What Is Metaphysics?
Heidegger's Evolving
Account of Metaphysics

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Abstract: In this paper, I deal with Heidegger's evolving account of metaphysics, since Heidegger's persistent concern, the question of being, is a basic metaphysical question. To date, most Heidegger scholars have focused only on a particular stage of Heidegger's philosophy: either his early attempt to deconstruct metaphysics, or his efforts to overcome metaphysics in the 1930s, or his late embrace of 'releasement' from metaphysics. However, these limited approaches fail to address Heidegger's different understandings of metaphysics, which lie at the root of his changing approaches to the question of being. They also fail to explain whether there is any inner connection between the various approaches. Further, given Heidegger's unremittingly negative attitude towards metaphysics, some scholars have even maintained that Heidegger thought it both possible and desirable to leave metaphysics behind altogether. I address these issues first by arguing that metaphysics for Heidegger has three interconnected meanings: initially it is the representation of the totality of things that are present-at-hand, a view subsequently developed into subjective representational thinking, and finally radicalized into an expression of the will to power. At each stage, Heidegger critiques the metaphysical tradition but never claims that it can be fully eliminated, since it is a mode of Dasein's being and ultimately possiblized by being itself. For this reason, Heidegger's own philosophy of being remains inseparable from metaphysics.

Keywords: Being, Martin Heidegger, metaphysics, representational thinking, will.

1. Heidegger's Motivation for Dealing with Metaphysics

A substantial part of Heidegger's philosophy deals with the problem of metaphysics. This is quite obvious given his perennial concern, namely, the question of being, which is also the basic question of metaphysics. Heidegger finds the traditional metaphysical account of being problematic and wants to rethink this question in his own way. To do so, he must explain what traditional metaphysics is and in what sense it fails to do justice to being. At different stages of his philosophy, Heidegger describes the tradition of metaphysics differently, and his attitude towards it changes accordingly. For us philosophers, tracing Heidegger's ways of responding to the metaphysical tradition helps to comprehend and evaluate his own approach to the question of being, i.e., to determine whether Heidegger has found an alternative, more promising way to

deal with the question of being that allows him to leave the metaphysical tradition behind, or whether his own philosophy is still committed to this tradition in one way or another.

Contemporary Heidegger scholarship normally focuses on one or another stage of Heidegger's attitude towards metaphysics. For instance, most readers address either Heidegger's early attempt to deconstruct [*Destruktion*] metaphysics in *Being and Time* (1927) (Barash 1994; Thomson 2000) or his effort to overcome [*Überwindung*] metaphysics in works from the decade of 1935-1945 (Engelland 2007; Young 2015), or his intention to release [*Gelassenheit*] from metaphysics after around 1945 (Davis 2007; Rae 2013). What has not been scrutinized sufficiently is, first, his own evolving account of metaphysics. Without addressing what metaphysics is for Heidegger at each stage, we cannot comprehend his changing attitude towards metaphysics. Second and more importantly, even if some Heidegger readers, such as Dominique Janicaud (1994), have observed Heidegger's changing attitude towards metaphysics, they have not attended to the development of, or the inner connections between, Heidegger's different understandings of metaphysics. Third, given Heidegger's dominantly negative attitude towards metaphysics, his readers (Stambaugh 2003; Trawny 2019) have tended to think that the metaphysical tradition can or will be left behind sooner or later, and hence they have failed to see that even for Heidegger, metaphysics is grounded in being.

To deal with the first and second issues, I present Heidegger's own understanding of metaphysics and then highlight three important shifts in Heidegger's different accounts of metaphysics throughout his philosophy. Heidegger does not simply change his view of metaphysics randomly. To deal with the third issue, I show that even what Heidegger identifies as problematic in the metaphysical tradition has roots in being as such. It can be critiqued but not eliminated if the question of being is to be retained. In fact, Heidegger himself seems to think that his own approach to the question of being is a new way of doing metaphysics or at least a new approach to the essence of metaphysics.

To proceed, I first highlight some core features of Heidegger's evolving account of metaphysics throughout his philosophy by focusing on key texts at each stage. Since the aim is to show an internal coherence in these accounts by identifying the systematic core of this evolution, I will not consider everything Heidegger wrote or said about metaphysics. This is an obvious limitation of my approach. Yet, given that my aim is to restart a debate, and not to present comprehensive results, we must at present rest content with unavoidable limits in scope.

Specifically, in Sections 2, 4 and 6, I argue that Heidegger's sometimes implicit account of what the term 'metaphysics' refers to is framed in three rather different ways over the years: Whereas in *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger takes metaphysics to be a representation of the totality of things as being present-at-hand, he tacitly moves to presenting it as the canonical expression of

representational subjective thinking in the 1930s (e.g., in *Nietzsche I & II* (1936-46)), and, finally, as an important expression of the will to power both in his middle [1] and late philosophy (e.g., in "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953)). To support my arguments, I will also consider other key texts related to the problem of metaphysics, such as "What Is Metaphysics?" (1929), a series of fragments in his middle philosophy, e.g., "Overcoming Metaphysics" (1936-1946), and The *Country Path Conversations* (1944-46). I will show that it is because of Heidegger's peculiar understandings of metaphysics that he finds metaphysics in all these senses problematic and attempts to deconstruct metaphysics (Second 2), to overcome it (Section 5), and eventually to peacefully refrain or release from willful metaphysics (Section 6), respectively. At the same time, however, metaphysics is a mode of Dasein and thus rooted in being itself according to Heidegger's own standards, which I will address in Sections 3, 5 and 6. This is the fundamental reason why Heidegger cannot simply turn his back on the problem of metaphysics. Lastly, I will argue that Heidegger himself recognizes that his own account of the question of being is committed to 'metaphysics,' notwithstanding his sustained critique of the metaphysical tradition (Sections 3 and 6). For these reasons, Heidegger's philosophy of being cannot help but remain closely connected to metaphysics. It is, as it were, condemned to study metaphysics and its history.

