

THE TRUTH OF BEING AND THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

1. *Introduction*

In a recent article Richard Rorty has attempted to juxtapose Heidegger and Dewey. While finding significant points of agreement between the two, and by implication praising much of Heidegger's work, Rorty also suggests a series of criticisms of Heidegger. The problems which Rorty finds with Heidegger can, I think, all be reduced to one basic criticism, which has two main sides. In Rorty's view Heidegger can not really differentiate between Being and beings in the way that he wants, and thus can give no sense to the word 'Being' other than the old metaphysical one. That is, Being and the ontological difference are metaphysical remnants, the last evaporating presence of the Platonic distinction of the real world and the apparent world. This is indicated in two ways. First, Rorty feels that Heidegger can make no real distinction between philosophy, which they both agree has ended, and 'thinking' in the specifically Heideggerian sense. Second, Rorty claims that it is impossible to distinguish ontic from ontological becoming. That is, the various epochs of Being which Heidegger distinguishes are, for Rorty, parasitic upon and reducible to the ordinary history of man's activity in relation to things, material and social. As such, Heidegger's account of ontological epochs is a species of idealistic reflection upon the history of man's activity upon things.

This paper attempts to reflect upon the adequacy of both main parts of Rorty's criticism of Heidegger. Is it possible to differentiate Being and beings in such a way as to allow for epochs of Being which are not simply reducible to ordinary historical periods? If not, then we will have reason to accept Rorty's criticism of the ontological difference, and hence of Heidegger's formulation in regard to Being. If this distinction can be maintained then one major element of Rorty's pragmatist criticism of Heidegger will need to be abandoned. Is it possible to distinguish the matter of Heidegger's thought from the concerns of philosophy in such a way as to preserve this thought given the end of philosophy? If not, then Heidegger's thinking is just another attempt to keep alive a bankrupt tradition. If this distinction can be maintained, then the other major element of Rorty's criticism must be abandoned.

2. *Varieties of Difference*

Rorty thinks that Heidegger is necessarily impaled on the horns of a dilemma in regard to the history and historicity of Being. *Either* Being is

long end which would require close examination of the relation of form and process in Hegel.

32. The objection is a sophisticated descendant of Kiekegaard's claim that existence cannot be caught in the closure of the system. Heidegger claims to find conditions for Hegel's discourse which cannot be comprehended within that discourse, thus undermining its claimed completeness.

33. Hegel distinguishes between pointing out a *Mangel* and producing a *Widerlegung* (*The Science of Logic* [Leipzig: Meiner, 1955]), II, pp. 216–17; in the Miller translation (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), pp. 580–81.)

34. If this resembles the problem of the 'Stoic' as Hegel describes him in the *Phenomenology*, it is tempting to see in some of Heidegger's French successors, such as Derrida, some analogue to the active negating done by the Sceptic.

35. Cf. "The Turning," *Question*, pp. 37, 39, 48. Because Heidegger insists on the lack of necessity and culmination, the resemblance is somewhat to Schelling rather than Hegel. But this suspends Ereignis uneasily between the concrete universal and the night in which all cows are black.

36. In my essay "A Place Without a Form?" (*Proceedings of the Fifteenth Heidegger Conference* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1981 (preprint))) I suggest that Heidegger develops a kind of formalism across eras in the history of Being, but a formalism which does not allow totalization or meta-description. This has affinities with Hegel's treatment of formalism, but lacks his closure. As a way of answering some of the questions in the first two problem areas, this leads to considerable difficulties in the third.

37. "But Being does not have a history in the way in which a city or a people have their history. What is history-like in the history of Being is obviously determined by the way in which Being takes place and by this alone," (*Time and Being*, p. 8) "No historiographical representation of history as happening ever brings us into the proper relation to destining (Geschicken) let alone into the essential origin of destining in the disclosing coming-to-pass of the truth of Being that brings everything into its own" (*Question*, p. 48). Cf. the whole essay "The Turning."

38. It will not do to avoid these questions by pointing out that the social sciences themselves are but one mode of presencing. For what are being talked about here are themselves modes of presencing in different eras, which can be talked of ontically as well as in Heidegger's way. If *this* is denied, then we see Heidegger (or his defenders) adopting the detached transcendental standpoint for which they criticize others.

39. This obviously recalls recent French philosophy, but also current analytic work by Richard Rorty, Nelson Goodman and Hilary Putnam.

radically different and distinct from beings, in which case 'Being' can be nothing other than the old Platonic 'real' world, a 'real' which is impossibly vague, abstract, and lacks content and historical determinacy, or in order to give the historical becoming of Being definiteness, the history of 'Being' can be seen as utterly dependent on the history of beings. If Heidegger accepts the first alternative then he is committed to, in words Rorty quotes from Versenyi, "an all too empty and formal, though often emotionally charged and mystically-religious, thinking of absolute unity."¹ On the other hand, if Heidegger admitted that the history of Being must be seen in terms of the history of beings, then he would see that Philosophy (or Heidegger's own alternative, 'thought'), as a discipline or even a distinct activity, is obsolete. That is, his concern with Being would be replaced by concrete attention to beings. In fact Rorty feels that Heidegger wants it both ways. While maintaining that he is giving us a history of Being, Heidegger necessarily has recourse to the ordinary history of nations, persons, and their relation to beings in order to give concreteness and definiteness to his ontological history.

