

# On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking

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TRANSLATORS' NOTE: On October 30, 1965, in Amriswil, on the occasion of a celebration for the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, Heidegger gave a talk titled "*Das Ende des Denkens in der Gestalt der Philosophie*" ("The End of Thinking in the Form of Philosophy"). In a somewhat expanded version, this address was first published in Japan (translated into Japanese by Kōichi Tsujimura) in December 1968 by Chikumashobō Press, Tokyo, with a new title "*Zur Frage nach der Bestimmung der Sache des Denkens*" ("On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking"). For the 1968 Japanese edition, Heidegger added a brief foreword that was not published in Germany until 1989 in *Japan und Heidegger*, ed. Hartmut Buchner (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag), 230–1. The German text of the expanded version of the talk, excluding the foreword, was edited by Hermann Heidegger and first published in Europe in 1984 as *Zur Frage nach der Bestimmung der Sache des Denkens* by Erker-Verlag, St. Gallen, Switzerland. In 2000, this same text appeared in the *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 16, edited by Hermann Heidegger (Vittorio Klostermann Verlag), 620–33. Our translation follows the original Erker-Verlag edition (© Erker-Verlag, Franz Larese und Jürg Janett, Gallusstrasse 32, CH-9000 St. Gallen/Schweiz). We are most grateful to Erker-Verlag for granting us the translation rights.

The present text, hitherto untranslated into English, is an important statement of Heidegger's thinking in the 1960s and is closely related to his 1964 lecture "*Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens*" ("The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking"), which appears in English translation in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993).

**O**n this evening of celebration we could learn that Ludwig Binswanger, along the path of his medical activities and scientific investigations, also traversed the different phases and movements of the philosophy of our century.

Every science rests on foundations, which, considering the inquiries and methods of its manner of research, remain in principle inaccessible to the science itself. Nevertheless, every researcher is able to address these foundations thoughtfully assuming that he dares, with an alert mind, to engage in a dialogue with philosophy. Such daring belongs to the life of the man whose will and work we are celebrating today.

For that reason, permit me to say a word from the region of thinking to which philosophy belongs, a word that, in accordance with its provenance, has the indigenous character of a question. We ask: What is, and what is the determination of, the matter for thinking in the present age? The matter—this means that by which thinking is claimed and thereby is itself determined in the first place. Admittedly, it must be enough to point out only a few things. But these remarks shall be regarded as a greeting and a gift to this evening of celebration.

Whether the question concerning the determination of the matter for thinking is asked and how it is asked decides, so it seems to me, the fate of thinking. The decision that here is to be made we do not make ourselves. We are only involved in it, though necessarily.

Whoever speaks of this decision assumes that thinking, with regard to the determination of its matter, finds itself in a state of indecision. In what does this indecision consist? Presumably, in the fact that thinking in its traditional form has reached its end. Should this be the case, then with its end the fate of philosophy is indeed decided, but not the fate of thinking. For it remains possible that in the end of philosophy another beginning of thinking is concealed. What has just been said can be considered to be a series of unproved assertions. However, these are questions.

One of these questions is whether the demand for proofs, which is characteristic of science, has its place in the region of thinking. What cannot be proven can nevertheless be grounded. Yet even the grounding falls into the void if the matter for thinking no longer has the character of a ground and therefore can no longer be the matter for philosophy.

It is, therefore, first of all essential to learn in what way philosophy has entered into its end.

In speaking of an end we mean that something proceeds no further, that it has ceased to be. The end is regarded as something lacking and unfortunate. End—sounds like inability and decay.

But expressions in language such as “from one end to another” and “from end to end” [*an allen Ecken und Enden*] evince a different meaning of the word “end.” Here, end more or less means place. In what follows, by end we understand the place wherein something gathers itself in its final possibility, wherein it completely ends.

The direction that philosophical thinking has followed along the way of its history from its beginning is fulfilled in the end of philosophy. At the end of phi-

losophy the final possibility of its thinking arrives in earnest. We can understand this by considering an occurrence that can be characterized in a few sentences.