2. Deconstructing the Metaphysical Tradition as the Task of a Philosophy of Being

Since Aristotle, metaphysics has been considered the science of being qua being. In his various attempts to engage with the tradition of metaphysics, Heidegger's ultimate concern is always the relation between metaphysics and being, that is, whether metaphysics can attend to being itself as it is. In this section, I will examine Heidegger's early account of, and engagement with, metaphysics up until around 1929.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not begin by giving a definition of what metaphysics is but by critiquing the metaphysical tradition for failing to fulfil its aim. That is, it has failed to do justice to the question of being. Heidegger claims that "the question of being has been forgotten" in metaphysics – not that the metaphysical tradition no longer considers the question of being but that it never addressed being in an appropriate manner at all (1962, 21; GA 2, 2). The metaphysical tradition thinks of being as the 'most universal,' 'indefinable' and 'self-evident' concept (Heidegger 1962, 22-24; GA 3-4). This is not to say that these characterizations of the concept of being are necessarily incorrect but rather that

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[1] Indeed, Heidegger already takes metaphysics as an expression of the will to power in the 1930s. It is considered as self-willing and self-wanting during this period (*Nietzsche* I, GA 6.1). I will argue that it is in Heidegger's late philosophy that the will to power is further developed as the will to power over the other, making the other to serve the self.

they do not really explain why being poses a problem in the first place. We take being for granted. For instance, being is indeed indefinable since it cannot be derived from some higher concepts, but it is not a particular entity either. Clearly, such a purely negative account of being does not tell us much about what being is. We need to "look that question in the face," as Heidegger writes (1962, GA 23; 4).

The Heidegger of *Being and Time* basically identifies traditional metaphysics with ontology. According to him, the reason why the question of being is no longer attended to in this tradition is because the philosophical tradition "blocks our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts are handed down to us," "makes us forget that they have had such an origin" and therefore prevents us from going back to these sources (Heidegger 1962, 43; GA 2, 21). We are uprooted from the origin by the tradition so that the question of being is no longer perceived as an issue. At bottom, Heidegger simply argues that the tradition of philosophy does not consider whence and how the history of understanding being is handed down to us. Heidegger intends to re-raise the question of being and find a different approach, one that can do justice to being.

Heidegger claims that the first task is therefore to tear down the tradition of metaphysics. That is, we must "destroy [*Destruktion*] the history of ontology" (Heidegger 1962, 41; GA 2, 20):

> If the question of being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieve our first ways of determining the nature of being – the ways which have guided us ever since. (1962, 44; GA 22)

Despite the controversy caused by his own choice of words, what Heidegger means by 'de(con)struction' here is not the simple abolition of traditional ontology. Instead, in shaking off the negative aspect of the tradition, the aim is to discover its positive potentiality to account for being itself (Heidegger 1962, 44; GA 2, 22-23). In his 1955 essay "On the Question of Being," Heidegger complains that some readers of *Being and Time* misconstrued 'de(con)struction' [*Destruktion*] as the elimination of ontology whereas his true intention is to "reattain the originary experiences of being belonging to metaphysics by deconstructing [*Abbau*] representations that have become commonplace and empty." (1998, 315; GA 9, 244-245)

Here, I want to point out that Heidegger's attempt to deconstruct metaphysics is limited to his treatment of metaphysics in the late 1920s but not beyond. The Heidegger scholar Iain Thomson (2000), however, thinks that Heidegger's approach to the metaphysical tradition is to deconstruct metaphysics through and through and takes what Heidegger means by metaphysics to be equivalent to ontotheology. There is indeed a certain level of continuity and inner

connection in Heidegger's treatment of metaphysics throughout his philosophy – something I try to argue in this paper. But such an inner connection needs to be argued for rather than taken for granted. The same goes for Heidegger's interpretation of metaphysics as ontotheology: although the idea of ontotheology already appears in *Being and Time*, it is mainly a theme in the late Heidegger. What Heidegger means by ontotheology is that the metaphysical tradition either takes being as some universal idea and essence, i.e., an ontological question; or it takes being as the highest being, i.e., God, as he clarifies in "Introduction to 'What Is Metaphysics?'"(1949) (1998, 287; GA 9, 207). Both interpretations of being have the problem of reducing being to some particular being.[2] Heidegger does point out this problem already in *Being and Time*[3], but Thomson cannot simply pair 'de(con)struction' with 'ontotheology' without first justifying his claims. In my reading, Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics is limited to his early period where the term 'ontotheology' remains relatively scarce. This is because Heidegger deconstructs metaphysics for a reason; namely, he wants to propose a more primordial kind of metaphysics, which is not always the case for Heidegger's later philosophy.

These are precisely the questions I want to address: If the tradition is torn down, what are we left with? How exactly can we recover an originary experience of being? Does this new approach to being still belong to metaphysics? If so, how? If not, what is this new philosophy instead? Heidegger tries to come up with a new way to think of being for the first time in *Being and Time*. For the early Heidegger, the question of being is equivalent to the question of the meaning of being. This is because it is an ontological question that can only be raised and understood by 'Dasein' – a special mode of being for whom the question of the meaning of being can be a problem in the first place (Heidegger 1962, 31-32; GA 2, 11-12). The original experience of being is only accessible to Dasein. Against a common misunderstanding, it must be stressed that Dasein is not the human subject but the structure of human existence. It is a concrete mode of being in which the abstract notions of subject and object of (inter-) subjectivity and objectivity are grounded, a mode of always already being-in-the-world-with-others. It is *ek*-sistent, prior to the external-internal or subjective-objective dichotomy that structures mainstream traditional philosophy.[4] Dasein's being is its comporting different possibilities in the world, manifesting different ways of being within this

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[2] I will not elaborate on ontotheology in my account of Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics, since as I explain here, the problem of ontotheology is that it reduces being to particular being, which will be treated in Section 4.

[3] For instance, this can be seen in Heidegger's criticism of the cogito argument. He accuses Descartes of not explicating the 'am' in 'I am,' and of hastening to ground his own existence in God as the primary being instead (Heidegger 1962, 46; GA 2, 24).

