

A Walk in the Landscape of Language

A Walk in the Landscape of Language:

*A Journey towards
a Heideggerian Understanding
with Language*

By

Simon Young

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INTRODUCTION

Within the works of Heidegger, language appears to hold a special place. The problem is, though, what is “language” or how should “language” be addressed from a Heideggerian perspective? The goal of this book is to address language from a perspective offered from within the works of Heidegger using that mode of thought indicated by Heidegger. This does not mean that any attempt will be made to work towards a conceptual model of what language was for Heidegger, but, rather, the works of Heidegger will be allowed to indicate a way towards a journey; an exploration of a strange land where everything discovered is stared at until it starts to become translucent. By starting at the things found on the way, a hint of that which lies beyond can be felt, but it can only ever be a hint and never come into the sharp focus offered by conceptualisation. This will be a journey into the unknown and unknowable; where the known becomes unknown and the destination becomes unknowable. A mysterious land, but a land that is not distant as this land is the land we already inhabit; this land is ourselves looked at through the spectacles of Heideggerian thought.

The journey might be seen to lead through different stages in the form of chapters but this would be only seeing a conceptualisation of the book as all stages are a part of a unified whole with the divisions being imposed on it rather than being divisions that are there of necessity. At one level, the stages of the journey can be seen as milestones on a way, but the way has no destination and so the milestones can give no distance or even direction. The stages do try to point to a way leading ever deeper into the strangeness of our own existence but they can also be seen as aspects or perspectives onto the same. To this extent, each chapter says the same as all of the others. This is an effort to both reflect the works of Heidegger and to gain an understanding with language at the most primordial level. Although the parts of the book might appear disparate as different chapters with different labels apparently on different subjects, just as Heidegger is taken before and after a “turn” that some choose to impose on his writings, they actually all speak of the same.

Chapter 1 ostensibly deals with what is, very loosely, termed “methodologies”. It seeks to explore the way the material examined later

in the work is to be addressed by examining how the term “methodology” itself is to be understood and, from there, progresses onto encounters with different terms used to describe the activities undertaken by Heidegger. Although this can certainly be considered as an initial signpost towards the road to be taken when engaging with the works of Heidegger, it also points towards itself; that is, although, at a conceptual level, it is talking about ways Heideggerian thinking is undertaken, these ways also talk about how they themselves are being thought about. To create an understanding with the text, the reader has to allow the text to lead them on their own path; it is this path itself that allows an understanding with the mode of thinking being sought and not things discovered along the way. This first step is just another step on the path; not a beginning of the journey, but already on the journey. Building an understanding *with* the mode of thought used by Heidegger and used in this book does not imply that an understanding *of* such thinking will be sought: an understanding *with* allows a walking alongside; an understanding *of* implies an encapsulation and the killing or limitation of thought.

The second chapter is dominated by an engagement with *Being and Time* and excavating the pointers that, if they do not point towards language explicitly, allow comportment towards the essence of language. Although the chapter can, like *Being and Time* itself, be taken conceptually, this temptation should be resisted. The chapter tries to open the way for such a resistance to be undertaken, or, at least, tries to indicate that such a resistance could be attempted. The chapter is a walk with Heidegger through the landscape revealed by *Being and Time* in the light offered by a contemplation of our essential selves: the activity of Dasein.

In the third chapter an understanding with language is sought beyond *Being and Time*: using dictionary definitions as starting points for thought as well as the writings of Heidegger. Although it might appear odd to use dictionary definitions in a Heideggerian journey when Heidegger himself claimed that dictionaries contained no meanings, this would miss the point. The starting point for thought can be taken from any source. Heideggerian thought does not depend on the limitations of the starting point, but, rather, if that starting point is taken as a signpost on the beginning of a journey. If this is done then the destination has been arrived at in the following of the path indicated beyond the signpost. Taking a definition from a dictionary and confusing that definition with meaning would be the antithesis of Heideggerian thought; taking the definition as a starting point for a train of thought that is not confined within the definition would be an example of Heideggerian thought. The surprise that

some might feel at a dictionary being used implies that the mode of thinking used by Heidegger has not been fully embraced: taking dictionary definitions as driving forces for the activity of thought is the same as using any text, including Heidegger's own texts, as the impetus for such thinking. If Heidegger himself were taken as making arguments and assertions that can be extracted from the text as autonomous truths (or claims to being truths) then this would be to distort the text through the lens of technicity or calculative thought. Just as the dictionary contains no meanings at all, so Heidegger's works contain no meaning; a comportment towards meaning can, though, be gained from a thinking engagement with a dictionary just as such a comportment can be made through a thinking engagement with the texts Heidegger left us. Just as art is made art by the observer, so Heideggerian philosophy is made Heideggerian philosophy by the reader.

Having tried to travel a journey of discovery within the light offered by the term "language" but with no goal other than to be on the journey, the fourth chapter allows other lights to shine forth and reveal new landscapes. The lights can be seen, not as different light sources, but as a light that permeates from beyond and through the landscape that allows the objects within the landscape to shine forth from themselves. The things that are found while on a journey of Heideggerian thinking are not just things that can be taken and held still, but share in a common source of self-illumination. They are discernible because of the illumination but they are also of the illumination and so self-illuminating; illuminated from their own essence. As the journey is on the way towards an essential understanding, the essence is the common illumination and so the essence of all things found on the way becoming a single shining forth that one can only be aware of as a part of the activity of boundless thought and, even then, only as an echo of an experience having passed. Bringing together aspects of ourselves to become a single essence does not mean that a common essence can be discovered as something on which thinking can be based, rather, the search of the common essence is an activity that points to that essence. The singularity at the heart of us is not something, but no-thing. This core does not allow itself to be modelled or a representation made, but can be encountered only within the thinking activity; the essence is the activity of thinking.

CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY

This book sets out to travel the ways signposted by Heidegger in his effort to come to an understanding or experience with “language”. The journey allows both language and the mode of thought offered by Heidegger in his experience of language to be encountered. Travelling with Heidegger should not be mistaken for a search for a conceptualisation offered by Heidegger of language or a conceptualisation of Heideggerian thought at all, but a journey with Heidegger using language as the light by which the landscape can be revealed while walking; a light by which both language as well as Heideggerian thinking might be sensed.

In order to explore a landscape bathed in the revealing light of language, the texts used must be addressed with a certain attitude that allows language to reveal aspects of itself that are taken as signposts to their own essence. The experience of the text is dependent on the way it is read. If the text is taken as offering only concepts that are used to limit the text, then those concepts will be all that is found, but if the concepts that reveal themselves when encountering the text are not taken as ends but beginnings, then the text takes on a different character; the text starts to become alive and boundless.

The way the text is read might be called a methodology, but the term “methodology” must be understood in a special way. A method is defined as, “the pursuit of knowledge, mode of investigation” and a “procedure for attaining an object.” (Onions, 1973) With these definitions as pointers, the appropriateness of using the term methodology when trying to think with Heidegger will be explored.

The above definitions can be divided in two parts:

1. The pursuit of knowledge; and
2. Mode of investigation.

The definition that says that method is the “procedure for attaining an object” has not been included. The reasons for this are twofold: if the object is seen as a thing – a physical thing, a law of nature, a concept or the like – then this is already necessitated by the definition of method as being the pursuit of knowledge, taking knowledge as knowledge of something; and, if object is taken a goal, then the definition adds nothing as it would be just saying that the method is a way of achieving a goal.

The first understanding of “method” explored will, therefore, be method as the pursuit of knowledge. To know is often taken to be to know a thing, but to know can be taken as to be familiar or acquainted with. (Onions, 1973) This might be taken as it is, but it leaves something out: to be familiar or acquainted with what? As this is the start of the investigation into Heideggerian experience rather than a conceptualisation of Heidegger or language, the “what” cannot be assumed before the first step on the way has been taken. The assumption is often made that any “what” is a thing; a thing that can be pointed at and examined. An investigation might take a thing discovered and examine it from all angles and perspectives in order that the thing might become “known”, but the impulse to assume that the “what” is a thing must be resisted. Not only must it be said that the object of the investigation is not known beforehand, but also that it cannot even be known if the object of our investigation is a thing at all. The proposal is not to investigate a “what” as something that can be regarded as such at all, but to experience moving in the light of a “what” while travelling past any conceptual “what” that might be disclosed along the way.

The second definition allows the movement further away from method as a way things can become familiar and towards “method” as way of thinking. No assumptions as to the nature of the subject sought are made at the outset. Having said this, we are certainly investigating and so we are undertaking a mode of investigation. To this extent, it may be said that a methodology is being used. The nature of the methodology, though, should not be assumed to be of any particular type; further, the methodology being perused should be discovered, not in the form of a formula or computational process, but iteratively during the investigation itself; a demonstration rather than a formulation.

Understanding Heidegger

Heidegger does not lend himself to conceptual interpretation or the kind of interpretation that has become so familiar with the rise of the positive

sciences. There is a temptation to translate his writing into conceptual formulae and, in so doing, into something that can be understood as a series of assertions. Taken in this way, Heidegger becomes contradictory, absurd and mysterious; Heidegger becomes, “another obscure Heraclitus: Heidegger the skoteinos, the bard of the equally Black Forest.” (Vandeveldt, 2014, p. 255) On the other hand, what he said could be regarded as a form of poetics, but in this case, philosophy would have been left behind. The choice appears to be that “either the propositional Heidegger turns us, interpreters, into unexciting practitioners of a new scholastics, or the poetic Heidegger leaves us no choice but to become philologists, in both cases abandoning the field of philosophy altogether.” (Vandeveldt, 2014, p. 255) The challenge is to find a way to speak and think about or with Heidegger’s work that falls into neither trap. An understanding is needed of what Heidegger was trying to do and then use this understanding to read Heidegger; that is, to follow Heidegger rather than to impose preconceptions on Heidegger; understanding in the sense of an agreement or acceptance.

Listening to Heidegger

The temptation, when thinking about a Heideggerian understanding of language, is to take what he says about the apparent subject under consideration and perform an analysis so that a conceptual model is produced that can be taken as the Heideggerian understanding of the subject. This would be to presume that a Heideggerian understanding could be encapsulated within such an analysis. In *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, Wrathall takes much care to avoid the trap of assuming that the subject can be taken in such a way, but even here, there is a danger that Wrathall’s work can be read as confining itself to a conceptual model.

At the outset of the piece, Wrathall explicitly points away from a conventional analysis. He warns that, “we are not meant to plug a preexisting conception of language into Heidegger’s claims about language, as too many commentators on Heidegger are prone to do.” (Wrathall, 2011, p. 125) Although this does indicate that Wrathall will not be addressing language in the same way as other commentators, it allows that he could still be talking about language in a conceptual, although novel, way. By rejecting pre-existing conceptual models of language, he does not reject the possibility of a new conceptual model that might be found and taken as an endpoint of an analysis of a Heidegger’s writing on the subject.

The conflict between imposing preconceived constructs and allowing Heidegger to speak for himself are brought out when Wrathall goes on to write, “as we accompany Heidegger in his reflections on language, the word ‘language’ is meant to come to function differently than it did when we first set out.” (Wrathall, 2011, p. 126) This seems to be in tension. On one hand, we are to accompany Heidegger, on the other we are assuming that language is to function in a certain way; a way that we are to seek. Although there has been no presumption that language has any specific characteristics, there does appear to be the assumption that it has a definite character that can be determined through an analysis of Heidegger’s writings.

