

On Being in Hegel and Heidegger

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Abstract

What is being? This is, from the Greeks to Hegel (according to Heidegger), the guiding question of ontology and the history of philosophy as metaphysics. And the answer is *presence*: ‘being’ means ‘being present’, ‘presencing’; ‘to be’ means ‘to be present’. By clarifying the limit of this philosophy of presence, however, it is possible to go beyond it, to a thinking of being as presence and *absence*—for both coming-to-presence and going-out-into-absence are ways in which beings are, and being happens. And yet, are presence and absence the only ways to think being? On the contrary—there is a third. From the Greeks (through Hegel) to Heidegger, the being that fails to come to presence, but also does not simply remain in absence—this is what is merely implied, an *implication*. But then what does it mean to think being as implied? Being as implying? As an implication?

What is being? This is—at least according to Heidegger—the guiding question of the history of philosophy as metaphysics from the Greeks to us. And Hegel provides ‘the clearest and greatest example of the unity’ of this ontological tradition (GA 65:76).¹ But the question of *what* being is—this is not the only question. For the other ontological question is *how* is being? And if this question becomes essential for the history of philosophy as metaphysics, it may be because the how of being, its way of being, is determinative for the what of being, for the being of being, even the essence and concept of being—indeed, for any understanding of being whatsoever.²

So then, three questions: (1) How does Hegel think being? (2) What is the difference between the way in which Hegel and Heidegger think being? (3) Does the history of philosophy as metaphysics not imply another understanding of being—one that the ontological tradition cannot think?

I. The concept of being

‘*Being, pure being*,—without any further determination’; or ‘*being*, and nothing else, without further determination or filling’; being understood as ‘indeterminate

immediacy’—so begins Hegel’s *Logic* (*WL* II: 59). And it ends with being too: the absolute idea—this ‘alone is *being*’ (*WL* I 1: 371–72). But what is being? What is Hegel’s concept of being? And how does he think it?

In fact, for Hegel’s system of science, the phenomenologic (*Phenomenology* and *Logic*) of absolute spirit’s absolute (actually-rational speculative) knowledge of the absolute idea, being means *presence*, that is, the *presence* of absolute spirit throughout history, and so throughout the history of the education of consciousness from sense-certainty to absolute knowledge (a knowledge which was always already present to absolute spirit); and the *presence* of the absolute idea throughout thinking (which was always already the essence and ground, the reality and truth, the substance and subject, of every concept). For the end is present in the beginning, and continues to be so; the *τέλος* is the *ἀρχή*. As Hegel writes: ‘advance is actually a *retreat* into the ground, to what is *original* and *true*, on which depends and, in fact, from which originates, that with which the beginning is made’ (*WL* II: 43; Haas 2000: 90). Thus, both the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* must be read in reverse, back-to-front, from the last chapter to the first, from absolute knowing to sense-certainty, from the absolute idea to being—for the end is already present as the actual beginning, and the beginning is merely a result of abstraction, the coming to presence of the end.

What then—if the beginning is the end, or the end is the beginning—does it mean for absolute knowing *to be* sense-certainty? Or to claim that the idea *is* being? What is this verb, being, ‘to be’, doing here?

In fact, in phenomenologic—as for the entire onto-theo-logical history of philosophy as metaphysics—‘being is understood in the same sense as in the ancients, namely, as *continual presence*’ (Heidegger 2001).³ The verb, being, means: to be present—or being means presence. So the end is present at the beginning, or the beginning is where the end comes to presence. Thus, absolute knowledge is already present in sense-certainty, and throughout the *Phenomenology*; and being is how the idea comes to presence as the beginning of the *Logic*, and stays with it throughout.

On the one hand, every moment of the dialectical movement of the *Phenomenology* bears the stamp of spirit’s presence, of its absolute knowledge and knowledge of the absolute—and so, of being *qua* presence. If, in the beginning, ‘knowledge of what *immediately* or simply *is* ... pure *being* or this simple immediacy’, comes to presence *qua* sense-certainty, that is, the consciousness of a contradictory concept (that an object which is immediately present in the world as a particular this-or-that, here-and-now, is just as universal); it is because, in the end, absolute spirit’s absolute knowledge of ‘what *it is*’ (whereby it comes back to itself as pure presence-to-self) reveals itself as having always been present—not only in us, but just as much in spirit’s absolute self-consciousness (*PbG*:22–23,764). For spirit was always already present in the moment of

sense-certainty—whether we recognize it and know it, or not. And ‘being is thinking’ because thinking comes to presence as the thinking of being, or ‘a substance is’ means ‘a substance comes to presence (as itself by going-through the movement of becoming other than itself)’ (*PbG*: lxvii, lxiv).⁴ So spirit presents itself to itself as natural-historical, as the dialectical movement by which it comes to the absolute self-presence of absolute self-knowledge—which is why spirit’s becoming is eternally-temporal, both together, *beide zusammen*, (1) the eternal externalization, *ewige Entäußerung*, of its continual existence (the presentation of its presence as the substance of nature), and (2) the recollection and preservation of itself in time, *an die Zeit* (the re-presentation of its presence as history) (*PbG*: 763–64). Thus, from what presents itself as consciousness to what comes to presence as absolute knowing, spirit is present—or rather, the presence of what is present—for Hegel thinks the continuous presence of spirit, just as he thinks absolute knowing as being (or having always already been from the beginning) present throughout the *Phenomenology*.

