

The History of Being and the Undecidability of Sense

(Chapter 7 of Draft MS: *The Logic of Being: Heidegger, Truth, and Time*)

Heidegger's project during and after the "turn" or *Kehre* of the mid-1930s is characterized by the transition from the "guiding" question of the being of beings to the "grounding" question of the truth of Being itself. At the same time, Heidegger undertakes an intensified inquiry into the structure, origin, and being of language. Both developments play important roles in the later Heidegger's analysis of the "history of being": the historical determination of the different epochal interpretations of the being of beings and of the epoch of metaphysics itself. In this chapter, developing what Reiner Schürmann has called "hegemonic phantasms," I consider the constitution of the sense of beings in particular being-historical epochs. I argue that we must understand this determination as having an underlying logical structure of *undecidability*. In particular, the fixation of the sense of beings in a particular historical epoch involves constituting reference to an organizing structure that is itself undecidable in terms of the ontological difference between beings and being. This implies that sense cannot completely be stabilized by any epochal interpretation, and provides the conditions under which these interpretations can radically transform themselves. As I argue, this undecidability is structurally analogous or homologous to the undecidability that Derrida has located at the necessary boundaries of determined textual regimes. Furthermore, it bears important structural similarities to the necessary undecidability of formal systems and procedures demonstrated by Gödel and Turing.

In "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", Donald Davidson argues on the basis of linguistic considerations against relativism with respect to what have been called "conceptual schemes." Because of the holistic character of language and the necessity of employing "principles of charity" in any linguistic interpretation, it is not coherent to see different historical languages as embodying distinct "conceptual schemes" or total ways of organizing contents or "the world." The argument can seem to threaten pictures of the history of science, such as Thomas Kuhn's, according to which this history has been shaped or determined by a series of particular configurations of intelligibility or understanding of things. It can seem that such pictures demand that successive regimes of intelligibility, or partisans of successive paradigms, are mutually *incommensurable* in a sense that is incompatible with Davidson's anti-relativist argument. I shall argue that Heidegger's conception of the epochs of the history of being, as determined by an original differentiation of being with itself, provides grounds for resolving this apparent tension. This points, in turn, to the irreducibly *temporal* dynamics of undecidable sense that characterizes historical languages as such. As I shall argue, these dynamics involve a phenomenon of "strong" incommensurability which is an inherent characteristic feature of any historical language that structurally introduces principles or paradigms that govern the total intelligibility of entities as a whole. This "strong" incommensurability is not the incommensurability of "no common measure" between two separately constituted languages, cultures, practices, or schemes. Rather, it stems from the ultimate failure of each language consistently and decidably to measure itself. This points to a temporal

determination of the changing interpretations of beings that is not in competition with Davidson's anti-relativist conclusions, and introduces considerations bearing against humanist, anthropological and culturalist conceptions of the foundations of sense. Additionally, it provides new terms and concepts for a formally motivated critique of the technological present.

I

In the *Beiträge zur Philosophie: vom Ereignis*, Martin Heidegger specifies the transition from the previous "guiding question" [Leitfrage] of philosophy, that of the nature of beings, to the "grounding" question [Grundfrage] of the "truth of being":

Die Seinsfrage ist die Frage nach der Wahrheit des Seyns.¹ Geschichtlich vollzogen und begriffen wird sie gegenüber der bisherigen Frage der Philosophie nach dem Seienden (der Leitfrage) zur Grundfrage.²

According to Heidegger, philosophy previously has interpreted beings in terms of a general essence or characteristic type of entity, thus characterizing the underlying nature of beings by reference to some kind of "highest" entity. Being, in this sense, has hitherto been interpreted as "beingness" [Seiendheit] – the most general essence or characteristic common to beings as such and as a whole.³ The various historical periods or epochs have themselves conceived this general character in terms of one or another specific entity. By contrast, the question of the truth of being asks historically about the conditions for the possibility of *this* interpretation as it unfolds in each of the determinate conceptions of the nature of beings that comprise the history of metaphysical thought.⁴ This is a history of the progressive "abandonment" [verlassenheit] or "forgottenness" [vergessenheit] of being wherein being is understood, more and more, in terms of what is most general and common to entities.⁵ With the transition to the historical "grounding question," however, it is no longer possible to understand being overall in terms of, or by reference to, beings. There is no longer any possibility for thought to decide on the being of what is, except from out of the truth of Being. Thus, "Dieses [Seyn] kann daher nicht mehr vom Seienden her gedacht, es muß aus ihm selbst erdacht werden."⁶ What is here thought is how being "essentially occurs" [wie das Seyn west] - both its character in and of itself, and how it conditions the specific epochs of history in which beings as a whole are successively revealed in the light of some determinate standard, measure, or conception.

The sequence of historical epochs that characterizes the history of the interpretation of being hitherto is specified, with minor variations, in the *Beiträge* and several other texts. In the 1943 lecture "Nietzsche's

¹ In the *Beiträge*, Heidegger writes "Seyn" to designate being as it is thought outside its metaphysical determination as beingness.

² *Beiträge* (GA 65), s. 6.

³ *Beiträge* (GA 65), s. 75.

⁴ *Beiträge* (GA 65), s. 75-77, s. 116-117.

⁵ *Beiträge* (GA 65), s. 116.

⁶ *Beiträge* (GA 65), s. 7.

Word: God is Dead," the ontic principles that have governed collective understanding and action through the history of metaphysics as the history of the basic constitution of beings as a whole [das Grundgefüge des Seienden im Ganzen] are given as "die übersinnliche Welt, die Ideen, Gott, das Sittengesetz, die Vernunftautorität, der Fortschritt, das Glück der Meisten, die Kultur, die Zivilisation..."⁷ In the 1957 lecture "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics," Heidegger specifies the "historical stampings" [geschicklichen Prägungen] of Being, somewhat differently, as "*phusis, logos, hen, idea, energeia*, Substantialität, Objektivität, Subjektivität, Wille, Wille zur Macht, Wille zum Willen."⁸ Here, the historical succession begins with the Greek conceptions of the character of the world and thought and proceeds through Descartes' interpretation of thinking and being in terms of subject and object, eventually culminating in the configuration of contemporary technology, which Heidegger identifies as prepared by Nietzsche's metaphysics of will. The Nietzschean principle of the will to power is here ultimately understood as a redoubled "will to will" in which entities are constantly handled, circulated and calculated without any overarching purpose or goal except instrumentality itself. As Iain Thomson has argued in connection with Heidegger's thesis in "The Onto-Theological Constitution of Metaphysics", the constitution of the metaphysical thought of being in each epoch must in fact be understood as double, both "ontological" and "theological."⁹ It is, in particular, a construction both "from below" in terms of the most basic underlying character of beings as such, and "from above" in terms of an ultimate referent, a superior being that encompasses and governs beings as a whole.¹⁰ The determination of beings in terms of beingness thus always involves such a twofold grounding, both in terms of the ultimate character of beings and in terms of the privileged being that is elevated above all others as a supreme and organizing principle of "cause and ground."¹¹

As Heidegger suggests in the *Beiträge*, each configuration can also be thought as a particular specification of the relationship between thought and being that Parmenides first specified as a unity:

Thinking and being are the same (or: For the same thing is there to be thought of and to be).¹²

It is in accordance with this guiding conception that Parmenides also specifies the necessity to "say and think that being is".¹³ The statement exhibits not only a basic determination of thinking (*noein*) but also a certain priority of the *logos*, which (understood both as "logic" and as language) will act as an

⁷ *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 204/221; also quoted in Schürmann (1987), p. 230.

⁸ Stambaugh, *Identity and Difference*, p. 134.

⁹ Thomson (2005), pp. 14-16.

¹⁰ Thomson (2005, p. 16) gives a paired list of some 17 ontological and theological determinants of entities "as such" and "as a whole", including as key moments Plato's determination of the idea as universal and as paradigm, the Cartesian determination of subjectivity as the ultimate determination of knowledge and the subject as the principle, and, finally, the culminating configuration of "will to power" and "eternal return of the same" that is exemplified in Nietzsche's metaphysics and characterizes the contemporary configuration of technology and calculative trafficking with entities.

¹¹ Thomson (2005), p. 15.

¹² Parmenides Fr. 3 (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, p. 246): *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*. The provenance and correct translation of the fragment are controversial.

¹³ Fr. 6 (KRS, p. 247): *chre to legein te noein t' eon emmenai*. Cf. Heidegger, *Was Heisst Denken?*, Part II, lectures 6-11.

organizing structure for all determinate configurations of the being of beings subsequently.¹⁴ In the *Beiträge*, Heidegger suggests that the whole history of metaphysics can be understood as standing under the “mastery” [*Herrschaft*] of a Platonism that determines a certain “manner of dealing with the guiding question” [*Art der Leitfragenbehandlung*], a manner that “can be indicated by the title: being and thinking” [kann angezeigt werden durch den Titel: *Sein und Denken*].¹⁵ In particular, within the history of the development of this formula in Western thought, “being” refers to beingness, or to what is thought as the most general character of beings, and “thinking” is meant in the sense of “representing something in general” [des Vor-stellens von etwas im Allgemeinen].¹⁶ Heidegger suggests that the succession of configurations determined by this pairing of a general conception of being as beingness and thought as representation culminates in a contemporary configuration that sets “machination” [*Machenschaft*] – a universal calculability and technological handling of beings – against “lived experience” [*Erlebnis*], or the standard of neutral experienceability by anyone in general. According to Heidegger, the “hidden” unity of these two determinations – of beings as calculable and capable of technical manipulation and of lived-experience as the ultimate standard for their reality – characterizes “more originally” the metaphysical unity of thinking and being itself:

Machenschaft und Erlebnis ist formelhaft die ursprünglichere Fassung der Formel für die Leitfrage des abendländischen Denkens: Seiendheit (Sein) und Denken (als vor-stellendes Begreifen).¹⁷

In particular, Heidegger suggests, if machination and lived experience are grasped together in their belonging to each other, “dann ist zugleich der Grundzug der Geschichte des ersten Anfangs (die Geschichte der abendländischen Metaphysik) bereits aus dem Wissen des anderen Anfangs her begriffen.”¹⁸ In this way, the consideration of the determination of the contemporary configuration of the technical understanding and manipulation of beings – what is here understood as machination and elsewhere discussed as *Gestell* -- can itself provide a kind of insight or hint into the character of being in itself, a “first hint” to the event of being, *Ereignis*.¹⁹

Along with the first explicit consideration of the epochal history of being, Heidegger’s turn toward the “grounding question” of being itself in the 1930s is also marked by a renewed attention to the ontological and historical character of *language*. While on the one hand Heidegger now understands the epochal configurations of metaphysics as intimately related to the “historical languages” that successively articulate them, on the other he now poses the question of the “being of language” itself as

¹⁴ Cf. *Beiträge*, s. 457: “Nun wird durch eine bestimmte Auslegung des Seins (als *idea*) das *noein* des Parmenides zum *noein* des *dialegesthai* bei Plato. Der *logos* des Heraklit wird zum *logos* als Aussage, wird Leitfaden der “Kategorien” (Plato: “Sophistes”). Die Verkoppelung beider zur *ratio* und d.h. die entsprechende Fassung von *nous* und *logos* bereitet sich bei Aristoteles vor.”