It seems clear that before we can evaluate this criticism we need a better notion of just what Heidegger means by 'Being' and how it is supposed to be different from beings. Rorty, of course, denies that Heidegger can give any other than a negative account.

All we are told about Being, Thought, and the ontological difference is by negation. . . . Heidegger thinks that the historical picture which has been sketched offers a glimpse of something else. Yet nothing further can be said about this something else, and so the negative way to Being, through the destruction of ontology, leaves us facing beings-without-Being, with no hint about what Thought might be of.²

But Rorty himself inadvertently indicates Heidegger's attempt to hint at the matter to be thought, although he doesn't discuss it. In the first quote from Heidegger in the paper, from the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger clearly distinguishes the truth of Being from Being itself.

Ontology, whether transcendental or pre-critical, is subject to criticism not because it thinks the Being of beings and thereby subjugates Being to a concept, but because it does not think the truth of Being. . . .³

Often Heidegger commentary does not recognize that in all of his periods Heidegger focuses not so much upon Being as on the *sense* of Being, or the *truth* of Being, or the *place* of Being.⁴ The distinction between Being and the truth of Being is swallowed, as it were, by the distinction between Being and beings. This failure to note the distinction between Being and the truth of Being is perhaps not surprising, given that Heidegger himself is often unclear in regard to it. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics* for example, which Rorty

cites extensively, this distinction barely makes an appearance as the distinction between the inquiry into Being as such and the inquiry into the Being of beings.⁵ Nevertheless, this distinction is both present in Heidegger's texts and the hidden light which illuminates those texts. Heidegger "knows with full clarity the difference between Being as the Being of beings and Being as 'Being' in respect of its proper sense, that is, in respect of its truth (the clearing)."⁶

'Being' then is used by Heidegger in two different, indeed opposed, senses. First, 'Being' is the Being of beings, what each being is thought to need so that it is, rather than nothing. That is, 'Being' in this first sense refers to that which each being involves simply and solely insofar as it *is* at all. The science which studies Being in this sense is metaphysics, the science of Being *qua* Being. Equally, metaphysics, as the science of Being *qua* Being, increasingly comes to see Being in this sense, i.e., the Being of beings, as the ground of beings and itself. ". . . the Being of beings reveals itself as the ground that gives itself ground and accounts for itself."⁷ Metaphysics thus comes to see Being in this first sense as both what is most general, that which every being possesses in that it is, and as that which supplies the ground for all such beings. "Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the unity of the all that accounts for the general, that is, of the All-Highest."⁸ As such, such views of Being as pure act, as absolute concept, or even Heidegger's own view of the Greek notion of Being as the presence of the presencing, all speak to this first sense of Being.

The question of Being also concerns the *aletheia* of Being, that which allows for the possibility of *any* answer to the question of Being in the first sense.

The question of Being, on the other hand, can also be understood in the following sense: Wherein is each answer to the question of Being based i.e., wherein, after all, is the unconcealment of Being grounded? For example: It is said that the Greeks defined Being as the presence of the presencing. In presence speaks the present, in the present is a moment of time; therefore, the manifestation of Being as presence is related to time.⁹

In this second sense 'Being' is sometimes used, unfortunately, as a shorthand expression standing for the "sense of Being," or the unconcealment (truth) of Being, or, more simply, the clearing or opening in which Being, in the first sense as presence, occurs. This 'Being', as the sense of Being, time, is the concern of Heidegger's thought from *Being and Time* onward.

What then does Heidegger mean by "the truth of Being"? (Although there are serious differences among Heidegger's successive formulations, the sense of Being, the truth of Being, and the place of Being, for the sake of

brevity I will speak mainly of the truth of Being, the formulation from his 'middle' period.) Abstractly, the truth of Being is thought as the opening or clearing which allows Being as presencing to appear and manifest itself. In order to think this it is necessary to explicate the sense in which Heidegger uses the term 'truth'. Beginning with *Being and Time* and continuing until very late in his career Heidegger interprets 'truth' with the aid of an idiosyncratic and etymological translation of the Greek *aletheia*. Etymologically '*aletheia*' is a privative of '*lethe*', it is the not-hidden, the uncovered. "'Being-true' ('truth') means Being-uncovering."¹⁰ Yet equally essential to Heidegger's thinking on truth is the claim that unconcealment also involves concealment, hiddenness.

The nature of truth, that is, of unconcealment, is dominated throughout by a denial. Yet this denial is not a defect or a fault, as though truth were an unalloyed unconcealment that has rid itself of everything concealed. If truth could accomplish this, it would no longer be itself. . . . Truth, in its nature, is untruth. We put the matter this way in order to serve notice. . . .that denial in the manner of concealment belongs to unconcealedness as clearing.¹¹

The initial motivation for this interpretation of truth is clear enough. In order for there to be truth in either of the traditional senses, as correspondence or coherence, there must be evidence. That is, the object referred to in the true statement must be manifest, must show itself, it must be uncovered. But that the being disclosed can be uncovered depends upon the possibility of such uncovering. In *Being and Time* this possibility is supplied by the being whose Being consists in Being-in-the-world, Dasein. Thus the early Heidegger distinguishes two senses of 'true', the Being-uncovered of beings and the Being-uncovering of Dasein.