Philosophy disintegrates into independent sciences: logistics, semantics, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, political science, poetics, technology. Philosophy, which is disintegrating, is replaced by a novel unification of these new and all already existing sciences. Its unity announces itself in the fact that the different thematic fields of the sciences are thoroughly projected unto a unique happening. The sciences are challenged to present this happening as one of steering [*Steuerung*] and information. The new science, which unifies all sciences in a new sense of unity, is called cybernetics. As far as the clarification of its leading ideas and their introduction into all fields of knowledge is concerned, cybernetics is still in its infancy. Its dominance is assured, however, because cybernetics itself is already steered by a power that stamps the character of planning and steering not only on the sciences, but also on all human action.

This much is already clear today: Through the leading ideas of cybernetics—information, steering, feedback—principal concepts like ground and consequence, cause and effect, which until now have been authoritative in the sciences, are transformed in a way that one could almost call uncanny. For this reason cybernetics can no longer be characterized as a grounding science. The unity of the thematic fields of knowledge is no longer the unity of ground. This unity is in a strict sense technical. Cybernetics remains set on making available and establishing everywhere the perspective of thoroughly steerable processes. The unrestrained power that demands such producibility determines the proper character of modern technicity, yet it withdraws from any attempt to represent itself as technical. The character of the sciences, which becomes more and more clearly pronounced, is easily recognizable in the way the sciences understand the categories that in each case define and structure their thematic fields, namely, in terms of the instrumental. The categories are regarded as operative exemplary ideas whose truth is measured on the basis of the effect that their application brings about within the progress of research.

Scientific truth is equated with the efficiency of these effects. The sciences take on themselves the task of forming the exemplary concepts that in each case is necessary. These exemplary concepts are permitted only a technical-cybernetic function, while in contrast all ontological content is denied. Philosophy becomes superfluous. The judgment, which is still made from time to time, that philosophy limps behind the sciences—that is, the natural sciences—has lost its meaning.

Moreover, the cybernetic leading concept of information is far-reaching enough to make one day the historical humanistic disciplines, too, subject to the claim of cybernetics. This comes about all the easier as the relation of the contemporary human being to the historical tradition is increasingly transformed into a mere need for information. Yet insofar as the human being still understands himself to

be a free historical being, he will indeed resist surrendering the determination of humankind to the cybernetic way of thinking. First of all, cybernetics itself admits that it here encounters difficult questions. Even so, it considers such questions to be in principle resolvable and for the time being regards the human being as “a disturbing factor” in the cybernetic calculation. In the meantime, cybernetics can already reassure itself that its matter is to calculate everything, which is, as a steered process because the idea looms large that the freedom of the human being is to be determined as what is planned, that is, as what is steerable. For, in the technical world that ever more resolutely pushes itself forward, this freedom alone seems to grant the industrial society the possibility of a humane dwelling.

The end of philosophy is characterized by the disintegration of its disciplines into discrete sciences whose novel unification is in the offing in cybernetics. However, if we were to judge the disintegration of philosophy into the sciences and its replacement by cybernetics as a manifestation of mere decay, then we would miss the insight into the matter of what the end of philosophy means.

Such a judgment would also be rash because up to this point we have only mentioned marks of the end of philosophy, but we have not yet considered the proper character of the end.

This can be accomplished only when we—at least for a moment—engage the question: What is the proper matter for philosophy to which it remains directed from its beginning?

In its beginning, the thinking that is later called philosophy finds itself initially directed to perceive and to say the astonishing [*das Erstaunliche*], namely, that beings are and how they are. What we call, ambiguously and confusedly enough, beings, the Greek philosophers experienced as what-is-present [*das Anwesende*] because being was granted to them as presence [*Anwesenheit*]. In this [presence], what was thought together was the passage from presencing to absencing, from arriving to disappearing, from emerging to passing away, that is, movement.