[4] Charles E. Scott uses the phrase 'body of thought' to refer to the *ek-sistence* of Dasein, meaning "by it living and alert events that are both physical and extensive beyond the intentions and abilities that compose one of their aspects, subjectivity." (2001, 19)

fundamental ontological structure. Heidegger's key idea in *Being and Time* is that Dasein accesses and reveals being via its own being. Accordingly, he calls the existential structure of Dasein 'the existential analytic of Dasein' and his investigation into this structure a 'fundamental ontology.' (Heidegger 1962, 34; GA 13)

According to Heidegger's analysis of fundamental ontological structures, there are different ways of being with others and of dwelling in the world, i.e., of being with others in different modes of interpersonal exchange and of relating to things as either 'ready-to-hand' or 'present-at-hand.' (Heidegger 1962, 101; GA 2, 71-72) The former term refers to knowing how to handle things in Dasein's practical engagement in the world, prior to reasoning or conceptual analysis, and the latter refers to theoretical knowledge, which, according to Heidegger, in a way presupposes readiness to hand. Presence-at-hand is, as it were, an elevated form of readiness-to-hand, since Heidegger takes the most primordial mode of knowing being to be the practical attitude. The theoretical attitude is grounded in *praxis* although we often do not recognize this. Heidegger takes theoretical knowing to be a latecomer, a certain advanced modification of practical experience. Primordial experience takes place in the practical encounter with things as being ready-to-hand. At the same time, Heidegger also claims that Dasein is 'thrown into the world' in a way that causes a certain opacity so that even Dasein's primordial and practical being-in-the-world has an aspect of concealment, e.g., with matters being partially distorted or covered up by 'idle talk' unfocused 'curiosity' and the resulting 'ambiguity.' (Heidegger 1962, 167-175; GA 211-219) This is what Heidegger calls the 'fallen' mode of Dasein, inauthentically being merely one of 'them' instead of being authentically in its own accord (1962, 175; GA 219-220). Authenticity, by contrast, is a way to at least partly overcome the opaqueness of our average everyday encounters with being and attends to being as it is.

By contrast, relating to things as being present-at-hand means focusing on how things present themselves to us, how they are given to us in perception and thought, abstracting from our more primordial practical relations to them. Conceiving things as present-at-hand finds its expression in (re)presenting things, which are thereby turned into objects of (conceptual) representation, into instantiations of universals. On top of this, the inevitable fallenness of Dasein tends to further ossify universal concepts into pieces of information that circulate among 'them.' For Heidegger, the traditional way of doing metaphysics as a theory that analyzes the universal concept of being is an important variety of this kind of abstract, representational thinking that has lost all contact with primordial experience. This allows us to infer that the early Heidegger takes metaphysics to be the universal representation of the totality of things as being present-at-hand. At the same time, it should be noted that even this allegedly problematic way of doing metaphysics is essentially grounded in and emerges from the fundamental ontology of Dasein. This might explain why Heidegger barely talks about what metaphysics is in *Being and Time* but is more interested in its ground. As Otto

Pöggeler writes, "*Being and Time* attempts to recover through thinking that which has remained unthought, the forgotten ground of metaphysics upon which everything that has been thought certainly rested." (1987, 34)

Heidegger famously claims that only an authentic way of relating to Dasein allows us to encounter being primordially, and he equally famously, but perhaps less plausibly, links authenticity to the proper awareness of our own finitude. Dasein, he suggests, can only face its own being by heeding the call of conscience. The call summons Dasein to its own finitude, its being-towards-death, the abyss or nothingness of existence (Heidegger 1962, 310; GA 2, 265-266). [5] In the face of nothing and the receding of beings, Dasein becomes anxious: as "the receding of beings as a whole, closing in on us in anxiety, oppresses us," Heidegger further explains in "What Is Metaphysics?" (1998, 88; GA 9, 9). Attending to Dasein's own finitude anxiously transforms human existence as a whole into its authentic modes of being. It is by comporting its modes of being authentically that Dasein truly experiences its being. Conversely, Heidegger suggests that being inauthentic means failing to attend to the finitude of Dasein, and that engaging in traditional metaphysics is one way of relating to finitude inauthentically, which is why it fails to do justice to being.

So far, I have argued that, for the early Heidegger, deconstructing the metaphysical tradition makes the original experience of being possible, namely, via Dasein's authentic mode of being. But Heidegger's early philosophy does not stop there. He goes on to argue that the primordial experience of being as such is still a metaphysical topic, albeit one for a different kind of metaphysics.

3. Heidegger's Early Philosophy of Being as Primordial Metaphysics

Immediately after *Being and Time*, in "What Is Metaphysics?" (1929), Heidegger argues that since Dasein's ownmost, innermost and uttermost possibility is its being-towards-nothing, this finitude of Dasein signifies a more fundamental nothing, namely, the nothingness of being or being as nothingness. It perhaps goes without saying but being is more than just Dasein's being. This notion of being allows Heidegger to move from the fundamental ontology of Dasein to a more fundamental metaphysics, or at least to consider such a move. Heidegger maintains that thinking of being as nothingness is precisely the task of a true metaphysics that is more fundamental and originary than the metaphysical tradition. It is an 'arch-metaphysics,' so to speak. So, by turning down the way in which the metaphysical tradition deals with being, Heidegger wants to treat the problem of being anew, in a different kind of metaphysics. For him, the question of being is still a metaphysical question.

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[5] To note: Since Dasein is always being-towards-death, its ownmost possibility, Dasein is always futural and returns from its futurity to its authentic having-been, the present. In this sense, for the early Heidegger, the ultimate ground of Dasein's existence is time.