On the other hand, in the *Logic*, every moment is merely another way in which the concept is, and comes to presence. The concept is (1) present as being, as ‘indeterminate immediacy’, pure presence, without any further determination (*WL* II: 59). So if being is immediate (like pure nothing), it is present as the pure concept of being; and if being is indeterminate, it comes to presence without determination, as being a purely indeterminate concept (*WL* I 1: 7, 21, 22).⁵ In other words, being is presented as devoid of all content, equal only to itself; pure being presents itself as purely indeterminate. And ‘to be indeterminate’ means ‘to be indeterminately present’; just as ‘to be immediate’ means ‘to be immediately present’. So being can be grasped insofar as its indeterminacy (being indeterminate) comes to presence; or it can be thought only as the presence of being. For determination means conceptual presentation, how being is being, how being is present (or comes to presence) in all its purity—for the concept of pure being is the presence of both being, and the concept of being (thus, the presence of the concept). But then (2) the concept is present as being nothing: if being is presented without any determinations, pure indeterminacy—well then, it is nothing (*WL* II: 59).⁶ Then as the absence of all determinations, being presents itself as being nothing; being is the presentation of nothing, the presence of non-presence; and ‘to be *nothing*’ means ‘to be nothing’, just as ‘being nothing’ means ‘to be present as nothing’, or ‘being present insofar as nothing is determined’, or ‘nothing is present’—here or there or anywhere, now or then or anytime. And thinking being is thinking nothing; just as the thought of being is the thought of nothing. So being and nothing are the same: pure presentations of pure indeterminateness, which is why they present themselves as one another, come to presence as the presence of the absence of determination (*WL* II: 60). And then (3), the concept is present as being both being and nothing, as becoming. For being and nothing are not just

being and nothing; in being the same, they are themselves and each other; or more precisely, being and nothing are (in truth) their sameness, their relation through which they become one another, their unity (and so not merely unmediated, separate, self-equal; but just as much mediated, inseparable, equal-to-one-another). Indeed, sameness is how being and nothing come to presence; their way of being present as one (although not simply identical)—for the unity of being and nothing both destroys their difference and maintains it. And this unity is becoming, that is, the becoming nothing of being which is the coming to be (the becoming) of nothing, or the movement of both through which they come to presence as distinct and indistinguishable, separate and inseparable. So becoming is the way in which being and nothing are present, and ‘to become’ means ‘to be continually present as the movement of being and nothing’, the movement whereby their difference comes to presence, and (becoming their identity) goes out into absence. And thinking being and/or nothing is thinking becoming as the truth of the relation of being and nothing, that is, thinking the being of becoming, thinking how becoming is, or always already is (so that being and becoming can come to presence as different from one another, each identical with itself—although the truth is that they are also one, identical and different). Thus, the meaning of being in the *Logic* is being-present: if ‘being is nothing’ means that ‘being comes to presence as nothing’, if ‘becoming is a movement’ (whereby being and nothing are the same and different) means that ‘becoming presents itself in the presence of being and nothing’; then it is because the concept is continually present (and coming to presence) throughout its determination as quality–quantity–measure, or reflection–appearance–actuality, or subjectivity–objectivity–idea (which is also how any being, natural or cultural, subject or substance, whether τὸδε τι or φύσις as a whole, a word or deed, can be present and come to presence as itself or as another)—for the concept reveals itself as having been continuously present as the truth, and being means always already having been present.

For phenomenologic then—in fact, for the entire system of science, and so for everything that is—‘to be’ is ‘to be present’. Being is being-present. And each moment of the movement of Hegel’s thought exhibits the continual presence of the absolute idea of conceptual spirit.

But how so? How can the *Phenomenology’s* spirit be, on the one hand, present in sense-certainty, in force and understanding, in the master and the slave—and yet, on the other hand, still be spirit? How can spirit be another (the spirit of, for example, reason and religion)—and yet still be itself? How can the *Logic’s* idea come to presence as indeterminate immediacy—be there at the beginning—and yet still be the idea (there at the end)? Or how can the concept be present in concepts—and yet be irreducible to any of them? How could there be a concept of being and of nothing, and becoming—and yet still, a concept of the concept?

Hegel answers: the concept can be continually present only as a contradiction; the presence of spirit is contradictory. And this is why each moment of the *Phenomenology* is contradictory: spirit is present in (and as) natural consciousness—we just do not know it until all is recollected and realized and revealed at the end, and the end shows itself to have always already actually been there from the beginning. And this is why each concept of the *Logic* is a contradiction: being is indeterminate and determined, itself and another, nothing (from which it is both distinguishable and indistinguishable, immediate and mediated, separable and inseparable, the same and different, empty and full, pure and impure, itself and its opposite, *ἑτερότης* or *στέρησις*)—but *the* concept is not simply *a* concept, not merely a particular concept, although being is a concept, as is nothing, because the concept is just as universal, which is how it can also be both being and nothing. But this contradiction (of particular and universal) is not a defect or flaw, not a ‘real philosophical embarrassment’ (GA 2, front-piece); nor is it illogical, nor simply nonsense—on the contrary, it is the truth of the phenomenologic in which ‘*all things are in themselves contradictory*’ (WL I 2: 77).

What then, does it mean to think this contradictory concept? How is the contradiction of being to be brought to presence in thought? In a way of thinking that (in accordance with Hegel’s adoption of the Spinozistic principle, *omnis determinatio est negatio*) must be as contradictory as it is non-contradictory?⁷ And a contradiction that must be as present as it is absent?

In fact, Hegel is quite clear: contradiction must be thought as the essence of the concept. In this way, the concept is neither a category—neither Aristotelian nor Kantian, which both seek to resolve contradiction; nor is it simply an abstract idea (like some Platonic other-worldly *εἶδος*)—for it is just as real and concrete. Rather, the concept, *Begriff*, is a way of tolerating contradiction, by both resolving and maintaining it, by grasping, *begreifen*, the truth of contradiction contradictorily, by ‘sublating’ contradiction. And Hegel uses this word, sublation, *Aufhebung*, because it has the advantage of ‘not just different meanings, but opposite ones’ (WL II: xvii); it translates a Latin two-fold origin: *tollo, tollere, sustuli, sublatum* comes from *tolero, tolerare, toleravi, toleratus* (bear, endure, tolerate) and *fero, ferre, tulis, latus* (bring, bear; tell speak of; consider; carry off, win, receive, produce; get). Thus, as Hegel notes: one word, *aufheben*, is essentially ambiguous, double, two-fold, Janus-headed (and so perfectly suited to phenomenologic)—for it means both destroying or dissolving, *elevare*, and preserving or keeping, *conservare*.⁸

It should, then, be no surprise that the concept of being is contradictory, the sublation that simultaneously preserves and destroys itself—for being tolerates nothing as its opposite, maintains nothing insofar as it is. And so too, being as presence is a contradiction—for it tolerates absence as its negation (and itself as negation of the negation), presents it as being absent (itself a contradiction).

