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The Enigma of the Question: Heidegger on the Nullity of Reason and Ground

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I. Introduction

Heidegger maintains that because the human being is an issue for itself in its being, philosophy is necessarily a matter of questioning — chiefly, of questioning why there is something rather than nothing, and why something is this way rather than that. Being resounds as the innermost stake in each and every question — as the secret law of questioning. Being is, in this sense, that which is most worthy of questioning. Yet what is this law of the question? As we can see, the question of being is a matter of grounding, of somehow establishing the original inter-relation or unity that orders all the elements of experience, which renders human experience intelligible. The history of philosophy (as metaphysics) has understood the concept of ground in a variety of manners, as the reason, cause or condition of possibility for what is. In whichever form such grounding has assumed over the course of the history of metaphysics, then, Heidegger finds that the latter is always motivated by a need to address the question of ground in such a way as to re-solve it, to render it no longer a question, to make it self-evident, and to thereby provide us with security and control over all that is. In one way or another, the history of metaphysics has sought to resolve the

question of ground by thinking being in terms of beings, by thinking being as the constant presence of the look or outward appearance (i.e. eidos, idea, form, essence) of present beings, which seems to endure across all of the changes that beings undergo in their existence.

Whether in its early or late phases, Heidegger's thought continuously summons metaphysical thinking to ask why the question of ground has only ever appeared in such a way, as a matter of providing human beings with certainty and control over the world. In Heidegger's eyes, that which gives rise to the question of ground (i.e. being), and to the issue that beings are for themselves in their being, is also that which has let the history of metaphysics forget the question of ground by continuously seeking to resolve it once and for all. The suggestion that emerges from Heidegger's thought is that the innermost law of the question of ground has to do with the enigmatic nature of the finitude of being. If the finitude of being is in some way enigmatic, then this would seem to indicate that the question of ground cannot be one that philosophy can answer correctly and thereby square away once and for all. It could be argued that the enigmatic character of the question of ground stands outside all intelligibility or meaning and that it precludes any and all manners of rational response. As our everyday desire to understand and render things in an intelligible order suggests though, the enigma of ground does seem to exert a pull on us; to call for, if not an answer, then a response. How would the human being respond to the question of ground in the right way? Or, if the enigma of being is refractory to reflective elucidation, then perhaps this rules out the possibility of responding in the right way, and instead sends philosophy down the path of aestheticism, of merely providing human beings with the means to creatively interpret their lives such that those lives are in some ways improved?[1]

[1] Steven Crowell, 'Facticity and transcendental philosophy', in *From Kant to Davidson: Philosophy and the idea of the transcendental*, ed. by Jeff Malpas (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 102-103, 111. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as FT.

To this issue, Steven Crowell responds by pointing out that, since beings cannot fully assume the ground of their being, the enigma of ground prevents beings from integrating their ground into a creative self-interpretation that would enhance their lives (FT, 113-114). Instead, Crowell maintains that this enigmatic ground, as incommensurable with reflective elucidation, provides the philosophical subject with a negative freedom from the other sciences — among them, aestheticism (114). This grants beings a certain autonomy (*Ibid.*). It means that beings are self-grounding, not in the sense of creating themselves, but as called by their irrecuperable ground to respond by taking responsibility for it, by providing reasons for the choices and habits that they assume on the basis of this ground.

Crowell's position is that, as we can see, beings respond to the question of ground in a proper or authentic way by giving reasons for their existence in the world (115-116). While the ground necessarily retains its enigmatic character, because of the negative autonomy that this grants beings, the irrecoverable otherness of this ground necessarily has a certain meaning: it means that human existence is at heart necessarily concerned with the normative practice of reason-giving. As Crowell writes, 'what it means to be a ground (*Grund*) is to be a *reason*' (117). In fact, Crowell states that such reason-giving is the only way that ground can be 'understood' at all' (*Ibid.*). But is this in fact the case?