Wrathall writes that Heidegger, “will proceed by (1) identifying the world-disclosive function of language, (2) analysing language in terms of the structures that allow it to perform that world-disclosive function, and (3) using the word ‘language’ indiscriminately to refer to different things that perform this same function.” (Wrathall, 2011, pp. 126-127) One might agree with this in as far that these understandings can be taken from Heidegger, but that, in itself, would impose a limit on Heidegger. Terms like “function” and “structures” appear to assume that language is of a certain definite conceptual character and this assumption is an imposition. The use of the terms are not in themselves limiting, but reading those terms in such a way as to assume that a definite endpoint can be reached is a limit.

In exploring the nature of language with Heidegger further, Wrathall tells us that, “The originary language is an ontological structure responsible for the disclosure of the world. Language plays this role in virtue of imposing a particular structure on the world – the gathering of relationships of meaning or reference.” (Wrathall, 2011, p. 134) This, again, can be taken as assuming a conceptual character of language that can be encapsulated. Wrathall could be taken as saying that, although there is no necessity that language has the character imposed on it by a conventional understanding, it still has a definite nature. To get a definite understanding, the works of Heidegger are being used as a source of the understanding, but the understanding uncovered or created would have to be extracted from those works rather than being allowed to live and change within them. This impression is reinforced when Wrathall writes, “The logos is the structure of worldly meanings and references, the relationships that constitute things as the things they are.” (Wrathall, 2011, p. 137) The nature of language has become strange, but that strangeness has settled into something else; a new structure, but, nevertheless, a structure.

Wrathall offers a possibility of going beyond the conceptual understanding when he says:

To reduce a poem to a punch line, to a readily intelligible and unambiguous claim is somehow to miss what is essential. Poetic words, moreover, have what one might call a 'productive ambiguity' or, as Heidegger puts it, they 'oscillate,' thus opening up multiple paths of understanding. As frustrating as this might be to those of an analytic or scientific mindset, this is not a weakness of the poem but its strength – and precisely one of the elements of the poem we must attend to in order to experience language. For one of the essential features of language is its ability to oscillate and thus to lead us into any of an indefinite number of paths. (Wrathall, 2011, p. 139)

This gives the possibility of allowing an experience of language altogether different from that offered by one limited to static concepts and structures. Rather than thinking of language as giving a structure, Heidegger can be seen as travelling a path that yields no such definite conclusions; not a path towards a destination, but a journey taken for the sake of the journey where structures can be taken as transient scenery – sometimes attractive, sometimes interesting, but always to be passed by in the continuation of the journey.

Wrathall can be taken as further reinforcing this when he says that, "Language in Heidegger's originary sense as the structure of relations is a paradigm case of withdrawinggiving. The structure of relations, with its coherent style, withdraws in favor of the entities that are what they are only in terms of the relations." (Wrathall, 2011, p. 151) From this, it could be understood that the structure, in itself, must be rejected as it withdraws. The structure must, itself, withdraw and so cannot be a structure in the sense of something towards which one can point. However, the term "structure" can mislead. By saying "structure," it might be assumed that there is something conceptual that can be grasped, but, by pointing out that this withdraws, a tension is established. Language becomes a non-structure or anti-structure. A concept that can never be grasped as it withdraws and so it is not a concept at all.

Wrathall goes on to say, "It is not the terms and associated concepts of ordinary language that house being. It is language understood as the fitted structure of relations." (Wrathall, 2011, p. 154) This again appears to be trying to bring language within a conceptual grasp. Language becomes a set of relationships. Wrathall had successfully shown that language in Heidegger cannot be taken in a conventional sense, but he appears to have

allowed it to be taken in a new sense. That is, although he has been able to uproot language, he appears to have planted it again in a new position.

At the end of the piece, Wrathall writes, “To complete the analysis, though, we would need to work out with more care the relationship between ordinary language and originary language – a task to be deferred.” (Wrathall, 2011, p. 155) This task is not to be taken up directly in this work, but, rather, the task of walking with Heidegger towards originary language is undertaken. This journey, though, will not be undertaken with the assumption that a destination can be arrived at – there will be no assumption that structures or concepts can be taken as conclusions from a Heideggerian encounter with language—but the journey will be taken as a journey through the scenery offered by Heidegger. There will be no presumption that any-thing is sought other than the journey Heidegger takes us on. As we accompany Heidegger, we will listen to what he says, but not presume at the outset that he has anything definite to tell us, rather, what he says will be listen to and that saying allowed to guide us in our own journey, not to a conceptual understanding of language, but a journey set out from language back to language.

What Heideggerian thinking is not

The sort of thinking that Heidegger has in mind is a type of thinking beyond thinking about things. This is thinking that is not only difficult to engage in, but, as it is not thinking about things, cannot say anything “useful” in the conventional sense. Heidegger says:

1. Thinking does not bring knowledge, as do the sciences.
2. Thinking does not produce usable practical wisdom.
3. Thinking solves no cosmic riddles.
4. Thinking does not endow us directly with the power to act. (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1976, p. 159)

This appears to be a rather depressing start. It looks as though the type of thinking that is being called for is not only difficult to do, but has no use in any normal sense at all.

The limitations of Heideggerian thinking given above can be compared to the limitations of thinking required for fundamental ontology. If the two are consistent with one another, then there is a ground for supposing that “thinking” in Heidegger is the same activity as that required for the

practice of fundamental ontology and so for the investigation carried out in *Being and Time*.