In this way, being is and is not, is indeterminate and determinate, immediate and mediated, identical and different; or, the concept comes to presence as itself by being another—which is a contradiction. But not just contradiction—for the contradiction must be contradicted, if it is to be contradictory. Thus, the truth of each moment is the movement of contradiction and non-contradiction, as positive as it is negative; it is the continual presence of the concept in that which Hegel names ‘the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk’, but a revel which is just as much repose (*PbG* §47: lvi; Haas 1997).

And if being is contradictory, then spirit’s way of being present, the continual presence of absolute knowing, is contradictory as well—for every moment of history (even the sense-certainty with which the *Phenomenology* begins) is absolutely spiritual, mediated by the knowing spirit that is there, present; but each is just as much immediately itself and unspiritual. So spirit is the essence of both the master and the slave—but each is master and slave of itself, and spirit is gone. And spirit knows not only itself, but its negation—for it is the contradiction of both, externalization and internalization, concrete and abstract, subject and substance, really ideal and ideally real. Thus, contradictory spirit comes to presence temporally as history; and has always already come to presence (or been present, eternally or constantly present, which is the end of history).

And the *Logic* shows how to tolerate the presence of contradiction in thinking—and in being itself. In this way, phenomenologic is not simply natural or human science—for insofar as science refuses the contradictory *Aufhebung* of ‘knowledge and truth’, it cannot know (or think) contradiction as true, nor the truth of contradictory and two-sided knowledge, nor think truth *qua* contradiction (*PbG*: 762). But if being is a contradiction, and thought as contradictory, then logic must learn to tolerate the presence of the contradictory concept, just as the work of phenomenology is learning to tolerate spirit’s contradictory presence.

II. The question of being

If phenomenologic, however, thinks being *qua* presence; then, for Heidegger, Hegel is (1) unable to raise the question of being because he has already answered it with absolute spirit’s continually present absolute idea, and (2) unable to engage in asking about the ‘to be’ because he already thinks he knows that it means ‘to be present’. On the one hand, Hegel thinks *what* being is as spirit (or concept, or idea), that is, a being, *ein Seiendes* (albeit one that is two-fold, double, contradictory: ideally real and really ideal, substance and subject, formal-material, abstract-concrete, empirical-transcendental, as negative as it is positive); he thinks spirit *qua* totality of things, the beingness, *Seinheit*, essence

or concept or idea (even the absolute essence or absolute concept or absolute idea) of being that is always already present as the ‘ground of the belonging-together’ of an (absolute) substance, or comes to presence as the foundation or *ὑποκειμενον* of the (absolute) knowing of an (absolute) subject.⁹ But this means that Hegel cannot think beings as a whole, *Seienden im Ganzen*, or being as a whole, *Sein im Ganzen* or being itself, *Sein*, the being of beings, *Sein des Seienden*—for although he thinks *what* it is, he forgets about *how* so; and thus, cannot think both the *what* (presence) and the *how* (present) of being (GA 9: 110; GA 2: 8, 16n). On the other hand, Hegel thinks being *qua* contradiction; but this means thinking the presence of contradiction, however true—not only that being is always already present as *aufgehoben*, but that the contradictory concept is continually present as sublated in the *Phenomenology*’s absolute knowledge, and in the *Logic*’s movement of sublation in play (GA 65: 264; GA 68: 12).

And yet, although this philosophy of presence is, according to Heidegger, the apogee or completion of Western philosophy as metaphysics, the *Vollendung* of ontology, it is not the only way to think being. On the contrary, by listening to *what* language (and especially the language of the Greeks) has to say about being, as well as *how* it does so, it is possible to take up the task of thinking being in a way that is no longer simply bound to presence, that is not merely limited to what is present; and so to destroy or destructure the traditional (and still dominant) answer to the question of being. Thus, by clarifying the limits of the philosophy of presence, Heidegger hopes to contribute to the history of metaphysics by attempting to notice that which has remained unnoticed, seeking to think the unthought, say the unsaid, remember what has been forgotten and how so.

How then, is it possible to think ‘what being is’ in a way that does not reduce it to a being, or the presence of the beingness of a being? And how is it possible to think ‘how being is’ as not simply being present?

Heidegger is quite clear: thinking must take a *Schritt zurück*, a step back from the present, and back from the way in which being *qua* presence has been thought from the Greeks to Hegel—even to those who today remain loyal to the philosophy of presence and the ontology of the present (Heidegger 1957: 39).¹⁰ Or rather, three steps back: (1) the step from Hegel’s negating as preserving the presence of the negated, and into a questioning (of being and beings) that opens up the possibility of the absence of an answer; (2) the step from the presence of the (tolerated) contradiction of identity and difference, and into an original difference that opens onto the possibility of the absence of identity; (3) the step from the eternal presence of the present (as the ground of history and the experience of time from the Greeks to contemporary science), and into a temporality of original finitude that opens up the possibility of the non-present, the absent (that is not merely reducible to a present absence). And this means back from Hegel.

First step: while Hegel thinks negation as the movement by which spirit, knowledge, the idea, comes to presence (as nothing, in the *Logic*, for example, is the negation of being, and becoming is the negation of the negation, which will itself be negated); for Heidegger, this simply embodies the metaphysical prejudice for translating the negativity of absence into positive presence. But the conceptual thinking that negates what is absent in order to tolerate contradiction actually leaves fundamental absence (like abstract negation)—as well as the essence of the nothing and nothingness—unthought; and

philosophy as *ab*-solute, as *un*-conditioned, must in a particular way *enclose negativity within it*, and that means, *not* fundamentally taking it *seriously*. The *dis-engagement* as *preservation*, the complete equivalence of everything.—There is no nothing at all. And that even seems to be perfectly in order (GA 68: 24).

