

WHAT CALLS FOR ATTENTION?

Abstract

I show that attention in the form of *Achtsamkeit* and *Aufmerksamkeit* becomes a major concept for Heidegger after the completion of the *Beiträge*, beginning with works such as the 1939 *On the Essence of Language* and the 1941-42 *Das Ereignis*. The 1951-52 *What is Called Thinking?* contains perhaps the most sustained treatment of the phenomenon, with Heidegger translating the *voẽiv* of Parmenides as *in-die-Acht-nehmen*. I discuss how attention figures in Heidegger's work, and then argue on that basis that the effort of attention enables more profound presencing, including that of our own. When Being is understood as presencing, this implies that attention is intimately related to the very Being of beings, as Heidegger argues in *What is Called Thinking?*

Keywords

Heidegger, attention, intuition, listening, presencing, hermeneutical circle

Heidegger calls for us to *be* a certain way. He calls for authenticity in *Being and Time*, and for efforts such as meditative thinking, letting be, and waiting in the later work.¹ I wish to show that the required effort involves *attention* most essentially. The text where this is most evident is *What is Called Thinking?*, where Heidegger translates *voẽiv* as *in-die-Acht-nehmen* (to take heed of) and interprets Parmenides as proclaiming that attention² and the presencing of Being are the

¹ *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). Pagination from the German, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993). Referred to as *BT*.

² Attending and heeding are treated as synonymous in what follows.

Same; in fact, that the presencing of Being calls for attention.³ In this text Heidegger also associates attention with direct (*unmittelbar*) apprehension, which would appear to be a reversal of *BT* where he argues against the intuition of present-at-hand objects in Husserl. Indeed, for Husserl attention and intuition are intimately related,⁴ but I argue that for (the later) Heidegger the meaning of attention/intuition has changed with the associated ontology, for now it is how we *stay with* entities as they come into presence, how we participate in their very manifestation. Attention is the fundamental mode of access to particulars, where the very meaning of particulars has changed—this is not access to fixed entities that are already present, but rather to entities with depths that can be plunged by way of proper (*eigentlich*) efforts of attentiveness.

There has recently been work on attention which has largely focused on its treatment in Husserl.⁵ Of these works, only Michael Marder's two articles in this Journal address the role of attention in Heidegger (together with its role in Husserl, Levinas, Augustine, Merleau-Ponty, Blanchot,

³ *What Is Called Thinking?*, Trans. F. Wieck and J. Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). Referred to as *WCT*.

⁴ E.g., Husserl, E., *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenological philosophy and to a phenomenological philosophy, first book*, trans. D. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 49.

⁵ E.g., Arvidson, S., *The sphere of attention* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); Zahavi, D., *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005); Marder, M., "What is Living and What is Dead in Attention?" *Research in Phenomenology* 39(2009): 29-51; Marder, M. "Phenomenology of Distraction, or Attention in the Fissuring of Time and Space", *Research in Phenomenology* 41(2011): 396-419; B. Waldenfals, "Phenomenology of Attention," *Alter* (Paris); H. Gander, "On Attention: From a Phenomenological Analysis towards an Ethical Understanding of Social Attention," *Research in Phenomenology* 37(2007): 287-302. See also the March 2004 (Vol. 37) special issue of *Continental Philosophy Review* on the philosophy of attention for articles by Steinbock, Gendlin, Vermersch, Casey, and Depraz, and the recently issued Depraz, N., *Attention et Vigilance: A la croisee de la phenomenologie et des sciences cognitives* (Paris: PUF, 2014).

Derrida, and Pessoa).⁶ Marder's citations focus almost exclusively on the early Heidegger.

While he aims to deliver a critique, Marder is apparently unaware of the fact that attention (in the form of *Achtsamkeit* and *Aufmerksamkeit*, as discussed below) is not thematic for Heidegger until the turn of the 1940s, with the 1939 *On the Essence of Language* (GA 85) and the 1941-42 *The Event* (GA 71).⁷ He rightly points to the importance of gathering (*Versammlung*) in relation to attention, but does not consider that we are called on to be steadfastly and acutely attentive, thereby enabling the more profound manifestation of all entities, including ourselves. It may be true that such attentiveness is an impossible task, as he argues, but it must be understood to be our calling in any event.