¹⁵ *Beiträge*, s. 196.

¹⁶ *Beiträge*, s. 196.

¹⁷ *Beiträge*, s. 128.

¹⁸ *Beiträge*, s. 128.

¹⁹ “Die Machenschaft als Wesung der Seiendheit gibt einen ersten Wink in die Wahrheit des Seyns selbst.” (*Beiträge*, s. 127).

one closely related to the radicalized “grounding” question of the truth of being itself.²⁰ During this period, Heidegger considers the investigations of Herder into the origins and expressive structure of languages.²¹ These considerations can be related to a more general mystery or paradox of the origin of language in its referential, descriptive, or nominative relation to the world. In particular, *prima facie* there is a paradox that arises whenever language is thought to be originally connected to the world through some initial act of institution or primary naming: the paradox is that, for the requisite connections between words and things to be set up, it must apparently be presupposed that things are already understood in determinate ways. But this understanding plausibly only comes *through* language, and so *cannot* be thus presupposed. The institution of meaning thus appears to presuppose that meaning already exists, and so the possible origin of language itself remains obscure on any such picture.²²

For Heidegger, this paradoxical situation that arises in considering the origin of language is actually positively indicative of an ontologically characteristic feature of language in relation to its being: its tendency to withdraw or refuse itself to positive overall description. In 1957, in the course of reading of a poem of Stefan George, Heidegger specifies this *positive* characteristic of the “being of language” that appears in its withdrawal:

Manches spricht dafür, daß das Wesen der Sprache es gerade verweigert, zur Sprache zu kommen, nämlich zu der Sprache, in der wir über die Sprache Aussagen machen. Wenn die Sprache überall ihr Wesen in diesem Sinne verweigert, dann gehört diese Verweigerung zum Wesen der Sprache. Somit halt die Sprache nicht nur dot an sich, wo wir sie gewohnterweise sprechen, sondern dieses ihr An-sich-halten wird von daher bestimmt, daß die Sprache mit ihrer Herkunft an sich halt und so ihr Wesen dem uns gelaufigen Vorstellen versagt. Für diesen Fall dürfen wir aber dann auch nicht mehr sagen, das Wesen der Sprache sei die Sprache des Wesens, es sei denn, das Wort »Sprache« besage in der zweiten Wendung etwas anderes und sogar solches, worin die Verweigerung des Sprachwesens - spricht.²³

The paradox of the institution of meaning is thus, according to Heidegger, actually positively indicative of a claim in which something “speaks”. This “something” is nothing other than the “withholding” [Verweigerung] of the being of language, the resistance of language to any positive description of its own basic structure, and in particular of the ultimate basis of the relationship it sets up between words and things.

Seen in the context of the history of being, what is indicated in the paradox of origin and in the withdrawal and refusal of language to its own positive description can also be grasped as pointing toward that deeper character of language that is thought, through the Western tradition, as the

²⁰ Cf. Beiträge, sections 36-38 and 281.

²¹ *Vom Wesen der Sprache* (GA 85); cf. also *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache* (GA 38), esp. sections 6 and 29, and *Sein und Wahrheit* (GA 36/37)

²² Cf. Livingston (2012), chapter 1.

²³ *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (GA 12), s. 186/175.

character of the “logos”. This, in particular, in connection with the relation that is thought since early in western history as that of “language to an entity as such”:

Sobald wir bedenken, hier werde das Verhältnis von Ding und Wort genannt, somit das Verhältnis der Sprache zu einem jeweils Seienden als solchem, haben wir das Dichterische in das Nachbarliche eines Denkens herüber gerufen. Dieses jedoch, das Denken, vermischt dabei nichts Fremdes. Denn mit das Früheste, was durch das abendlandische Denken ins Wort gelangt, ist das Verhältnis von Ding und Wort, und zwar in der Gestalt des Verhältnisses von Sein und Sagen. Dieses Verhältnis überfällt das Denken so bestürzend, daß es sich in einem einzigen Wort ansagt. Es lautet: *logos*. Dieses Wort spricht in einem zumal als der Name für das Sein und für das Sagen.²⁴

Throughout the succession of historical determinations of the beingness of beings, *logos* names simultaneously Being and Saying, and thus points to the assumed basis or actual ground for the possible linguistic expressibility of things as such. Within the ambit of this overarching determination, the various specific ontological and theological determinants of beingness capture beings insofar as they are thinkable and expressible at all. Throughout the history of metaphysics, this determination occurs through the particular historical languages that privilege such specific determinants of the nature of beings as such and as a whole.

How should we understand the basis of this determination, whereby historical languages themselves become structured by the privileged standards or measures of beingness that in turn determine how beings “as a whole and as such” appear and can appear? In *Heidegger on Being and Acting and Broken Hegemonies*, Reiner Schürmann interprets Heidegger as pointing to a series of “principal economies” that have successively unfolded over the historical time. Each is stabilized by a particular “epochal principle” which functions to stabilize and orient practice by elevating a *particular* entity to the rank of an absolute measure or standard for the interpretation of *all* beings.²⁵ According to Schürmann, the role of the principles in ordering beings within a particular epoch must be understood historically in both a proactive and a retroactive sense. That is, their authority must be understood both from the perspective of their institution and that of their destitution, both as origin and in the “reversal” in which, in falling into ruin, they first become visible and accessible as such to retrospective critical consideration.²⁶ It is in these historical reversals, in particular, according to Schürmann, that the history of being itself becomes visible as a “phenomenology of the reversals of history” marking the conditions for the intelligibility and sense of beings as a whole as they appear in each epoch of metaphysics. This history is, at the same time, more broadly grounded by the “difference between presence and presencing” that underlies the “phenomenological” “genealogy of the formations of economies of presence.”²⁷ In *Broken Hegemonies*, along similar lines, Schürmann understands the history of metaphysical norms and principles as structured by a series of “hegemonic fantasms” that successively “justify ... all that may become a phenomenon during the linguistic epoch that bears its hallmark” (p. 7).

²⁴ *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (GA 12), s. 185/174.

²⁵ Schürmann (1987), p. 17.

²⁶ Schürmann (1987), p. 30.

²⁷ Schürmann (1987), p. 31.

These successive principles are thus “hegemonic” in their scope with respect to the determination of beings as a whole, but they are not themselves ultimately justified in any final or definitive way. Their institution results from the raising of some particular being to the status of an “ultimate” referent, whereby they constitute a regulated total set of relationships among beings, allowing “all that we are able to say, do, and know” to be arranged under them, while themselves not appearing among the beings thus arranged and regulated (p. 8).

This structure of the stabilization of organizing referents replicates, at each moment of transition from one epoch to the next, the original paradox of the institution of language itself. In particular, since each epochal economy achieves, by means of the elevation of an epochal standard, the ability to refer to and express beings as a whole, each one instantiates the general structural paradox of the authority of a particular element over the totality of which it is a part. If each hegemonic phantasm “measures measures”, setting up in its institution a total system of legitimacy in which beings become intelligible as such and regulating what can appear at all, then each also constitutively implies the paradox that the measure itself cannot be measured in its own terms.²⁸ The ultimate standard both is and is not an entity; it is the source of all measurement and regulation that, for this very reason, cannot itself be measured.²⁹ This is the condition under which it can be simultaneously elevated from within, and held above, the realm of beings as such. This paradox also provides the structural condition under which, according to Schürmann, a principial economy, once instituted in terms of such an ultimate referent, must ultimately wither. In particular, such a decline occurs, as it must, “when the phantasm promoted to the normative rank for an epoch suddenly appears as one commonplace representation among others.”³⁰ Here, the “singularization” involved in the institution of any economy of presence, whereby one being is separated from all others to serve as a standard for their regulation, itself succumbs to an underlying “differend” (Widerstreit) that both supports and undermines the separation, pointing to their deeper underlying condition in the differentiation between presencing and presence itself.³¹

According to Schürmann, Heidegger with his description of the history of the interpretation of being as the history of the institution and diremption of epochs, will thus have pointed out an ultimate origin of all phenomenalization in a differentiating difference that precedes and conditions all instituted economies of principles. This suggests as well the possibility of a condition beyond the kind of presencing that has been determined by principles throughout the history of metaphysics. Such a configuration would be literally an-archic; it would be, as Schürmann argues, one in which the force of the *arche* to organize and bind would no longer be in effect. Schürmann suggests that we can learn from Heidegger’s discussion of the structure of *Ereignis* as appropriation and expropriation something of this more basic condition of heteronomy:

²⁸ Schürmann (2003), pp. 96-97.

²⁹ Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, section 50: “Aber man möchte sagen: Man kann dem Element nicht Sein beilegen, denn *wäre* es nicht, so konnte man es auch nicht einmal nennen und also gar nichts von ihm aussagen. – Betrachten wir doch einen analogen Fall! Man kann von *einem* Ding nicht aussagen, es sei 1 m lang, noch, es sei nicht 1 m lang, und das ist das Urmeter in Paris.” (p. 29)

³⁰ Schürmann (2003), p. 614.

³¹ Schürmann (2003), pp. 34-36; p. 527.

At least one *law of the other* can, in any event, be learned from Heidegger, one that is severed from the whole problem of determinate negation – a revival of a heteronomy which, however, is not posited and which therefore is incapable of opposing autonomy. Thus, the law of the other is the link by which we are ever bound to being *qua* event. But this event has literally nothing in common. ... The event, Heidegger will be shown to say, works on phenomena in a twofold manner. It appropriates them in a world and expropriates them by means of their mortifying singularization that is always immanent. All references posited as uniformly obligatory are fractured upon this conflictual (and therefore not simple) *singularum tantum*. (p. 47).