Or again: ‘Hegel’s negativity is no negativity at all’—for the No of the nothing, of non-presence, absent absence, is already sublated, *aufgehoben*, in the Yes, present absence (GA 68: 47). And if phenomenologic thinks immediate absence as mediated, it cannot think immediate immediacy or the absencing of immediate absence—rather, ‘with Hegel: everything immediate is mediated’ (GA 56–57: 108). So infinite absence is thought as present *qua* absent, wherein lies its finitude; just as infinite infinity is bad, *schlecht*, and must be translated into good infinity, a finite infinity, in order to think the accomplishment of what has always already been accomplished, the thought of what is totalized, completed, ended. And thinking is merely the explication of the *Vollendung*, of what is the case, the realization that ‘what is’ has always been true, the revelation of the truth, the grasping (as in Platonic ἀνάμνησις) of what is actually already there, present, to be grasped or revealed, discovering or uncovering the infinite presence of what has actually been infinitely present. There is nothing new here, nothing truly absent, only the unconcealing, ἀλήθεια, of the very old—thus, complete boredom, *die vollständige Langweiligkeit*. As Heidegger writes: ‘nothing happens anymore, and nothing can happen’ (GA 68: 54)—which is not simply a criticism, especially from a thinker who undertakes an entire phenomenology of boredom (GA 29–30). But if Heidegger follows Hegel in negating the one-sidedness, *das Einseitige*, of traditional metaphysics as onto-theology; it is not because he follows Hegel’s adoption of the contradictory concept—rather, Heidegger seeks to think being’s presence and absence, that is, its all-sidedness, *das Allseitige* (GA 68: 54). Then thinking is not merely negating absence (and affirming, nor negating the negation, nor affirming the affirmation), just as speaking is not simply yes-saying (nor merely judging, determining, subsuming under categories). Thinking is a matter of questioning, of questioning and listening for what is present and absent, for an answer and non-answer, for the

coming to presence of what is answerable and the remaining in absence of the unanswerable, for that which presents itself as given and for what is not (and cannot be) given. And questioning? For Heidegger, questioning is a way of being that opens up the possibility of thinking presence and absence; it is a way for us human beings to be with being, a belonging-together that happens when we step-back from determining and negating (and from determinate negation) what presents itself, back from the translations of the philosophy of presence, back from grasping and back from the *nachträgliche* conceptualization of that which is always already present, in order to raise the question of being present and absent, and take up the task of listening to how being comes to presence (and goes out into absence) in beings (GA 68: 39). And although questioning may not know the answer to the question of being (whether such an answering is possible at all, or rather far more impossible) and may not be able to bring the absence of being to presence—it might at least know (in accordance with Socratic irony) that it does not know, which is perhaps more than can be said for the history of philosophy as metaphysics, or for the ontology that stretches from the Greeks to us.¹¹

Second step: while Hegel thinks the coming to presence of the ‘unity of being and non-being’ (*WL* II: 48), the contradictory identity of identity and difference, the conceptual ground of subject and substance, the infinite (eternally present) foundation of knowledge; Heidegger also thinks the non-presence of identity, that is, the difference that belongs to ‘*everything that “is”*’ (GA 40: 155). Or, prior to the presence of spirit in each of its historical moments lies their absence, out of which they come, and the difference between presence and absence. So more original than contradiction is difference, the intolerant *Streit*, πόλεμος, *différend*, out of which tolerance comes. And before the concept of the concept (the idea) actually shows itself to have always already been present, before the idea reveals itself in any concept (so that truth can be what is the case, *wirklich* in the world and in consciousness, the actual work of spirit, ἐνέργεια), it must have already been absent therefrom, that is, a *mögliche* presence, a possibility, *potentia*, δύναμις; and there must be a difference between actually present and potentially present (that is, actually absent)—but this difference, or difference’s way of being, can be neither actual nor potential, neither present nor absent. Heidegger’s step then, is back from the unity of being and non-being in the history of philosophy, back from the unity of presence and absence of history, spirit, science, logic; and so back from the identity of identity and difference, back from the one-sided logical identity of Fichte’s I = I, back from the no-sided indifference of Schelling’s night in which all cows are black (*PbG*: xix); and back from Hegel’s refusal or *Ab-sage* of difference (*WL* I 2: 43), whereby he cannot question the origin of identity, nor think the difference of identity and difference, nor the absence of unity in the difference of being and non-being—and this is

because Hegel already knows (or thinks he knows) that difference has come to presence by being abstracted out of identity, and that difference is to be (or has always already actually been present as) *aufgehoben* by contradiction. Thus, Heidegger steps back from all this, and into a thinking of original difference, the difference of differences, the ontological difference (between being and beings), the grounding or fundamental difference, *gründender Unterschied*, from whence beings as a whole first come to presence and go out into absence.¹²

Third step: while Hegel thinks being as eternal or infinite presence, an always actually present spirit, and an already actually present concept; Heidegger steps back in order to also think the original temporality out of which the eternal and the temporal (the present and the absent non-present, now and then, past and future) first come. But then being is not ‘in’ time—for time is not something ‘in which’ being (or anything) could be; it is neither an order of things (Aristotle 1950: 219b2) nor their schema (Kant 1900, III–IV: A145/B184), nor the history in which spirit runs its course or in which it appears (*PbG*: 764). Rather, ‘time is the how’ (GA 64: 124), the way being is present and absent; so how beings are determined in their finitude as coming to presence and going out into absence. Indeed, being (and beings) does not just have time; it is temporal. As Heidegger writes:

The characteristics whereby these phenomena are *zeitlich*, we call their *temporale* characteristics. I am intentionally employing this foreign-word because the word ‘*zeitlich*’ has been mostly claimed by natural, pre-philosophical speaking where it simply means that something runs its course, or happens, or takes place *in* time. However, when we say that a phenomenon is *temporal*, we do not mean that this phenomenon is a process or a movement, much less that it happens *in* time. Therefore *zeitlich* in the sense of running its course in time, is not the same as *temporale*, which means first and foremost that something is ‘characterized by time’.¹³

And not just beings that come to be (or phenomena that appear, come to presence, present and absent themselves)—like those that are born and die, words and deeds, objects and subjects—for if time is how anything is whatsoever, then even the a-temporal or supra-temporal or non-temporal (or phenomena that are given as always already having been present), the eternal and infinite, are characterized by time. In other words, not only the moments of the education of consciousness, not merely the movement of the concept through its logical iterations, but just as much infinite spirit and the absolute idea—in fact, everything which Hegel speaks in the infinitive—is finite and temporal (which is why being, *sein*, in German is a verb, time-word, *Zeitwort*)—and the infinitive is a

privation of finitude, of past-present-future tense. Thus, Heidegger steps back from the continual presence of time, the infinite time of being, and into a thinking of original temporality as the finite way in which being and beings are present and in the present, or absent and past or future.