He writes that unlike all other sciences, which think of beings as beings, including even those that address the entirety of all beings in this manner, true metaphysics needs to think of 'the nothing,' i.e., not of anything particular but of nothingness as such. He argues that being, which is nothing particular but also not an empty universal, is the boundary and condition of all things. Heidegger accordingly seeks to transform the Leibnizian question "why is there anything rather than nothing?" into an identification of being as such with nothingness.[6] In order to access 'the nothing,' we must suspend beings, i.e., "remove all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference." (1998, 86-87; GA 9, 7) This approach corresponds to Heidegger's novel notion of metaphysics: "Metaphysics is inquiry beyond or over beings that aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp [...] In the question concerning the nothing such an inquiry beyond or over beings, beings as a whole, takes place. It proves thereby to be a 'metaphysical' question" (1998, 93-94; GA 15):

> Going beyond beings occurs in the essence of Dasein. But this going beyond is metaphysics itself. This implies this metaphysics belongs to the "nature of the human being." It is neither a division of academic philosophy nor a field of arbitrary notions. Metaphysics is the fundamental occurrence in our Dasein. It is Dasein itself. (1998, 96; GA 9, 18)

If the question of the nothing unfolded here has actually questioned us, then we have not simply brought metaphysics before us in an extrinsic manner. Nor have we merely been 'ransposed' into it. We cannot be transposed into it at all, because insofar as we exist we are always already within it. (1998, 96; GA 19)

Hence, Heidegger now openly argues that true metaphysics can only access being as nothingness via the fundamental ontology of Dasein, although this move is in a way already implicit in *Being and Time*. That is to say, true metaphysics, too, emerges from Dasein's fundamental ontology. It implies that genuine metaphysics must not address being as a present-at-hand thing or object and that it requires Dasein to face its own finitude authentically. Metaphysics in this sense radically breaks with the metaphysical tradition.

Up until 1929, Heidegger hence maintains that both the metaphysical tradition and primordial metaphysics are grounded in the existential structure of Dasein. Although the tradition of metaphysics fails to fulfil its task to address the question of being rigorously, his aim is not to destroy metaphysics but to deconstruct its history and to find out its positive possibilities. He seeks to justify metaphysics by tracing back the question of being to its ground. For the early Heidegger, the question of being as such is still a metaphysical question.

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[6] In his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), Heidegger unpacks this question "why is there anything rather than nothing" in greater detail, i.e., what is asked in this questioning, the way in which the tradition of philosophy deals with this question and Heidegger's elucidation of the meaning of being, and its relation with non-being (GA 40).

4. Metaphysics as Representational Thinking and Will to Power

But, for Heidegger himself, the problem of metaphysics, namely, its failure to do justice to being, is not solved in the late 1920s but merely takes on a different form. Heidegger continues to ponder the relationship between metaphysics and the question of being after 1930, but the way in which he does so differs from his earlier approach. From 1930 onwards, Heidegger seems to realize that his early approach to being via Dasein's being still tacitly accepts the idea of a totality of beings. What is worse, accessing being via Dasein as a peculiar mode of being renders the early approach subjective and anthropocentric, as it were. In order to avoid such problems, Heidegger thus attempts to address being directly. This is the so-called turn [*Kehre*]. The underlying idea is not that being itself no longer needs the mediation of Dasein but that, in its mediation, Dasein does not play the determining role: beings other than Dasein no longer gain determinateness and meaning in their relations to Dasein and its comportments. Heidegger now holds that Dasein rather opens up a space for other beings, allowing them to reveal themselves as what they are in themselves rather than only in terms of Dasein. As Gavin Rae cites Eugene Thacker: this approach to being is "human centered but unhuman oriented." (2013, 256)

As regards the notion of truth, Heidegger develops the notion of *aletheia* from *Being and Time*. In the 1930 essay "On the Essence of Truth," he stresses the inherent and antecedent concealment of truth (Heidegger 1998, 148; GA 9, 89). Being is concealing-revealing, *a-lethe-ia* with an inherent *lethe*. The idea perhaps comes from the Husserlian account of perception, and notably from Husserl's observation that we always perceive things partially from and in certain aspects.[7] Heidegger broadens this notion by further developing this partial hiddenness of being in his middle philosophy, calling this inherent concealment a 'mystery' and the movement towards the readily available, which is caused by this concealment, an 'erring.' (1998, 149-150; GA 91-92) Human beings inevitably err, for being is partially open to humans but cannot be entirely transparent to them. There is a double concealment: the inherent concealment of being and a concealment due to the forgetfulness of being as such in average everydayness. Thus, to properly think of being is not simply to return to being itself in its openness, as the ancient Greek philosophers had assumed in the so-called 'first beginning,' i.e., the beginning of the metaphysical tradition. To do so rather requires us to retrieve [*wiederholen*] being as concealing-revealing, in what Heidegger calls the second or the other

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[7] Rudolf Bernet comments that this hidden 'potential truth' belongs essentially to what appears; and "the more that shows the more it hides, since each thoughtful response to the thing intensifies its ultimately unsolvable mystery." (2019, 249) I agree that Heidegger's initial inspiration for developing the inherent concealment indeed comes from Husserl; but what Heidegger ultimately means by inherent hiddenness is not so much a promise for potential truth or potential revealing but the ultimate origin, the possibilizing power for being to reveal itself. It is not exactly that "the more that shows the more it hides." The origin simply does not reveal itself at all.

beginning in *Contributions* (2012, 135; GA 65, 171). The ontological difference between beingness and beings that he wants to keep is also no longer the 'ontological difference' (Heidegger 1962, 31-33; GA 2, 11-12) of *Being and Time* but a more radical one, since being as nothing is not just the beingness of beings or of Dasein.

Heidegger's view of the metaphysical tradition has also developed in the meantime. As I have already argued, the early Heidegger maintains that the tradition of metaphysics is based on the present-at-hand mode of relating to being but that theoretical knowledge itself is rooted in the being ready-to-hand of things for Dasein in its average everydayness. Heidegger now takes this argument further by characterizing metaphysics as a peculiar way of thinking, namely, subjective representational thinking. The idea is that once metaphysics treats being as a totality of given things, it naturally represents beings as a set of objects that are there before human subjects. In acts of representation, being is objectified and a subjective-objective dichotomy is established between human and non-human being. Further, in human cognitive representation, objects are idealized, reduced to their essences and then transformed into mere concepts, since, as Heidegger writes in "Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics" (1939-46), a concept is considered as "what is represented as such, thinking, representing; that is, presenting itself." (1973, 61; GA 6, 464)

Given Heidegger's engagement with, and critique of, German idealism in the 1930s, Daniel Dahlstrom claims that for Heidegger, idealism is a kind of 'synecdoche' for metaphysics (2013, 242). In line with this I argue that, for the middle Heidegger, metaphysics culminates in subjective, idealistic and rational thinking, and that it can ultimately be reduced to epistemology.[8] Reason thinks and even pre-determines beings to such an extent that it only deals with the concepts that denote beings, using the propositional language of 'S is P.' Concepts as fixed ideas are prone to be picked up by anyone and taken for granted, further contributing to Dasein's fallen mode of being. Metaphysics, as understood by Heidegger, does not suffice to consider the question of being – an ontological question – adequately. The metaphysical tradition is rather a history of the separation of thinking and true being. No proper way of thinking can attend to being as such.