According to Schürmann, it is thus the original character of *Ereignis* itself which appears as the paradox of institution that is repeated at each moment of the institution of a new epoch and the destitution of an old one. The paradoxical situation that ultimately brings about the destitution of each instituted epoch itself is an expression of the more general paradox of the original institution of language, which is obscured or stabilized through the assumption of the stable correspondence of word and thing in the *logos*, but is not thereby removed. Structurally, this paradox itself points to the underlying character of Being itself, beyond the epochal determinations of it, in its “granting” or determination of each of the particular epochs and in the history of the metaphysical determination of being as presence in its totality.

But if epochal measures, in their determinative reference to beings as a whole, cannot measure themselves, then this structure of paradox points to a basic type of *strong incommensurability* that characterizes each historical language in relation to itself. This “strong” incommensurability is the direct result of the way in which each epoch determines the structure of its possible reference and expression by elevating a particular referent to the status of a regulative standard for beings as a whole. But no such measure can ultimately measure itself; each instituted economy is thus structurally characterized by a basic incommensurability or failure of measure, whereby the language itself fails to ground and measure the standards by which it measures all beings. This incommensurability is not the familiar incommensurability of “no common measure” between two separately constituted languages, but rather a more basic structural failure of measure of each total language with respect to itself under the condition that it achieves and attempts to stabilize reference to the totality of beings by elevating a particular being or type of beings.³² As I shall argue, it is because they are strongly incommensurable in this sense that each language has, with respect to its ultimate referents, the *temporal* character of institution and destitution. It is, in particular, this strong incommensurability that makes it possible and even necessary that an epochal economy, once instituted, eventually withers away and dies. For if measures are normally held in force by inertia, authority or habit, nevertheless they *can*, under certain circumstances, be questioned, and the questioning may lead to the condition under which the hegemonic referent which has functioned as ultimate appears once more as a simple object of representation among others.

³² In Livingston (2012), pp. 285-87, I contrasted this “strong” incommensurability, or incommensurability of the immeasurable, with the claim of “weak” incommensurability that characterizes the spontaneous conviction of contemporary belief in its emphasis on cultural difference and the pluralism of communities and cultural practices.

If the principles that determine the character of being for an epoch thus yield to the paradox of strong incommensurability, then the guidance they provide for decisions on the sense of things must itself yield to a deeper structural undecidability. This is particularly clear when the sense of words and linguistic expressions is seen, as it is for Heidegger, as inevitably pre-determined by a previous understanding of the being of beings that first makes them available as intelligible objects of reference and description. For Heidegger in *Being and Time*, sense is understood as the specific kind of temporal *projection* upon possibilities by means of which Da-sein renders entities intelligible. The concept of sense fixes the formal framework [das formale Gerüst], in particular, “worin sich Verständlichkeit von etwas hält” as the “upon-which” [Woraufhin] of the “durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff strukturierte Woraufhin des Entwurfs...”³³ It is thus grounded in the hermeneutic structure that makes possible all interpretation, itself defined by these “fore-structures”, as well as constitutively related to the structure of truth as unconcealment or disclosure.³⁴ This projection always has a totalizing character in that it first “opens” the domain of entities as a whole by providing an overarching conceptual fixation of their overall way of being; both in particular domains and with respect to beings as a whole, sense is thus determined by the interpretive projection that first renders the relevant beings intelligible in their being. In the *Beiträge* and Heidegger’s later thought generally, this conception of sense as the projective opening of a domain of entities is retained, while the ground on which it takes place is radicalized.³⁵ In particular, the basis of sense is here no longer seen as a specific activity of Dasein but rather as involving the prior phenomenon of what Heidegger calls the *clearing*: the underlying structure of concealment and unconcealment within which Da-sein itself is, alone, in fact possible and achievable. But even after this radicalization of the specific structure of truth, sense remains connected to it at a basic level, as that which is opened in the temporal projection by means of which a domain of entities, including entities as a whole, are first opened for intelligibility and thus for the subsequent possibility of explicit linguistic discussion and referent.

In the history of being project, the projection of sense thus has a basic relationship to the constitution of the historical languages of metaphysics. This temporal projection, in making entities accessible, prepares the possibility of determinate reference that subsequently characterizes the structure of a language overall. It thereby yields the determinate standards and principles of logic, grammar, and practice by which its speakers measure beings in their being. Once instituted, these principles and standards provide a basis for linguistic decision on sense within the constituted domain. But they cannot ultimately decide on themselves; in particular, they cannot provide a univocal basis for deciding on their *own* scope of application. There is thus a structurally necessary undecidability of linguistic sense that can be shown to be a necessary feature of each historical language and can even be positively demonstrated in the course of a formal analysis of the conditions of semantical structure for such languages.

³³ S&Z, s. 151.

³⁴ For the “fore-“structures, see S&Z, p. 150.

³⁵ Cf. *Beiträge*, s. 10: “Die Frage nach dem “Sinn”, d. h. nach der Erläuterung in “Sein und Zeit” die Frage nach der Gründung des Entwurfsbereichs, kurz nach der *Wahrheit des Seyns* ist und bleibt *meine* Frage und ist *meine einzige*, denn sie gilt ja dem *Einzigsten*.”

This structural undecidability arises within instituted languages, as I shall argue, at the inherent point at which these languages reflexively figure or envision their own constitutive relation to being in the sense of truth. For whereas each such language includes within itself, as an inherent structural moment, the capacity to describe and consider the sense and meaning of its own sentences in general, each one also involves a going conception of these sentences as capable of truth or falsehood which relates their behavior, at least implicitly and in general, to being as such. On the internal conception each historical language has of itself, sense is thus constitutively linked to truth; but the fixation of sense by determinate standards and rules allows what can only be, from the perspective of this constitutive link, limited and relative procedures of decision. As I shall argue on semantic and formal grounds, in relation to new phenomena and unanticipated cases, it is thus, on one hand, never possible fully to specify unitary procedures which will always completely and exceptionlessly determine the sense of linguistic terms. But this undecidability is, on the other hand, not merely limitative, since it also points to an original ontological structure linking historically instituted languages to the structure of truth, and thereby to being itself. In particular, the gap between the reflexive self-conception of a language that opens it to truth and the determinate procedures that decide sense within it means that each such language, even in totalizing beings according to determinate standards, is necessarily, and structurally, open to the possibility of its own transformation. This ultimate undecidability of historically instituted languages, based in the paradoxical behavior with respect to self-reference and totality thus points, as I shall argue, to the underlying *temporal* structure of the historical as such.

II

In “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” Donald Davidson gives a well-known and far-ranging argument against the “heady and exotic” doctrine of conceptual relativism.³⁶ In particular, Davidson argues that it is incoherent to suppose that different systems of categories, conceptual perspectives or conceptual organizations of experience are embodied in “conceptual schemes” that are both identical with or contained within particular languages and significantly distinct from one another. The basis of Davidson’s argument is his inquiry into the structure linguistic interpretation; this inquiry also forms the methodological core of his influential program for the provision of theories of meaning for natural languages. On Davidson’s program, a theory of meaning for a language is a recursive structure which allows the systematic derivation, from a finite number of semantic primitives, of the truth-conditions of the totality of the language’s sentences.³⁷ These sentences have the form suggested by Tarski in his own theory of the structure of truth-definitions for particular languages, systematically coordinating sentences with their truth-conditions; for each sentence of the interpreted language, the Davidsonian theory of meaning thus yields a sentence in the language of the interpreter stating the conditions under which it is true. Davidson further requires that the theory of meaning must itself be worked out under the condition of “radical interpretation.” Here, the interpreter has no initial knowledge of the language

³⁶ Davidson (1973), p. 183.

³⁷ See Davidson (1965), Davidson (1967), Davidson (1970), and Davidson (1973).

to be interpreted and must reconstruct its meaning on the basis only of the intersubjectively available evidence, including speakers' assent or dissent to particular sentences under particular conditions.

Under this constraint, as Davidson argues "Belief and the Basis of Meaning", it will be impossible actually to interpret the language of a speaker unless a significant amount of agreement between the interpreter and the interpreted is actually assumed at the outset. In particular, since it is not possible to interpret another speaker's beliefs by means of her utterances unless it can be largely assumed that they express truths, there is always a necessary trade-off of belief and meaning in interpretation. It is thus obligatory to apply what have been called "principles of charity" in interpretation: it must be assumed that the beliefs of the speakers under interpretation are largely identical with one's own in order for the interpretation even to be possible in general.³⁸ For this reason, the very possibility of interpretation involves a "vast amount of agreement on plain matters" and the possibility of disagreement is generally only intelligible against an assumed background of "widespread" agreement.³⁹ Because of the way charity thus figures in the necessary conditions of any possible interpretation, Davidson argues in "On the Very Idea," it is in fact impossible to judge the concepts or beliefs of the speakers of another language to be "radically" different from our own, given that interpretation is possible at all.⁴⁰

As Davidson notes, a defender of the idea of multiple conceptual schemes might take refuge in the idea of mutually untranslatable languages, so that two languages embodying wholly distinct conceptual schemes might be thought of as simply incapable of being translated into one another. But here Davidson challenges the basis of the underlying metaphor that makes sense of the idea that a pattern of behavior embodies a linguistic "conceptual scheme" at all. On the most common accounts, such a scheme is successful insofar as it succeeds in "organizing" or "fitting" the world, objects, or the "given" of experience.⁴¹ These metaphors of organization and fit themselves have various versions, but Davidson argues that none of them are ultimately coherent. For, to begin with, the idea of a relationship of "organizing" between language and reality (or experience) presupposes the prior existence and determinate ontology of the entities that are supposed to be organized. Once this is assumed, however, there is no longer any room for a radical difference in the ontologies of different conceptual schemes. Variant conceptual schemes will then just be different ways of expressing the same ontology rather than the embodiment of radically different ones.⁴² The idea of an accurate scheme or theory as correct in that it accurately or appropriately "fits" the totality of experience or the world is similarly idle, Davidson suggests, in that we understand the appropriateness of the "fit" only as a matter of the scheme or theory being largely *true*.⁴³ But we understand truth only through the kind of translation or interpretation of sentences that is modeled explicitly by the corpus of Tarskian T-sentences. Once a Tarskian truth-theory for a language is given, the metaphor of "fit" adds nothing

³⁸ Davidson (1967), p. 27; Davidson (1974), p. 153.

³⁹ Davidson (1974a), p. 153.

⁴⁰ Davidson (1974b), p. 197.

⁴¹ Davidson (1974b), p. 191.

⁴² Davidson (1974b), p. 192.

⁴³ Davidson (1974b), pp. 193-194.

substantive. In particular, it again cannot serve as a basis for comparing what are thought of as distinct “conceptual schemes” set over against the world or the totality of experience.