So three steps back from Hegel, and from the philosophy of presence—back to the absence of an answer to the question of being, to the absence of the original difference of identity (being identical, self-identical, as well as the identity of being), and to the absence of the finitude of temporality (as being's way of being).

But what about this absence? Does questioning not bring the absence of the questioning of being to presence as questionable? Does the thinking of original difference not bring it to presence as the ground of being? Is the finitude of temporality not continuously present as the how of being and beings? In other words, in stepping back from the philosophy of presence, has Heidegger not stepped into it? Into an always already present question, difference, temporality? Into a thinking of another being on which to ground the (actual possibility of the) absence of the question, of difference, and of temporality?

On the contrary—in fact, for Heidegger, the step back from presence is not a step into another continuously present ground, but into an unground, an abyss, *Abgrund* (GA 68: 48). Indeed, the abyss is that which allows 'everything that is' to be. As the origin of being, the 'groundless ground' opens up and thus makes the difference of being and nothing (and being and beings) first possible. The abyss is that which withdraws and so lets the question of being be questionable (rather than answered or even answerable); it is what clears a path for being to be temporal (and so for the finitude of beings, whether beings like us, or any being whatsoever). And if being is not presence, not present as ground, but an abyss; then this is not to say it is nothing—although neither is it thereby something, some being, nor being itself—rather, as empty and open, not simply there, the abyss 'is' the absence of ground. Thus, the abyss is the actual possibility of being, and so the origin of presence.

But what is being *qua* abyss? As Heidegger insists: 'I mean the "ground"?' (GA 68: 48)—here in quotes in order to mark that it is not presence, but nevertheless still somehow 'present'; not eternal but temporal, not infinite but finite; so not a ground, but a 'ground'. Indeed, '*being as a-bbyss—nothing and ground at the same time*' (GA 68: 48). In other words, being is not a ground, but still 'grounds'; the abyss is groundless, but it functions as, *als*, a 'ground'—for it is not merely negative, privative, deficient, and its work is far more a positive way of being (GA 2: 308). As Heidegger writes: 'If I say of someone: "I miss him very much, he is not there," I precisely do not mean to say that he is not there, but express a *quite particular way that he is there for me*.'¹⁴ Thus absence is a particular way of being present, just as the abyssal non-ground is a way of being a 'ground',

at least insofar as ‘the ground grounds as *a-byss*’ (GA 65: 29); and ‘the opening of the a-byss is not groundless. The abyss is not “no” to every ground in the manner of groundlessness; but a “yes” to the ground in its concealed breadth and remoteness’ (GA 65: 387).

If the abyss, however, is the ‘ground’ of presence, then it is because being is no longer thought as presence, but just as much as absence, as that absence which allows being to be, which lets the event of being, *Ereignis*, happen.¹⁵ In this way, Heidegger thinks that which remains unthought in Hegel: being as an absence which is both there and not there, not present (and being there, present *qua* absent). For Heidegger thinks the abyss as a way of being nothing and something, the original non-ground grounding of being itself. And *what* being is, the abyssal event, is determined on the ‘ground’ of how so, on *how* being *qua* event happens, ‘*das Ereignis ereignet*’ (GA 14: 29)—for if being, ‘to be’, *sein*, is a verb; it is because it is an action, an act, the activity on the ‘ground’ of which presence and absence are first possible.

The history of philosophy as metaphysics then, becomes ‘richer’ (GA 68: 55n1)—for thinking the unthought, stepping back from presence, back into absence, back into difference, back into how being is temporally, means that the question of being (from the Greeks to Hegel) becomes questionable again. And if the *Grund* of knowing and thinking, feeling and imagining, shows itself to be an *Abergrund*—then being is not some kind of thing or being, but the happening of the abyss, the event that brings being and beings to presence and lets them go out into absence. Thus being is no longer presence, but just as much absence—or more precisely, it is the ‘ground’ of both.

III. Being as implication

With respect to the question of being then, Heidegger steps back from Hegel, back from a concept of being as presence, and into a thinking of being as absence (as well), into the happening of the event on the ‘ground’ of which beings come to presence and go out into absence. In this way, the history of philosophy as metaphysics, first philosophy, φιλοσοφία πρώτη—which has ‘its source in ancient philosophy’, in the study of being *qua* being, τὸ ὄν ἢ ὅν—comes to think ‘everything that is’, or being as a whole, καθόλου (GA 80: 5). And the clearest and greatest example of this tradition is the thought of being as (the happening of) the abyss as the ‘ground’ on which beings come to presence and go out into absence—for here, being continues to be understood, in one way or another, as it has always been understood, in terms of presence and absence, ground and abyss—and *tertium non datur*, there is no third.

Or is there? For what if it became necessary to step back again? To repeat the step back? To step back from Heidegger's step back from Hegel's retreat—and from the history of philosophy as the philosophy of absence and presence? To step back from the ground and the abyss? To think that which remains unthought in the ontological tradition—because it could not be thought—namely, an understanding of what it means to be neither simply present, nor merely absent? What then?

For as Aristotle reminds us: being and unity *imply* one another (Aristotle 1957: 1003b22–24). But what does that mean? To imply? To be implied? To implicate? Or to be an implication? And so, to think being—not as presence or absence, neither as ground nor abyss, neither as an event, nor even a non-event—but as implying?

Aristotle is quite clear: implication is not λόγος; it is not definition or meaning, value or measure, explanation or argument, expression or utterance, speech or subject-matter, word or law—and it is not ground (and so too, not non-ground or abyss—thus, neither presence nor absence, neither happening nor non-happening). To imply is not λέγειν; it is neither to reason or calculate, nor to give an account or narrative, nor merely to speak or to think, nor just to lay-out or gather-up.

Rather, implying is the how of being. Implied is the way in which being is. Implication is the what of being. And this implicates the entire history of philosophy as metaphysics (as well as the other philosophical disciplines which presuppose its results), and the ontological tradition (as well as the human and natural sciences which remain loyal to its assumptions), from the Greeks to us.