An important work that has gone unnoticed in this literature is William McNeill's *The Glance of the Eye* (1999), which aims to "phenomenologically open up" the experience of the *Augenblick* in Heidegger.⁸ Translating *Gewärtigen* as attending, McNeill argues that attention is how Dasein is futurally open for the presencing of beings.⁹ He sees attention and presence as intimately related, where presence is conceived as "retention-attention" (typically translated as retention-awaiting). The human being is that which attends (*das Gegenwartende*), as *Gegenwarten* suggests a waiting (*warten*) in response to (*gegen*), a coming to presence in the manner of

⁶ Zahavi discusses Heidegger's position on reflection in terms of attention, but does not refer to its explicit presence in his texts.

⁷ *On the Essence of Language*, Trans. W. Gregory and Y. Unna (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), referred to as *OEL*; *The Event*, Trans. R. Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), referred to as *TE*.

⁸ McNeill, W., *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

responsive awaiting, an attending. *Gegen-wart* is a ‘waiting toward’ or ‘waiting upon’ that first lets things be encountered as present.

McNeill argues that attention understood in the sense of tarrying and dwelling enables the authentic temporality that characterizes the *Augenblick*.¹⁰ Here the human being attends the presencing of things in such a way as to accompany them in their presencing, to let them be, to let them come to presence. Such attending in the sense of tarrying is to be contrasted with the flitting about of curiosity and the related “technovision,” which is a compulsive movement toward the ever newer in an environment of ongoing substitution where everything is replaceable.¹¹ Thus he argues that attention understood as “waiting-toward” is essential for authentic presencing itself.

McNeill also explores the relation between the *Augenblick* and a more ancient sense of *theoria*, which is an “exalted and mysterious sense of seeing, a tarrying in the presence of the look of something as it shows itself.” It refers to a more originary look and approach of things, of a being in touch and in contact with other beings in a more profound manner. For McNeill, *theoria* is “an exceptional manner of human comportment that is characterized by an attentive and respectful tarrying in proximity to the presencing of the divine.” It points humans toward the divine as the “supreme phenomenon of being.”¹²

¹⁰ As McNeill notes, for Heidegger (*BT* 338), “That presence [*Gegenwart*] which is held in temporality proper and which is thus itself authentic, we call the *Augenblick*.”

¹¹ *Op Cit.*, 183.

¹² *Ibid.*, 175, 303, 317.

McNeill focuses on individuation rather than a substance ontology in considering how Dasein comes into presence, which “occurs in and as the temporality of the practical situation.”¹³ The awaiting that lets entities be in their manifestation is not the activity of an already existing self, but rather an “ongoing responsiveness to an event of origination.”¹⁴ Thus we see attention as essential for our very coming into presence, and thus for the originary intuition that enables encounters with particular entities. McNeill’s identification of attention with presence suggests that it is the most general form of intuition of particulars.

Although the translation of *Gegenwarten* as attention is highly innovative and insightful, it is not obvious that Heidegger himself would have thought of *warten* in terms of attention (that is, as the *achten and aufmerken* that is so important in the later work) at the time that *BT* was written. I will show that it is rather the case that attention in this form is studiously ignored by Heidegger in *BT*, and does not appear in any significant manner until the 1939 *On the Essence of Language*. However, it is the case that Heidegger explicitly relates *Achtsamkeit* and *Warten* in the 1944/45 *Country Path Conversations*, so that in retrospect at a minimum McNeill’s translation is validated by Heidegger himself.¹⁵

I show that there is a significant change in the posture taken toward attention after the *Beiträge* and the development of being-historical thinking. Prior to that it is associated with the

¹³ Ibid., 119.

¹⁴ Ibid., 313.

¹⁵ *Country Path Conversations*, Trans. B. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), referred to as *CPC*. Heidegger also makes the connection between hearing, waiting, and holding open in *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, Trans. M. Fritsch and J. Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 150-51.

metaphysics that Heidegger seeks to overcome, but after the *Beiträge* Heidegger takes the position that acute and sustained attention is required to go deeper into fundamental questions such as the meaning of Being. This goes well beyond the common understanding of attention as being involved in perception and cognition. My claim is that this proposition cannot be argued in the traditional manner, but must rather be put to the test of attention/experience itself. For logical argumentation requires assumptions that must themselves be grounded, which ultimately depend upon experience—the depth and profundity of which depends in turn upon the acuity of attention. Thus the validation of the proposition depends upon the application of the proposition itself, putting it to the test in practice. Even McNeill’s exemplary discussion of *theoria* as enabling a more profound relation with other entities rests more on explication of Heidegger (and other figures) than logical argumentation. That is, Heidegger seeks to inspire such effort because it is required for deeper understanding of the fundamental questions that remain open regardless of the accepted wisdom of an age, questions that he seeks to stay with as attentively as possible as the true work of philosophy.