To further research this matter, we will begin by turning to Heidegger's account of how the history of metaphysics has come to respond to the question of ground by formulating the principle of reason. This will place us in a better position to see the determinate character of the otherness of metaphysics, to hear and respond to the other tonality of the principle of reason that Heidegger maintains has been necessarily forgotten in the first inception of metaphysics. Heidegger finds the other tonality in the principle of reason to consist in the enigmatic finitude of being. Heidegger engages with the enigma of finitude through his study of the nothingness, transcendence and freedom of being. As we will see, Heidegger uncovers a variety of forms of grounding. With his late study of

the abyssal freedom of being, we will be led to the following finding: that, contrary to Crowell's position, the enigmatic ground of being does not merely grant human beings a negative autonomy from the premises of other sciences, and that, as a result, it does not simply prod beings to respond to the enigma or otherness of ground by giving reasons. Heidegger's account of the abyssal freedom of being suggests that beings properly correspond to the enigma of being in philosophical questioning.

I.I. The Otherness of Metaphysics

Because the late Greeks, as evidenced in the work of Plato and Aristotle, were given to experience the ground of all presence (i.e. being) in terms of the most constant and enduring aspect of present beings — their eidos, form, look, essence — Heidegger maintains that metaphysical thinking has necessarily forgotten the enigmatic finitude that would render beings an issue for themselves. By overlooking the enigmatic finitude of being in favour of the constant presence of beings, metaphysical thought understands being as an absolute cause or reason.

Yet this forgetting of the enigma of finitude does not absolve metaphysical thought from having any sense for this issue that beings are for themselves in their being. Metaphysics is indirectly aware of the issue beings are for themselves in the concern for stability and security that it shows in its understanding of being. If this is the case, then, since it lies at the heart of metaphysics, this latent unease must necessarily be found at play in the principle of reason.

Sure enough, with the initial and still prevalent understanding of the principle of reason, we receive a hint of this distress. According to its first explicit formulation in the thought of Leibniz, the principle of reason states that 'nothing is without reason' — that every-thing that is must have a

reason or ground (cause, explanation) in which it is lodged.[2] The principle of reason grounds beings by getting to the bottom of them, by showing the ultimate cause or explanation for why beings are, and for why they are as they are and not some other way.[3]

Given this demand for reasons, the principle of reason demands an account of the being of beings. The principle of reason is bound to being. But it comes at the question of being from a certain angle: it addresses being only in terms of beings (i.e. as beingness), as that being, aspect or way of being that lets beings come to presence and endure there. Heard in this way, the principle of reason equates being with ground; it regards being as that which consists exclusively in grounding beings (PR, 125). In this case, the principle of reason remains centred around beings. It seeks the ground of beings, and not of being.[4]

This interpretation of the principle of reason unites being and beings according to their simple difference. Difference is here understood as a matter of separation or opposition, so that being, as ground, is separate from the beings which are grounded. As the presumed guiding principle of the history of metaphysics, the difference that animates this principle therefore delimits all metaphysical thought according to this presumed oppositional structure — of beingness and beings, of essence and existence. As a result, in this initial phase, metaphysical thought is constitutively unable to think how this difference between essence and existence came to be in the first place.

[2] Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 3. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as PR.

[3] Martin Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Ground', in *Pathmarks*, ed. by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 127, 131. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as EG. PR, pp. 3-4.

[4] Jeff Malpas, 'From the transcendental to the 'topological': Heidegger on ground, unity, and limit', in *From Kant to Davidson: Philosophy and the idea of the transcendental*, ed. by Jeff Malpas (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 77. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as TT.

Though this simple difference does not allow metaphysical thought to grasp how the essence and existence of beings came to diverge, it does afford it an intimation of its secret basis in the enigma of finitude. For this simple difference indicates that grounds only apply to what is, and that what is is limited to beings (51)- This indirectly suggests that being, as ground, is not, and that, as a result, it is without a why (PR, 125; TT, 77).

While being, as ground, provides an account of beings and thereby sustains them in presence, it itself remains an enigma in that it is not, in that it stands as a nothingness. The enigma of finitude therefore has something to do with the nothingness that lies at the heart of the ground of being. As per the outright opposition that orients the metaphysical understanding of the principle of reason, where beingness is understood as what is most fully present — a perfect substance or ideality — nothingness is necessarily understood in contrast as a pure non-being or negation, as the privation or 'not' (i.e. negation) of being.[5] Just as the principle of reason understands being in terms of beings, so too it views nothingness on the level of beings — as their privation or negation.

But since being and beings are united according to the simple difference that guides the principal of reason, the latter's forgetting of being must be seen as a turning away from the nothingness of being. As such, this turning away itself attests to and reveals the nothingness it turns away from in its very act of turning away from it. The principle of reason's separation of the nothing from being itself intimates that beings are, in some sense, aware that the basis of their being consists in a nullity.