Before examining the four limitations Heidegger places on thinking, a question that has to be addressed is: What is meant by science here? Heidegger tells us that, “science is the founding disclosure, for the sheer sake of disclosure, of a self-contained region of beings or being.” (Heidegger, *Phenomenology and Theology*, 1998, p. 41) From this it can be taken that there are two possible modes of science: the consideration of beings and the consideration of being, or ontic science and ontological science. Ontic science starts from a given set of assumptions; they start from a set of posits. However, what are the ontic sciences? If we consider them as any study that is based on a set of posits we find that all studies that seek to reveal conceptual understanding or knowledge are positive sciences. This includes studies that are normally thought of under the label of sciences as well as those thought of under the label of humanities and any other label we might like to put on areas of study. The thing that all of these have in common is that they are all working from set of posits; that is, they have to make assumptions that they take as being true in order to progress in a logical and rational direction. The difference between all of these sciences is that they are each based on a different set of assumptions and are so relatively different from one another; their underlying principles or structures being the same but their underlying posits different. When it comes to Heideggerian thinking, however, the difference is complete. With Heideggerian thinking there is no binding principle, no beings on which it is based, nothing is posited. Heideggerian thinking is based on no-thing at all and, as such, is something completely different in nature from the thinking used in ontic science. There is no bridge or way of crossing from ontic science to Heideggerian thinking, just a gulf that requires a leap away from the very groundings of the ontic. To understand the fundamental nature of thinking – thinking in a Heideggerian sense – previous ideas or preconceptions of thinking must first be unlearned; the framework adopted when engaged in ontic science must be forgotten or, at least, not accepted as a cage that restricts us.

Ontological thinking cannot bring knowledge as in the ontic sciences. Knowledge in ontic science is knowledge of things relative only to other things, fundamentally, on the posits of the science. If a piece of scientific knowledge is discovered in a contemplation of the ontological, then that piece of knowledge would have to be knowledge of a thing, but then the contemplation would no longer be an ontological contemplation. So, there is no hope of achieving any knowledge in the sense of scientific

knowledge; any knowledge that is discovered is knowledge at a different level and of a different type. The things that emerge as a part of an ontological investigation cannot be taken as things on which structures can be built as, from this perspective, they lack the foundation that would allow them to carry any weight; they lack the posits taken, at the outset, as being true.

The question of practical wisdom, of how to act, presupposes a number of things taken as true and so is cannot be offered by a mode of thought that does not allow itself to be limited by things posited. A claim might be made that the possible actions one could perform are all within or offered by the ontological; that is, the set of all actions that could be followed is not a thing as such (ignoring the issue of the set itself being a thing), but a set of possible things. This would be correct, but having a set of possibilities does not give any particular possibility over and above any other and so ontological thinking “does not produce usable practical wisdom;” a practical wisdom might be gleaned in a certain sense, the possible courses of action, but possibilities cannot be limited and so ontological knowledge cannot be used to tell what, specifically, the correct course would be as this would demand the restriction of the possibilities to a single thing with the motivation of so doing being another thing.

Because ontological thinking cannot be thinking restricted to things as such, it cannot help with our puzzling over any cosmic riddles. If it was asked, “What created the universe?” the question is meaningless in ontological terms and any possible positive answer is beyond the realms of ontological thinking. The “what” assumes the answer has to be a thing or things; the “created” assumes a positive action that is itself a thing and so beyond the ontological; and “universe” is a thing or set of things and so is not ontological at all. Although ontological thinking is able to give possibilities, these possibilities cannot be delimited to the extent that a meaningful answer to a question that is not in posed in an ontological way can be given.

In the same way as ontological thinking fails to help in the above, it can also be of no assistance in giving us the power to act. The ontological cannot give us anything positive. Although dealing in possible things, none of these specific possibilities can take priority of any other. Because of this, the ontological can give us no positive information or inclination.

All of the limitations given by Heidegger of thinking are totally consistent with the limitations of thinking in a fundamental ontological mode.

Although this might not prove definitively that the thinking of Heidegger is fundamental ontological thinking, it certainly says nothing against this view.

What Heideggerian thinking is

What has been done is to show what Heideggerian thinking is not: it is not an activity grounded on concepts of any sort. The task is now to move beyond a negative understanding of Heideggerian thinking to uncover what it is. The purpose of this mode of thinking is to uncover the basis of all beings and so uncover what cannot be put into terms or be conceived of as a thing of whatever sort.

When one normally thinks of beings and the source of those beings, one tends to make assumptions at the outset. An assumption is made that the nature of beings is understood and that the origin of beings can be equally as clear and obvious. This might be seen as the metaphysical codification of our historical epoch. "By codifying and disseminating an understanding of what beings are, metaphysics provides each historical 'epoch' of intelligibility with its ontological bedrock. And by providing an account of the ultimate source from which beings issue, metaphysics supplies intelligibility with a kind of foundational justification which [...] Heidegger characterizes as 'theological'." (Thompson, 2000, p. 298) Heidegger wants to go beyond our normal theological or ontotheological ground and discover the ground of even this. To do so requires going beyond any ontotheology under which the world interpreted. The grounding of beings is assumed to be known because that grounding is provided by ontotheology and is not questioned. However, Heidegger wants to question the very basis of normal understanding. As everything including the concepts and terms used are born on an ontotheological basis, we must be ready to allow those terms and concepts to speak of what lies beyond their very basis.