How then, is being implied? Perhaps a clue from language—for as Heidegger reminds us: 'language speaks' (GA 12: 243; Benjamin 1991: II.1, 144; Haas 2014). Or as Hegel writes: 'the forms-of-thought are first set-out and put-down in human *language*' (*Wer* V: 20).

Heraclitus says: ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων (Diels 1960: B119).¹⁶ That is: 'a person's character *is* his divinity'.¹⁷ Or 'the (familiar) abode for humans *is* the opening for the presencing of the (un-familiar) god' (GA 9: 356; my emphasis). But the word 'is' is not in the original—being is not present, or absent; it is implied, an implication, that which neither comes to presence nor simply remains in absence. But what is implied can be neither determined as appearing, nor asserted to be what does not appear; it is neither an event nor a non-event, neither something nor nothing, neither a ground nor an abyss, neither here nor there, now nor then, never nor always—at least insofar as it is implied. Rather, implication suspends presence and absence, which is why Heraclitus simply says: 'human character divine'—for 'to be' does not mean 'to be present', but 'to be implied'; being is implying, an implication.¹⁸

And language speaks. It speaks of implication. It speaks in the language of implication. So language does not simply speak, or remain silent, but implies.

But what does language imply? Not just *what* is implied, but just as much *how* so. So if language implies anything whatsoever, it also implies something about implication.

And language tells us *how* being is implied; and thereby, *what* being is—an implication—not just in speech, but just as much in thought (and act).

The history of philosophy as metaphysics then, insofar as it presupposes an understanding of being *qua* presence and absence, would leave the history of implication unthought—even if this would no longer simply be ontology or onto-theology.

On the one hand, when Hegel thinks that being and nothing *are* the same, he means that being and nothing necessarily *imply* one another—for it is not simply a matter of tolerating the presence of that which is *aufgehoben* in the contradictory concept, but thinking how it is implied thereby (which presumably implicates the entire *Logic*). When all things *are* in themselves contradictory, he means that contradiction is *implied* by each thing insofar as it is; when spirit is thought as always already present in history, emptied out into time, as the original truth of subject and substance, and the ground of the education of consciousness from sense-certainty to absolute knowledge—it is because spirit is implied in every movement of every moment of the *Phenomenology*—for Hegel thinks implication as presence.

On the other hand, when Heidegger raises the question of being, thereby illuminating the question as questionable; it is not merely because the answer is absent, but because it is implied, because the ‘answer’ to the question of the meaning of being is implication. Or when difference is thought prior to identity, as the origin of the ontological difference of being and beings, it is not because difference is always already present as the possibility of presence; but rather because difference (and identity) is implied by ‘everything that is’, by everything that comes to presence and passes out into absence, and because difference is implicated in how being is, and is thought. Or when temporality characterizes the finite way in which being and beings are present or absent, it is because time is implicated therein—not only that being and time imply one another, but just as much that time is implied by any being whatsoever, which is how it can be past, present or future. Or when the ‘ground’ of being is thought as a non-ground or unground, it is not because the abyss is the original absence out of which the event happens, comes to presence—rather, it is a sign that there might be another way of thinking being, even if it never happens at all.

So, how can being be thought as implied, an implication? Is being necessarily implied, an actually necessary implication, every time anything is, in anyway whatsoever? Or is it only possibly implied, a possibility or possible implication? So that to be or not to be remains a question? Or is there a third, *tertium datur*, being implied in such a way that is neither simply necessary nor

merely possible, that suspends the necessity and possibility of being, and so of being present and absent? And would this way of being not be a problem for the history of philosophy as metaphysics, for the entire ontological tradition from the Greeks to us? But then, how could this problem be thought?

A clue from Kant, from a thinker who knows that there are things we cannot *know* and ‘yet must be able to *think*’ (Kant 1900, III: Bxxvi)—for ‘we first judge something problematically, then take its truth assertorically, and finally claim it as inseparably united with understanding, that is, as necessary and apodictic’ (Kant 1900, IV: A76; III: B101). And these categories are not simply ways of judging or knowing, of determining whether something is being implied (and if so, then what) or nothing; on the contrary, they are ways of being. Then implication is either problematic, assertoric or apodictic; and ‘everything is’ in a way that is necessary or possible or problematic—and being too: being is implied necessarily, possibly or problematically by beings. But if implied being—not only in speaking, but just as much in doing and thinking, or more precisely, in ‘everything that is’—is problematic, it is because implication is a way of being that suspends the necessity and contingency, the possibility and impossibility, of being there, of the event of coming to presence (indeed, of presence itself, and absence). So that which is problematic about the problem is that being (as well as unity, time, aspect; Haas 2015b) is only implied. Then being’s way of being is in suspense, neither something nor nothing, neither being nor non-being. For being is an implication—and so, *tertium datur*, a third thing, a problem to be held, kept, carried, borne. And if being can be asserted as a possibility, or apodictic as a necessity, it is because being *qua* implication is first problematic. Thus the problem of being, that which is problematic about being, is the problem of implication, or *how* being is implied.

So *tertium datur*: being is neither presence nor absence, but implication; it is neither present nor absent, but only implied. Beings are because being is implied, which implicates being in everything that is. And presence and absence are merely (perhaps certain somehow motivated necessary or possible) ways in which implication has been thought (or translated) by the history of philosophy as metaphysics.

The question of the meaning of being then, is the question of implication—for if being is an implication, and implying is the how of being, then how is being implied? And how is being implicated in the being of any being whatsoever?

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Notes

¹ It is easy enough, nowadays, to determine when and where Heidegger mentions or uses Hegel, from the earliest texts in 1912, GA 1—through, for example, 1927, GA 2, GA 86; 1930, GA 80; 1930/31, GA 32; 1927, 1934/35, 1941/42/43, 1955/56, 1956/57, GA 86; 1938/39/41/42, GA 68; 1958, GA 9—to the 1966 Spiegel interview.