So far, Heidegger has not offered any explanation of why the present-at-hand mode of relating to things, which he takes to be the root of representational thinking, including metaphysics, can become so dominant. The mere idea of fallenness does not offer any clue to this issue. Therefore, Heidegger performs a radical turn after 1930. Instead of blaming the theoretical attitude as such, he starts to reinterpret it as something practical and willful, and as motivated by

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[8] For instance, in "Overcoming Metaphysics" (1936-46), Heidegger argues that Kant's so-called metaphysics is simply epistemology (1973, 88; GA 7, 84).

what he calls the will to power (a term that he takes from Nietzsche (cf. *Nietzsche* I, GA 6.1, 15-17). This will is a self-will, wanting itself (33).

To clarify this idea, Heidegger's critique of German Idealism as metaphysics in 1941 might be helpful. There, he argues that German Idealism is basically a philosophy of subject and of subjectivity. He attributes two kinds of subjectivity to the subject, the '*subiectum*,' which he identifies with the will in his claim 'the will is *subiectum*': 1) the willing subject is a *hypokeimenon*, a willful, striving, 'basis'; 2) it has egoity, consciousness, spirit, 'Word,' *logos* (GA 49: 90, 93). This means that, in the metaphysics of German Idealism, the *hypokeimenon* as the underlying ground wills to become a self or ego. This process of willing is the process of self-becoming. By willing itself, the *hypokeimenon*, the basis, becomes determined and able to represent itself as the subject that comes to be. The latter is the 'genuine *subiectum*,' the 'referential center of beings as such', as Heidegger comments in "The Age of the World Picture." (1950, 66-67; GA 5, 88) According to Heidegger, not only German Idealism but the whole metaphysical tradition focuses on the willing subject and its willful interactions with the world. Hence, if metaphysics is nothing but an expression of this self-wanting of subjective being, it cannot fail to be based on an extreme subjectivism.

In line with this move, Heidegger even argues that metaphysical thinking is not limited to metaphysics as a philosophical discipline. For him, modern science and technology are nothing but a dramatic expansion of metaphysical thinking. He holds that science, including technology, is the the most important by-product of metaphysics because science, by focusing on objective facts that it seeks to register precisely in order to gain control over them, cannot fail to be a mode of subjective thinking, which is not thinking beyond the subject-object dichotomy. "Science does not think," Heidegger thus later writes in "What Calls for Thinking?" (1977, 264; GA 7, 133). I will show that Heidegger's account of the will to power is exacerbated in Heidegger's late writings on technology, for technological thinking is not only self-wanting but rather willing to power over everything, including one's own self. To a certain extent, Heidegger's late claims on this issue are also already implicit in his writings from the 1930s, just as his radical reading of the metaphysical tradition builds on his early view of metaphysics. His path of thinking [*Denkweg*] is always evolving but not always straightforward.

In spite of all his misgivings about metaphysics, however, Heidegger still clings to the basic idea that what we need is to think being. The question then is in what way a genuine experience of being is possible and what a corresponding 'philosophy of being,' or rather a proper, non-representational way of thinking being would look like. Is it still an alternative way of metaphysical thinking, as Heidegger apparently held in the late 1920s, or something entirely different?

5. Heidegger's Attempt to Overcome Metaphysics

Heidegger wrestles with metaphysical thinking more fiercely during the time of his engagement with Nietzsche. He no longer thinks that it suffices to deconstruct

the metaphysical tradition but claims that additional measures must be taken to entirely overcome metaphysical thinking. At first sight, the expression 'overcoming metaphysics' might be taken to indicate that Heidegger simply wants to eliminate representational thinking as such. But this is not quite the case. According to him, we can 'overcome' metaphysical thinking by taking a 'leap' from representation to being itself, notwithstanding the problem of concealment.

As he writes in *Contributions*, "the leap is the extreme projection of the essence of the being, of such a kind that we place ourselves in what is thereby opened up, become steadfast, and by being appropriated come to ourselves for the first time." (Heidegger 2012, 182; GA 65, 231) A leap is an event or *Ereignis,* a happening of being. In this 'original happening,' humans can attend to and experience a genuine relation with being itself. In this way, the *Ereignis* is said to show that human beings and being belong together essentially. "Of all beings, only the human being, called upon by the voice of being, experiences the wonder of all wonders: that beings are"; only humans can at least partially experience being itself, Heidegger writes in "Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?'" (1943) (Heidegger 1998, 234; GA 9, 103). Indeed, what he describes here seems more like an 'image' than an account of how leaping actually takes place, since this leap itself sounds mysterious and it is not clear what it is like to experience being genuinely.

For Heidegger, the very idea of such a leap from metaphysical thinking into the realm of being is to allow us to trace the origin of metaphysics. In the 1930 essay "On the Essence of Truth," Heidegger himself emphasizes that what he truly means by overcoming metaphysics is to examine how the tradition of metaphysics comes to represent being as a concept or idea (1998, 154; GA 9, 202). Therefore, overcoming metaphysics, for Heidegger, means to recover the origin and the course of the development of metaphysics. It is an attempt to move beyond traditional metaphysical thinking and beyond representation. Being itself is the source of metaphysics, but the source itself cannot be grasped by its own product, metaphysics. It is also questionable whether it can be grasped by Heidegger himself because the 'leap' itself is not a theoretical exercise but something that might eventually happen or else fail to happen. Overcoming in this sense implies a transition or transfer [*Übergang*] from one realm to the other, to the other beginning (GA 67, 11). Despite the shifts in rhetoric, this argument does not seem radically different from the one offered by Heidegger in his early period, since the early Heidegger had already claimed that the original experience of being is not accessible to the metaphysical tradition, nor to any conceivable theoretical alternative. Then what is the point of emphasizing that metaphysics is to be not only deconstructed but overcome?