The principle of reason prepares metaphysical thinking for a turn from the forgetting of being toward its embrace as that which is most worthy of questioning. This entails no longer hearing the question of ground in the key of a simple difference, that is, as a matter of the opposition between the essence (beingness) and existence of beings, but in the key of a self-

[5] Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', in *Pathmarks*, ed. by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 94, 86. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as WM. EG, p. 130.

differentiation, of the more originary self-differentiation between being and nothingness, which opens a finite space of appearing. To the extent that this is done, the principle of reason can also be heard as saying that 'nothing *is* without reason'.[6] To put this still more clearly, this other tonality to the principle of reason says that the nothing *is* without a reason.

This other tonality in the principle of reason stands as the first step toward the other beginning that the first inception of metaphysics necessary overlooks. This forgotten tonality in the principle of reason, which consists in the belonging together of being and nothingness, calls into question the primacy of nothingness in the history of metaphysics as negation. In Heidegger's words, 'negation is…only one way of nihilating, that is, only one sort of comportment that has been grounded beforehand in the nihilation of the nothing' (WM, 92). This should prompt us to understand, as it has Heidegger, that rather than give way 'to the haste of such empty acumen and relinquishing the enigmatic ambiguities of the nothing, we must prepare ourselves solely in readiness to experience in the nothing the pervasive expanse of that which gives every being the warrant to be'.[7]

In this case, we understand nothingness in this other tonality, when we understand that, far from being the negation or privation of being, nothingness belongs to being as that which enables the separation between being and beings in the first place (94). Nothingness belongs to being as the self-differentiation that lets being stand as a ground, as a ground that stands opposed to the beings its grounds. By hearing the principle of reason in this other tonality, then, metaphysics is raised into its forgotten essence, into its ownmost reality in the enigmatic finitude of being, which finally enables thinking to begin to understand how being (essence) and beings (existence) come to diverge from one another.

[6] PR, pp. 125-126. Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 57-58.

[7] Martin Heidegger, 'Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?'', in *Pathmarks*, ed. by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 233. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as PM.

In beginning to move beyond its inability to understand how the essence and existence of beings come to diverge, this other reality harboured in the principle of reason opens metaphysical thinking to another level of being. In other words, this other tonality to the principle of reason reveals that being does not consist in two but rather three levels. There is not only that of beings, and of being as the ground of beings, but now also that of being as such, of the ground of being as nothingness. As that which accounts for the relation between being and beings, being is itself in some way grounded. But its manner of being grounded cannot be that of a being — it cannot be a reason or why, since it is that which lets reason arise in the first place. No, the ground of being has to do with its own nothingness. The ground of being, in this sense, is an un-ground; not as a radical nothingness, but as a self-differentiation, which is to say, as the relative nothingness in being, as the enigmatic finitude at the heart of being.

I.II. From Finite Transcendence to Freedom

Up until the late 1930's Heidegger will understand being in terms of a finite transcendence. Heidegger finds it necessary to begin a study of this transcendence by analysing the Dasein of human beings, as that being who has been released to itself from this transcendence. At this stage in his work, then, Heidegger's inquiry into being as transcendence only enables him to understand being as the being of beings, and thus always seems on the verge of understanding transcendence as an aspect or way of being of a particular being (i.e. Dasein), and so of confusing being with the beingness of beings.

As per its formal structure as a self-differentiation, the finite transcendence of Dasein differentiates itself in a movement of withdrawal of certain possibilities concerning how humans can exist in the world — the availability of everything for complete comprehension, for instance — which serves to project Dasein out toward the world as a finite space of appearing. As a movement of relative withdrawal, finite transcendence opens Dasein as this clearing of being, as a horizon of light, in which 'a true nearness to things' for the first time arises in the human being (EG,

135). In this way, transcendence is a limit that opens Dasein to its beginning, to its finite livelihood.