In the course of the history of philosophy, the experience and interpretation of the presence of what-is-present is transformed. The end of philosophy is reached when this transformation is fulfilled in its final possibility. The history of this transformation and its completion has thus far not been recognized because Greek thinking was overlaid with modern ideas. The classic example of this practice on a grand scale remains Hegel’s interpretation of the history of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, presence in the sense of the objectiveness of objects remained unknown to Greek thinking. To them, what-is-present was never given as an object. Presence in the sense of objectivity first begins to be thinkable for philosophy when the what-is-present—in Greek ὑποκείμενον, the lying-before from itself, the Roman *subiectum*—was found in the *Ego sum* of the *Ego cogito* by Descartes. Accordingly, the I of the human being, the human being himself, appears as the distinctive *subiectum* who henceforth claims the name subject exclusively for

himself. Consequently, from here on subjectivity constitutes the region in which and for which an objectivity is first framed together.

In the meantime, the presence of what-is-present has also lost the meaning of objectivity and objectiveness. What-is-present concerns the human being of today as that which is in each case orderable. Presence, even though it is hardly ever considered and expressed as such, shows the character of the absolute orderability of everything and anything.

What-is-present is encountered and lingers no longer in the form of objects. It dissolves itself into standing-reserves that must be makeable, deliverable, and replaceable at any time for any and all purposes. The standing-reserves are demanded as the case arises according to particular plans. As such, they are posited in terms of their composition. The standing-reserves do not possess constancy in the sense of a steady, unchanged presence. The kind of presencing of the standing-reserves is orderability, which is distinguished by the possibility of the unsettled ever-new-and-improved that has no view to what is best.

But for whom does the what-is-present, of such a nature, become orderable? Not for individual human beings who as subjects stand over against objects. The orderability of the standing-reserves is arranged and regulated from out of the relation of the with-each-other and for-each-other of the industrial society. Admittedly, this industrial society still often appears as the self-sufficient and determining subjectivity for the objectivity of the products and institutions of the technical world civilization. The industrial society, to whose demands and institutions sociological thinking purports to trace back everything which is, still largely thinks of itself accordingly as subjectivity within the subject-object-schema, that is, as the explanatory ground for all appearances. Yet industrial society is neither subject nor object. Rather, contrary to the appearance of its self-sufficient and singularly determining self-subsistence, industrial society is placed into subjection by the same power of the challenging placing [*des herausfordernden Stellens*] that also has transformed the former objectiveness of objects into the mere orderability of standing-reserves.

The nature [*Natur*] of natural science is also proposed as orderable standing-reserve. The presence of nature in the thematic field of nuclear physics remains unthinkable as long as it is still represented as objectivity instead of orderability. The transformation of the presence of what-is-present from objectiveness to orderability is, however, also the precondition for the fact that something like the cybernetic way of representation can emerge and lay claim to the role of the universal science at all.

Because cybernetics, without knowing and being able to think it, remains subordinated to the aforementioned transformation of the presence of what-is-present, cybernetics may be cited only as a mark of the end of philosophy. This mark itself is based on the fact that with the orderability of what-is-present the

final possibility in the transformation of presence is reached. In this way, the different fields of what-is-present become orderable for representing. The disciplines of thinking that are directed toward these fields can address themselves, each individually, to their treatment. The disintegration of philosophy unfolds an orderable task whose unitariness is replaced by the emergence of cybernetics.

That philosophy enters into its end is a legitimate occurrence. This occurrence corresponds to the law, according to which philosophy has taken up its beginning, insofar as philosophy follows the direction to think the presence of what-is-present in accordance with the way that presence claims thinking, without thereby being thought itself as such.

The transformation of the presence of what-is-present is not based on the change in the views of the philosophers. Rather, philosophers are only the thinkers that they are insofar as they are able to correspond to the transformed claim of presence. With this correspondence, of course, a relation is named that belongs within the ambit of what is worthy of question and to which the question concerning the determination of the matter for thinking is directed.