The real difference from his earlier view is that, at this stage, Heidegger no longer thinks that the question of being is a metaphysical question at all. In other words, the task of metaphysics has never been to give us access to an originary experience of being, nor does it presuppose such an experience. In *Contributions*, he writes that in this transition, what appears as metaphysics is "already no longer

metaphysics, but the overcoming of metaphysics"; at the same time, however, this overcoming "is not an 'opposition' to 'metaphysics,' as that would simply bring metaphysics back into play; rather, the task is an overcoming of metaphysics out of its ground." (Heidegger, 2012, 135-136; GA 65, 171-173) In the 1938/39 fragments "The Overcoming of Metaphysics," he writes that over-coming [*Über-windung*] means a twist [*Windung*] into that which is no longer metaphysics, and this twist is the essence of being (GA 67, 15). By this overcoming, the 'abandonment of being' in modernity is overcome; the question of being is regained. Therefore, in his "Postscript to 'What Is Metaphysics?'" (1943), Heidegger writes that the metaphysical tradition is what comes first in philosophy but not what comes first in thinking (1998, 278-279; GA 9, 197). True thinking is thinking of the truth of being, which requires us to move beyond representational thinking to its source, to being itself. This, however, is something that we cannot bring about ourselves but must be called to by being. Therefore, after his critique of the metaphysical tradition in his early philosophy, Heidegger now attempts to contribute to the overcoming of metaphysics to prepare a new openness to being.

I also want to point out that Heidegger himself does not seem to think that the notion of a leap to being can solve the problem of metaphysics as representational thinking and as will to power. He addresses the reason why he is concerned about the problem of metaphysics at all, from the very beginning up until the end of his philosophy. Responding to this question, he identifies metaphysical thinking with Dasein's metaphysical constitution. In "On the Essence of Truth" (1930), tracing the development of metaphysics, Heidegger suggests that even if we begin with the concealing-revealing nature of being itself, the most original beginning, the problem of representational thinking cannot be avoided. This is because what we immediately perceive in daily life are always particular truths, whereas being itself can only be accessed indirectly via the being of beings. By heeding readily available things, we cannot help taking ourselves as subjects and others as objects, setting up our own standards for all beings and approaching them based on our subjective needs. Given the human will to power, this natural tendency can be radicalized in theoretical thinking and eventually in metaphysics. In representing things 'clearly and distinctly,' as the Cartesians put it, we naturally forget the concealing-revealing nature of being as the source of all beings.[9] We forget what makes individual beings possible in the first place, i.e., being itself.[10]

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[9] "Thus left, humanity replenishes its 'world' on the basis of the latest needs and aims, and fills out that world by means of proposing and planning. From these human beings then take their standards, forgetting beings as a whole [...] yet without considering either the ground for taking up standards or the essence of what gives the standard [...] Human beings are all the more mistaken the more extensively they take themselves, as subject, to be the standard for all beings. The inordinate forgetfulness of humanity persists in securing itself by means of what is readily available and always accessible." (Heidegger 1998, 149-150; GA 9, 195-196)

[10] Daniela Vallega-Neu clarifies that beings arising from beyng does not mean that beyng generates beings (2015, 19). It is not a generation or production of some actual thing, but rather

The double concealment of being prevails: the inherent concealment of being itself and the concealment due to subjective thinking. But it is because of the peculiar structure of human existence that we inevitably turn to beings and forget being, even if we start with being itself as nothingness. Metaphysical thinking somehow belongs to human existence in problematic ways. The source of the forgetfulness of being lies in human nature and ultimately in being itself. Representational thinking is a natural consequence of our peculiar way of existence. Or better, it is the fate of human rationality.

In fact, Heidegger claims, in line with his ideas about the *Ereignis*, that both the progression to metaphysics and then to overcoming metaphysics to recover its origin are demanded by being as such. In *Nietzsche II*, Heidegger writes that "being releases itself into beingness and withdraws its dignity in concealment, which is itself at the same time concealed"; and this "progression of being to beingness is that history of being – called metaphysics." (2003, 79, 81; GA 6.2, 486-87) In *Metaphysics and Nihilism* (1938/39), he writes that the attempt to overcome metaphysical thinking might sound as if it were a request from us – something done by us humans – but in fact it is demanded by being itself: "This overcoming stems from being itself and commences in its abandonment of beings." (GA 67, 8) Also, "the over-coming belongs to the history of being, that it springs out as its first clearing." (GA 15) More extensively, Heidegger explains in *Nietzsche II* (1939-46):

> Metaphysics is the history of being as the progression [*Fortgang*] out of the origin. This progression allows the return to become a need, and allows recollection in the origin to become a needful necessity. That history of being which is historically familiar as metaphysics has its essence in that a progression from the origin occurs. In this progression being releases itself to beingness and refuses the opening out of the origin's originating. (Heidegger 2003, 79; GA 6.2, 486)

Even if metaphysical thinking does not account for being properly, it is a consequence of how being manifests itself. In other words, as an *existentiell* mode of being, so to speak, subjective representational thinking is also grounded in being. Human Dasein is torn between being attentive to the originary mode of being and falling back into representational thinking, with ontotheology being one of the dominant modes of metaphysical thinking.

In the 1930s, Heidegger argues, on the one hand, that subjective metaphysical thinking is not able to do justice to the question of being; on the other hand, he acknowledges that this particular *existentiell* mode of being belongs to modern human existence, in addition to the problem of will to power. This is still in line with, and a continuation of, his early philosophy. What he gives up, however, is the idea that the origin of metaphysics, being itself, can be accounted for by theory at all, even by a different and genuine theory. Fundamental ontology

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describes how beings can come to show themselves as phenomena, given the possiblizing power of being.

is a theory too, even if it is grounded in Dasein's practical dwelling in the world, and hence another variety of representational thinking. This move radicalizes Heidegger's very idea of overcoming metaphysics. Since the problem of metaphysics prevails, Heidegger continues to deal with it after 1946. His giving up of the view that the question of being is a metaphysical question is not his last word on the subject. His way of treating metaphysics changes again afterwards.