Circumspective concern, or even that concern in which we tarry and look at something, uncovers entities within-the-world. These entities become that which has been uncovered. They are 'true' in a second sense. What is primarily 'true'—that is, uncovering—is Dasein. 'Truth' in the second sense does not mean Being-uncovering, but Being-uncovered.¹²

When the later Heidegger speaks of truth as unconcealedness he is speaking on analogy with the Being-uncovering of *Being and Time*, without the subjectivist bias of the latter. That is, 'truth' is that which allows beings to show themselves through providing an area of showing. As such Heidegger's 'truth' is analogous with the horizon of earlier phenomenology, but with Heidegger the horizon allows for the possibility of focus, or being manifest, and in that sense is primary truth. As such however it itself is that which is ordinarily *not* manifest, not present. "Only what *aletheia* as opening grants is experienced and thought, not what it is as such. This remains concealed."¹³ The con-

cealedness and hiddenness which is fundamental to truth is primarily the essential non-presence (in the sense of not being in the present) of the opening which allows beings to be present. Only secondarily is it the perspectival hiddenness native to those beings themselves.

After 1964 Heidegger gives up the translation of *aletheia* as truth, without giving up the matter thought by *aletheia*. This matter, the clearing or opening in which both beings and Being can appear, remains the primary 'object' of Heidegger's thought. In *On Time and Being* Heidegger returns to his earliest treatment of the clearing, in terms of temporality. The ecstatic temporality which is the meaning of the Being of Dasein in *Being and Time* is now thought as 'time-space'. Time-space is introduced during a discussion of presence in terms of the present and absence. As opposed to the traditional understanding of the present as a now point in a sequence of now points, Heidegger interprets the present as that which concerns human being, the matter illuminated in concern. "What is present concerns us, the present, that is: what, lasting, comes toward us, us human beings." "Presence means: the constant abiding that approaches man, reaches him, is extended to him."¹⁴ Presence, understood in this way as that which lasts in concern, involves more than the present ordinarily so called. It necessarily also involves absence, the absence of that which has been, and of that which is coming toward us. That which is 'past' and 'future' for Heidegger, is equally present, but *only* in the sense of being of concern, not in the sense of being in the temporal now. There is a presence of 'past' and 'future' precisely insofar as they are absent from the now, i.e., as having been and coming toward.

But we have to do with absence just as often, that is, constantly. For one thing, there is much that is no longer present in the way we know presencing in the sense of the present. And yet, even that which is no longer present presences immediately in its absence—in the manner of what has been, and still concerns us.

... absence, as the presencing of what is not yet present, always in some way concerns us, is present no less immediately than what has been.¹⁵

Thus not every presencing involves the present. But the present too is itself a mode of presence.

Heidegger's concern, however, is not with that which is present, past, or future. Reverting to a distinction which is focal in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, he is rather interested in temporality itself or the opening in which that which is temporal can be so. "For time itself is nothing temporal, no more than it is something that is." "Time-space now is the name for the openness which opens up in the mutual self-extending of futural approach, past, and present."¹⁶ Time-space supplies this openness in which present and absent beings can be, however, only in that the dimensions of time, past, pre-

sent, and future, are both related to one another and distinct. Within this distinction lies a withholding of the present. The past and future are present *only* through their absence.

... we call the first, original, literally incipient extending in which the unity of true time consists 'nearing nearness', 'nearhood'. . . . But it brings future, past, and present near to one another by distancing them. For it keeps what has been open by denying its advent as present. . . . Nearing nearness has the character of denial and withholding.¹⁷

It is both possible and helpful to distinguish Heidegger's truth of Being, as we have just interpreted it, from certain other contemporary notions which seem to be similar to it. First, the truth of Being should not be seen as analogous to a conceptual scheme. Aside from the obvious fact that Heidegger associates the truth of Being with temporality, rather than concepts, there is a deeper difference between these notions. As Donald Davidson pointed out in his paper "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," the idea of a conceptual scheme depends ultimately upon something like the hard Kantian distinction between sensibility and understanding. But Heidegger rejects this distinction as fully as do Davidson, Sellars, and Rorty. As early as *Being and Time*, Heidegger held that we never have merely 'raw feelings'.¹⁸ Rather, for Heidegger, all human 'experience' is only possible within a *world*, a world which is always already linguistically articulated. But then, perhaps the truth of Being should be seen as similar to the analytic notion of a set of linguistic rules which allow for the possibility of language use? There is more to be said in favor of this analogy, as Heidegger frequently remarks on the connection between the truth of Being and the pre-thematic articulation of a world by language. We must be careful here with the concept of a rule. The word 'rule' suggests a situation in which a person acting according to a rule must either be obeying the rule (i.e., the rule is a principle which is explicit *for* the agent) or merely acting in conformity to a rule (i.e., the agent's acts fall into a regular, perhaps causal, pattern, although the agent is not aware of this).¹⁹ Heidegger wishes to avoid both of these alternatives, which he sees as metaphysical. In both cases we are seen as capable, in principle, of giving a single correct interpretation and explication of what is involved in acting according to any particular rule. That is, every rule can be made explicit and focal, either by the agent (in the case of obeying a rule) or by a scientist observing the behavior (in the case of conforming to a rule). For Heidegger, the necessity of the hermeneutic circle, which precludes the possibility of any fully grounded interpretation points to the *necessarily* nonfocal character of both language and the truth of Being. Thus Heidegger's truth of Being must also be distinguished from the notion of a set of linguistic rules. Put bluntly,

Heidegger's position is that 'rules' can not be successfully used to account for the possibility and actuality of language use.