Heidegger sets out to question our own basis: the fundamental basis on which the totality of beings with which we are involved is built. When we question the basis of beings and being in the normal way we are actually asking a double question; our question, "What is a being?" asks about the Being of beings by searching both for what makes a being a being (the essence or 'whatness' of beings) and for the way in which a being is a being (the existence or 'thatness' of beings)." (Thompson, 2000, p. 300) We might assume that being, as the being of beings, is a being and

something that can be examined just as any other being can be examined, but such assumptions must be challenged and rejected. We want to understand the grounding of the being of beings and so must seek to look past all beings. We seek to ask, “If metaphysics’ ontotheological postulates of the Being of beings doubly ‘ground’ those beings, then *what in turn grounds the Being of beings?* Only two kinds of answers can halt the regress. Either there must be something beyond the Being of beings in or by which the Being of beings can itself be grounded, or else the Being of beings must be self-grounding.” (Thompson, 2000, pp. 304-305) This question will not be answered at this point, but the thing to take from it is that what we are questioning lies, of necessity, beyond our normal use of terms and concepts, beyond the ontotheology in which these terms and concepts are grounded and beyond all things, even the being of beings taken as a being.

The problem is that one normally talk about things – terms are things, and they refer to things – those things conceal their source because, once a thing is disclosed, that thing becomes an object of attention. Because of this, the question that needs to be addressed is, “how does one gain access to the question of the meaning of Being without also engaging in the corruption of covering it up, especially since one must put into words – and thus flirt with the possible corruption that attends the mere recitation of assertions – the very investigation that seeks to do the uncovering?” (Streeter, 1997, p. 2)

In order to understand the nature of thinking, Heidegger does confine himself to the usual methods one might normally use to understand a term; he does not look for a simple dictionary definition and stop at that; he does not resort to what we already know or assume the nature of thinking; and he does not ask what it is to think well. Rather than any one of these, he asks, “What is called thinking – what does call for thinking?” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1976, p. 114) This question can be understood as asking: What is it that makes us think; what commands and pushes us into this activity we call thinking? What we are trying to discover in this question is what it is that makes us, in the first place, start to think and, by thus pulling us into thought, make us thinkers, and so, having become a thinker, indulge in thinking only because of its calling. Of course, if we look at the question in the normal way, we might well consider it only to be asking for a definition or an account of thinking as we understand it and, in this way, it becomes an object of investigation. Taking it as such already limits possible understanding; already the question is only being

asked from the realm of ontic science and so limiting the sphere of thought to beings and allowing the concealment of being.

As the investigation is at first directed toward only thinking, it can be assumed that the laws of thought are something independent of us as human being; that is, as physical ontic bodies. If we were to assume that Heideggerian thinking was just a feature of the human being, we would have already covered up the nature of that thinking. As “human being” presupposes things and a conceptual basis, then claiming that thinking is a feature of a human being would be claiming that thinking is an attribute of a thing and so would have fallen into being limited within the ontic. All that can be assumed is that we think and that the activity of thinking is something that can be examined in some way. However, when we ask the question, we are asking something about the nature of our self. We are asking, not only about thinking, but also about our own essential nature. The question is directed at ourselves and, as we are to answer the question, the answer will be about ourselves.

Heidegger tells us that to understand what thought is, we must examine what is most essential to it. To this end, that which is most thought provoking will be considered, “we now call ‘thought-provoking’ what in itself is to be thought about.” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1976, p. 4) But the problem that impedes any progress in this direction is that Heidegger claims that, “What must be thought about, turns away from man.” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1976, p. 8) How we can contemplate that which withdraws from us? How can we examine that which disappears as soon as we look in its direction? How can we even hope to name that which has gone before it can even be named? These are, indeed, problems, but we can start by noticing that the withdrawal itself is not nothing but is an event or happening. For the most part, we concern ourselves with the actual or ontic. The actual is made up of the totality of beings, but this concern with beings blinds us to that which concerns and touches us more fundamentally: if we are man then it “touches man in the surely mysterious way of escaping him by its withdrawal.” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1976, p. 9) That which withdraws might turn out to be more fundamental and concrete than all of the things with which we are normally concerned; more than the totality of beings. Heidegger claims that this act of withdrawing pulls on us and, by pulling, we are turned to point to it. This turning towards and pointing is something that happens despite ourselves; we turn to point whether we know it or not; whether we are aware of it or not. With this attraction, pulling and pointing, we become the signpost to that which withdraws. The nature of

pointing is not something in addition to us, but is what we essentially are; we are the signpost to that which withdraws. As a pointer to that which has withdrawn, we do not point at anything, but towards the withdrawal; we are the “sign that stays without interpretation.” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1976, p. 10)

Heidegger indicates the nature of this pointing when he tells us that we are the beings that have their being “by pointing to what is, and that particular beings manifest themselves as such by such pointing.” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1976, p. 149) This pointing, then, is not a pointing at a being or even the totality of beings; the pointing is the pointing at the manifesting of beings prior to them become beings. The pointing is at being itself; it points at everything in the having been, present and what might be. Rather than pointing at a thing or even the totality of things, our essential nature is to point to the source of all things. As we have discovered in our explication of ontological, the source of things is the ontological, so we can now say, in a more positive sense, that the thinking Heidegger tells us about is compatible in this sense, as well as in the negative sense addressed earlier, with ontological thinking.

Destruktion of Konstruktion

If metaphysics is taken as an activity trapped in the ontotheological landscape of an epoch, then, in order to see beyond the confines of this ontotheology, one must be prepared first to clear away that which obscures one's vision. The addressing of the ontotheological confines of normal thinking, early Heidegger calls *Destruktion*. The assumption could be made that this *Destruktion* would be something like the demolishing of the ontotheological ground of our current metaphysics, but “despite the apparent negativity implied by *Destruktion*, Heidegger is not endorsing a ‘demolition’ of metaphysics. On the contrary, the *Destruktion* aims to dissolve the sclerotic historical layers of metaphysics by revealing their concealed ontotheological structure and endeavouring to uncover the ‘decisive experiences’ responsible for this structure.” (Botha, 2008, p. 56) *Destruktion* does not aim to destroy the metaphysical theology within which the activity is positioned, but takes that as a basis of understanding what lies beneath. The metaphysical theology does not need to be destroyed at all, it is just not itself the end point of the *Destruktion*, but a way pointer. So, “Heidegger’s *Destruktion* does not abandon the ontological tradition. Rather, it attempts to reveal its positive possibilities

by casting a critical eye on the prevailing approach to the history of ontology.” (Botha, 2008, p. 57)