An extensive explication of Heidegger's treatment of the concept of world is not our concern. Our account of transcendence as the self-differentiation of Dasein and the world is only meant to provide a basic insight into how Dasein relates to the world, and how this relation makes possible the ground and truth of being. While Heidegger understands finite transcendence as a movement of surpassing, and this movement of surpassing as a relation, this relation cannot be understood according to a simple difference, as the relation between two opposed beings or substances — say, between subject and object — but instead according to a process of self-differentiation, as the self-differentiation between Dasein and the world (109). Dasein exists as being-in-the-world as that being who, in its self-differentiating transcendence, 'has been "*cleared*,"' has been opened to the world, so that it is always already *there*, there in the world to which it belongs.[8]

The world therefore belongs to Dasein as the inner limit that is opened or projected out in the self-differentiation of its finite transcendence. In this sense, the world shows the wholeness of beings; it shows how beings as a whole are in being (111-112). As this wholeness of Dasein, the world 'is the possibility of every 'how' in general as limit and measure' (*Ibid.*). In its belonging together with Dasein, the world is '*relative to* human *Dasein*…even though it embraces in its whole all beings, including Dasein' (*Ibid.*). The world is relative to Dasein in that it gives itself to Dasein in each case as the respective whole of its 'for the sake of itself' (125). That Dasein exists for-the-sake-of-itself is another way of saying that Dasein, by virtue of the finite transcendence at the basis of its being, is an issue for itself (BT, 182). This reveals that Dasein's finite, self-differentiating transcendence, its always being out beyond itself, is oriented toward its own grounding and perseverance in being. But since Dasein, in its

[8] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 401-402. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as BT. EG, p. 109.

movement beyond beings — including itself — is directed toward the wholeness of the world, its way of existing for the sake of itself is in fact an existing for the sake of all those beings with whom it shares a world (EG, 108).

Heidegger states that this finite transcendence grounds the truth of being in the manner of freedom. (125) Finite transcendence is a matter of freedom in that it opens a horizon of light like a clearing in a forest, which '*gives* free access for going through and looking through'.[9] The clearing of Dasein serves as the limit that opens beings as a finite presence, as a finite temporality or thrown-projection. The clearing of Dasein stands as the finite presence of that which is present. Opened as a thrown-projection, Dasein is free to project itself toward its possible ways of existing in the world and to take over its null ground by choosing to take responsibility for the historical situation in which it finds itself (126-127). In light of this, beings are not merely free in a negative manner, as free from external constraints, but in a positive manner, as free for its lifetime and for the choices that it has to make.

Heidegger will uphold throughout nearly all his years of study that this making-free of Dasein's clearing or disclosedness is a more basic form of truth. Heidegger maintains that, in the history of Western thought, truth has generally been considered a matter of correspondence. In this case, truth consists in the correspondence of a thought or proposition with a given entity or state of affairs. When a proposition corresponds to a given entity, it is said to be true in the sense of being correct, and when it does not, it is false/incorrect. This is what we call propositional truth. But for a being to first see and correspond to entities in the world, a space of appearing must first be opened u Since it is in light of the clearing of Dasein that propositional truth can occur, Heidegger assumes that this clearing is itself a more original form of truth. The disclosedness of Dasein demarcates ontological truth, which, in turn, renders ontic truth a matter of being

[9] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Parable of the Cave and Theaetetus*, trans. by Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 44. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as ET.

anticipated by Dasein's transcendence and of being un-veiled in the light of its clearing.

We can now better see that the freedom of Dasein's clearing grounds the finitude of being that resounds in the principle of reason (i.e. ground), as well as the truth of being, by establishing a space of appearing wherein beings can appear as they are. At the same time, since the freedom of being is here pursued in terms of Dasein's finite transcendence toward the world, the disclosure of the truth of being does not enable us to actually access the truth of being from being itself. For, as we indicated at the onset of this section, Heidegger's approach to the truth of being from Dasein's transcendence views being in terms of an aspect or modality of beings. This approach to the truth of being, in other words, is always at risk of dragging being back into the trappings of beingness, into the forgetting of the enigmatic finitude of being that it was intended to help recover.

For Heidegger, though, this is a necessary risk. While the formulation of the principle of reason helps bring metaphysical thinking to a point where it can hear another tonality resound within it, this other tonality represents the otherness of metaphysics, and not of some radical exteriority. Accordingly, as we have indicated, this otherness only ever allows metaphysics to be raised into its own forgotten essence, and not to overcome itself in something else altogether. Though Heidegger insists that metaphysical thought in its ancient and modern forms is incapable of actually embracing this other tonality that it houses within itself, the other kind of thinking that is to accomplish this task cannot therefore be one that could ever stand at a remove from the threats of metaphysical thinking. Metaphysics carries on like an un-closable wound. 'Post'-metaphysical thinking can only seek to restrain this wound within its own proper limits.