The matter of Heidegger's thought, then, is the truth of Being, the clearing in which beings can appear and in which Being, as the presencing of presence, can manifest itself. The clearing is analogous with the phenomenological horizon. As such it is the concealed possibility of unconcealment, the 'truth' of Being. Further, the opening is temporality, the ecstatic extendedness and distinction of past, present and future. All of this is different from Being, or presencing as such. But how is any of this relevant to Heidegger's insistence on the epochal history of Being, and his distinction of thought and philosophy, and Rorty's criticism of these?

3. *The Truth of Being and the History of Philosophy*

The thrust of Rorty's criticism of Heidegger is aimed at the supposed vacuity of Heidegger's thought of Being without beings. In order to overcome this vacuity, Rorty thinks that Heidegger has recourse to the history of beings. But the form ordinary history takes for Rorty's Heidegger is the alienated form of the history of philosophy.

If he [Heidegger] were true to his own dictum that we should 'cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself', he would have nothing to say, nowhere to point. *The whole force of Heidegger's thought lies in his account of the history of philosophy.*²⁰

For Rorty's Heidegger, therefore, the content of the history of Being arises out of the history of philosophy. But the history of Being can be subsumed under the history of philosophy, for Rorty, only if philosophy is *of* Being. Thus Rorty's Heidegger is necessarily committed to the view that metaphysics was always about Being, and that his own thought is tied to this tradition.

... the only thing which links him with the tradition is his claim that the tradition, though persistently sidetracked onto beings, was really concerned with Being all the time—and, indeed, constituted the history of Being.²¹

But if Heidegger's 'thought' is really different from the tradition as Heidegger claims, then he is committed to the odd view that his thought is essentially a continuation of the *same* thinking as metaphysics, although at the same time he utterly rejects everything in that tradition. The criticism thus has three steps. First, Being without being is a vacuous notion. Second, this vacuity is overcome through a consideration of the history of philosophy. This in turn commits Heidegger to the absurd position that his thought is both entirely different from the tradition and also a continuation of the tradi-

tion which is about the very same thing as that tradition. Heidegger needs the tradition in order to identify the matter of his thinking, but then turns around and denies that the tradition tells us anything about that matter.

The criticism is dominated throughout by the reading of Heidegger which sees his primary distinction in the difference between Being and beings. Rorty's initial claim, that Being without beings is a vacuous notion, is motivated by this reading. We have argued in the previous section that this understanding of Heidegger is inadequate. Nevertheless, this fact, by itself, is not sufficient to show that the criticism is not cogent. It still may be the case that this other matter of Heidegger's thought, the truth of Being, may also prove to be vacuous. That is, Heidegger might be equally unable to determine the truth of Being without recourse to his version of the history of philosophy. As Heidegger rejects that tradition as, at least, inadequate, he would once again be in the position of identifying the matter of his thinking through ontology, while denying that ontology has anything positive to say about that matter.

Although Heidegger's truth of Being is in no sense the same as is thought in Kant's thing in itself (the truth of Being is not a 'real world' or beings as they are independent of experience) there does seem to be a certain formal analogy between them. The truth of Being can not successfully be made into an object of experience. This is because it is not an object at all, whether of experience or in itself. It is not. Rather it is meant as the concealed space in which objects can be. But if the truth of Being can never be an object of experience, how can it be indicated, 'pointed to'? It can't be ostensively determined, it can't be distinguished as this as opposed to that, and it can't be defined in terms of some being. The reference to Kant, however, suggests a transcendental procedure for the determination of the truth of Being. But, even though Heidegger often uses transcendental sounding language, even in his late writings, he specifically precludes the option of considering the truth of Being as merely the necessary condition for the possibility of experience, as this would be overly subjectivistic. Nonetheless Heidegger often *does* use quasi-transcendental arguments in order to identify the place and role of the truth of Being. Indeed, the characterizations we have already given to the truth of Being in the last section all arise out of such transcendental considerations. On the other hand, the base step for these procedures is not the certainty of experience. When the truth of Being is discussed as the clearing, that which it supplies the condition of the possibility of is not experience, but Being. Similarly, when *aletheia* or temporality are under consideration it is Being in the sense of present evidence or presencing as such which is the basis for the transcendental discussion.²²

It is clear that Heidegger thinks there can be no direct access to the truth of Being, no uncovering of the truth of Being such as occurs in regard to beings. I am suggesting that Heidegger substitutes a quasi-transcendental approach. The foundation for this transcendental access is not experience, however, but rather Being. But how is Being itself to be determined and characterized? It seems that we are back to Rorty's problem. If the truth of Being can only be identified in and through Being, then Being itself must be available to us. But Being as presencing is not. It, Being is not in the open to be viewed. Where then does Heidegger get the determination of Being as presencing? Heidegger explicitly addresses this question in "On Time and Being." He suggests two answers, one of which is a blatant statement of Rorty's contention that Heidegger can only determine Being from out of the tradition of ontology.