The approach of the paper is as follows: I discuss how attention figures in Heidegger’s work, and then argue on that basis that the effort of attention enables more profound presencing, including that of our own. When Being is understood as presencing, this implies that attention is intimately related to the very Being of beings. I show that Heidegger argues for this position in the 1951/52 *What is Called Thinking?*(*WCT*), where he emphasizes the necessity of experiencing and continuing to question, thereby going deeper into the most primordial philosophical questions by way of extraordinary attentiveness.

I. An Overview of Attention in Heidegger

It is essential in addressing the nature of attention to recognize two related dimensions, selection (highlighting, foregrounding) and effort (intensity, vigilance). Under the former fall connotations such as noticing, emerging, and appearing, while under the latter we see connotations such as steadfastness, enduring, and holding. These two dimensions are well recognized in the cognitive psychology literature, where attention is the subject of extensive study, as well as in Heidegger himself when he takes up the question in *On the Essence of Language* and *The Event*.

We are all familiar with the effort of attention, with the necessity of staying with a particular activity in order to complete it successfully. It typically appears in the notion of “concentration,” or focusing on a particular intellectual task, but attention is by no means limited to such activities. The notion employed here is that of *staying with* any one of a variety of modes of engagement, of *maintaining one’s presence* in the course of an encounter with an entity. The act of staying with, of *holding one’s ground* in the face of competing influences, which can also be seen as a standing, stilling, enduring, sustaining, waiting, or watching, enables the opening and gathering that is essentially related to Heidegger’s notion of Being.

Heidegger seeks to overcome the traditional understanding of intuition as directed from an inner sphere toward free standing objects which are then dealt with by way of representation.

Theodore Kisiel argues that Heidegger transforms Husserl’s notion of categorical intuition into the understanding of being, seeking thereby to overcome connotations of intuition as limited to perception and cognition in a metaphysics of constant presence. He seeks an “intimate

awareness of being,” a pre-reflective understanding that comes with the “habit of living.” This is a form of life that outstrips the cognitive connotations of the word intuition. The question is, how are we to intuit a situation rather than things? Heidegger says that the concept of intuition is not yet originary enough, even though it orients phenomenology to the phenomena themselves. He seeks a way of access along the lines of everyday preoccupation with worldly affairs rather than a free-floating perception of objects.¹⁶

We see exactly this in the 1919/1920 *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* with the conception “taking-notice” (*Kenntnisnehmen*, which can also be translated as attention), where the presence of *Kenntnis* renders it more a mode of acquaintance than distanced cognition.¹⁷ It is true, however, that although it arises in the course of factual living, Heidegger is concerned that taking-notice can lead to theoretical decontextualization and thus a devivification of lived experience.¹⁸ We also see Heidegger’s transformation of intuition terms in the 1919 lectures *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, where he emphasizes the embeddedness of lived experience in intelligible contexts which inform its movement: “The empowering experiencing of living experience that takes itself along is the understanding intuition, the *hermeneutic intuition*, the originary phenomenological back-and-forth formation of re-cepts and pre-

¹⁶ Kisiel, T., “From Intuition to Understanding,” in *Heidegger’s Way of Thought: Critical and Interpretive Signposts* (London: Continuum, 2002).

¹⁷ *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, Winter Semester 1919/1920*, Trans. S. Campbell (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

¹⁸ Heidegger also considers the related notions of prominence (*Abheben*) and intensification (*Zugespitztheit*) in this text.

cepts....”¹⁹ We see here the nascent hermeneutical circle, which can be expressed as understanding guiding the movement of attention, the deliverances of which revise the understanding and thus the further movement of attention. If attention is indeed the most general form of intuition (as discussed above), this would be the most general form of the hermeneutical circle, to which we will turn below in discussing the return to prominence of attention in the later Heidegger. As Kisiel puts it, hermeneutical intuition is a spontaneous experience of experience, the streaming return of life upon already experienced life, the spontaneous historicity immanent to life itself. Simple apprehension is the constant coming-back (to the understanding) in order to grasp what is encountered from the ahead-of (the pre-understanding that guides attention) that I always already am. What is developed here is a deeper structure of presence, exposed in its pre-intuitional substructure.²⁰