Davidson suggests that the idea of a dualism of “scheme and content” embodied in the metaphors of fitting or organizing is a dogma, a “third” dogma of empiricism to be added to what Quine treated as the dogmas of reductionism and the analytic/synthetic distinction.⁴⁴ According to Davidson, the dualism of scheme and content underlies the idea that two languages or “theories” may be *incommensurable* in the sense that there is no neutral or empirical way to settle substantive differences or disagreements between them. This appears, in particular, in the example Davidson gives, to be the position of Kuhn in his interpretation of the history of science as structured by a series of successive theories or “paradigms” which replace one another discontinuously in the events that Kuhn calls “scientific revolutions.” Specifically, Kuhn holds that:

In the transition from one theory to the next words change their meanings or conditions of applicability in subtle ways. Though most of the same signs are used before and after a revolution – e.g. force, mass, element, compound, cell – the way in which some of them attach to nature has somehow changed. Successive theories are thus, we say, incommensurable.⁴⁵

Davidson suggests that Kuhn means “incommensurable,” here, in the sense of “not mutually translatable”: the supposed difference between two theories in their “way” of “attaching to nature” is thus taken to imply that the similar-sounding locutions used by the two theories are not in fact capable of being translated into one another without loss. At any rate, it is clear that, as Davidson now suggests, the very possibility of making sense of alternative or older theories as determinate theories at all undermines this claim of untranslatability. The proponents of older theories or paradigms might be seen as ignorant of phenomena of which we now know, or confused in grouping together some entities now distinguished or drawing distinctions where no real ones exist. But if we can understand their theory at all there is no general ground for the claim of untranslatability, and Kuhn’s metaphorical picture of different theories as embodying distinct “ways of attaching to nature,” which again turns on the dualism of scheme and content, is itself incoherent.

At first glance, it can seem that Davidson’s argument in “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” poses a direct challenge to Heidegger’s conception of the history of being. Like Kuhn’s successive “paradigms,” Heidegger’s successive “epochs” explicitly involve basically different global ways of understanding the nature of things and the larger contours of reality. Indeed, for Heidegger these differences are both farther-ranging and deeper rooted than they are for Kuhn, since they do not only characterize particular scientific theories or scientific practices, narrowly defined, but extend to the whole unity of possible thought and practice at any given historical time. Moreover, as we have seen, the distinct orientations or positions that are involved in each of the historical epochs as described by Heidegger are indeed conceived as both individually *total* in their determinative relationship to beings as a whole and deeply different from one another. In particular, on Heidegger’s account, the successive epochs or “principal economies,” each yield a standard or measure that, for a time, determines and

⁴⁴ Davidson (1974b), p. 189.

⁴⁵ Davidson (1974b), p. 190, quoting Kuhn (1970), pp. 266-267.

regulates the appearance and relations of all beings. Like Kuhn's "paradigms," the epochal principles serve as examples and as measures for thought as well as practice; by figuring and determining the basic conditions under which entities are intelligible, they also determine in a basic way what can be considered to exist at all. Since each of the different epochal principles "measures" the being of beings by onto-theologically grounding beings as a whole, and the measures are distinct, there is also a clear sense in which the economies of presence involved in distinct epochs are themselves "incommensurable", having no common, higher ontic "standard" that itself could be used to measure their differences.

For all of these reasons, Davidson's argument against the kind of conceptual and ontological relativity embodied in the widespread idea of distinct "conceptual schemes" may seem to pose a direct challenge to the intelligibility of Heidegger's account of the history of being, as it does, explicitly, as well, to Kuhn's account of the history of science. The impression of conflict can begin to lessen in both cases, however, as soon as we consider that both Heidegger and Kuhn have in view a primarily *temporal* problematic of difference and change. In particular, neither the Heideggerian history of being nor Kuhn's picture of scientific revolutions centrally involves the question of the comparability of distinct schemes, patterns or languages set against one another *synchronously*. Rather, both involve most centrally an idea of discontinuous, diachronic change, whereby one large-scale pattern of organization comes to replace another, preserving the significance of many terms while also replacing some and transforming others.

On Heidegger's account, in particular, this kind of change may take place within languages but is often more characteristically indicated by shifts between them; thus, for example, the early but distinct conceptions of *idea* and *hypokeimenon* correspond to the "Greek" configurations represented by Plato and Aristotle, each of which is obviously distinct from, but also continuous with, the "Latin" conception of a creator God as the highest being and the figure of transcendence. In an obvious sense, the organizing conception of a later epoch, or at least a sense of its "point" or "purpose," may not be directly accessible, at least not without significant indoctrination or education, to the partisans of an earlier one. In some cases, Heidegger suggests, the organizing referent of an age may even be largely invented or constructed by means of semantic shifts or new interpretations performed by philosophers, as (for example) when Plato creates a new sense of *idea* by shifting from the established sense of the "outward look" of a thing to a new sense involving the supersensible and unchanging, or when Descartes gives a fundamentally new significance to the *cogito* as thinking substance.⁴⁶

Because of the way the principal economies thus succeed each other temporally within the unitary configuration of the metaphysics of presence, there is in fact no reason to suppose that this involves any actual *untranslatability* between them. The idea of incommensurability, in the sense of non-translatability, which Davidson attributes (whether correctly or incorrectly) to Kuhn, thus does not figure in the motivation or implications of Heidegger's picture. Nor is there, on Heidegger's picture, any dualism of scheme and content, either with respect to particular languages or to language in general. Rather, as we have seen, a language is integrated into the world as a single, holistic system of meaning, grounded and exhibited in the specific possibility of interpretation, that simultaneously gives meaning to

⁴⁶ See, e.g., *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* (GA 34), esp. section 9 ff.

words *and* to the things they describe. This holistic picture of the integration of language and world, far from coming under the scope of Davidson's anti-relativist argument, is in fact familiar from Davidson's own picture of linguistic behavior as intrinsically integrated with practice and with worldly objects and phenomena. For this inherently world-involving structure as Heidegger describes it, "syntactic" components cannot simply be separated from "semantic" ones and the structure of a language as such, is as we have seen, constituted by means of the projective understanding that renders entities intelligible according to a particular interpretation of their being. Each of the successive understandings of the being of beings is different from the one that came before; but they are all nevertheless situated within a larger *unitary* configuration that itself clarifies the structure of their discontinuous temporal succession. This is the unitary configuration of the history of metaphysics, determined as the history of successive interpretations of being or beingness as presence, but ultimately (as we have seen) from the truth of being itself. Given this unitary configuration, the impression of relativism that at first may seem to be a consequence of Heidegger's picture of conceptual change can dissipate. Here, it is in fact decisive for Heidegger's own picture that every actually spoken "historical" language must be considered to co-imply, as such, the world as a totality of beings. For this reason, it must be intertranslatable (in a broad sense) with every other such language. At the same time there are, nevertheless, different ways of making and stabilizing this constitutive reference to the totality which can shift over time while translatability is maintained.

What, then, of the discontinuous succession between different epochs of presence? Here, it is again important to note that what is at issue in Heidegger's picture is not simply the meeting of languages or schemes considered different from each other and juxtaposed, but the *internal* development of an essential *continuous* trajectory. The unfolding of this trajectory, as we have seen, involves radical and discontinuous shifts in principal referents; but it also involves a basically continuous with the interpretation of entities in terms of beingness and presence. In the course of this development, older epochal principles and the economies they organize are not simply rendered inaccessible or the conceptions they have organized incomprehensible from the perspective of newer ones. Rather, they become specifically visible, in their destitution, as the ontic referents they always in fact were, victims of the singularizing undertow that leads ultimately to the eventual unfolding of all ontologies of presence. At the moments of transition from one principal economy to the next, this makes for a specific dynamics of transformation which, as we have seen, becomes fully visible only retrospectively, from the position of the new understanding looking backward. But the structure of such transitions is itself, on Heidegger's account, recurrently determined by the underlying structure of Being in its granting and withholding of presence. This granting and withholding determines, in each case, the total measure of beings that a particular epochal principle allows and maintains. The specific dynamics of transition at these moments of crisis thus reflect the more general structure of the *strong incommensurability* that, as I have argued, characterizes every such totalizing system of reference and which implies that each such instituted system ultimately fails to measure itself.

By noting these structural features of stabilizing referents and the theoretical structures they produce, it is possible to see a formally grounded alternative to standard accounts of the dynamics of theory change. These accounts often refer it to political or sociological factors themselves conceived as simply

external to rational and empirical scientific inquiry. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, for example, Kuhn suggests that at a moment of crisis, the shift from one paradigm to the next is largely or fully determined by such factors as the surrounding political climate, the availability of a cohort of younger researchers not already convinced by the existing paradigm, or the overall organization of the “community life” of scientists.⁴⁷ By contrast with this, the dynamics of large-scale change that we have considered in connection to Heidegger can be characterized both formally and “ontologically”: since, as I have argued, it is structurally related to the very underlying structure of sense itself, the general dynamics involved are plausibly involved in any historically constituted linguistic situation, and not just those in which certain contingent sociological or political features are present. But the specification of the general dynamics of this structure as formal and ontological in this sense does not, at the same time, exclude its constitutive involvement with the actual phenomena or process discovered in the course of empirical inquiry; the picture is, rather, that such inquiry reflects, as an ongoing process, the complex conditions of truth as disclosure, up to and including the kind of transformative disclosure in which the overall character of entities changes in a basic sense. On the picture that Heidegger suggests, positive inquiry into any “domain” is impossible and basically unintelligible if this domain is not first opened to the possibility of inquiry by this manifold projection of sense. Nevertheless, this projection is not simply “prior” to empirical inquiry and discovery, but rather is an inherent structural moment of the larger holistic phenomenon of interpretive disclosure, of which ordinary empirical inquiry is *also* an integral part. In this way, as I have argued, it is thus actually possible to see revolutionary changes in paradigms and theories as determined *structurally* from the implicit dynamics of instituted sense, insofar as it is formally and ontologically related to truth.

In fact, far from being directly opposed to it, the suggestion of a temporal and paradoxical dynamics of sense insofar as it is related to truth can receive direct motivation from another structural part of Davidson’s own Tarskian account of truth and meaning. As we have seen, Davidson follows Tarski in holding truth and meaning to be systematically interconnected in the structure of a language. In particular, for Davidson, under the condition of radical interpretation a theory that gives a Tarskian T-sentence for each sentence of the language will clarify the structure of meaning for the language as a whole. The application of such a structure to any natural language will also involve, however, that some of the sentences whose meaning is thus characterized themselves involve reference to language, and in particular to truth. And as is well known, the inclusion of the possibility of discussing truth within a language leads directly, when combined with the general apparatus of the T-sentences themselves, to structural paradoxes.