But what gives us the right to characterize Being as presencing? This question comes too late. For this character of Being has long since been decided without our contribution. . . . Thus we are bound to the characterization of Being as presencing. It derives its binding force from the beginning of the unconcealment of Being as something that can be said. . . . Ever since the beginning of Western thinking with the Greeks, all saying of 'Being' and 'Is' is held in remembrance of the determination of Being as presencing which is binding for thinking.²³

In this same passage Heidegger also suggests a second mode of access to Being or presencing. Harkening back to *Being and Time* he asserts that a phenomenological approach to *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* will also yield a characterization of Being as presencing. We will leave aside this second answer to the question concerning the determination of Being as presencing and concentrate on the adequacy of the first answer, given Rorty's criticism of it.²⁴

Heidegger explicitly asserts that Being has already been characterized as presencing, and that this has been done at the beginning of the Western philosophical tradition.²⁵ It would thus seem that Rorty is right in regard to the first two steps of his argument. Even though Heidegger is not primarily concerned with Being, but rather with the truth of Being, the characterization of the truth of Being depends upon the determination of Being. Apart from the phenomenological arguments developed in *Being and Time* and then mostly ignored by Heidegger, there is no way to determine Being except through the supposedly already established determination given by the tradition. Rorty is thus apparently correct in his contention that Being is a vacuous notion which is only given content in and through the history of philosophy.

The third step in Rorty's argument is accomplished through the juxtaposition of Heidegger's dependence upon the tradition with his rejection of that tradition. But Heidegger *never* simply rejects or refutes the tradition of

Western thinking as wrong. In speaking specifically of Hegel, he makes the general point that it is impossible ever to give such a refutation or to hazard such a rejection.

Whatever stems from it [absolute metaphysics] cannot be affected or done away with by refutation. It can only be appraised, as its truth is reintegrated more incipiently into Being itself and removed from the sphere of human opinion. To refute everything in the field of essential thought is ridiculous.²⁶

But if Heidegger does not see himself as refuting or rejecting the history of ontology as wrong, then what is the character of his rejection of the tradition? For reject it he does. The answer has already been given. The tradition is inadequate because it never thinks the truth of Being. This, necessarily, remains hidden from metaphysics "... the truth of Being as the clearing itself remains concealed from metaphysics. This concealment, however, is not a defect of metaphysics, but the treasure of its own richness. . ."²⁷

In the history of Western thinking. . . what is, is thought, in reference to Being; yet the truth of Being remains unthought, and not only is that truth denied to thinking as a possible experience, but Western thinking itself, and indeed in the form of metaphysics, expressly, but nevertheless unknowingly, veils the happening of that denial.²⁸

The tradition of ontology, for Heidegger, is not wrong in regard to its continuous thinking of Being as presencing. It is inadequate and incomplete in that it fails to think the clearing, or truth of Being, in which there can be both present beings and presencing itself, Being.

Two crucial conclusions rest upon the character of Heidegger's rejection of the tradition. First, the fact that Heidegger rejects metaphysics in the way he does, does not commit him to the position that metaphysics is wrong in regard to its characterization of Being. Quite the contrary appears to be the case. It is not even possible for us to 'give up' the content of Being as presencing, we necessarily live in terms of it. We can no longer *do* metaphysics not because it is wrong, but rather because it has ended in, and been continued by, technology and the positive sciences. Second, Heidegger's thinking is *not* about the very same thing metaphysics was about. Rorty is just wrong in his contention that it is. Rather, Heidegger's thinking is distinguished from metaphysics precisely insofar as it is not concerned with Being, but is concerned with the truth of Being. It is in this sense that we must read his dictum that we need to leave metaphysics to itself. Heidegger would seem to agree with Rorty that the proper 'end' to philosophy is in the sciences, natural and social, and in practical, technological activity. But there is something left unthought in philosophy, the clearing in which philosophy happens, the truth of Being.

Indicating the nature of Heidegger's rejection of metaphysics does not yet, however, decide the issue between him and Rorty. One additional step is necessary. We have already seen that there is a sense in which Heidegger can not 'leave metaphysics to itself'. Even though he is not directly determining the matter of his thinking through the characterization of Being in the history of philosophy, Rorty is right in thinking that Heidegger does need the tradition in order to identify that matter. The truth of Being is identified by asking how Being as presencing is possible. Only through rethinking the tradition as the successive revelation of Being as presencing does it become possible to ask this question. But *this* relation between Heidegger and the tradition is not open to the criticism Rorty levels. There is nothing odd, contradictory, or impossible about rejecting ontology as incomplete because it does not think the truth of Being, which is necessary for its own possibility, and then determining the truth of Being through a quasi-transcendental discussion of the possibility of the ontological tradition. On the contrary, this is the 'method' which is adequate and appropriate to the task.

4. *The Truth of Being and Epochs of Being*

Rorty's criticism of Heidegger in regard to the possibility for thinking at the end of philosophy is coordinated with a second criticism. This criticism concerns the relation among Heidegger's account of Being, the history of Being, and ordinary history. Heidegger's account of Being is, admittedly, dependent for its determination upon his understanding of the history of Being. Rorty claims that this history of Being is reducible to history in the usual sense. At best it is a history of ideas, which itself is parasitic upon the social, political, and economic history of peoples. At worst it is vacuous.

There are two distinct though related claims involved in Rorty's criticism of Heidegger on the history of Being. For most of his paper Rorty asserts that Heidegger's history of Being must be seen as simply a version of the history of philosophy. "Heidegger's sense of the vulgarity of the age . . . is strongest when what is trivialized is the history of metaphysics. For this history is the history of Being . . ." ²⁹ On this account, the history of Being is both constituted by and manifest in the writings of the great philosophers. As such, ordinary history is seen as secondary to metaphysical history—a period is characterized as a failure or a success in terms of its ability to actualize the thought of its philosophers. On the other hand, Rorty also claims that the history of Being must be seen in terms of, and gets its content from, the ordinary history of 'ages, cultures', etc.