Destruktion is a way by which what is being examined can be taken as a starting point for investigation. Because the text itself is not the endpoint, the text becomes a tool used to achieve a goal. What is being examined is accepted as being produced from an ontotheological ground and is a *Konstruktion* based on that ground, but that does not imply that either the text or the metaphysics upon which it is based is something to be done away with. Rather, both the text and the underlying metaphysics are accepted but recognised as what they are. If this is done, movement can be made. The reading of the text goes beyond the confines of the text. Using the text as a guide, it exposes the underpinnings of the text in the ontotheology of the epoch of its interpretation by the reader. But one does not stop there. By exposing the position and grounding of the interpretation of the text, one can go beyond both the immediate text and the underlying metaphysics. These can be taken to be talking about their own ultimate ground as one questions their basis. This is what Heidegger is concerned with. The most fundamental ground is implied with all theological metaphysics and so all interpretations of texts are based on that. By moving beyond each interpretation of text in such a way, engagement with the text can be used to say something beyond the bounds of the text. When a text is used in this way, the goal is not to understand the text within its own metaphysical theology; not to understand the text within the metaphysical theology of our own epoch; not even to understand our own or the metaphysical theology of the writer of the text, but to move beyond all of this to ask the text the question of the ultimate ground. Of course, this may never have crossed the mind of the writer of the text or, at least, explicitly crossed their mind. The writer might have seen the text as an exploration within their current ontological theology or even as a movement within and beyond that metaphysics to create a new *Konstruktion*, but, as the ultimate basis is always the same, that basis must be implied by the text.

In other words, because philosophy is a *Konstruktion*, it is also subject to a *Destruktion*. The *Destruktion* is an attempt to become aware of the unthought (das *Ungedachte*) in thinking and to the unsaid in saying. The unthought of the unsaid is always presupposed in philosophical thinking, which can be thought and said. This is the problem of the difference (*Differenz*) – the difference remains essentially unthought and unsaid, but remains simultaneously constitutive for every thinking and saying, or in Heidegger’s words, for every understanding of Being. (Botha, 2008, p. 58)

Confrontation with the text

When text is read, it is read in a way that allows entering into a discourse with the text that can yield a movement towards an understanding of the goal of reading; the text is allowed to speak for itself and answer questions addressed of the text in the reading. Heidegger did not read a text as simply an interpretation whereby he proposed that how he read a text was the “true” conceptual representation of the text but, rather, as a confrontation during which he entered into a dialogue with the text. This way of reading texts can be helpful in our own reading of Heidegger. Blok examines Heidegger’s confrontation with Nietzsche (Blok, 2009). In this confrontation, Heidegger explores the writings of Nietzsche but in doing so, recognises the fundamental difference between his own concern with being and Nietzsche’s concern based on a metaphysics grounded in beings. These positions are incompatible, but that does not mean that a discourse, one with the other, is pointless. Heidegger recognises from the outset the fundamental differences and does not propose to ignore these. On the contrary, Heidegger’s confrontation with the text highlights the differences and allows the differences to become the fruit of the confrontation. Blok points to three differences between an interpretation and Heidegger’s confrontation.

“First of all, every interpretation lives off the understanding of being and presupposes in this way the principal identity of interpretation and interpretandum.” (Blok, 2009, p. 47) In a normal interpretation, a common ground is assumed. In the case of Heideggerian concerns with being and his examination of Nietzsche’s texts, this commonality is, according to Heidegger, lacking. Nietzsche has assumed a ground for his work, but Heidegger wants to go beyond this ground to a ground of a different type. In doing this, the underlying principle of the interpretation and interpretandum is questioned. In a normal interpretation, there is no such fundamental difference and so the possibility of a chasm between the two positions is overlooked. The assumption is made at the outset of the identity of the groundings between the reader and the writer. With Heidegger’s confrontation the grounding differences are brought out and so the, “confrontation, is in other words, not controlled by the logic of identity as in interpretation, but by a logic of difference; the point is the ‘difference’ between me and the other.” (Blok, 2009, p. 48) The difference does not imply a criticism or attack on the text, but, by focusing on the difference, the interpreter is able to go beyond both their position and the position of the writer. The difference is based on the difference between the two groundings and it is this difference in grounding, the fundamental

difference, which Heidegger wants to bring out so that he is able to think beyond both. However, the difference, as it is a difference in a specific area, a difference in grounding, is not a total difference. It implies that there is a similarity as the “grounding question is indeed differentiated but not completely disconnected from the guiding question. Both are involved in the question about being, that is to say that the confrontation has the *Auseinander-setzung* (difference) within the same (identity) in mind. The confrontation is, in other words, controlled by a logic of ‘iteration’.” (Blok, 2009, p. 48) The difference is a difference within a common totality. When Heidegger addresses the text from Nietzsche he seeks to discover the fundamental difference between Nietzsche’s and his own fundamental ground, but that difference assumes that there is a fundamental ground in both the text and Heidegger’s position against the text. By addressing the text in this way, the text and the question are able to enter into a discourse in a dynamic becoming.