The most basic of these paradoxes is the famous paradox of the Liar, the sentence which says of itself that it is not true. As Tarski himself pointed out in his original presentation of a method for systematically defining truth for formal languages, paradoxes of the liar type arise inevitably for every language that both contains its own truth-predicate and has the capacity of supplying distinct names (by

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Kuhn (1962), pp. 92-96.

means of quotation or some similar device) for each of its sentences.⁴⁸ Tarski's solution, in the context of his own demonstration of the method for defining truth-predicates for artificial, formal languages, was to preclude each such languages from containing its own truth-predicate; truth could be defined for a particular language L only by using a *stronger* metalanguage L', containing L or a systematic translation of it as a proper fragment, to express and frame the definition.⁴⁹ The solution works to ensure the definability of truth predicates without contradiction for particular formal languages whose structural and grammatical rules are themselves stipulated in advance and can be discussed in a stronger formal or natural language, but it is not clearly applicable to the case of natural languages such as English, wherein there is not, generally, a "stronger" metalanguage available. Tarski himself concluded that the behavior of truth with respect to natural languages such as English, characterized as they are by their "total" or "universal" expressive power, could not be clarified by means of his method; such languages are, he suggested, very plausibly inconsistent anyway.⁵⁰

In this way, Tarski could avoid contradiction in the case of the definition of truth-predicates for well-defined artificial languages, provided there is always a metalanguage position from which to discuss them. The difficulty persists, and is even sharpened, however, in the context of a program such as Davidson's, which attempts not to define truth for artificial languages but to interpret the already-existing "natural" languages in terms of it.⁵¹ The Tarskian truth-definition that is seen as embodying the total structure of meaning for a particular natural language can, it is true, be carried out in another natural language; for instance a theory of meaning for German might be stated in English. But since each of these languages, like all natural languages, contains its own truth-predicate, the question naturally arises of how the meaning of those sentences that involve the use of this predicate directly or indirectly is to be specified and understood. And here it is plausible that any systematic account of the meaning of these sentences will portray them as involving a constitutive structure of paradox with respect to the language as a whole. In particular, in those parts of the language in which it deploys the resources to consider its *own* overall structure and constitution of sense, the underlying structural paradox will mirror the original one by which the constitution of meaning both presupposes and figures itself.

In fact, it is possible to show that *any* language that includes its own truth-predicate and the general ability to make reference to its own sentences must be structurally undecidable in the technical sense that there is no possible *decision procedure* for determining the truth of arbitrary sentences from any finite number of axioms. Here, the argument is closely related to Tarski's own. The inclusion within any language of the possibility of referring to the truth of its own sentences in general introduces contradiction; it is thus not possible, on pain of inconsistency, for any such language to include a truth-predicate defined, as Tarski's are, syntactically on the basis of a finite set of axioms and capable of

⁴⁸ See Tarski (1931), section 1.

⁴⁹ Tarski (1931), pp. 167-169.

⁵⁰ Tarski (1931), pp. 164-165.

⁵¹ Following Davidson, I here use "natural language" to refer to those languages that Heidegger calls "historical languages".

univocally separating truths from falsehoods.⁵² As has often been noted, Tarski's argument in "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages" is closely related to the incompleteness and undecidability results achieved by Gödel and Turing about axiomatic systems for mathematics.⁵³ These results show that any axiomatic arithmetic language of a certain degree of complexity and which is capable of self-reference must, if consistent, be undecidable in two senses. First, there will be sentences formulable in the language which cannot either be proven or refuted by means of the axioms themselves but may nevertheless be seen to be true from a meta-systematic perspective. Second, it will be impossible in general to specify a rigorous decision procedure that will always be capable of deciding, in a finite number of steps, whether an arbitrary well-formed sentence indeed follows from the axioms. Any criterion or procedural definition of provability that is specifiable using only the vocabulary of the system will thus fail to capture the actual extension of truth. Furthermore, the predicate of provability that *is* available within the system will both fail to capture all of the (arithmetic) truths and itself be undecidable by any effective procedure within the system itself, assuming the system is consistent to begin with.

On the usual model-theoretic interpretation of Tarski's construction of theories of truth for formal languages, such a theory is grounded by first specifying relations of "satisfaction" for primitive terms and predicates. Within the Tarskian construction, the satisfaction relations function as axioms for the recursive definition of the truth-predicate by specifying formally in detail what is intuitively the "reference" of simple nominative terms and the extensions of primitive predicates. It is crucial to the construction that there be only finitely many such axioms, considered as giving the extensional definitions of simple or "primitive" terms of the language's (finite) vocabulary; otherwise there will be no tractable explanation for the infinite capacity of the language to produce new sentences capable of truth or falsity. The axiomatic specification of these satisfaction relations might be thought to be analogous to the moment of the institution of a language in its specific relation to the world; through the specification, the language is specifically defined in its "semantic" bearing on reality. But the structural paradox introduced by the inclusion within a language of its own truth-predicate means that no language thus instituted can determine the extension of "truth" for itself univocally and without contradiction. If, in particular, sense is constitutively linked to truth in the way that Tarski's own structure of truth-definitions suggests, this implies that instituted or axiomatic sense will always be

⁵² Relatedly, Priest (2006), pp. 135-36 shows by applying an extended version of the Liar paradox that even a theory of meaning that treats the contradictory sentences introduced by the inclusion of the truth-predicate as meaningless, and thus as neither true nor false, attempting thereby to characterize the truth conditions of the remaining sentences recursively cannot succeed, for it cannot even be (so much as) recursively enumerable or axiomatizable. The argument is this: We suppose for reductio that there is a recursively enumerable theory that provides a (true) T-sentence for each sentence of the language that is meaningful, excluding those that are contradictory and thus treated as meaningless. Then, since it is possible effectively to tell of each T-sentence what sentence it is the T-sentence for, the set of meaningful sentences must be r.e. too. But then it is possible to generate a sentence that says of itself that it is either not true or not meaningful. If this sentence is true, it is not; therefore it is not true. Thus it is either not true or not meaningful; thus it is true after all. This is a contradiction, so it follows that there cannot be any such (recursively enumerable) theory. The argument demonstrates, as Priest says (p. 136) that even the device of rejecting as meaningless those instances of the T-schema that lead to contradiction cannot suffice to insulate the truth theory from the consequences of paradox.

⁵³ Gödel (1931) and Turing (1936).

constitutively undecidable, incapable of being univocally settled by the explicit or implicit criteria, procedures, or standards of the language itself. Such criteria, procedures and standards always appear, in the context of any particular language, as essentially incomplete with respect to a broader phenomenon of truth that provides their ultimate basis but cannot be fully captured by them, if they are consistent at all.

If we may generalize these results to the consideration of the structure of non-formal languages, it appears to follow that the sense of the terms and sentences of such a language, even if conceived as a direct outcome of the organizing principles and epistemic procedures constitutive of the language as such, must ultimately be undecidable in terms of these very principles and procedures. The constitution of particular languages in terms of ultimate principles that function axiomatically cannot, then, ultimately stabilize meaning; the further question of the ground of the principles that govern sense points to a deeper phenomenon of truth that cannot be completely captured by any consistent set of intra-linguistic principles, standards, or procedures. In connection with such principles and procedures, there is thus always a residual undecidability which becomes explicit in the question of *their* grounding and points to the always-open possibility of their radical transformation. In this way, the specific axiomatic or principial constitution of languages, which makes them capable of objective reference to a totality of entities and stabilizes the ontological sense of this reference by providing a ground for decisions on meaning, always evinces the structural undecidability of sense that points to the deeper conditioning of all standards and (ontic) grounds in the more original structural context of (ontic-ontological) truth.

This ultimate failure of axiomatic and principial standards to provide for the noncontradictory decidability of sense might seem to suggest that the picture of languages as structurally based in such standards at all should simply be rejected. In particular, if a language cannot be decidably founded in a consistent way by axioms and principles, perhaps (it might seem) it is not in any meaningful sense “governed” or “structured” by such grounds at all; we might (on this line of thought) do better simply to abandon the search for any such principles in the underlying structure of existing languages and, by so doing, resolve or foreclose the problem of ultimate grounding this search invokes. However, it is clear that each actually spoken language involves, as a constitutive and essential aspect of its own structure of sense, a going conception of *itself* as a determinately structured unity arising under historical and temporal conditions but allowing it the general capability of reference to the world as a whole. This conception is, moreover, not simply that of a syntactical structure of rules governing the formation or transformation of expressions on wholly internal grounds. Rather, it includes a constitutive sense of the range of the language as a whole including a going concern with the constitution and boundaries of what the language *can* allow to appear in the horizon of its (inexplicit) reference to the world as a whole. This image is generally not, as long as a particular principial economy is in place, explicit; it becomes more so retrospectively, once a new economy is in place. Nevertheless this, at least implicit, inclusion in each language of a more or less determinate self-conception appears most directly in those regions of the language where it makes explicit reference to its own expressions and sentences. As we have seen, it is these regions, as well, that the paradoxical behavior of sense and the grounds for its ultimate undecidability most basically show up. The ultimate relevance of a conception of language as

principally or axiomatically structured, then, is not to be located in the false hope of founding language, once and for all, in a univocal and consistent basis of principles able finally to stabilize sense by ensuring its ultimate consistency and decidability. It is rather to be found in the way that the structural paradoxes of each language's foundational image of itself point to the deeper structural phenomenon of undecidability and to the possibility of radical transformation that is implied by it.