Unless Heidegger connected the history of Being with that of men and nations through such phrases as 'a nation's relation to Being' and thus connected the history of philosophy with just plain history, he would be able to say only what Kierkegaard said . . . ³⁰

i.e., his history of Being would be vacuous. These two claims do not, of course, contradict one another. Rather, together they amount to a single assertion concerning Heidegger's history of Being. For Rorty, Heidegger sees the history of Being as the history of philosophy. But, for Rorty, following Marx and Dewey, the history of philosophy itself is composed of a series of *Weltanschauung* which in turn are determined in and through ordinary history. Rorty emphasizes those passages in Heidegger which connect the history of Being with ordinary history because for Rorty it is ultimately through this reference that the history of philosophy is made definite.

There are thus two relations in question in Rorty's discussion of Heidegger's history of Being—the relation between the history of Being and the history of philosophy, and the relation between the history of philosophy and ordinary history. We have already seen that there is a sense in which the history of metaphysics is a history of Being for Heidegger. The various metaphysical determinations of Being as presencing do constitute something like a history of Being. "The development of the abundance of transformations of Being [in metaphysics] looks at first like a history of Being."³¹ It is also the case that whatever genuinely characterizes the history of Being for Heidegger, the indications for the concrete stages of this history are taken almost exclusively from the thinking of philosophers. But these metaphysical systems are not *themselves* the epochs of Being which compose the history of Being, for Heidegger. Rather, Heidegger attempts to differentiate the epochs of Being, which are the stages of his history of Being, from the metaphysical systems, which are merely the concrete indicators for discovering the content of this history. This differentiation can be seen clearly in Heidegger's use of the term 'epoch' to stand for the stages of the history of Being. For the word 'epoch' has a specific technical sense in Heidegger's thought which goes beyond and is different from its ordinary sense.

To hold back is, in Greek, *epoche*. Hence we speak of the epochs of the destiny of Being. Epoch does not mean here a span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernability of the gift, that is of Being with regard to the grounding of beings.³²

An epoch of Being, then, is not characterized by what is positive in any metaphysical thesis in regard to Being. Rather, it is determined by what is absent, held back, in that position. The history of Being is a history of hiddenness, not of presence. It is a history of the specific ways in which the place and truth of being have been forgotten, not of Being in the ontological sense, itself.

At this point an apparent, but only apparent, similarity between Heidegger and Hegel suggests itself and is instructive. Hegel's history of philosophy is also a history of absence, of holding back. For Hegel, each successive stage

in philosophical development (corresponding roughly to moments in the Logic) is, as finite, determined by its limit. A philosophical system is as it is because it fails to incorporate within its own thought something which is nonetheless necessary for itself. This other, its limit, is both the determination of the philosophy, and, ultimately, its *Aufhebung*. But in Hegel's 'history of Being' this holding back is itself limited. That is, thought progressively overcomes each of its successive limits until limitation itself is finally incorporated into philosophy in the *Science of Logic*. In this culmination the form of finitude, temporality, is also *Aufgehoben*. In Heidegger's history of Being, on the other hand, there is not and can not be any such final reappropriation of the hidden. At best there can be only a simple recognition of the hidden, non-present limit of all philosophical discourse.

Returning to the main problem, however, how does the epochal character of Heidegger's history of Being affect the relation between that history and the history of philosophy? The history of Being is obviously dependent upon Heidegger's critical rethinking of the history of philosophy, but only in a negative way. The actual content that Heidegger gives to his history of Being is both discovered through and different from the actual content of the history of philosophy. It is discovered through the tradition in that it traces what is forgotten by but necessary for each specific moment in the history of philosophy. It is different from the content of the tradition in that no particular stage in the tradition, or even that tradition taken as a whole, thinks what is at issue in the history of Being. For what is at issue in the history of Being is *not* Being, but the truth of Being. The history of Being includes, for example, a history of the ways in which temporality functions but is passed over, and must be passed over, in ontology. But if this is the case then it is clear that the history of Being is not simply reducible to the history of metaphysics. Rorty's claim that "... this history [the history of metaphysics] is the history of Being ..." is just false. As was the case in regard to the relation of thinking and philosophy, Rorty has confused an admitted *dependence* of Heidegger on the tradition with the false proposition that the matter of Heidegger's thinking must be *identical* with the content of the tradition.

If Heidegger is not committed to the view that the history of Being is reducible to the history of metaphysics, then what are we to make of the relation between the history of Being and ordinary history? A simple transitive relation like the one implied by Rorty will not do. That is, if the history of Being is *not* the history of philosophy, then the determination of the content of the history of philosophy by ordinary history does not necessitate, by itself, an equal determination of the content of the history of Being by ordinary history. But *we* can *discover* the actual content of the history of Being only