The second difference is that, “An interpretation takes a position or standpoint, out of which the ‘interpretandum’ is represented. This standpoint is the ground or the subject of interpretation, which itself is not involved in interpretation. On the contrary, the confrontation is primarily the confrontation with our ‘ownmost’; the interpretative subject. Our thinking is, in other words, ‘involved’ (*einbegriffen*) in the confrontation.” (Blok, 2009, p. 49) When a text is read in a confrontational way, it is read, not as something “objective” that is apart from us and stands on its own, but as our interpretation, grounded in our self. We enter into a discourse with the text in which the text is allowed to speak to us, but not as a monologue. Both the text and our understanding contribute to the interpretation that becomes based on our own new grounding. We do not claim that our interpretation is “the” interpretation of the text or the correct interpretation of the text, but our confrontation with the text results in a creation of an understanding that results from an interaction with the text based on our own guiding principles. From the perspective of trying to understand the nature of being, it is the fundamental grounding in which we are most interested. This underlying principle on which our interpretation of the text is based is our understanding of the nature of our fundamental ontology. When Heidegger interacts with Nietzsche, he is doing so in order to bring out and understand the difference between the fundamental basis on which Nietzsche grounds what he says and Heidegger’s grounding allowing a progress beyond both.

“An interpretation presupposes a priori the presence-at-hand of the interpretandum, which has already appropriated its presence. That *our*

philosophical thinking is involved in the guiding question means on the contrary, that we *cannot* claim to possess the other commencement of philosophical questioning as our property.” (Blok, 2009, p. 49) When a text is confronted and left behind, the idea of interpreting it only based on an unquestioned existing ontotheological ground where both the text and the interpretations of the text become static things is rejected; the reader allows them self to be moved by the text. The text is allowed to live and change as it is read. Instead of understanding the text in a predetermined way and so restrict the text within the framework of what is already known, the text is allowed to move us and this movement changes the interpretation by changing the basis on which the interpretation is built. As the questions we ask the text in a study of Heidegger are questions of our most fundamental basis, we must expect that our fundamental position is moved with our encounter with the text; the examination of the text becomes a two-way movement. When Heidegger confronts Nietzsche’s text, he allows the text to move his own fundamental position, away from the ground on the metaphysics of beings and towards the ground of the metaphysics of being, “we see the eventual or momentous character of confrontation, the farewell of the metaphysical guiding question and the ‘leap’ in the grounding question, which has to happen every time again and has to be attempted by everyone for himself.” (Blok, 2009, p. 49) The interaction with the text can take the reader away from the ontotheological ground with which they start and position them within a different ground; a moving and evolving ground. If the guiding question is a question of a fundamental ontological basis, then a leap is required to take the reader away from any restrictive ontotheological ground and towards fundamental ontologically. When reading in a Heideggerian way, or when Heidegger reads, “What is demanded from us is that we leave interpretation behind and become involved with the confrontation between being and thinking.” (Blok, 2009, p. 55) We must be prepared, not to understand the text as terms and concepts, not even in a way that allows for the being of being as a being, but we must be prepared to rattle the confines of the ontotheological ground of our epoch and, further, allow ourselves to see and challenge the confines of any ontotheological ground at all. The reader must be willing to question and seek to go beyond their entire ontic basis.

Formal indication

Dahlstrom quotes Augustine when he writes, “To give them as much credit as possible, words possess only sufficient efficacy to remind us in order

that we may seek things, but not to exhibit the things that we know by them.” (Dahlstrom, 1994, p. 1) Therefore, when terms are normally used, things are not picked out, but hints are given in the direction of things. The term is used as a signpost, but the signpost can only point; it is up to reader to follow the way indicated by the signpost to discover the thing itself even if the discovery of a specific thing is possible or the goal at all. Terms are not directly linked to things when we receive them by hearing, reading, or even thinking them, but can be taken as initiators of a journey of thinking. According to Dahlstrom, Heidegger’s thinking, “is nothing but a way of comporting oneself to an original, reflected or unthematic (*unabgehoben*) comportment, an attempt to ‘have’ or ‘understand’ the latter authentically.” (Dahlstrom, 1994, p. 1) This highlights the way in which this type of thinking is carried out. Rather than thinking conceptually where concepts of things are created to become the subject of the investigation, there is comportment toward what lies prior to such conceptual structures. “Since philosophy’s ‘object’ is what ‘to be’ means in the context of that original comportment, it cannot ‘have’ (understand, retrieve) its object as it were from the outside. Instead philosophy must itself carry out or enact (or more exactly, reenact) that original, unthematic ‘having,’ so as to appropriate it explicitly.” (Dahlstrom, 1994, p. 1) As Heidegger is addressing what lies prior to things and a concept is one thing among many, he cannot use concepts as concepts because these concepts are themselves things and can only speak directly about other things. In order to speak about the ground of things, Heidegger has to use apparently conceptual terms in a novel way; he has to use terms to allow the reader to position them self so that the ground of things can be experienced. As we have already seen, this way of taking what is said in a text is not novel, but what is novel is that Heidegger intends this reading of the text beyond its own confines or all confines. The self-conscious use of terms as pointers towards something they do not immediately express is what makes Heidegger’s writing have a poetic quality. This does not mean that Heidegger writes poetry just that the way in which both poetic and Heideggerian texts should be taken to be close or related to one another. However, whereas poetry allows the reader to be positioned within their world, Heidegger tries to allow the reader to position them self towards the ontological ground and so beyond worlds.