Furthermore, there are good reasons, internal to Davidson's account, to suspect that the paradoxical dynamic of reflexive sense has not only a structural but also a fundamentally *temporal* significance. In Davidson's last book, *Truth and Predication*, he considers various objections that have been formulated against Tarski's method of defining truth by supplying a machinery capable of producing T-sentences for each sentence of the language. One of these is that any particular Tarskian definition – the structural definition of truth-in-L for a particular language, L – does not show us anything about how to define truth for *another*, distinct language M. Another, related objection is that the Tarskian truth-definition for a particular language at a particular time tells us nothing about how to apply the concept of truth to *new* cases.⁵⁴ New objects first encountered at a later time and new terms or sentences framed to describe them will themselves obviously be characterizable in terms of truth and falsity, but a Tarskian truth-definition provides no guidance to this possible extension. For both reasons, Davidson concludes that Tarskian truth-definitions, even if considered as a general “pattern” of possible structures definitive of truth in particular cases, do not and cannot capture “all there is” to the nature of truth; Tarski has told us “much of what we want to know about the concept of truth,” but there must be more to say.⁵⁵ In particular, Davidson suggests, the general concept of truth to which the various specific Tarskian definitions point, without defining or exhausting it, also plausibly guides inquiry and interpretation in each of the specific languages.⁵⁶

Both the dynamics of the transformation of language in view of new phenomena or structural realities and the paradoxical status of sentences discussing truth are clearly relevant to the structure of this more general (and non-language-specific) concept of truth. In particular, though Tarski himself forecloses both problems by allowing truth to be defined only for artificial languages that are in themselves statically defined by their corpus of constitutive rules and readily describable from a metalanguage position, the dynamics of temporal change that characterize every actually existing natural or “historical” language are plausibly deeply linked to the inherent capacity of these languages to consider, implicitly or explicitly, their own totality and the total structure underlying their own truth-claims. Here, the temporal transformation of language in relation to what appear as new and shifting realities does not simply mean that new expedients or constructions to deal with hitherto unfamiliar phenomena. For the underlying relation of sense to truth also creates, as I have suggested, the possibility of relatively sudden and discontinuous total change. As I have argued, the structural basis for such change can be seen as resting in the structural undecidability of sense which is characteristic of each language bearing total expressive power and becomes visible in the specific structure of the paradoxes which manifest a language's own relation to its own total structure of sense.

⁵⁴ Davidson (2005), p. 17.

⁵⁵ Davidson (2005), p. 27.

⁵⁶ Davidson (2005), p. 55.

III

As I have argued, the kind of difference that characterizes the transitions between the successive epochs of metaphysics for Heidegger is not the “conceptual relativity” that Davidson opposes in “On the Very Idea.” Once we grasp the kind of diachronic unity that is at the structural basis for Heidegger’s account of the conditioning of epochal truth by the deeper underlying phenomenon of the truth of being itself, it is clear that his conception avoids relativism by basing itself on the inherently paradoxical dynamics of possible change that emerge forcefully from the way that every metaphysical language grounds beings as such and *as a whole*. It is the specific sense of unity that is involved in this constitutive reference to beings as a whole that itself, then, grounds the possibility of radical structural change; and this consideration is, as I have argued, by no means opposed to Davidson’s claim of the intertranslatability of languages. In fact, Davidson’s picture as a whole can be seen as based on two powerful considerations of unity that might at first seem opposed to each other. First, each language must, bearing total expressive power, be intertranslatable with all other such languages; thus, all languages are as such unified with respect to what then appears as a world as a totality of beings. It is, of course, possible that a particular language will lack a specifically referential word or term for one type of phenomenon or another; but every language nevertheless more broadly contains, in principle, the structural possibility of making reference to anything that any other language refers to, since there is never any actually insurmountable or complete failure of translatability. In this way, each language implicitly or explicitly contains the structural capacity of determinate reference to the totality of the world, and stabilizes this reference under one or another conception of the total character of beings as such. Nevertheless, as Davidson also cogently argues, it is also incoherent to suppose any language to be set off against this totality of the world, since then the question arises of their relationship, and we can only answer this question in terms of some version of the (untenable) scheme/content dualism. The unity of languages as such can thus be characterized in terms of the total expressive power that they share with respect to the totality of beings, or the world. But this unity of languages as such cannot be specified as their unity with respect to this totality as a common referent, on pain of invoking the untenable dualism of scheme and world.

As I have argued, Heidegger’s picture provides a basis for reconciling these considerations in that it deals with a *unitary* hermeneutic dynamics in which each language structurally and constitutively involves, as such, a consideration of beings as a whole that is grounded in the more basic phenomenon of projection that endows both words and objects with sense. In this story, both the sense of language and the sense of entities is always at stake; and the conjoint total fixation of both is not simply a function of one or the other but a “setting up of world” that also, simultaneously, sets up every possibility of languages and linguistic articulation. This is, moreover, not a kind of unity that is given once and for all, but is actually repeatedly temporally constituted at specific moments of the institution of epochal referents, and bears within itself the structural conditions for change in the form of their destitution.

In this way, the Heideggerian account provides the elements for an account of the *temporality* of linguistic change that is essentially absent from Davidson’s account. It is not that Davidson actually denies that languages originate at a particular time and are transformed in various ways over the course

of their careers; he just does not address the issue. As we have seen, this limitation in Davidson's picture can be related to the inherent limitations of Tarski's own structure for the characterization of the temporal dimension of linguistic use and transformation. Because Tarskian truth-theories can be considered to capture the structure of a language only through a recursive description of their constitutive rules *at a particular time*, including the "satisfaction" conditions for primitive terms taken as given, the Tarskian structure itself does not speak to the possibility of transformations in these rules and conditions. This corresponds, in Tarski's own project, to the idea of a conventional or stipulative definition of the structure of language itself: the thought is that languages can be instituted simply by laying down or designating referential and predicative meanings for all of their signs. This idea is appropriately applied to formal languages of the type Tarski in fact considered; but as we have seen, it fails to capture their very different kind of temporal structure and existence characteristic of the natural languages Davidson considers.

What form, then, can an account of linguistic transformation take, if it acknowledges the paradoxical and ontological dynamics of totality that I have considered here? In the 1928 treatise "On the Essence of Ground," Heidegger considers the way in which the availability of entities for positive reference, consideration and description is grounded, in each case, in the phenomenon of projection whereby Dasein opens a particular domain through a projective understanding of the being of the beings thereby defined.⁵⁷ The ultimate condition for this opening is to be found in the structural "transcendence" of Dasein, whereby it is always already "outside itself" in its original structural relation to truth as unconcealment and thereby *grounds* in its own structure the ontological difference between beings and being.⁵⁸ In this sense, according to Heidegger, the availability of any domain of entities is always conditioned by a prior interpretation which makes accessible a particular domain on the basis of an interpretation which is itself grounded in Dasein's (initially inexplicit) understanding of Being itself. In this interpretation, new entities may "enter" the world through sudden shifts that allow something of the character of a domain of beings, hitherto obscure, to appear. The phenomenon of "world-entry" is thus to be characterized on ontological grounds as a basic possibility of Dasein insofar as Dasein itself is "world-forming" [*Weltbildend*], structured by a basic transcendence that relates it to the ontological difference.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Wegmarken* (GA 9), s. 131-33.

⁵⁸ *Wegmarken* (GA 9), s. 133-34.

⁵⁹ *Wegmarken* (GA 9), s. 158-59: "Die Welt wird als die jeweilige Ganzheit des Umwillen eines Daseins durch dieses selbst vor es selbst gebracht ... Der Entwurf von Welt aber ist, imgleichen wie er das Entworfenen nicht eigens erfaßt, so auch immer *Überwurf* der entworfenen Welt über das Seiende. Der vorgänigige Überwurf ermöglicht erst, daß Seiendes als solches sich offenbart. Dieses Geschehen des entwerfenden Überwurfs, worin sich das Sein des Daseins zeitigt, ist das In-der-Welt-sein. "Das Dasein transzendiert" heißt: es ist im Wesen seines Seins *weltbildend*, und zwar "bildend" in dem mehrfachen Sinne, daß es Welt geschehen läßt, mit der Welt sich einen ursprünglichen Anblick (Bild) gibt, der nicht eigens erfaßt, gleichwohl gerade als Vor-bild für alles offenbare Seiende fungiert, darunter das jeweilige Dasein selbst gehört. Seiendes, etwa die Natur im weitesten Sinne, könnte in keiner Weise offenbar werden, wenn es nicht *Gelegenheit* fände, in eine Welt einzugehen. Wir sprechen daher vom möglichen und gelegentlichen *Welteingang* des Seienden. Welteingang ist kein Vorgang am eingehenden Seienden, sondern etwas, das "mit" dem Seienden "geschieht".

This conception of world-entry as grounded in interpretation and in interpretive shifts in the total understanding of domains of beings again invites comparison with Kuhn's account of scientific revolutions in *The Structure*. In particular, as Kuhn also suggests, it is through such interpretive shifts in the sense of whole domains of entities – Kuhn's notorious "paradigm shifts" – that genuinely "new" entities and phenomena can be thought to enter the world. Along these lines, there is moreover even a sense in which, as Kuhn says, partisans of different paradigms live in different "worlds" marked by very different ontological determinations, although (as we have seen) any such formulation must also preserve the important dimension of continuity between older and newer theories.⁶⁰ As I have suggested, it is generally not possible to clarify the underlying hermeneutic dynamics of these shifts, in any case, without considering the specific phenomena of constitutive reference to the world *as a whole* and how these phenomena themselves condition the possibility of large-scale shifts in the intelligibility of entities and phenomena.⁶¹ This significance of totality, as I have argued, must be considered integral to the possible phenomena of world-entry, projection, and paradigm shift; in this way, the dynamic and temporal structure of languages in relation to entities is shown to have a positive formal basis in the paradoxical dynamics of total self-reference itself.

For Heidegger, the "world-forming" structure of projection thus provides an ontological basis for the phenomenon of world-entry, whereby new entities as well as whole new ways of understanding the totality of beings are grounded in the specific structure of truth as disclosure. But what is it to form a world? In the 1930s, as we have seen, Heidegger replaces the earlier conception of truth as grounded in Dasein's "transcendence" with the more explicitly historical conception of a plurality of historical epochs, themselves grounded as a whole in the unitary configuration of the interpretation of Being as presence and the progressive withdrawal of Being itself. In 1935, in "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger develops on the basis of a consideration of the temporal and ontological nature of artworks a penetrating new conception of the ontological and temporal conditions under which it is possible for "a world" to be "set up" or "opened up" through the "setting-to-work" of a work of art. On this conception, the process of "setting up" by which worlds are formed or set up is a "worlding" of the world whereby a whole domain of objects, practices, and possible perceptions is first made available:

Werksein heißt: eine Welt aufstellen. Aber was ist das, eine welt?... Welt ist nicht die bloße Ansammlung der vorhandenen abzählbaren oder un abzählbaren, bekannten und unbekannt en Dinge. Welt is aber auch nicht ein nur eingebilter, zur Summe des Vorhandenen hinzu

⁶⁰ Cf. Kuhn (1962), p. 111: "Examining the record of past research from the vantage of contemporary historiography, the historian of science may be tempted to exclaim that when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them...It is rather as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and joined by unfamiliar ones as well... In so far as their only recourse to [the world of their research engagement] is through what they see and do, we may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world."