Heidegger's thinking of the finite clearing of being from Dasein therefore stands as a necessary first step in this direction. This stage in Heidegger's thought can be seen as occupying a middle ground, one that begins to allow the enigmatic finitude of being to resound as a question, but without yet being able to hear how that question itself challenges human beings with their own essential tasks. In a way, Heidegger never

entirely leaves this middle ground. Even in his later thought, where Heidegger endeavours to think the truth of being as an event, and no longer from Dasein, the latter remains an essential element in the appropriating event of being — only then as one element amongst others. The event of being needs to appropriate human beings in order for its truth to endure, and human beings need to let themselves be appropriated by the event of being in order to attain to their selfhood.[10]

What is perhaps a still more perilous matter for our present concerns is a realisation that Heidegger finally seems to acknowledge towards the end of his work. As Daniel Dahlstrom has pointed out, the simple fact that the clearing of Dasein serves as that which lets truth as correspondence and correctness arise does not necessitate that it itself is a more originary form of truth.[11] A connection such as this would need to be drawn out in detail. In his research into the nature of this ontological truth, Heidegger not only does not look into this matter, but, as we will see, he eventually abandons his initial association of the clearing with truth (DD, 64, 72).

I.III. Normativity and Abyssal Freedom

Whether or not the clearing of Dasein can in fact be seen as an originary form of truth will prove decisive for whether the ground of being can only be understood as reason. If it can be shown that the making-free of the clearing of Dasein, as that which grounds the finitude of being, must necessarily be aligned with truth, then this would at least hold open the possibility that the ground of being must be understood in normative terms, as a concern for how things truly are.

[10] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of The Event)*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 251. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as CP.

[11] Daniel O. Dahlstrom, 'Transcendental Truth and the Truth That Prevails', in *Transcendental Heidegger*, ed. by Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas (California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 72. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as DD.

To see to this matter ourselves, let us take a closer look at the various aspects involved in Heidegger's account of how the enigmatic finitude of being is grounded in the clearing it opens in Dasein. Heidegger characterises the basic unity of the clearing of Dasein as the self-differentiation between its withdrawal and excess (EG, 129, 132). The withdrawal and excess of Dasein's clearing has to do with two aspects of Dasein's existential structure of care as being-in-the-world, namely its thrownness (or facticity) and its understanding. In other words, thrownness represents one aspect in the essential formal structure of Dasein's constitutive stance toward the world. Thrownness is meant to indicate that Dasein is in the world as having been thrown into a finite, historical-cultural situation in the world (BT, 131). In this sense, Dasein finds itself — via its moods — thrown into a situation wherein certain possibilities have necessarily always already withdrawn. Thrownness therefore represents Dasein's original past, not in the sense of a series of empirical events that have transpired and that now only remain in our memory, but as that aspect of Dasein's stance toward the world that from the start precedes and resists our reflective elucidation (127). As resistant to our determination, Dasein's thrownness represents the enigma of finitude at the basis of its being.

Because Dasein has been thrown into a finite situation where certain possibilities have always already withdrawn, it finds itself projected out beyond itself; it is projected out beyond itself toward its future in the world, such that 'the projection of possibilities is in each case richer than the possession of them by the one projecting' (EG, 128). In Heidegger's words,

> [t]he ready possession of possibilities belongs to Dasein, however, because, as projective, it finds itself in the midst of beings. Certain other possibilities are thereby already *withdrawn* from Dasein, and indeed merely through its own facticity. Yet precisely this *withdrawal* of certain possibilities pertaining to its potentiality for being-in-the-world — a withdrawal entailed in its being absorbed by beings — first brings those possibilities of world-projection that can 'actually' be seized upon *toward* Dasein as its world. (128-129)

As we can see here, Dasein's situatedness gives it a projection of its possibilities in the sense of an inherent understanding of the world as a referential context of meaning or significance, which has its ultimate end in Dasein's existing for-the-sake-of-itself. This understanding provides Dasein with an inherent know-how or ability to be, with an inherent ability to find its way in life and to understand what it needs to do in order to preserve itself in being.