Formal indication is a method that can be used to discover things, that is, beings, from a text. What is said in the text is taken as a pointer towards something other than what is immediately obvious. Therefore, the text is not taken as the end and a thing in itself, but as a pointer to something else. However, Heidegger does not ask about things and so he does not use

formal indication to point at any beings at all. The pointer in the text points in a direction “wanting completion in a concrete context although there is not enough in this direction itself to satisfy that want.” (Streeter, 1997, p. 417) A pointer is normally taken to be a pointer towards something, that is, some-thing, but, in this case, the indicator is being used to point to the ontological basis of things and not things at all. Heidegger’s use of formal indication takes the indication in two ways, “first, the exploration into the character of its object does not look into the content of that which is in question, and yet it yields something determinate and positive; second, as an analysis of the how of the ‘having,’ it is not just enough to analyze this modality at a distance.” (Streeter, 1997, p. 419)

The formal indicator itself should be taken as just that and not a thing as such. The formal indicator is allowed to point away from itself and towards the path to be investigated. However, a pointer points towards something and so the pointer yields another thing. To remain within the mode of formal indication, however, the thing pointed to by the pointer must itself be taken as a pointer and so the formal indication is empty; it yields no-thing as such as all pointers can only point to further pointers because taking a thing as an end would be to stop using formal indication. In this way, there can be no end of a formal indication because that would imply the discovery of an ultimate thing. In following the path of a formal indication, no ultimate being is found – the content of the contemplation must remain empty – but the direction indicated is followed and “In this giving of a definite direction, there is more than just a lack of content; there is also a positive yield in this formality and attendant emptiness because every formal indication leads to the concrete.” (Streeter, 1997, p. 419) The indication does not end in the discovery of a static thing, but we must allow the indication to “lead directly into the concrete experience of that to which it points.” (Streeter, 1997, p. 419)

The second implication of formal indication is that, rather than leading us to any static thing as such, it leads us to the conclusion that if philosophy is carried out in such a way, then “philosophy must be a kind of comportment.” (Streeter, 1997, p. 420) The object is not to discover things or to create constructs, but to put oneself in the position to comport oneself relative to the object. This is a fourfold comportment in that it includes:

In being comported to . . . , one is situated in a sense of relation (*Bezugssinn*), which gives the unique way that one comports oneself to something. There is also a sense in which the content becomes important (*Gehaltssinn*), in that something is “held” by the one who comports; but

one is also “held by” that something because one must interpret an object out of its “full sense,” which is the phenomenon. A third sense is that of enactment or actualization (*Vollzugsinn*), that sense of fulfillment, in which, as remarked above, one “savors to the full” the object as it stands out in the shapeliness of its contours from its background. A final sense, not found in previous course texts, is a temporalizing sense (*Zeitigungssinn*) that embraces the “how” of the entire movement to fulfillment or enactment. (Streeter, 1997, p. 420)

Although the use of formal indication can allow such comportment to be achieved, the comportment is achieved by means of the activity of formal indication rather than an end product. The process does not yield a thing as such at all and so the conclusion is not reached as an assertion, but the conclusion, the reaching of a comportment towards and from the ground, can only be achieved during a journey on the path given by formal indication. It is not a logic that can yield a deductive result, but one that can put one in a position to think towards being and from being. “Thus, in order to ‘have’ this object in its original accessibility, philosophy must become a fundamental way of life – a way that retrieves the fundamental experiences of comportment to objects of all sorts so as to guard against falling into the irresponsible repetition of statements not undergirded by the experiences that gave rise to them.” (Streeter, 1997, p. 421) Formal indication does not change the object of one’s study or have the disclosure of new things that can be held as the result of the process as its goal, but formal indication changes the one involved in the process; it is not a way that statements, concepts, assertion or and other things can be discovered in a conclusion, but a way for the investigator to change themselves so that the object of their study becomes visible or, rather, that what is already there can be glimpsed during a journey. In this practice, “Heidegger has aroused through indication a specific realm closest to our immediate Being-here/there, but that realm remains an empty construct until the reader comes to know it in a refreshing way.” (Streeter, 1997, p. 421)

If formal indication is taken as a continual process, then there is no content; it is only when formal indication stops that content is assumed. As this is the case, in the case of *Being and Time*, “Because Heidegger’s method is formal indication and not metaphysical theorization understood as the attempt to give a comprehensive account of the basic ‘attributes’ of a human being, it is an ‘empty book.’” (Streeter, 1997, p. 426) If *Being and Time*, or any other work, is read using formal indication, then that work is understood as having no content. Apparent assertions and references to beings are taken as only pointers on a path to an understanding and, if the formal indication is taken to be pointing to the

ultimate destination that is being indicated, then there can be no end in the sense of a thing discovered, just a continual change in comportment.

Formal indication, when used to seek the ultimate ground, is taken *ad absurdum*. In following the sign towards its own essence, we are no longer interested in things at all, but seek a comportment to that which lies beyond: not a thing but a manner of seeing. This is *ad absurdum* as the journey leads beyond things and so the thinking points beyond logical thought – in a certain way of understanding logic – not to irrationality, but to the totality including the underpinning of rationality and logic itself. From this level of understanding, the status of derivative understandings can be observed; they become irrational as they are shown to be, if not actually unsound, then insensible of their own soundness. To understand any science, that science must be seen from beyond that science. From the position offered by formal indication taken to an extreme, one goes beyond even the grounds of logic itself. As this is going beyond logic, formal indication takes us to the absurd. It says nothing about the status of logic within the realms of logic, but it does put one in a position to see logic as an activity within a realm and not a fundamental activity at all.

Hermeneutics

The aforementioned methods of reading texts can be used in the activity of hermeneutics. That is, these ways of reading texts see beyond what the text says at just the level of the definitions of the terms used with our predetermined understandings of those terms and goes towards an understanding of the question we want to ask of the text. These can therefore be understood as hermeneutical modes or techniques. As our guiding question is prior to the realm of beings, we already understand that we cannot take terms as they would normally be taken in our day-to-day dealings with them. We have to be prepared to interact with the text in a different way.

We are always within the metaphysical theology of our epoch. When we read a text, we project our understanding of that text, in fact, “A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting.” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 269) When the text is first encountered, an understanding of the text is projected based on the ontotheological ground with which the text is first approached, but, in rereading the text, the projection is influenced by the previous projection and so, taken in combination, a new reading of the text is discovered based on an evolved ontotheological ground. The “fore-