of cultivated individuals). On Readings' materialist account, the industrial revolution's push toward globalization undermined the university of culture's unifying idea of serving a *national* culture, eventually generating its own successor, the contemporary 'university of excellence', a university defined by its *lack* of any substantive, unifying self-conception. Despite the great merits of Readings' book, this account of the historical transition from 'the university of culture' to 'the university of excellence' is overly dependent on a dubious equation of *Bildung* – the formation of cultivated individuals – with *national culture*. Heidegger's account of the development of education as reflecting an ontohistorical *dissolution* of its guiding idea is much more satisfactory. Although Heidegger is critical of aspects of (what Readings calls) 'the university of culture' and 'the university of excellence', we will see that Heidegger's own vision for the future of the

- university combines ontologically resuscitated understandings of *Bildung* and of excellence.
- 26 Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, op. cit., p. 26. For Derrida's deliberate restaging, see his 'The Principle of Reason: The University Through the Eyes of its Pupils', *Diacritics* 14 (Fall 1983), p. 5, where Derrida gives us 'something like an inaugural address'.
- 27 Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', op. cit., p. 95/GA9, p. 121.
- 28 Published in 1940, Heidegger's *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* summarizes and extends themes from a 1930–31 lecture course on Plato. I translate the title as 'Plato's Teaching on Truth' (rather than McNeill's 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth') to preserve Heidegger's reference to *teaching* and the title's dual implication (1) that education is grounded in (the history of) truth, as we have seen, and (2) that Plato's own doctrine concerning truth covers over and so obscures truth's historically earlier and ontologically more basic meaning, as we will see.
- 29 Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', op. cit., p. 167/GA9, p. 217.
- 30 See Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. G. Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). Contending that '*paideia*, the shaping of the Greek character', best explains 'the unique educational genius which is the secret of the undying influence of Greece on all subsequent ages', Jaeger pitches his work in terms that harmonize only too well with the growing Nazi currents (vitalism, the breeding of the Nietzschean 'higher man', race, the community, the leader, the state, etc.), e.g.: 'Every nation which has reached a certain stage of development is instinctively impelled to practice education. Education is the process by which a community preserves and transmits its physical character. For the individual passes away, but the type remains. . . . Education, as practised by man, is inspired by the same creative and directive vital force which impels every natural species to maintain and preserve its own type' (*Paideia*, p. xiii).
- 31 See Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. G. Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 71/*Was Heißt Denken?* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1984), p. 68: 'Polysemy is no objection against the rigorousness of what is thought thereby. For all genuine thinking remains in its essence thoughtfully . . . polysemic [*mehrdeutig*]. . . . Polysemy is the element in which all thinking must itself be underway in order to be rigorous'.
- 32 Heidegger writes '*Entschlossenheit*' ('resoluteness' or 'decisiveness') as '*Ent-schlossenheit*' ('un-closedness') in order to emphasize that the existential 'resoluteness' whereby *Dasein* finds a way to authentically choose the commitments which define it (and is thus 're-born' after having been radically individualized in being-toward-death) does not entail deciding on a particular course of action ahead of time and obstinately sticking to one's guns come what may, but rather requires an 'openness' whereby we continue to be responsive to the emerging solicitations of our particular existential 'situation'. The existential situation in general is thus not unlike a living puzzle we must continually 'resolve'. The later notion of *Gelassenheit* (or *Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*) names a comportment in which we maintain our sensitivity to several interconnected ways in which things show themselves to us – viz., as grounded, as mattering, as taking place within a horizon of possibilities, and as showing themselves to finite beings who disclose a world through language – four phenomenological modalities of 'presencing' that Heidegger (in a *détournement* of Hölderlin) calls 'earth', 'heavens', 'divinities', and 'mortals'. See Heidegger, 'The Thing', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, op. cit., pp. 165–86.
- 33 The increasingly dominant *metaphor*, too often literalized, of the brain as a computer forgets (to paraphrase a line from Heidegger's 1942–43 lecture course *Parmenides*) that we do not think *because* we have a brain; *we have* a brain *because* we can *think*.
- 34 Heidegger, 'Preface' to *Pathmarks*, op. cit., p. xiii.
- 35 Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', op. cit., p. 140; p. 142.
- 36 Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', op. cit., p. 167/GA9, pp. 217–18.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 168/GA9, p. 219. (See also John A. Taber, *Transformative Philosophy: A Study of Sankara, Fichte, and Heidegger* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983], esp. pp. 104–15.) *Aufenthalte* ('odyssey, abidance, sojourn, stay, or stop-over') is an important term of art for the later Heidegger; it connotes the journey through intelligibility definitive of human existence. Since it is the title Heidegger gave to the journal in which he recorded his thoughts during his first trip to Greece in the Spring of 1962 (see Heidegger, *Aufenthalte*