With these two elements in Dasein's existential structure, we have two of the ways in which Dasein can be said to ground the finitude of its being. As Crowell points out, Dasein's thrownness grounds the finitude of being by letting itself assume a determinate historical-cultural place in the world.[12] Differently, Dasein's thrownness grounds being by letting Dasein assume a particular situation in the world, by letting it take up a basis within beings by becoming absorbed and attuned to beings via its moods, and by thereby becoming a determinate self (128, 108, 122). In this way, Dasein grounds its finitude by letting itself gain ground in the world with others (128).

As the thrownness of Dasein is bound to its understanding, this gaining ground is tied to the other form of grounding that occurs in the latter. Dasein's understanding grounds its finitude, its way of existing for-the-sake-of-itself, by giving ground, that is, by establishing or setting 'forth possibilities of existence in its projection of world' (130). Taken together, Dasein's thrown-projection, as the interplay of its original past and future, of its gaining and giving ground, allows a third form of grounding to occur in the present, namely '*grounding as the grounding of* something' (*Ibid.*, 129). In other words, Dasein's thrown-projection, as its ecstatic temporality, grounds its finitude by opening a clearing in which beings can be appear in their being, and which thereby lets the ontic truth of beings occur

[12] Steven Crowell, 'Conscience and Reason: Heidegger and the Grounds of Intentionality', in *Transcendental Heidegger*, ed. by Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas (California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 60. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as CR.

in its original sense, as an ex-posing or un-concealing of oneself to one's ontological truth in the finitude of one's Dasein.

As a matter of course, this third form of grounding concerns the last remaining aspect in Dasein's existential structure, namely discourse. Since, as we've seen, ontic truth is not at heart a matter of corresponding to a given entity or state of affairs, but of letting oneself be engaged by one's ontological truth in the finitude of one's Dasein, authentic discourse must necessarily consist in somehow expressing the understanding of that finitude as determined by its grounding in the freedom of Dasein's clearing or thrown-projection. In our analysis of how the enigmatic finitude of being as grounded in and by Dasein's clearing or transcendence, we have come to see that the grounding of finitude is always a matter of Dasein's null ground charging it with the task of taking it over as the source of possibility, and by thereby becoming 'sovereign' (124). In this way, Dasein expresses its pre-ontological understanding of its enigmatic finitude by '"possibilising" this enigmatic ground of finitude, by somehow personally taking up the possibilities, customs and values into which one has been thrown and making them 'into my reasons for doing what I do' (CR, 58).

Because sovereignty is here a matter of transcendence, as Crowell indicates, Heidegger refers back to its origin in the work of Plato in an effort to shed further light on the historical meaning of this term. For Plato transcendence is aligned with the sun, or, in other words, with the Good (*agathon*), as the original unity of the truth of being (*Ibid.*; EG, 124). As a development of this historical connection of finite transcendence with the Good, Crowell is then justified in stating that the concern Dasein is for itself in its being — in its existing for-the-sake-of-itself — is a 'concern for normatively' (FT, 117). In turn, it would necessarily follow that the finitude of Dasein's being must necessarily be grounded in discourse — i.e. possibilised — in an authentic manner by Dasein's "becoming rational," which is to say, by its becoming accountable for its choices by giving reasons for them to oneself and to others (*Ibid.*).

So long as the finitude of being is studied in terms of Dasein's transcendence or thrown-projection, with its ties to *agathon* and truth, as we

have seen, it follows that this finitude must be grounded in the totality of the world's significance. In this case, since the 'excess of possibility' is projected in Dasein's clearing toward the world, the why-question — the question of ground — would arise in relation to 'those (actual) beings that press around us as we find ourselves' there in the world (EG, 130). An authentic response to the question of ground in discourse would then necessarily be a matter of resolutely taking up one's factic situation by giving reasons for one's choices and by thereby discussing and contemplating them with oneself and others.

But Heidegger eventually abandons this talk of transcendence precisely because of its problematic relation to Plato and to classical metaphysical thinking in general. The concept of transcendence originates in Plato's understanding of being in terms of the eidos or outward appearance of beings, as that aspect which pertains to all beings, but which stands beyond them all as their eternal and universal essence (CP, 169). Owing to this lineage, all subsequent conceptions of transcendence must similarly entail an understanding of being in terms of beings, and so the term ultimately seems to overshadow the study of the finitude of being that it is intended to help recollect (169-171).