⁶¹ Here, for instance, the structure of negative existential statements has an obvious significance; in the shift from one paradigm to the next, a large part of the transition consists in the determination that certain entities previously referred to routinely do not in fact exist, as such ("there is no such thing as phlogiston"). But negative existentials are themselves logically related to the determination of the whole, for they are logically equivalent to universals (For all x, x is not phlogiston) whose domain of quantification must be considered to be the totality of the world or universe.

vorgestellter Rahmen. *Welt weltet* und ist seiender als das Greifbare und Vernehmbare, worin wir uns heimisch glauben. Welt ist nie ein Gegenstand, der vor uns steht und angeschaut werden kann. Welt ist das immer Ungegenständliche, dem wir unterstehen, solange die Bahnen von Geburt und Tod, Segen und Fluch uns in das Sein entrückt halten.⁶²

This possibility of “opening up” a world is itself understood in close relation to the essential “opposition” [*Gegeneinander*] that Heidegger describes as the “strife” [*Streit*] of earth and world.⁶³ In particular, whereas world is the “sich offende Offenheit der weiten Bahnen der einfachen und wesentlichen Entscheidungen im Geschick eines geschichtlichen Volkes”, earth is that which is “ständig Sichverschließenden und dergestalt Bergenden” although nevertheless in a certain way also brought forth in the world-opening work.⁶⁴ The specific phenomenon of the strife of world and earth is, on Heidegger’s description, the tension or rift [*Risse*] that makes it possible for a work to not only to “set up a world” but to “set forth the earth”; it is in this way that “historical man” [*geschichtliche Mensch*] grounds life in the world.⁶⁵ The grounding is, specifically, an “instigating of the” strife and thereby a “setting to work of truth”.⁶⁶ Truth is, here, understood as the “essence” of the true,” and in particular as *aletheia* and unconcealment. But that there is truth as unconcealment means that there is “already manifest something to which we can conform ourselves.”⁶⁷ The more original condition for this manifestness is what Heidegger calls the clearing [*Lichtung*]:

Und dennoch: über das Seiende hinaus, aber nicht von ihm weg, sondern vor ihm her, geschieht noch ein Anderes. Inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen west eine offene Stelle. Eine *Lichtung* ist. Sie ist, vom Seienden her gedacht, seiender als das Seiende. Diese offene Mitte ist daher nicht vom Seienden umschlossen, sondern die lichtende Mitte selbst umkreist wie das Nichts, das wir kaum kennen, alles Seiende.⁶⁸

The “setting up” of a world that a work can accomplish is thus related back to the specific phenomenon of the strife between earth and world and thereby also to the deeper condition of the clearing, which itself “opens” all that can be discussed or considered as existing. This opening is itself the constitution of world from and in the dynamics of opening and setting-up that the work exemplifies in its “setting to work” of truth.

As commentators have noted, the late Heidegger’s grand picture of Western history as constituted and exhausted by the series of epochal transformations ultimately “sent” or “granted” from or by Being itself stands in some tension with a culturalist or humanist picture on which essentially contingent human cultural practice or institutions set up the conditions under which entities are understood and experienced in particular and differing ways over historical time.⁶⁹ On the other hand, Heidegger

⁶² *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 33/30-31.

⁶³ *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 37/35.

⁶⁴ *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 37/35.

⁶⁵ *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 35/32.

⁶⁶ *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 38/36.

⁶⁷ *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 41/39.

⁶⁸ *Holzwege* (GA 5), s. 41/39-40.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Rorty (1991).

himself may seem at times to suggest such a culturalist picture of the origin and structure of worlds. For example, his development of the example of the Greek temple in “The Origin of the Work of Art” and in his own description (for instance) of the specific phenomenon of world as constitutively related, in each case, to a “historical people” may seem to suggest that he understands “worlds”, in the plural, in each case as an instituted correlate of localized practices or of the languages that surround them. On this kind of picture, the availability and intelligibility of beings themselves is constituted by such a configuration of practice and language, and the “setting up” of a world which first “discloses” such a totality is to be understood as primarily a matter of conventionally or culturally instituted practice, in principle comprehensible in sociological or pragmatic terms.

It is not that commentators who hold this kind of picture simply deny that the later Heidegger also characterizes the conditions for the institution of world that relate it ultimately to the “destining” [*Schicken*] of Being itself and to ontic-ontological structures that, on Heidegger’s own account, cannot ultimately be rooted exclusively in the phenomena of “culture” or “practices.”⁷⁰ But it has nevertheless been tempting, given the apparent obscurity of the notion of “Being itself” and its “destining” of history, to correct Heidegger by supplementing or replacing his conception of world-formation with this culturalist or pragmatist picture. Here, what is seen as most obscure is exactly *how* something like “Being itself” could itself be responsible for those large-scale shifts in which the entire character of the world appears discontinuously to change, or for the evident differences between such large-scale understandings that appear to occur over historical time.

By contrast with this, however, I have argued that the institution as well as the destitution of languages and practices themselves can and must be seen, in an ontological context, as subject to an inherent structural necessity that also has its ontological and temporal ground in the structure of disclosive truth. Here, far from being obfuscatory or mystifying, a consideration of the determining ontological dynamic of truth as unconcealment is in fact essential. This dynamic does not have to be explained in mystifying, mystical, or nostalgic metaphors in order to be clarified in its underlying structure. To the contrary, it can, as I have argued, be put on a firm metalogical basis by considering the specific implications and dynamical paradoxes of the institution of languages by means of the fixation of epochal referents. This points to an underlying determination of the phenomenal constellations in which beings appear that is not simply culturalist or pragmatic, since it points to the ontological and hermeneutic basis of disclosive

⁷⁰ Cf., e.g., *Beiträge*, s. 98-99, in the course of a discussion of the “decision” regarding “history” as the “playing out of the strife between earth and world”: “Bringt die Entscheidung noch einmal die Griindung der Augenblicksstätte fiir die Gründung der Wahrheit des Seyns, oder rollt alles nur noch ab als »Kampf« um die nackten Bedingungen des Fort- und Auslebens in den riesigen Ausmaßen, so daß »Weltanschauung« und »Kultur« auch nur noch Stiitzen und Kampfmittel dieses »Kampfes« sind? Was bereitet sich dann vor? Der *Übergang zum technisierten Tier*, das die bereits schwächer und gröber werdenden Instinkte durch das Riesenhafte der Technik zu ersetzen beginnt.

Bei dieser Entscheidungsrichtung ist nicht kennzeichnend die Technisierung der »Kultur« und »Weltanschauungs« durchsetzung, sondern daß »Kultur« und »Weltanschauung« zu Mitteln der Kampftechnik werden fiir einen Willen, der kein Ziel mehr will; denn Erhaltung des Volkes ist nie ein mögliches Ziel, sondern nur Bedingung einer Zielsetzung. Wird die Bedingung aber zum Unbedingten, dann kommt das Nichtwollen des Ziels, das Abschneiden jeder ausgreifenden Besinnung zur Macht. Vollends schwindet dann die Möglichkeit der Erkenntnis, daß »Kultur« und »Weltanschauung« bereits Ableger einer Weltordnung sind, die angeblich iiberwunden werden soll.

truth that is plausibly the ground for any possible formation of cultures and practices themselves. And although it does not depend in any essential way on the transcendence of a “mystical” beyond, this structure of truth in itself also owes nothing to any prior cultural or humanist reference.

IV

I have argued that Heidegger’s conception of the history of being can be defended from the charge of conceptual relativity, and understood on the level of its real structural problematic, only if we see it as unfolding a specifically temporal structure of undecidable sense. This structure is also separately motivated by a metalogical reflection on the structure of axiomatic principles in relation to the totality of a language that they institute and maintain. Seeing it in this way involves acknowledging that the shifting configurations of epochal economies of presence, each constituted by a particular determination of the being of beings, themselves have a larger determinative unity in the itinerary of what Heidegger calls the epoch of “metaphysics” itself. Heidegger’s understanding of the history of these determinations, as a whole, is itself directional. It is oriented by the growing gap between an original or inceptual determination of being *as* presence and the ever-greater obscurity, forgetting or withdrawal of being itself in the sway of the successive epochal principles. For Heidegger, this history, moreover, has a culmination and an end. Specifically, it ends in the contemporary configuration of the metaphysics of technology and the unchallenged sway of a universal *calculability* and *ordering* of beings in which being itself no longer appears at all. I have argued that in order to understand the specific kind of temporality that is constitutive of, and constituted by, metaphysics as the history of presence, we need also to see the unifying basis of the entire regime or epoch of metaphysics in the self-differentiation of Being as it both grants the possibility of presence, and holds itself back, in the epochal constitution of each specific economy of beings. This involves, as well, comprehending in the contemporary condition of universal technology and “enframing” the *closure* and specific boundary of the metaphysics of presence itself. In this final section, I shall consider how the specific phenomenon of the undecidability of sense itself points to and articulates this closure, and also in a certain way intimates or indicates its “beyond”.

If Heidegger sees in the contemporary configuration of advanced technology a culmination or end of the metaphysical interpretation of being in terms of presence that also begins to indicate a specific “beyond” to metaphysics, then the structure of this indication itself can be clarified by reference to the differential structure, between presence and presencing, that lies at the basis of any constituted discursive realm of sense. As Schürmann points out near the end of his own analysis of the contemporary closure of metaphysics, this “middle term” of difference is not itself any human or sociological construction, but rather the underlying differential structure of “originary” time:

Heidegger does not examine the contemporary site and its genesis in order to gain further information about man. If he asks: How did we arrive there? it is not as a historian of culture. It is rather to elucidate the complex structure of the being question itself. That question is complex, for an economy of presence – for example, technology – is not an immediate given. It

is the *Anwesenheit* of what is *anwesend*, the modality of presence of what is present. Radicalized transcendental phenomenology consists in stepping back from this modality of presence toward *Anwesen* as such, toward the event of presencing. A second rule for thinking results from this *differential self-regulation* by which the present, through the modality of its presence, both hides and reveals the event of presencing.