- [Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989]), it could be rendered as 'odyssey' to emphasize Heidegger's engagement with the Homeric heritage. The idea of a journey between nothingnesses adds a more poetic – and tragic – dimension to Heidegger's etymological emphasis on 'existence' as the 'standing-out' (*ek-sistere*) into intelligibility. Yet, like the Hebrew *gêr*, the 'sojourn' of the non-Israelite in Israel (see, e.g., Exod. 12.19), *Aufenthalte* clearly also connotes the 'home-coming through alterity' which Heidegger powerfully elaborates in his 1942 lecture course *Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'*, trans. W. McNeill and J. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), and is thus properly polysemic (or 'jewgreek', as Lyotard puts it – borrowing Joyce's provocative expression).
- 38 Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', *ibid.*, p. 167/GA9, p. 218.
 - 39 *Ibid.*, pp. 177–78/GA9, pp. 230–31.
 - 40 *Ibid.*, p. 181/GA9, p. 236.
 - 41 *Ibid.*, pp. 166–67/GA9, p. 217. The English 'education' harbors a similar ambiguity; it comes from the Latin *educare*, 'to rear or bring up', which is closely related to *educere*, 'to lead forth'. Indeed, 'education' seems to have absorbed the Latin *educere*, for it means not only 'bringing up' (in the sense of training) but also 'bringing forth' (in the sense of actualizing); these two meanings come together in the modern conception of education as a training which develops certain desirable aptitudes.
 - 42 *Ibid.*, p. 167/GA9, p. 217.
 - 43 *Ibid.*, p. 170/GA9, p. 222.
 - 44 *Ibid.*, 'The open', Heidegger explains, 'does not mean the unboundedness of some wide-open space; rather, the open sets boundaries to things.' *Ibid.*, p. 169/GA9, p. 221.
 - 45 See, e.g., Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–61.
 - 46 Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', *op. cit.*, p. 169/GA9, p. 221.
 - 47 Metaphysics forgets that the condition of its own possibility – namely, the 'presencing' (*anwesen*) of entities, their pre-conceptual phenomenological givenness – is also the condition of metaphysics' impossibility. For the phenomenological presencing which elicits conceptualization can never be entirely captured by the yoke of our metaphysical concepts; it always partially defies conceptualization, lingering behind as an extra-conceptual phenomenological excess.
 - 48 See Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', *op. cit.*, p. 176/GA9, p. 229.
 - 49 Heidegger knew from personal experience that this is no easy task; someone who has learned to 'dwell' in a mode of revealing other than enframing 'no longer knows his or her way around the cave and risks the danger of succumbing to the overwhelming power of the kind of truth that is normative there, the danger of being overcome by the claim of the common reality to be the only reality'. *Ibid.*, p. 171/GA9, pp. 222–3.
 - 50 As *The Oxford English Dictionary* explains, the etymology of 'teach' goes back through the Old English *tæcan* or *tæcean*. One of the first recorded uses of the word in English can be found in *The Blickling Homilies*, AD 971: '*Him tæcean lifes weg*'. Heidegger would have appreciated the fortuitous ambiguity of *weg* or 'way' here, which, like the Greek *hodos*, means both *path* and *manner*. For Heidegger, too, the teacher teaches two different 'ways', both *what* and *how*, subject and method. The Old English *tæcean* has near cognates in Old Teutonic (*taikjan*), Gothic (*taikans*), Old Spanish (*tekan*), and Old High German (*zeihhan*). This family can itself be traced back to the pre-Teutonic *deik-*, the Sanskrit *dic-*, and the Greek *deik-nunai*, *deigma*. *Deik*, the Greek root, means to bring to light, display, or exhibit, hence to *show* by words.
 - 51 Agamben traces this important ambiguity between *demonstration* and *indication* back to Aristotle's distinction between 'primary and secondary substance'. See Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. K. Pinkus and M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 16–18. In 'Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's *Destruction of Metaphysics*', *op. cit.*, I show that Aristotle's formalization of this distinction constitutes the inaugural *unification* of metaphysics as ontotheology (although its elements go back much further).
 - 52 '*Lernen heißt: das Tun und Lassen zu dem in die Entsprechung bringen, was sich jeweils an wesenhaftem uns zuspricht*'. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, *op. cit.*, p14/Was