6. Metaphysics and the Will to Power Again

In *Country Path Conversations* (1944-46), Heidegger again changes his approach to the metaphysical tradition, speaking of a certain releasement [*Gelassenheit*] vis-à-vis metaphysics. The Heidegger of this period continues to argue that the metaphysical way of thinking dominates not only metaphysics and science but also technology – not just technology in some of its varieties but the essence of technological thinking. Indeed, Heidegger's critique of technology already appears in his middle period works, such as "The Origin of the Work of Art (1935-37)" and "The Age of the World Picture (1938)," but his most developed critique of technology appears in the 1950s. Expanding his critique of metaphysics as self-willing during his middle period, Heidegger now takes metaphysical thinking, which he still takes to be an expression of the will to power, as the essence of technological thinking, given that technological thinking seeks power and control over everything. Once metaphysics is understood as self-grounding and self-willing thinking, being is unavoidably objectified as the counterpart of human subjectivity. The will to power is not only self-willing but also a will to power over the other. Any object is potentially at human disposal and becomes a potential resource to fulfil human needs. In this way, Heidegger represents technological thinking as a product of subjective metaphysical thinking.

As he writes in "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953), technology is a peculiar way of revealing being that undergirds modern existence by sweeping away the original way of revealing being as *aletheia*: unlike the latter, technology rather conceals the truth of being (Heidegger 1977, 222-224; GA 7, 13-16). He calls this a modern condition or framework [*Gestell*] of existence. By mathematizing and systematizing nature in scientific and technological thinking, humans seek to gain power over, exploit, and manipulate nature. In doing so, technological thinking threatens to objectify, control, and manipulate human nature, too. Human beings are therefore in danger, "not just any danger, but *the* danger, the supreme danger." (Heidegger 1977, 231; GA 7, 27) At the same time, paradoxically, Heidegger also holds that the greatest danger is not necessarily just negative, for salvation can also only emerge from such a danger. As Bret Davis explains: "Not only that there remains a glimmer of hope for a turning beyond the technological will to will, but that it is precisely in the midst of this desolate age of technology that there lies the possibility for catching sight of a more originary way of being." (2007, 180)

But even if the turn to being itself is possible in a technological world, Heidegger at this stage realizes that it is impossible to actively overcome and get away from metaphysical thinking. He no longer strives to overcome metaphysics but softens his approach by taking a more peaceful attitude of releasement towards metaphysical thinking. He maintains that in the modern way of thinking and dwelling, we can only wait to be released into the sphere of being, beyond willing, representing, and manipulating.[11] His attitude towards metaphysics as an expression of the will to power is consistent with his earlier view, but his approach is less polemic now.

The idea of non-willing first appears in Heidegger's *Country Path Conversations* (1944-46). Non-willing could mean either actively and thus willfully renouncing the will or non-willing as releasement (Heidegger 2010, 69; GA 77, 106). The former would be slightly inconsistent: 'Wrestling' and 'overcoming' are expressions of the will, a counter-will that remains committed to willful thinking.[12] Hence only the latter can be an option. Heidegger thus takes the less polemic approach of releasement in order not to be caught up in willful thinking again. Non-willing as releasement is a peculiar notion in that it is "a third possibility beyond either actively willing or being swept along involuntarily by the technological will to will"; namely, "one of twisting free of such dichotomies within the domain of the will by way of cor-responsive meditative thinking," Bret Davis comments (2007, 180). In line with this 'third possibility,' Gavin Rae further elaborates that the will-less thinking is not devoid of all will but is a special type of will:

> The willing of non-willing is not self-centered, closed and dominant but open, expansive and free that releases thought towards being [...] Rather than try to impose itself on being or reveal being in a predetermined manner, non-willing wills thought to open itself to being in a way that releases itself to, and so takes its cue from, being. Non-willing is, therefore, a continuous process, rather than an end to be attained, whereby thinking brings itself to a different intentional approach towards being than that constitutive of metaphysics. (2013, 253)

Gelassenheit, as opposed to non-willing as willfully renouncing will, is a peculiar free and expansive will. In this way, "thinking learns to renounce the aggressive willing of metaphysics through a letting-be of being, learns to listen to being, and answers being's call in accordance with being's releasement toward thought." (Rae 2013, 254) This explanation of releasement is again closer to an 'image' than

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[11] In *Country Path Conversations*, Heidegger argues that waiting is not awaiting: the former does not have an object but "lets representing entirely alone"; whereas awaiting "already links itself with re-presenting and what is re-presented," namely, relating to some object (2010, 75; GA 77, 115). Only waiting can release Dasein into the realm of openness.

[12] As I mentioned above, Heidegger already makes a similar point in *Contributions*. That is, the overcoming of metaphysics is not an 'opposition' to metaphysics, which would bring metaphysics back into play. The task is to overcome metaphysics out of its ground.

a concrete account, just as what Heidegger calls the 'leap' in his middle period. It is not clear whether it can happen or not.

So far, by explaining what metaphysics means for Heidegger at different stages of his philosophy, I have shown the reason why Heidegger has different attitudes towards metaphysics, as deconstruction, as overcoming and as releasement. Dominique Janicaud has likewise identified Heidegger's early and middle attitudes toward metaphysics as deconstruction and overcoming metaphysics, respectively; and although he has characterized Heidegger's late approach to being as twisting free [*Verwindung*] from metaphysics, this is not very different from releasement (Janicaud 1994, 1). What Janicaud has not explained, however, is how and why Heidegger develops from one stage to the next. He has only observed that the transition from destruction to overcoming has to do with Heidegger's developed understanding and approach to being and with a certain polemical attitude inherent in the expression of deconstruction (1994, 4-5). But these are not decisive reason why Heidegger changes his approach. As I have shown, the main reason for this move has to do with his evolved understanding of metaphysics from a problematic way of thinking to an expression of the will to power. The transition from overcoming to twisting free from metaphysics in late Heidegger is even more obscure in Janicaud, since he seems to simply claim that overcoming is a 'forerunner' of twisting free (1994, 7). Here, he does not seem to have argued for the inner development of Heidegger's philosophy at all.