Turning to *BT*, *Kenntnisnehmen* is translated here as mere taking notice, acquisition of information, acknowledgement, and transmitted information, all of which are associated with the metaphysics he seeks to overcome.²¹ In this text, of course, the grounding of intuition terms in the understanding (of situational context) is a major theme:

We may formalize ‘sight’ and ‘seeing’ enough to obtain therewith a universal term for characterizing ... access in general. By showing how all sight is grounded in understanding (the circumspection of concern is understanding as

¹⁹ *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, Trans. T. Sadler (London, Continuum, 2002), 99.

²⁰ Kisiel, Op. Cit.

²¹ It is rendered “mere taking cognizance” in *TE*. Heidegger also refers to “mere attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*] to ideas” in *WCT* (214), which again demonstrates that it is the association with traditional metaphysics that it targeted. It is interesting that *Kenntnis-nehmen* appears in *WCT* as *in-die-Acht-nehmen*, as thinking (νοεῖν).

common sense), we have deprived pure intuition of its priority, which corresponds noetically to the priority of the present-at-hand in traditional ontology. ‘Intuition’ and ‘thinking’ are both derivatives of understanding, and already rather remote ones. Even the phenomenological ‘intuition of essences’ is grounded in existential understanding. (*BT* 147, italics in original)

Heidegger de-emphasizes the role of intuition in the hermeneutical circle here in his effort to ground it in the understanding. We can ask, however, given that understanding itself has possibilities, and that it can devote itself in various ways (*BT* 146), how is it that understanding is indeed devoted? In fact, in the one mention of *Aufmerksamkeit* in the text (discussed below), Heidegger is examining how concern turns when something cannot be used (enabling inspection and elimination of the disturbance; *BT* 355), which is a turn of attention. Similarly, when Heidegger says that every sense has its own domain of discovery, we must ask how is it that a given sense is selected for such engagement in the first place. For under normal circumstances all senses are available for worldly access; to which sense is one present at a given moment? For me to be able to say “I am seeing,” or “I am touching,” attention must be correspondingly deployed. It may be true that my feet are touching the ground, but only when attention shifts to the sensation can I say ‘I’ to that, can I say “I feel my feet touching the ground.” Attention as my presence is what enables me to say ‘I’ to any engagement.²²

²² The same applies to other modalities such as thought and imagination. It is implicit that attention is the basis for the activity, and thus it can be said that I am thinking, imagining, etc.

Of course, understanding is intimately involved in the selection process.²³ Attention moves to what is most salient, or relevant, or what matters most because it is understood to be so. But encounters with worldly entities cannot be reduced to understanding alone, for in that case there would be no possibility of fresh perception, or new insight. For this we need my presence at the site of manifestation of entities. As Heidegger says, sight provides general access to the world and its entities, and certainly if we had no understanding of Being and world it would indeed be inaccessible to us, but it must be asked how it is that particular entities are “discoverable in varying degrees of explicitness and with a varying circumspective penetration” (*BT* 71). What determines the quality of the encounters, the depth of revelation, if not attentiveness? The role of attention is ineliminable here.

It is interesting indeed that Heidegger studiously avoids the use of attention terms in this text. *Achten* and its conjugates only appear five times in *BT*, typically in contexts of Heidegger’s own activity (or that of others), such as “we can further elucidate the temporality of concern by giving heed [*achten*]...” (*BT* 354), or “Here we must notice [*achten*] that ...” (*BT* 389).²⁴ *Beachten* appears more often but in similarly peripheral usages, typically being translated as note or notice, while *betrachten* and *beobachten* typically appear as observation.

²³ I take understanding to be thrown projection throughout the paper, thereby including attunement in the understanding. E.g., state of mind always has its understanding, and understanding always has its mood (*BT* 143). See also *BT* 148, where Heidegger discusses the enigma of thrown-projective Being-in-the-World.

²⁴ In one instance Heidegger says we never pay heed (*achten*) to that which is ontically familiar, which “hides enigma after enigma existential-ontologically” (*BT* 371).