This same relation comes to light, however, as soon as we take up a consideration that remained unheeded in our elucidation hitherto concerning presence as orderability. This consideration is: To what extent is orderability the last phase in the history of the transformation of presence? No human being can decide whether yet more transformations are impending. We do not know the future. Nevertheless, in order to determine orderability as the last possible phase in the historical transformation of presence, no prophetic glimpse into the future is needed. The insight into the present day is sufficient, if only this insight, instead of describing the state of the world and the situation of human beings, looks to catch sight of the kind of the presence of human beings and of things, along with the presence of humans toward things. Thereupon this appears: In the dominance of the orderability of what-is-present, in this itself, the power of the challenging placing comes to light inasmuch as this power above all places human beings themselves in such a way as to securely place everything that is present, and therefore human beings themselves, in their orderability.

To be sure, the conspicuous successes of the inexorable development of technicity continue to give the appearance that the human being is the master of technicity. In truth, however, he is the servant of the power that thoroughly dominates all technical production. This power of the challenging placing shapes the human being into the mortal who is claimed, placed, and, in this sense, used by this power and for it. The prevailing power in the presence of what-is-present needs the human being. In this needing, that relation of presence to the human being manifests itself, which demands of him a proper correspondence. In view of this relation, the presence of what-is-present shows itself as the issue of a matter that withdraws itself from the field of vision of philosophical thinking.

This philosophical thinking, since its beginning and throughout its history, is allotted to think what-is-present with regard to its presence, but not presence itself in the history of its transformation, not presence in view of that which determines it as such. The question concerning this determination thinks into a region that remains inaccessible to the thinking of philosophy known as ontological, transcendental, and dialectical.

Given its other matter, the thinking that corresponds to this matter not only becomes a different thinking, but the meaning and manner of the determination of its matter is also transformed. The more clearly we experience that the power of the challenging placing, and along with it the dominance of the orderability of what-is-present, disguise their own provenance, the more pressing and, at the same time, the more uncanny becomes the question concerning the determination of the matter for thinking.

The end of philosophy is ambiguous. On the one hand, this end means the completion of a thinking, philosophical thinking, to which what-is-present shows itself in the aspect of orderability. On the other hand, precisely this kind of presence holds the clue to the power of the challenging placing, whose determination requires a different thinking for which presence as such becomes worthy of questioning. For, presence entails something still unthought whose proper character withdraws from philosophical thinking.

Actually, what is unthought in presence is not entirely unknown to philosophical thinking since its dawning. However, what is unthought is not only unapprehended by philosophy but even misapprehended in what it properly is; that is, it is interpreted anew in the sense of what philosophy thinks under the title “truth.”

But do we not run the risk of underestimating forthwith the significance of Greek thinking? When Plato beholds the presence of what-is-present in its outward appearance (εἶδος, ἰδέα), which grants the view of what-is-present as such, then right away he relates this view to the light that allows a view in the first place. This shows that he has a glimpse of that which prevails in presence as such. Thereby, he is only corresponding to a basic feature of the Greek experience of what-is-present.

Let us think back to Homer, who likewise already, almost reflexively, brings the presencing of a what-is-present into relation with light. We may recall a scene during the homecoming of Odysseus. With the departure of Eumaeus, Athena appears in the form of a beautiful young woman. The goddess appears to Odysseus. But his son Telemachus does not see her, and the poet says: οὐ γὰρ πῶς πάντεσσι θεοὶ φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς (*Odyssey* XVI, 161). “For the gods do not appear to everyone ἐναργεῖς”—this word is translated as “visible.” Yet ἀργός means gleaming. What gleams, shines forth from itself. What shines forth thus, presences forth from itself. Odysseus and Telemachus see the same woman. But

Odysseus perceives the presencing of the goddess. Later, the Romans translated ἐνάργεια, the shining-forth-from-itself, with *evidentia*; *evideri* means to become visible. Evidence is thought in terms of the human being as the one who sees. In contrast, ἐνάργεια is a feature of presencing things themselves.