At this point, the question returns once again: what kind of philosophy emerges when we are released from metaphysics? Is there any philosophy left at all? In this regard, Heidegger proposes an additional, more constructive attitude towards metaphysics and its basis. He writes:

> The recovery [*Verwindung*] from metaphysics initially appears to be an overcoming that merely brings exclusively metaphysical representation behind it, so as to lead thinking into the free realm attained by recovery from the essence of metaphysics. But in this recovery, the enduring truth of the metaphysics that has seemingly been rejected first returns explicitly as the now appropriated essence of metaphysics. (Heidegger 1998, 314; GA 9, 244)

That is to say, what he seeks to regain in recovering from metaphysics is a different, more constructive approach to its roots, i.e., a way to think being which he calls recollecting [*andenken*] of being – which the metaphysical tradition necessarily fails. In other words, his initial intention to move beyond metaphysics eventually gives way to the wish to recollect a certain original metaphysical impulse to do justice to being. In a sense, then, metaphysics is 'incorporated,' and its partial truth vindicated (Heidegger 1998, 91-92; 77).

Later in "On the Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics," he maintains that "the step back out of metaphysics into its essential nature [of being] requires a duration." (Heidegger 1969, 51; GA 11, 60) By stepping out of the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger claims to turn to an original, non-metaphysical attitude towards being. As Günter Figal puts it, there is no post-metaphysical

[*nachmetaphysisch*] thinking in Heidegger but only a paradoxical non-metaphysical metaphysical thinking [*die Paradoxie eines nichtmetaphysischen metaphysischen Denkens*] (1997, 459, 464). Figal's target here is perhaps Habermas (1992), who famously defends the project of post-metaphysical thinking.

But what exactly is this non-metaphysical metaphysical thinking? It might appear as if Heidegger returns to his early position regarding metaphysics, namely, aiming at a different kind of metaphysics, albeit no longer via the fundamental ontology of Dasein. This is not the case. In his late philosophy, this so-called different kind of thinking metaphysics itself is ambiguous. Apparently, the aim is not to re-establish metaphysics or to come up with an alternative metaphysical paradigm, as other 20th-century philosophers have tried to do. This is more so since the meaning of '*Verwindung*' is ambiguous: on the one hand, it can mean to 'recover' or 'regain something,' on the other hand, it also means to 'get over something.' This is one reason why Peter Trawny holds that Heidegger's philosophy is in the transition of stepping out of metaphysics and seeking for another beginning (2019, 103-104).

In any case, I take Heidegger's desire to be released from metaphysics to be an expression of his wrestling with the will to power and, to a certain extent, his intention to recover a genuine sense in which some aspects of metaphysics seem legitimate and not compromised by scientific and technological thinking, to be the defining features of the late phase of Heidegger's philosophy.

It should be stressed, however, that the dynamic relation between will-driven metaphysics and true, will-less non-metaphysical metaphysical thinking does not go away. Besides the 'technical difficulty' of leaping into this realm of will-lessness, dwelling in being cannot be a stable condition, a permanent possession. At best, we stay both near and far from being. The problem of subjectivism also remains. Metaphysical and representational thinking cannot be eliminated, simply because thinking is unavoidably representational. Heidegger therefore engages in a struggle with metaphysics that he cannot win.

Heidegger himself acknowledges subjective willful thinking. Dasein can both dwell near being itself and stay far from it, albeit in different respects. We always engage in the interplay of willing and non-willing. In the "Letter on Humanism," he refers this idea to the ek-sistence of Dasein:

> Forgetting the truth of being in favor of the pressing throng of beings unthought in their essence is what 'falling' [*Verfallen*] means in *Being and Time* [...] the terms 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity,' which are used in a provisional fashion, do not imply a moral-existentiell or an 'anthropological' distinction but rather a relation that [...] has yet to be thought for the first time, an 'ecstatic' relation of the essence of the human being to the truth of being. But this relation is as it is not by reason of ek-sistence; on the contrary, the essence of ek-sistence is destined existentially-ecstatically from the essence of the truth of being. (Heidegger 1998, 253; GA 9, 163-164)

In the same vein, Werner Marx likewise suggests the 'dual-state' of dwelling,

> What may in the end prove to be the truth of being is that being in its immensurable richness grants the world as creative *and* uncreative, the thing as worldly *and* substantial, man as open to the world *and* subjective, and holds them together in their manifold relations. The true concern of a thinking that carries on would then be the concrete demonstration of these relations. (1971, 225-256)

Eventually, Heidegger's philosophy as a philosophy of being includes both an ongoing struggle with the 'problematic metaphysics' and an attempt to form at least the idea of gaining access to being via and beyond traditional metaphysics. Only by the former can the latter emerge.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined Heidegger's engagement with metaphysics and his attitude towards it at the different stages of his philosophy. The aim is not to present an exhaustive account of Heidegger's writings on metaphysics but to sketch the changes and inner connections in the development of his reading of metaphysics, and therefore, in the course of his path of thinking itself. Specifically, the early Heidegger holds that metaphysics is a representation of the totality of things as being present-at-hand, and in his middle period, it is further characterized as subjective representational thinking. But even if his own fundamental ontology is a genuine and primordial approach to being, it is somehow also a theory, belonging to representational thinking. This 'theoretical impasse' motivates him to take metaphysics as something practical, i.e., an expression of the will to power. But his attempt to overcome metaphysics in 1930s is a willful act too, i.e., a counter will. And his approach to the origin of metaphysics remains an 'image' or provision, something more mysterious than concrete. His later expression of releasing from metaphysics has a similar problem. Lastly, his attempt to recover from metaphysics does not tell us much either, simply because one cannot overcome metaphysics without re-establishing it again and again, at least as long as one keeps philosophizing. Heidegger cannot give up his ongoing engagement with the problematic tradition of metaphysics, because he takes it to be an essential expression of the will to power, which belongs to Dasein. Metaphysics, for Heidegger, is thus a mode of Dasein. To a certain extent, Heidegger's own approach to the question of being can be called metaphysical, too, despite his anti-metaphysical polemic. All the complex and continual engagement with metaphysics shows that Heidegger is always concerned with the problem of metaphysics and its relation to being.

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