What is more, given the deep-seated historical associations of truth with correspondence in ancient Greek philosophy and literature, Heidegger will later acknowledge that correspondence stands as a necessary element in all conceptions of truth, and that, in turn, his own long-standing assertion that Dasein's clearing is a more originary form of truth is ill-founded.[13] These developments can only come as a considerable blow to anyone who would make the strong assertion, as Crowell himself does, that Dasein's concern for its own existence is simply a concern for normativity, and that, accordingly, being a ground is only '"understood" at all' when it is understood as a matter of reason-giving (FT, 117).

[13] Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), p. 77. DD, pp. 64, 72.

Heidegger's later study of the clearing of being as an event, and of an originary, abyssal freedom, suggests another way of properly responding to the question of ground. In Heidegger's work, the event of being 'is time's fourth dimension'.[14] Consequently, the 'excess of possibility' that gives rise to the why-question — to the question of ground — would not simply, or even primarily, stand in relation to 'those (actual) beings that press around us as we find ourselves', (EG, 130) but also in relation to the abyssal freedom of the event of being itself. The enigmatic question of ground would not then be something that would obligate us to take over this enigma by becoming responsible and answerable for customs and values that I find myself thrown into and that I necessarily assume in my everyday existence. An authentic response to this enigmatic ground of being would not then be a matter of our ability to take over being a ground by giving reasons. Instead, an authentic response to the question of ground would necessarily consist in somehow letting ourselves be appropriated by the enigma of this question, that is, by its abyssal (finite) freedom.

As becomes apparent in Heidegger's later work, asides from negative and positive freedom, there is this abyssal freedom of the event of being.[15] The event of being is free in an abyssal manner in that it just is a gift-giving, a letting-be. Abyssal freedom is a matter of *gelassenheit* (letting-be, releasement). There is therefore nothing gloomy about this abyssal freedom; it is a free and undeserved gift. As such, the abyssal freedom of being is gracious — it is grace itself. In turn, beings are appropriated to the measure and to the historical challenges and tasks that the event of being metes out insofar as they let themselves be appropriated by this event. It follows that the enigmatic finitude of being is grounded insofar as a being lets itself

[14] Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger: From Metaphysics to Thought*, trans. by Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 17.
[15] Hans Ruin explores this point in his essay 'The destiny of Freedom: in Heidegger', *Continental Philosophy Review* 41(2008), pp. 277-299.

be ex-posed to what the enigmatic finitude of being itself has in wait for it.[16]

This would first and foremost be done by undergoing a change in our relation to language — from a speech that lays claim to something and that provides reasons for it, to one that speaks to the limits of language and that lets entities appear as they are. As Heidegger finds that Dasein cannot disclose the truth of being in a pure and immediate intuition (*nous*), but in one that occurs by way of speech or discourse about things, he maintains that the disclosure of particular entities necessarily involves a deep-seated forgetting of being.[17] That is, in disclosing particular entities, Dasein not only invariably conceals being, but it forgets that concealing (OT, 150). Heidegger refers to this forgetting of the concealment or enigma of being as errancy. Errancy is not 'an isolated mistake', something we slide in and out of, but is essential to the being of Dasein (*Ibid.*). As Heidegger writes, human beings 'are always astray in errancy, because as ek-sistent they in-sist so already stand within errancy…Errancy is the free space for that turning in which in-sistent ek-sistence adroitly forgets and mistakes itself constantly anew'.[18]

At the same time, Heidegger insists that, 'as leading them astray, errancy at the same time contributes to a possibility that humans are capable of drawing up from their ek-sistence — the possibility that, by experiencing errancy itself and not by mistaking the mystery of Da-sein, they *not* let themselves be led astray' (151). According to Heidegger, Dasein undergoes an experience of errancy in a philosophical questioning that speaks to the limits of language. In Heidegger's words,

[16] Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. by Brett W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 21, 75, 140. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as PC.

[17] Martin Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Truth', in *Pathmarks*, ed. by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 150. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as OT.

[18] By in-sistent, Heidegger means that beings are oriented toward what is readily available. See OT, p. 150.