The other fundamental term, *Aufmerksamkeit*, appears only once in the text, in a context that provides a clue as to why these terms are not employed more meaningfully.²⁵ It appears in the discussion of the temporality of circumspective concern (§69), where Heidegger distinguishes between practical encounters and “thematical perception.” Inquiring into the existential structure of circumspective encounters, he says: “This question is now aimed not at those factual occasions which turn our attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*] to something already presented, but rather at the ontological meaning of the fact that it can thus be turned” (*BT* 354). So we see that Heidegger is contrasting the typical understanding of attention as emanating from an inner sphere toward pre-given objects with the hermeneutical intuition that he has developed.²⁶ Heidegger goes on here to discuss how indeed attention turns due to being situated in a context of involvement. Alternatively, we can see the turning of attention as arising out of the hermeneutical circle, where the understanding of the situation guides attention in its movement.

Other themes in *BT* can be related to attention, such as circumspective concern (*Umsicht*) which presents worldly engagement as embedded in a world and directed by concern, again presenting

²⁵ The adverb *aufmerksam* appears four times in a manner similar to the way that *achten* is deployed except for one instance where Heidegger discusses noticing that other people die (*BT* 257), which Marder (“What is Living,” 49) takes to suggest that attention is thematic in *BT*.

²⁶ It is interesting that Heidegger employs a term of Husserl’s for the turning of attention (*zuwenden*) in the 1929 Kant Book in discussing the ontology of the “play-space,” in what is a rare instance of attention appearing in an important context prior to 1939. It would appear that Heidegger here is in conversation with Husserl, who often refers to the turning of attention in what Heidegger would argue were “ontic” contexts, whereas Heidegger wants to point to the ontological dimension associated with the term. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Trans. R. Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), §34.

an alternative to the disembodied attention of the theoretical observer. In addition, Heidegger's discussion of listening and its relation to language in (§34) puts forward a theme that is present throughout his corpus. We will see textual support for the relation between listening and attention, but it can also be argued that the attentiveness is implicit in the notion of sustained listening. This implicit understanding can be seen, for instance, in the sentence "I am listening intently to the lecture, but my attention is otherwise engaged." We take this sentence to be nonsensical because we understand that attention is essential for sustained listening (or sustained presence in general). Thus the theme of listening (*Hören*) which is so important in Heidegger's treatment of language from early on, as early as the 1921 *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (GA 60)²⁷ and the 1924 *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* (GA 18),²⁸ is an essential dimension of his treatment of attention, as will be apparent in what follows.

It is not until *On the Essence of Language*, however, that Heidegger begins to make attention (in the form of *Aufmerksamkeit*) thematic in a sustained fashion.²⁹ Heidegger's lecture notes from this 1939 graduate seminar on Herder's *On the Origin of Language* provide a rich set of reflections on a variety of themes that are present in the Herder essay. Herder argues that language originates by way of *Besonnenheit* (translated as "reflective awareness") that enables us to attend (*Aufmerksamkeit*) to a specific distinguishing mark (*Merkmal*), and in fact he indicates

²⁷ *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, Trans. M. Fritsch and J. Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). See §11 of the lecture course "Augustine and Neo-Platonism."

²⁸ *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, Trans. R. Metcalf and M. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). See §13, entitled "Speaking-Being as Ability-to-Hear and as Possibility of Falling."

²⁹ *Achten* and its variants begin appearing in earnest in the 1940 *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst* (GA74), ed. Thomas Regehly, 2010, and in the 1941-42 *TE*.

their intimate relation in discussing “all the delicate and complex actions which we call attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*], reflection [*Reflexion*], abstraction, etc.”³⁰ Herder’s thought here is a classic statement of the selection problem that motivates the study of attention in cognitive psychology; as he puts it, out of “the vast ocean of sensations” which permeates the soul through all the “channels of the senses,” reflection (*Reflexion*) can “single out one wave, arrest it, concentrate its attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*] on it, and be conscious of being attentive [*aufmerke*].”³¹ Thus we will see here further evidence for attention as essential for the manifestation of entities in Heidegger.