² Abbreviations are as follows: *PbG* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1807), *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Bamberg: Goebhardt. *WL I 1* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1812), *Wissenschaft der Logik, Erster Band: Die objective Logik, Erstes Buch* (Bd. 1 von 3), Nürnberg: Schrag. *WL I 2* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1813), *Wissenschaft der Logik, Erster Band: Die objective Logik, Zweytes Buch: Die Lehre vom Wesen* (2 von 3), Nürnberg: Schrag. *WL II* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1816), *Wissenschaft der Logik, Zweiter Band* (3 von 3), Nürnberg: Schrag. *WL II* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1832), *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Stuttgart: Cotta. *Wer* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1986), *Werke*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. GA = Heidegger, 608M. (1977), *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt: Klostermann.

³ The discussion of the history of the understanding of being as presence (and its vicissitudes: present, presencing, etc.) from the Greeks to Heidegger, is widespread (see, for example, Olafson 1993; Dahlstrom 2003). For the deconstruction of the philosophy of presence in the history of Western metaphysics, see Allison 2005.

⁴ *WL II*: 60. Heidegger agrees with Hegel's general impulse to move beyond the absolute subjectivity or spirit of absolute knowledge in the *Phenomenology*, to the absolute idea of the *Logic*, by bringing being and nothing together (GA 65: 266); but for Heidegger, being and nothing are the same 'not because both—from the point-of-view of the Hegelian concept of thought—agree in their indeterminacy and immediacy, but rather because being itself is essentially finite and reveals itself only in the transcendence of Dasein which is held out into the nothing' (GA 9: 120). Heidegger does see, however, that Hegel's beginning with being (pure being, pure presence) is only a feign—for the true beginning is the end, that is, the absolute idea (which is being in the widest sense) or the absolute spirit that knows itself as such (and so is absolute presence-to-self). This is the logic of the circle (like the hermeneutic circle that Heidegger seeks not to get out of, but into in the right way): 'the whole of science is in itself a circle in which the first becomes also the last, and the last also the first' (*WL II*: 44).

⁵ Although I do not have space to do so here, it would be possible to show that throughout Hegel's entire corpus, being is understood as presence. Just one example, from the *Philosophy of Right*: although I can relinquish (alienate, negate) my property and its use, I cannot give up what I do not have, namely, my being, which is my freedom—for freedom is continually present as what I am, the substance of my being, what is actually present as the (rational) truth of being human, what comes to presence as the being of the human being (what I am essentially, my essence; and so the being and essence of myself as free, or the idea of humanity's freedom), that is, my inalienable freedom (*Wer VII*: §66). In other words, I am free; I am freedom (Sartre), or 'freedom is here not the characteristic of the human, but the reverse: the human is, in any case, the property of freedom' (GA 42: 15). Thus, if being human means being free, it is

because human history (which is the history of world spirit) is the history of humans coming to know the idea that freedom was always already present as the essence of human being—for any philosophy of essence is a philosophy of presence.

⁶ Although we are here investigating pure being and pure nothing, it is clear that being and nothing are not simply Platonic ideas or abstract categories—for they are real and concrete. Being and nothing—like every concept of phenomenologic—belong to things—for substance is subject; the real and the ideal, the objective and the subjective, are one. And ‘*nowhere on heaven or on earth is there anything which does not contain both being and nothing in itself*’ (WL II: 63). So, for example, if a tree is in the forest, if it is present there, then it is not present here, but far more absent—and its presence or absence is how being and nothing present themselves in the tree. For being and nothing are how words and deeds, thoughts and things, can be and not-be what they are or what they are not, can be present, or no-longer-present, or not-yet-present.

⁷ WL II: 104. Herein lies an essential difference between the first and second editions of *Logic*: in the first edition, Hegel only writes, ‘*Determinatio est negatio*’ (WL I 1: 75); in the second book, Hegel argues that Spinoza thinks determination as negation, but is unwilling to negate the negation, and so unable to grasp truth as negation of the negation (and thus, to think subject as the negation of substance) (WL I 2: 225). While Spinoza cannot accept the consequences of the *omnis*, Hegel is willing to negate every determination—even the determination that every negation must itself be negated. But this means that not every determination is negated—for there is at least one un-negated determination, namely, the determination that every determination must be negated. Hegel’s thinking, therefore, is a contradiction (all determination is negation, and not all determination is negation)—but the contradiction is true, the essence of the concept of the truth (Haas 1997; 2000).

⁸ *Wer, Enzy.* XI, 574. And the Hegelian concept is neither one-sided (*PbG*: 751) nor is it simply abstract, like a Platonic idea; nor merely subjective or relative, as in psychology; nor do concepts stand between us and things, mediating our knowledge of them, preventing us from knowing things-in-themselves (Kant)—for Hegel’s concept is as concrete as it is abstract, as formal as it is material, as universal as it is particular, as objective (and objectively valid) as it is subjective, as valid for the object (or substance) as for the subject (which is why it is the *λόγος* or truth of what we call things). For Heidegger’s understanding of the *Aufhebung* as *Überwindung*, see GA 2: 434.

⁹ Heidegger 2001. Although we shall not here examine the subjectivity of the subject, nevertheless according to Heidegger, while Hegel thinks subject as the other of substance (ultimately, absolute subject, God, absolute spirit); Heidegger thinks subject as Dasein, that being whose being is an issue for it. As I have argued elsewhere (Haas 2000, 135), if being and unity imply one another (Aristotle 1957: 1003b22–24), then the subject cannot merely be thought in relation to being, or its being, but also in terms of its unity—and Dasein is an inappropriate (perhaps even unjust, and somehow motivated, if not violent) name for us; and so it should maybe be no surprise that, insofar as being and unity are only implied, implications, the Greeks (Homer 1922: 21.26; Homer 1920: 17.377; Aeschylus 1973: 398; Sophocles 1990: 107) called us another name—neither *ἄνθρωπος* or *άνήρ*, but *φῶς*, the illuminating one (which is not merely *φῶς*, light).