According to Plato, things owe their shining to a light. This relation of the ideas to light is understood as a metaphor. Nevertheless, the question remains to be asked: What is it about the proper nature of presencing that its determination requires and allows a transference to light? For long enough, thinkers have troubled over in what way determinations such as identity, otherness, sameness, movement, which belong to the presencing of what-is-present, can still be thought of as ideas. Is here concealed a completely different issue that becomes entirely inaccessible because of the modern reinterpretation of ἰδέα, namely, from the outward appearance of what-is-present to *perceptio*, to a constituted representation by the human I?

The presence of what-is-present has as such no relation to light in the sense of brightness. But presence is referred to light in the sense of the clearing.

What this word gives us to think about may be made clear by an example, assuming that we consider it sufficiently. A forest clearing is what it is, not because of brightness and light, which can shine within it during the day. At night, too, the clearing remains. The clearing means: At this place, the forest is passable.

The lightening in the sense of brightness and the lightening of the clearing are different not only regarding the matter, but regarding the word as well. To lighten [*Lichten*] means: to render free, to free up [*freigeben*], to let free. To lighten belongs to light [*leicht*]. To render something light, to lighten something means: to clear away obstacles to it, to bring it into the unobstructed, into the free. To raise [*lichten*] the anchor says as much: to free it from the encompassing ocean floor and lift it into the free of water and air.

Presence is referred to clearing in the sense of the granting of the free. The question is posed: What is cleared in the clearing that frees up presence as such?

Is not this talk about the clearing also only a metaphor, read off from the forest clearing? Nevertheless, this forest clearing is itself something present in the presencing forest. The clearing, however, as the granting of the free for presencing and lingering of what-is-present, is neither something that is present nor a property of the presence. But the clearing and that which it clears remain of concern for thinking as soon as thinking is affected by the question as to how the matter stands with presence as such.

To consider that and how clearing grants presence belongs to the question concerning the determination of the matter for thinking, which, if thinking is to correspond to this matter and to its proper issues, will recognize itself compelled to a transformation. Space and time appear as just such issues for they have always been connected in thinking with the presence of what-is-present. Yet the proper



character of space and time and of their relation to presence as such becomes determinable only in terms of the clearing.

Space spatializes. It makes room. Space frees up, namely, nearness and farness, narrowness and width, places and distances. In the spatializing of space, clearing plays.

Time temporalizes. It liberates unto the free of the onefold of the ekstatic of having-beeness, future, and present. In the temporalizing of time, clearing plays.

And what of the onefold of space and time? The belonging-together of both is neither spatial nor temporal. Rather, presumably, in their belonging-together the clearing prevails. But does this clearing exist for itself, above and beside space and time? Or does the clearing clear only in the manner of space and time and their puzzling onefold? Or is the clearing not exhausted at all in the spatializing of space and the temporalizing of time?

Questions upon questions, which a thinking of the kind that is philosophy cannot even ask, let alone answer. And this is so because such questions press upon thinking only if what remains unquestioned for philosophy, namely presence as such, becomes worthy of questioning.

Thus, it may be appropriate at this time to indicate, at least broadly, the clearing as the distinctive matter for another thinking. This is called for because four decades ago the hermeneutic analytic of Dasein spoke about the clearing with the aim of unfolding the question of being in *Being and Time*. Later, "Daseinsanalysis," which aimed at a clarification of the foundations of psychiatry, entered into a dialogue with the analytic of Dasein and its positioning.

Yet it required a decades-long walk along those forest paths that lead only so far [*Holzwegen*] to realize that the sentence in *Being and Time*: "The Dasein of the human being is itself the clearing" (§28), perhaps surmised the matter for thinking but in no way considered the matter adequately, that is, in no way posed the matter as a question that arrived at the matter.

The Dasein is the clearing for presence as such, and yet Dasein is, at the same time, certainly not the clearing insofar as the clearing is Dasein in the first place, that is, insofar as the clearing grants Dasein as such. The analytic of Dasein does not yet attain to what is proper to the clearing and by no means attains to the region to which the clearing, in turn, belongs.