In the course of a detailed analysis of the Herder text, Heidegger undertakes an extensive examination of *Aufmerksamkeit* and its relation to hearing, hearkening, and the distinguishing marks of language. Besides the isolated instance in *BT* mentioned above, this to my knowledge is the earliest thematic discussion of *Aufmerksamkeit* in Heidegger. In §12 of *OEL* Heidegger points to the “signs for this attention that holds firmly [*Male für dieses fest haltende Merken*].” We see here the key relation between mark (*Merk*) and attention (*merken, auf-merken*) which

³⁰ A. Gode and J. Moran, trans., *On the origin of language: Two essays*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 119.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 115. Leibniz is an influence here, who coined the term “apperception” in this context: “When we are not alerted, so to speak, to pay heed to certain of our own present perceptions, we allow them to slip by unconsidered and even unnoticed. But if someone alerts us to them straight away, and makes us take note, for instance, of some noise which we have just heard, then we remember it and are aware of [apperceive] just having had some sense of it.” Leibniz, G., *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Trans. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54.

Heidegger highlights, and also the relation with words as “mark-signs [*Merkzeichen*]” which are somehow furnished with sounds. Distinct entities are recognized and named with marks.³²

Continuing in §13 entitled “Reflection and attention (differentiating), distinct, interpretable representing,” he sketches out more features of attention, relating noticing (*merken*) to perception (*vernehmen*), “attending to [*aufmerken*]” to “turning oneself toward” and “staying with [*dabeibleiben*],” memory (retaining, *sich merken*) with “to keep mark, to store, to register, to note down [*Merkmal behalten, aufbewahren, verzeichnen, vermerken*]”, and noticing as letting presence, to make-present, retainable through “signs” (*merken: als An-wesen lassen, Gegenwartigen, durch »Male« Behaltbares*). Thus in these sketches we see the intimate relation between attention, language, memory, and presencing. In particular we see the two dimensions of attention noted above, that of selection (noticing) and effort (staying with). In this text he also relates attention (*merken*) to hearkening (*Horchen*) and attentive listening (*Zuhören*).³³

³² Given the intimate relation between *auf-merken* and *merken*, I follow Gregory and Unna in translating *merken* as attention in appropriate contexts.

³³ It is interesting that OEL was produced in the aftermath of the work on *Beiträge*. Heidegger’s responses to Herder’s assertions regarding attention inevitably fall back on the being-historical concepts that are developed in that work. His approach is to identify what is innovative in Herder while pointing to its limitations from the perspective of being-historical thinking. One tension lies in the association of attention with reason and its attendant metaphysical assumptions, while also recognizing attention’s higher (or more originary) possibilities. The importance here is that for Herder the mark of reason/reflective awareness that produces the word of the soul is the basis for the origination of language, while Heidegger will seek a deeper essence of reason and its relation to attention. The alternative that Heidegger offers is *beyng* (*Das Seyn*) as the ground-word, and saying as making noticeable (*Merkbarmachung*) (§28). The key notions that Heidegger focuses on to bridge the two metaphysics are hearing, listening, and hearkening, together with attention. Indeed, for Herder the human being is a “hearkening,

In a section entitled “Hearkening as Middle of the Sensorium Commune,” Heidegger says:

Without properly grasping it and indeed measuring its importance, Herder executes here an interpretation of hearing as *hearkening* in the sense of *being-attentive-on* [*Auf-merkens*]. But this as ground-execution of the *erecting* of the

attentive creature [*horchendes, merkendes Geschöpf*],” and hearing is the “middle sense,” the “gateway to the soul” that is essential for language, lying between the darkness of touch and the excessive brightness of vision (Op. Cit., 129, 144, translation modified to follow OEL §78. *Merkendes* is translated as “noting” in the Gode and Moran version.) Herder also sees the human being as a “hearing, listening creature” (132). The key questions for Heidegger are broached early on, where he asks “Does the human being hearken because he hears, or can he hear because he hearkens and obeys? And what makes hearkening possible, being attentive-on and attentive-toward [*Auf-merken und das Hin-merken*] as perceiving of ‘beings’ ...?” (§7) Hearing enables the perception of “sounding acts,” but Heidegger inquires into the being of such sounding. How is it capable of giving something to be perceived if is not already a mark? What Heidegger wishes to do is move the seat of language from the inner realm of the soul to the clearing of being, when he points to “*the steadfastness* [*Inständigkeit*] *that hearkens and awaits in the clearing*” (§7, translation modified).