- Heißt Denken?*, p. 49. See also James F. Ward, *Heidegger's Political Thinking* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 177.
- 53 Concerning the performative situation, remember that Heidegger had been banned from teaching by the University of Freiburg's 'de-Nazification' hearings in 1946, a decision reached in large part on the basis of Karl Jaspers' judgment that Heidegger's teaching was dictatorial, mystagogic, and in its essence unfree, and thus a danger to the youth. Here Heidegger treads a tightrope over this political abyss, seeking unapologetically to articulate and defend his earlier pedagogical method (although with the charges of corrupting the youth and of mysticism ringing in his ears, it is hard not to read his text as a kind of *apology*). See Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. E. Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 332–52.
- 54 See Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, op. cit., p. 15/*Was Heißt Denken?*, p. 50.
- 55 See Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', pp. 129–30.
- 56 See Heidegger, 'Plato's Teaching on Truth', op. cit., p. 176/GA9, p. 229.
- 57 See the ground-breaking development of this insight by Charles Spinosa, Fernando Flores, and Hubert L. Dreyfus in *Disclosing New Worlds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), a book Dreyfus has since accurately described as 'a revolutionary manifesto for business and politics' (and for higher education as well, see esp. pp. 151–61). See Hubert L. Dreyfus, 'Responses', in Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (eds), *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), p. 347.
- 58 Recall that on the medieval model of the university, the task of higher education was to transmit a relatively fixed body of knowledge. The French preserved something of this view; universities taught the supposedly established doctrines, while research took place outside the university in non-teaching academies. The French model was appropriated by the German universities which preceded Kant, in which the state-sponsored 'higher faculties' of law, medicine, and theology were separated from the more independent 'lower' faculty of philosophy. Kant personally experienced *The Conflict of the Faculties* of philosophy and theology (after publishing *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*), and his subsequent argument that it is in the best long-term interests of the state for the 'philosophy faculty' to be 'conceived as free and subject only to laws given by reason' helped inspire Fichte's philosophical elaboration of a German alternative to the French model. At the heart of Fichte's idea for the new University of Berlin, which Humboldt institutionalized in 1809, was the 'scientific' view of research as a dynamic, open-ended endeavour. Research and teaching would now be combined into a single institution of higher learning, with philosophy at the centre of a new proliferation of academic pursuits. See Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. M. J. Gregor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 43; Haskins, *The Rise of Universities*, op. cit.; Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 218–308; Stephen Galt Crowell, 'Philosophy as a Vocation: Heidegger and University Reform in the Early Interwar Years', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14:2 (1997), pp. 257–9; Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Die Idee der deutschen Universität* (Darmstadt: Hermann Gentner Verlag, 1956), p. 377; and Jacques Derrida, 'The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils', op. cit.
- 59 See Heidegger, 'Phenomenology and Theology', *Pathmarks*, op. cit., p. 41/GA9, p. 48.
- 60 It is alarming thus to find philosophers of biology unknowingly extending the logic of Nietzschean metaphysics so far as inadvertently to grant 'life' to the computer virus, the cybernetic entity *par excellence*.
- 61 See Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', *The Question Concerning Technology*, op. cit., p. 118; see Trish Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).
- 62 See Heidegger, 'The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts', in Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering (eds), *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), p. 16.
- 63 Heidegger, 'The Self-Assertion of the German University', *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, *ibid.*, p. 9. It may seem provocative to end with a quote from Heidegger's notorious 'Rectoral Address', but see my 'Heidegger and the Politics of the University', which focuses on the political dimension of Heidegger's philosophical views on education

and critically investigates the plausibility of his programme for a reunification of the university.

- 64 An early version of this paper was delivered to the annual meeting of the International Society for Phenomenological Studies on 28 July 2000 in Asilomar, California; I would like to thank Bill Blattner, Dave Cerbone, Steve Crowell, Charles Guignon, Alastair Hannay, John Haugeland, Randall Havas, Sean Kelly, Jeff Malpas, Alexander Nehamas, and Mark Wrathall for helpful comments and criticisms. I presented a later version to the University of New Mexico Philosophy Department on 2 February 2001, and would like to thank John Bussanich, Manfred Frings, Russell Goodman, Barbara Hannan, Joachim Oberst, Fred Schueler, and John Taber for thoughtful critique on that occasion. I would also like to thank Leszek Koczanowicz, who has arranged for a Polish translation of this piece, and Michael Peters, for requesting to include it in his forthcoming volume on *Heidegger, Modernity, and Education* (Rowman & Littlefield). My deepest thanks, finally, go to Bert Dreyfus, not only for offering encouraging and insightful suggestions on both versions of this piece, but for inspiring it by exemplifying the virtues of the Heideggerian teacher.

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