The necessary transformation of thinking for entering into its entirely other matter, and the indication of the end and the inner limit of philosophical thinking, do not entail a disparagement of philosophy such that this other and, for the moment, still largely undetermined thinking would rise above philosophy. Here we are dealing with neither a heightening of philosophy, a transcendental posing of the question to the second power, so to speak; nor a laying deeper of the foundations of philosophy in the sense of a "going back into the ground of metaphysics."<sup>2</sup>

Rather, what becomes necessary is the step back from philosophy. This step back is the arrival in the region, initially indicated with the name of the clearing, wherein we human beings always already sojourn. In this region, however, things also linger in their own way.

With this step back, philosophy is neither forsaken nor made to vanish from the memory of the thinking human being. But precisely this danger threatens to an ever increasing degree from the side of the sciences and their cybernetic-technical organization within the world civilization that has been settling in. The whole of philosophy and its history in its completion is, however, not sublated by the step back in the sense of the dialectical course of history as it was thought by Hegel. Rather, by the step back the possibility arises of expressly handing over philosophy to what is properly its own in the first place. In this way, philosophy arrives at a more originary abiding that holds ready the riches of what has already been thought for another dialogue with philosophy.

The call to thinking to return “to the things themselves” only then is meaningful and a reliable supposition when first we ask what the matter for thinking is and from where it receives its determination. However, the discussion of this question allows us at once to realize that all thinking is finite. The finitude of thinking rests not solely and not primarily in the limitation of human ability, but rather in the finitude of the matter for thinking. To experience this finitude is much more difficult than hastily positing an absolute. The difficulty lies in a lack of education in thinking that is conditioned by the matter of thinking and is, therefore, not fortuitous, and which already Aristotle suggested in his own way (*Metaphysics* IV, 4, 1006 a 6ff.). The sentence reads: ἔστι γὰρ ἀπαιδευσία τὸ μὴ γινώσκειν τίνων δεῖ ζητεῖν ἀπόδειξιν καὶ τίνων οὐ δεῖ. “For it is a lack of education (in thinking) not to have an eye for that regarding which it is necessary to seek a proof and that regarding which this is not necessary.” This lack of education in today’s thinking is great. It is even greater with respect to the task of asking, first of all, the question concerning the determination of the matter for thinking and of unfolding it sufficiently. Therefore, the words of Aristotle demand careful reflection. Since, so far, it remains undecided in what way that which does not require a proof for becoming the thought-worthy matter for thinking is experienceable and sayable.

Does this happen through dialectical mediation? Is not the claim to dialectical mediation, contrary to all appearances, precisely an absolute claim and a failure to recognize the proper finitude of thinking? Or does the experience of the matter for thinking happen through the originally giving, ultimately grounding intuition of the non-mediatable? Is not the appeal to such an intuition the same claim to an absolute knowledge? And do not mediation and the unmediated remain in the same way related to the medium?

Does the matter for thinking require a manner of thinking whose basic feature is neither dialectic nor intuition? Regarding this, only the question concerning the determination of the matter for thinking can prepare the answer.

But what if the answer to this question of thinking were again only another question?

And what if this issue, instead of pointing to an endless progression, indicated the finitude of thinking that lies in its matter?

## NOTES

1. Editor's note (H. Heidegger): Cf. Heidegger, *Hegel und die Griechen*, in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt [Main]: Vittorio Klostermann, 2nd edition 1978), 421–38; also in Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 9, 427–44 (Frankfurt [Main]: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976).

Regarding the present text as a whole: Cf. Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 4th edition 1982), Bd. II, 399ff. In addition: Heidegger, *Die Technik und die Kehre* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 3rd edition, 1976); Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 6th edition, 1978).

2. Translators' note: Cf. Heidegger's essay *Einleitung zu "Was ist Metaphysik?"* (Introduction to "What is Metaphysics?") with the subtitle *Der Ruckgang in den Grund der Metaphysik* (Going Back into the Ground of Metaphysics), which he composed for the 5th edition (1949) of his 1929 lecture *Was ist Metaphysik?* *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 9, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976/2004), 365–83.