through recourse to the actual content of philosophical thought. Doesn't this imply the dependence in question? Not really. As the history of philosophy and the history of Being are correlative, and the history of philosophy and ordinary history are also, at least, correlative, there must be some correlation between ordinary history and the history of Being. But this correlation would allow for a criticism of Heidegger only if it made it impossible to differentiate Being or (more accurately) the truth of Being, from beings. That is, if the history of Being were a function of ordinary history, and ordinary history was not reciprocally a function of the history of Being, then the truth of Being would also be a simple function of the actual history of beings. In that case the investigation of the history of Being, in Heidegger's sense, could only be an alienated and unselfconscious study of the ordinary history of beings. Being and the truth of Being would not be radically different from beings, but only abstract and alienated ways in which a tradition of scholars had indirectly encountered beings. Rorty accepts this inference because he thinks of the history of Being as identical with the history of metaphysics and further thinks of the history of metaphysics as a function of ordinary history. We have already seen, however, that the history of Being is *not* identical with the history of metaphysics, for Heidegger. Given this lack of identity, Rorty's argument could work only if he showed that the history of Being were a function of the history of metaphysics. This relationship between the history of Being and the history of metaphysics he does not show, and Heidegger would deny. Although there is a correlation between an epoch of Being and a positive metaphysical assertion in regard to Being itself, which allows for the possibility of discovering the content of an epoch of Being, the metaphysical assertion does not *determine*, causally or otherwise, the holding back which is definitive for an epoch. Rather, Heidegger suggests, the reverse is more likely. Thus, even if the history of philosophy is a function of ordinary history, it does not follow that the history of Being is a function of ordinary history. An epoch of Being is defined by the field of openness in which both beings and Being can be manifest in the particular way they are in that epoch. This 'clearing', as the truth or place of Being, is itself hidden from the period. The correlation between ordinary history and the history of Being can be accounted for and is necessitated by the fact that the truth of Being opens a field or world of possibility in which the life of peoples, nations, etc., occurs. This implies no priority to either the ordinary historical events and structures or to the particular character of the open during a particular temporal period. Nor does this correlation make it impossible to distinguish and differentiate beings from the truth of Being.

The history of Being, although discoverable for Heidegger in and through the history of metaphysics, is not the history of metaphysics. Equal-

ly, the history of Being, although correlated with ordinary history, need not be for Heidegger simply a function of ordinary history. We then see that the second main aspect of Rorty's criticism of Heidegger fails to be conclusive. As was the case with the first main aspect of his criticism (in regard to the relation of thinking and philosophy), Rorty's failure to identify the difference between Being and the truth of Being in Heidegger's thought is crucial here. If this distinction is ignored, then the history of Being can only be identified with the history of metaphysics. If this were the case, Rorty's criticism would be correct and cogent. But as the history of Being is not simply a new version of the history of metaphysics, Rorty's criticism must be rejected.

5. Conclusion: Heidegger, Rorty, and Appropriation

Although the aims of this paper have now been reached, there is still a matter involved in the paper that needs further elucidation. I have somehow managed to write a paper which is primarily concerned with Heidegger but which never once speaks of *Ereignis*, or 'appropriation'.

It has been suggested throughout this paper that the real 'matter' of Heidegger's thinking is not Being, but rather the truth of Being. This is not entirely accurate. The ultimate concern of Heidegger's thought is neither Being nor the truth of Being. It is appropriation.

What lets the two matters [Being and time] belong together, what brings the two into their own and, even more, maintains and holds them in their belonging together—the way the two matters stand, the matter at stake—is Appropriation.³³

Why then have I intentionally suggested that the matter is temporality, or the truth of Being? This has been done for the sake of simplicity. Appropriation itself can only be grasped in terms of the relation between Being and the truth of Being. As such, it is almost totally incomprehensible without a prior thinking of the truth of Being, a thinking which Rorty's paper lacks. For appropriation operates for Heidegger precisely in the relation, the belonging together, of the two. "The matter at stake [appropriation] first appropriates Being and time into their own in virtue of their relation . . ."³⁴ Heidegger often speaks of appropriation as the 'It' which gives both time and Being. This suggests that appropriation is some third thing, a being over and beyond Being and time. But this substantialization of appropriation is a mistake. "Appropriation neither *is*, nor *is* Appropriation there."³⁵ Rather, the mutual opening up and belonging together of Being and the truth of Being is at issue in appropriation, and only that. In appropriation Heidegger is suggesting an entirely 'formal' feature of all historical worlds, the difference and relation of Being as presencing and the truth of Being as temporality. A preliminary at-

tention to the truth of Being is thus necessary to open the way to Heidegger's appropriation. Since Rorty's article fails to give this attention to the truth of Being, this paper has attempted to remedy this lack. To have brought up *Ereignis* prematurely would only have muddled the waters.

Then does this paper assert that Heidegger is right and Rorty is wrong, that 'thinking' is possible at the end of philosophy, and that there is indeed a history of Being independent of ordinary history? No, it remains uncommitted in regard to these issues. Neither does it suggest that there is no significant difference between Rorty and Heidegger. There is indeed such a difference. But Rorty has misidentified it. Rorty thinks that the difference between Heidegger and himself lies in Heidegger's insistent consideration of 'Being'. This amounts, for Rorty, to the 'hope' that even after the end of ontology there might still be philosophy, as thought, which searches for the 'holy', which while rejecting the tradition, still looks for something analogous to the 'real world'. In an odd way Rorty's interpretation and criticism of Heidegger mirrors Derrida's reading and criticism of Heidegger. For Derrida, 'Being' is used by Heidegger as a 'unique name', signifying a 'transcendental signified'. That is, the verb 'to be' is thought of by Derrida's Heidegger as having a 'lexical' as well as a grammatical function, a lexical use which signifies a transcendental 'Being' in a unique way. This supposed Heideggerian meaning of 'Being' amounts, for Derrida, to a certain 'nostalgia' for presence. In fact, as we have seen, neither of these interpretations can be justified in Heidegger's texts. The truth of Being is not Being as presencing, and *Ereignis* is nothing outside of the open field in which beings and meanings occur. Heidegger does not 'hope' for a 'real world', nor is he nostalgic concerning presence. Dominique Janicaud has made this point persuasively in regard to Derrida's criticism.