¹⁰ As I have argued elsewhere (Haas 2000, 142–156): Heidegger thinks being as a question, a question to which he has no answer, but an answer to which he is underway, or at least underway to a response. So in perfectly Socratic form, that is, ironically: Heidegger knows that he does not know the meaning of being—which is not to say that he can say nothing of being—for, on the contrary, he has a lot to say about being, which is not a being, but rather the being of everything that is, which is not an answer to the question of the meaning of being; it is the continuation of questioning. And this is why *Being and Time* is not really about subjectivity or the existential analytic of Dasein; nor is it simply about meaning and the constitution of sense, language and the philosophy of language—rather, it is ‘*fundamental-ontology*’ (GA 2: 13), which is why Heidegger insists: ‘the actual theme is being’ (GA 2: 67).

¹¹ As Heidegger writes: ‘That the essence of being can never be said definitively is no shortcoming; on the contrary, non-definitive knowledge holds precisely to the *abyss* and thus to the essence of being’ (GA 65: 460).

¹² GA 2: 56; GA 24: 322; GA 68: 20, 24. Another way in which Hegel remains loyal to the philosophy of presence, according to Heidegger, is by uncritically taking over a metaphysical or prejudicial understanding of time—and time is the horizon for any understanding of being. Hegel thinks what being is in time, that is, in the normal (quasi-Kantian, vulgar) sense of form—although not just of a subject’s inner and outer sense, but also of the object; and history as temporal, as that infinite space in which events take place or happen—which is why spirit empties itself out in time. It is this prejudice that prevents Hegel from thinking time as the way in which things like subjects and objects, events and spirit is, or how anything is whatsoever. Loyal to a philosophy of the present, and history as speculative-dialectical, it cannot think ontological time. If history therefore, appears to fall *into* time, it is not just because time is itself contradictory; it ‘is being that *is* insofar as it is *not* and is *not* insofar as it *is*’. For time is what the history of being can fall into; time is an infinitely large, pliable, extendable space, vessel, *χώρος*, form, schema, etc. But this means that Hegel thinks time as a *what*—and cannot think it as a *how*, that is, as how history (and beings, in fact, everything that is) is. I have taken up this issue in Haas 2007 and Haas 2015a.

¹³ GA 21: §15. Similarly, time cannot be understood as something that belongs to things, which would be marked by the genitive case or the little word ‘of’. Time is not that *of* which we are conscious—for example, in internal time-consciousness (Husserl)—rather, we are conscious temporally; or if consciousness is conscious *of* time, it is only because it is temporal consciousness. The issue of the foreignness or non-Germanic nature of the word ‘temporal’ would take us too far from the task at hand in this text—so too the possible prejudice, racism, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia implied thereby.

¹⁴ GA 18: 311; GA 14: 17–18. This privileging of presence motivates the destructuring or deconstruction or destruction (*Destruktion* or *Abbau*) of the philosophy of presence: on the one hand, analogous to Augustine’s analysis of time, absence is thought on the basis of presence, which clarifies how that which is not present can still be, that is, by being-absent; on the other hand, the possibility of absence, non-being, nothingness, non-presence (as well as the non-now, past and future, the non-possible or impossibility, the non-self or other, heterogeneity,

difference, etc.), is undercut, translated or transmuted into presence—and there is no absence, merely a modification of presence; or absence is simply presence, a yet more devious means for maintaining the privilege of presence (Derrida 1972: 33–34). For a discussion of a political philosophy of the possible and the impossible, see for example: Derrida 2001: 75–77; 2003: 122–23. On the event of the abyss of being (or beyng), see for example: Heidegger GA 65: 30, 371–88. For a consideration of the ambiguity of being in Heidegger (presence/absence, event/non-event, *Ereignis/Enteignis*), see Haas 2007.

¹⁵ GA 65: 380; GA 14: 28–29. We shall not here have the space to take up Badiou's reflection on Heidegger—'the last universally recognizable philosopher' (1988: 7)—or on the Heideggerian event; suffice it to say, rather, that although mathematics may be metaphysical, metaphysics (the study of being *qua* being, beings and the unity of being) is not mathematics (the study of mathematical objects, or a genus or species of beings, or sets of beings or sets of sets). Mathematics might study how it is eventual or eventish or event-like; but it could not study what the event is, nor how it happens (and certainly not the time and aspect of the event of being, and of being one). Then if meta-ontology *is* (in anyway whatsoever), it is merely ontology—but insofar as being is implied, it does not come to presence (nor remain absent, nor some combination or permutation of the two, which does not prevent it being translated into the language and logic, the mathematics and philosophy of presence); nor is its (singular or multiple) presence decidable or undecidable (and the undecidability of being is merely another avatar of the philosophy of presence), and so cannot be thought *qua* event; rather, being is an implication, and metaphysics is the study of implications.

¹⁶ Plato 1922, *Laws*, X: 901c8–d2; Kahn 2003: xii n11.

¹⁷ McKirahan 1996: 40; my emphasis. Kahn 1979: 81.

¹⁸ As Keats writes: 'Beauty *is* truth, truth beauty' (1814–91: 3.2; my emphasis). In other words, 'is' is not present, and not just absent either—for being is implied. And being's way of being is what the poem is about; it is the secret of the poem, if not of ποιησις itself, a secret kept hidden in full view, suspended before our eyes, neither visible nor invisible, neither there nor not-there, neither happening nor not-happening. So that being *qua* implication haunts the poem; it is the meaning of being that—failing to present itself—cannot be explicated, grasped, understood, known. Thus, implied being cannot come to presence and present itself, cannot be asserted or apodicted, revealed or concealed, demonstrated or determined; although nor can it remain absent—for it is merely an implication. Being is not simply implied for poetic reasons: Keats does not exclude it because he needs ten syllables for the line to scan—there are multiple ways in which the poem could have been constructed in iambic pentameter. In other words, being is not implied so it fits the poem; rather, if it fits the poem, it is because being is implied. Similarly in Russian: Я человек больной... Я злой человек (Dostoyevski 1864: 1); not, 'I am a sick man ... I am a wicked man' (1993: 1); but rather, 'I man sick', or 'I sick man ... I wicked man'. There is no being in (present tense) Russian—the 'is' is not there; it is not present and does not come to presence, although nor is it absent. And it is not necessary to write being between subject and predicate, nor is it actually even possible, without doing a certain kind of injustice—if not violence—to implication, to being, to the being of being, so to thinking and

speaking, doing and imagining and feeling, to ‘everything that is’—for being is, as every Russian speaker knows, only implied, an implication.

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