> [t]he glimpse into the mystery out of errancy is a questioning — in the sense of that unique question of what beings as such are as a whole — in the sense of that unique question of what beings as such are as a whole. This questioning thinks the question of the *Being* of beings, a question that is essentially misleading and thus in its manifold meaning is still not mastered. The thinking of Being, from which such questioning originarily stems, has since Plato been understood as 'philosophy,' and later received the title 'metaphysics' (151-152).

Philosophical thinking most aptly cor-responds to the question of being, as the play of concealing and unconcealing, not by providing reasons for it, but by bringing the truth of being into question as a question, as that which is concealed or enigmatic in all unconcealing (*Ibid.*). As David Webb thus notes,

> insofar as beings as a whole are disclosed 'as' what remains concealed, their disclosure adheres to the pattern of the *logos* in which things show themselves 'as something.' In this case, however, the only possible determination of beings as a whole by the *logos* is as that which does not show itself 'as' anything at all. In this way, the experience of errancy involves the *logos* itself encountering its limit.[19]

In philosophical questioning, then, the human being neither claims to adequately thematise or possess the truth of being, nor does it lapse into silence and quietism, but allows its enigmatic character to appear as enigmatic. Philosophical questioning is therefore not a matter of interrogating something in view of unearthing its secrets or of asserting one's dominance. Instead, it consists in letting things come to presence in their play of revealing and concealing. In letting things appear and speak for themselves in their mystery, philosophical questioning dignifies being in understanding that it

[19] David Webb, *Heidegger, Ethics and the Practice of Ontology* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 26.

is question-worthy and by preparing a way in which it might announce itself as such.[20]

As an event, then, being is a ground, but not in the manner of a being, that is, not in the manner of a why or reason. It is because being withdraws from the sight of Dasein and refuses to be pinned down by reasons that it appears to beings as an abyssal freedom. The kind of grounding that we find here in the abyssal freedom of being is one that Heidegger addresses in the latter stages of *The Principle of Reason*. In this work, Heidegger notes that being itself grounds, not in the manner of a why, by providing an account or explanation, but in the manner of a 'because'. Heidegger notes that the because 'guards against investigating the "why"… For the "because" is without *why*, it has no ground, it is ground itself' (PR, 127). Rather than calling for a reason, then, in saying because, being calls beings to let themselves be engaged by its enigmatic because, by its intimation of the particular historical challenges and tasks that remain for a particular historical community. So far as beings let themselves be engaged by the historical challenges and tasks of being, the latter gives beings a 'supportive' yet elusive presence, according to which beings can exist for a while in a world of meaning and wonder (*Ibid.*).

The abyssal grounding of being can be likened to the play of a child. As Heidegger states, '[t]he play is without "*why*." It plays since [or because] it plays. It simply remains a play: the most elevated and the most profound' (113). The profoundness of this play, of this manner of grounding in abyssal freedom, is that it grounds being itself, as that in which all human beings are at stake, by appearing only in its withdrawal, by offering this enigmatic 'because' that prompts beings to question its grounds, not so as to finally seize upon a why or an answer, or to justify or otherwise

[20] Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Philosophy — Thinking and Poeticizing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), p. 48. For Heidegger, the human being's poetic relation to language also allows the truth of being to appear in its mystery. See Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. by Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 147-151.

account for themselves, but so as to let themselves be ex-posed to this mysterious play of being all the more and to thereby minimise their erring.

Be that as it may, since this philosophical questioning, as a letting-be, can only ever let things appear in a mediate and partial manner, even this letting-be is not pure but necessarily remains a disruption of the truth of being and thus mis-leads beings to some extent. Errancy belongs to philosophical questioning. This seems to problematise our traditional understanding of responsibility as a matter of taking ownership of one's actions by providing an account of them to others — i.e. by providing reasons, justifications. Insofar as Dasein undergoes an experience of its errancy, it can still take ownership of its errancy by growing more mindful of it and seeking to temper it as much as possible. Yet this correspondence to the truth of being does not imply that Dasein can ever get the basis of its being into its power, and it does not seem to involve providing reasons for what one has done or in any way being answerable for it (PC, 78). In his later work, Heidegger makes it clear that while the human being can cor-respond to the enigma of being and commit itself to letting things come to presence in their mystery, the presencing of being is 'nothing for which we can answer' (*Ibid.*; OT, 151). Philosophical questioning tests the limits of accountability and reminds the human being of the possibility of disaster.