... I do not think it right to claim that there is nostalgia in Heidegger's works The Heideggerian *Ereignis* does not mean any self-closure or self-achievement, but rather an *ek-statikon*. My last words on this point will be taken from 'Time and Being': '*Zum Ereignis als solchem gehört die Enteignung*', which one might translate as follows: disappropriation belongs to appropriation as such. I thus do not see how one could assimilate the Heideggerian *Ereignis* to the appropriation of presence.³⁶

But if 'Being' in Heidegger is not a 'transcendental signified', if Heidegger does not hold out any 'hope' for a 'holy' real world, what then does oppose Heidegger and Rorty? It is precisely the same thing which really distinguishes Rorty from Derrida. Both Heidegger and Derrida consider the field in which presencing can occur, in Heidegger's language the open and appropriation, in Derrida's language 'differance', as worthy of thought. Heidegger is claiming that there is a 'formal' necessity involved in any actual world

of activity and meaning, the opposition and belonging together of Being and time. This clearing and belonging together is approachable for Heidegger through something like transcendental argumentation. These arguments do not get us outside of our world, however, only into it in a different way. It is this claim and this 'hope' which Rorty is really denying. "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey" unfortunately doesn't address this issue.

Mark B. Okrent

Bates College

NOTES

1. R. Rorty, "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey" in *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XXX, No. 2, Dec. 1976, p. 297. (Cited hereafter as OTT).
2. OTT, p. 297.
3. OTT, p. 280.
4. Otto Poggler and Thomas Sheehan are among those who *have* recognized the importance of the meaning or truth of Being in Heidegger's thought. For example, cf., Poggler's "Heidegger's Topology of Being" in Joseph J. Kockelmans, ed., *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972) and Sheehan's "Heidegger's Interpretation of Aristotle: *Dynamis and Ereignis*," in *Philosophy Research Archives*.
5. This distinction itself appears mostly in an interpolation into the text which was written after 1935. Cf., Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), p. 14ff.
6. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 20.
7. Heidegger, "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics" in Stambaugh, ed., *Identity and Difference* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 57.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
9. Heidegger, ed., R. Wisser, *Martin Heidegger in Conversation* (New Delhi, India: Arnold Hinneman Publishers, 1977), p. 45.
10. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 262, H. 219.
11. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Hofstadter, ed., *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 54.
12. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 263, H. 220.
13. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in Stambaugh, ed., *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 71.
14. Heidegger, "On Time and Being," in Stambaugh, ed., *On Time and Being*, p. 12. (Cited Hereafter as OTB).
15. OTB, p. 13.
16. OTB, p. 14.
17. OTB, p. 15. At this point Heidegger's discussion of time bears a striking resemblance to Hegel's treatment of time in the *Philosophy of Nature*. What distinguishes Heidegger's treatment from Hegel's, however, is his insistence that temporality is irreducible to a mode of thought.
18. Cf., *Being and Time*, Sec. 34, etc.

19. This tendency can be seen in Sellars's article, "Some Reflections on Language Games" in *Science, Perception, and Reality*. As I understand it, Sellars's own attempt to avoid these poles ultimately depends on a simple conformity, perhaps causal, to metarules.

20. OTT, pp. 302-303.

21. OTT, p. 303.

22. I describe Heidegger's procedure for identifying the truth of Being as 'quasi-transcendental'. This term needs some explication. For Heidegger, there is a sense in which the truth of Being is phenomenal, roughly the same sense in which a phenomenological horizon is phenomenal. (As opposed to a Husserlian horizon, however, the truth of Being can *never* be made focal.) It is this that leads Heidegger to assert, in the Introduction to *Being and Time*, that both the sense of Being and the Kantian forms of intuition are 'phenomena'. So, if a transcendental argument is seen as one which necessarily argues to a conclusion which asserts the being of a non-phenomenal condition, Heidegger's procedure can not be termed transcendental. Nevertheless, Heidegger's method for identifying and determining the truth of Being does have a transcendental form. That is, he moves from that which is admitted to be the case, beings and their Being, to the necessary condition for the possibility of beings, the truth of Being. For this reason I have called his procedure quasi-transcendental. I have no objection, however, to calling this method 'transcendental', as long as it is remembered that: (1) the argument does not start from experience and (2) the condition argued to is neither an existent nor non-phenomenal.

23. OTB, pp. 6-7.

24. But cf. Section IV of this paper.

25. OTB, p. 8.

26. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in Barrett & Aiken, eds., *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 3 (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 284-285.

27. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 282.

28. Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," in Lovitt, ed., *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 56.

29. OTT, p. 299.

30. OTT, p. 296.

31. OTB, p. 8.

32. OTB, p. 9.

33. OTB, p. 19.

34. OTB, p. 19.

35. OTB, p. 24.

36. D. Janicaud, "Presence and Appropriation," in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. VIII, 1978, p. 73.