If it is admitted that the starting point of the deconstruction is one particular economy, it becomes clearer why the ontological difference unites the three terms I have just sketched and not two (e.g. *ta onta*, “entities” and *to einai*, “the to-be”). The middle term is that order which, following Heidegger, other authors have located in discourse and called *episteme* or discursive regularity. In Heidegger, the three-tiered difference is generally described as between ‘entities’, their ‘beingness’ and ‘being’ (as a verb, as ‘to-be’). This way of formulating it, however, passes in silence over the decisive factor, time. In his last writings, he therefore characterizes beingness and being with some subtlety as two moments of ‘letting’, as “letting-be-present” and as “letting-be-present.” Originary time has ‘letting’ as its essence, which is to say that it remains unintelligible within any metaphysical quest for ultimate causes, grounds, or principles.⁷¹

As I have argued, the undecidability of sense which appears necessarily to characterize the logical structure of any instituted language or discursive regime itself structured according to the differentiation of entities and their being. This undecidability is thus itself nothing other than a structural manifestation of the inherently differential “self-regulation” of the event of presencing of which Schürmann speaks. In this differential self-relation, the event both grants the specific conditions under which entities can be phenomenized in particular configurations of intelligibility, and also withdraws in itself, hiding the ultimate eventual and differential bases of presencing beneath the assumption of a stable ontic referent. Heidegger himself thinks this originary self-differentiation of presence and the ground of presence in increasingly radical terms. At first, he conceives it as the ontological difference between beings and their being; later it is the self-differentiation of being in itself through which it grounds its truth as event, outside and prior to any reference to beings. In the context of any particular principial economy constituted by reference to assumed standards and principles, as I have argued, this original temporal differentiation or differend introduces both the possibility of a determinate configuration of sense and also the essential undecidability that also characterizes each such configuration. But as Schürmann points out, grasping this temporal difference as the ultimate basis for instituted sense can also point to the specific closure of the metaphysics of presence itself.

In “Différance,” Jacques Derrida considers how Heidegger’s thought of ontological difference communicates with or opens onto the thought of a more originary differentiation, thought as *différance*, that is originally both temporization (or deferral) and spacing.⁷² *différance* as the more basic condition for the differentiation of being and beings cannot itself be understood in positive terms as any entity or positively described phenomenon; it is visible, rather, in its trace, or in the erasure of its own

⁷¹ Schürmann (1987), p. 285.

⁷² Derrida (1968), p. 22.

“withdrawal” from the text of metaphysics.⁷³ Here, the consideration of the ontic/ontological structure of the historical languages of metaphysics, and in particular the way they manifest specific interpretations of presence, has a basic significance; this structure is itself, Derrida suggests, a phenomenon of *différance* in its self-differentiation or its constitutive “play”.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Derrida connects this play of *différance* to the specific phenomenon that he describes as the “undecidable” of specific texts or textual regimes; in particular, as I have argued elsewhere, Derrida’s conception of this “undecidable” involves the structural undecidability of syntactically constituted sense in relation to an exterior referent.⁷⁵ Undecidability in this sense is, however, as I have argued, analogous or actually structurally homologous to the undecidability demonstrated by Gödel, and verified in a different way by Turing, at the structural basis of each syntactically defined axiomatic system in its reference to an “external” reality.

The thought of this original differentiation and the structure of paradox and undecidability in which it is manifest can become the basis for a renewed critique of ideology that draws on the methods and forms of post-Kantian critique but radicalizes them on formal grounds. In particular, for the contemporary critique of technological society, the interlinked positive phenomena of structural paradox, undecidability, and ultimate ineffectivity thus have a determinate and rigorous formally indicative significance. They can be structurally interpreted as pointing to the broader conditions for systematization as such, and to the inescapable double bind of systematic regulation that characterizes the underlying structure of any specifically constituted system of meaning, communication, or social regularity or practice.

In an essay on “Tautology and Paradox in the Self-Descriptions of Modern Society,” Niklas Luhmann suggests from the perspective of a “second-order cybernetics” and reflexive theory of systems the way in which the inherently paradoxical structure of societal self-description can suggest terms for this positive critique. As Luhmann notes and as we have seen here, the unrestricted self-reference that is apparently involved in any language in its specific capacity to capture truth leads inevitably to tautologies and paradoxes.⁷⁶ According to Luhmann, the characteristic response of a social system to this situation is to “‘unfold’ self-reference” by interpreting it in a hierarchical or ordered configuration that allows its “deparadoxicalization,” or its self-description without apparent paradox. This operation of unfolding is specifically related to the constitution of a temporality in which the society is either conserved or seen as an object of possible progressive transformation. In either of these ways, the unfolding of paradox that is needed to avoid contradiction gains the significance of the constitution of an ordered temporality of conservation or transformative action. But this operation of temporal unfolding only takes place at the cost of obscuring the basis of this operation itself, as well as the underlying structural problematic to which it ultimately responds.⁷⁷ Undecidable sense is thus, according to Luhmann, rendered decidable by the unfolding of paradox along a temporal dimension that

⁷³ Derrida (1968), pp. 23-24.

⁷⁴ Derrida (1968), pp. 26-27. This constitutive activity of *différance* in differentiating invites comparison with what Gilles Deleuze calls “difference in itself” in Deleuze (1968) (especially chapter 1).

⁷⁵ Livingston (2010).

⁷⁶ Luhmann (1990), p. 137.

⁷⁷ Luhmann (1990), p. 127.

rationalizes the activity of society to itself. But the basis of this operation is the obscuration of the structural ground of paradox in the very constitutive structure of social self-reference. This process of deparadoxization is in fact identical, according to Luhmann, with the transformation of descriptions of society into “ideologies” which then come to play a privileged role in “directing and justifying social action” while at the same time insulating themselves from global critique by appearing to be contestable only by means of the competing “holistic systems” of their specific ideological opposites.⁷⁸ It is thus that, according to Luhmann, the concept of ideology itself comes to display a “particular reflexivity that appears immune to empirical evidence and criticism” which results in the outcome that “descriptions of societal self-descriptions face the antagonism of ideologies instead of reflecting on the more fundamental problems of tautology and paradox.”⁷⁹

If Luhmann is correct in seeing an actual basis for the whole structure of positive ideologies, including their holistic systems and mutual antagonisms, in the socially constitutive function of deparadoxicalization, then the only rigorous ground for their critique must rest in pointing out on logical, systematic, and metalogical grounds this underlying necessary structure of paradox itself. In this way, the elaboration on metalogical grounds of the underlying paradoxical structure of sense and the structural necessity of paradoxical foundations that it evinces can thus provide a specific and concrete metalogical basis for a renewal and reinvigoration of the traditional critique of ideology. For any ontologically grounded critique of the present, the interlinked positive phenomena of structural paradox, undecidability, and ultimate ineffectivity thus have a determinate and rigorous formally indicative significance. They can be structurally interpreted as pointing to the broader conditions for systematization as such, and to the inescapable double bind of systematic regulation that characterizes the underlying structure of any specifically constituted system of meaning, communication, or social regularity or practice. As such, and as I have tried to elaborate here, pointing out their specific structure and their relationship to the ontological conditions of presence and presencing can thus provide rigorous grounds for a critique of the technological present. At the same time, this indication points to the underlying *ontological* situation of the positive grounding of constituted regimes and languages in the arche-original structure of a self-differentiating difference at the root of all possible presencing.

As Derrida suggests, seeing how Heidegger’s thought of originary “Being itself” thus involves an underlying self-differentiation that is at the very basis of the possibility of any economy of presence can point to the specific significance of the purported contemporary “closure” of the whole epoch of presence, or the history of metaphysics, itself. The significance of this indication is as much temporal, or rather arche-temporal, as it is ontological; as Schürmann says, beyond the epoch of the various principal economies, it points to the *plural* temporalities of a condition that no longer stabilizes presence in terms of “causes, grounds, or principles”.⁸⁰ Seeing the possibility of transition to such an archaic condition in the contemporary configuration of advanced technology involves grasping the specific ways in which this contemporary configuration itself points, at the boundaries of the totality of its claim over beings, to the paradoxes underlying its own structural constitution. This involves, in

⁷⁸ Luhmann (1990), p. 128.

⁷⁹ Luhmann (1990) pp. 128-29.

⁸⁰ Schürmann (1987), p. 285.

particular, seeing the concrete basis for a demonstration of this underlying paradoxical structure in the actual structure of the technologies and techniques that constitute and make possible the contemporary regime of unlimited technology, both in ways that Heidegger himself pointed out and in ways he did not.

In particular, Heidegger sometimes suggests that the “end of metaphysics” is determined not only by the universal mechanical or instrumental enframing and manipulation of beings but also, and perhaps even more deeply, by the totalization of calculability, information exchange, or cybernetics as a “regulating-regulated” technology of the exchange of information.⁸¹ In connection with this, the conditions of the contemporary existence and predominance of what are called “information technologies” gains a particular and telling indicative significance. Here, the interrelated problems of self-referential paradox, axiomatic incompleteness and metalogical undecidability themselves prove decisive in pointing to the specific constitution of these concrete conditions as well as their specific limitations. In particular, as I have suggested elsewhere, it is by no means accidental that Turing’s own demonstration of the specific phenomenon of the necessary undecidability of logical and axiomatic systems is, at the same time and in the same gesture, the first conceptual construction of the actual underlying architecture of all algorithmic or programmable computers.⁸² In the very argument that first yields the contemporary sense of an algorithmic procedure that thus underlies all communicative and computational information technologies, the claim of such procedures to total effectivity is decisively limited by the demonstration of the actual necessity of undecidability and incalculability with respect to any such procedure. This amounts, as I have suggested, to an inherent and mathematically motivated critique of effectivity that appears to demonstrate, at the basis of any constituted procedural realm of the application of regular procedures of calculation or information processing, a more basic *ineffectivity* resulting from the original structures of paradox, incompleteness, and undecidability. In an ontological perspective suggested by Heidegger but also separately motivated by the theoretical and technical problematic of logic and its foundations in the twentieth century, this rigorously the critical reserve of what, in any effectively regulated system of meaning, resists the force of its constitutive rules and standards, manifesting in this resistance the original withdrawal at its ground.

⁸¹ Cf., e.g. Heidegger’s description of this contemporary condition in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”: “Es genügt, auf die Eigenständigkeit der Psychologie, der Soziologie, der Anthropologie als Kulturanthropologie, auf die Rolle der Logik als Logistik und Semantik hinzuweisen. Die Philosophie wird zur empirischen Wissenschaft vom Menschen, von allem, was für den Menschen erfahrbarer Gegenstand seiner Technik werden kann, durch die er sich in der Welt einrichtet, indem er sie nach den mannigfaltigen weisen des Machens und Bildens bearbeitet. Dies alles vollzieht sich überall auf dem Grunde und nach der Maßgabe der wissenschaftlichen Erschließung der einzelnen Bezirke des Seienden. Es bedarf keiner Prophetie, um zu erkennen, daß die sich einrichtenden Wissenschaften alsbald von der neuen Grundwissenschaft bestimmt und gesteuert werden, die Kybernetik heißt.” *Zur Sache des Denkens* (GA 14), s. 71-72.

⁸² See Livingston (2012), chapter 6.

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