In Section XV entitled “Saying and Hearing—Sound and Silence,” Heidegger links hearkening (*Horchen*) with attentive listening (*Lauschen, Zuhören*) and obedience (*Gehorsam*), where the theme is submission to something higher, to what is most question-worthy, most deserving of attention. When he asks what does one hearken to, the response is “*steadfastness in what is questionable and question-worthy*” (§91, trans. modified). The call is to “*Be still! Hearken! Listening to-as being silent....*” (§92). Thus we see the relation sketched between silence, stillness, hearkening, steadfastness, and attention. Heidegger now turns to the question of the relation between mark and sound (§93), and says that sound is integral to meaning, that the mark resounds [*tönen*], or rather that “*the resounding is taken as sign in attention* [*Merken genommen*], it resounds in the soul, that is, into the *understanding of being* [*Seinsverständnis*],” and we have moved to sounding as “*self-showing as a being, an appearing.*” Thus we see the move here from Herder’s positing of the origin in the soul/reflection/reason to the attention that is grounded in the understanding of being.

self, of *reflection* [*Besinnung*]. The *setting-oneself-in-the-open space-of-the-great-circle*, to adopt the indicated stand is the being-attentive-on in the sense of “reason,” *reflection*. But this also points to an essentially deeper and completely different consideration: The attending [*Aufmerken*] to beings as pro-jecting of and self-thrusting in the clearing of being [*des Seyn*]. (§99)

Thus we see attention as the basis for *Besinnung*, which concept that is so important in the *Beiträge* begins to fade as attention (especially *achten*) rises into prominence, and we see in “pro-jecting of and self-thrusting” further justification for McNeill’s conceiving of attention as the futural ecstasis.³⁴ We are left with a very suggestive and open line of inquiry into the nature of attention that will be pursued in Heidegger’s further thought.

While *On the Essence of Language* is limited to the discussion of *aufmerken*, *achten* begins to make its thematic appearance in the 1940 *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst* (GA74) in remarks such as “Become attentive [*achtsam*] to Beyng (Ereignis) from care [*Behutsamkeit*] for the truth of Beyng” (§68).³⁵ A much more extensive discussion involving

³⁴ The importance of attention can be seen further in Heidegger’s commentary on Herder’s notion of hearing; for while Herder argues that hearing is a special sense, Heidegger suggests that hearing is essential because “it is the hearkening as being attentive [*Aufmerken*] and this essential for coming into being of word” (§100). Thus while *hören* had been a key notion in the discussion of discourse as early as 1921, we now see the link with attention as *aufmerken*. Further sketches suggest the relation between attention, stillness and silence that has already been put forward, such as “Listen’—*be still, silence the silence*” (§109), and a deeper essence of reason in hearkening and listening attentively (§108).

³⁵ The heading for §68 is “*Achtsam werden dem Seyn (Ereignis)*,” while the next line reads “*Aus der Behutsamkeit für die Wahr-heit des Seyns.*”

both *aufmerken* and *achten* appears in the 1941-42 *The Event* (GA71), the sixth of the private treatises on being-historical thinking. Here attention (in the form of *achten* and *Aufmerksamkeit*, which are treated synonymously) appears as extensively involved in the web of concepts which populate the text. We can enter at Section XI B, entitled “Beginning and Heedfulness [*Aufmerksamkeit*],” where Heidegger tells us that “*Heedfulness provides the word of the saying of the beginning*, in that it “allows [*läßt*] the word ... from the fact that it marks and thereby allows being as beginning to emerge [*aufgehen*] (§324, italics in original). Thus we see the assertion of an intimate relation between attention, the word, and letting, which for the Heidegger of the *Le Thor* Seminar is the deepest meaning of being.³⁶ Heidegger also points to the relation between *Anmerkungen* and *Aufmerksamkeit*: “The markings [*Anmerkungen*] are the heedful [*aufmerkend*] words of the thinking of the history of being....” (§320), and to the relation between *Aufmerksamkeit* and mark-“sign” [*Merk- “Zeichen”*]: “The mark—that by which something “emerges” [*aufgeht*] for us, by which we “notice” [*merken*] something, i.e., are struck by it, feel its presence [*Anwesenheit*]....” (§323). Thus we see again not only the intimate relation between attention and language, but also its relation with the very emergence, the very presencing, of Being itself.

In Section (§321) Heidegger puts forward relations between attention and steadfastness (*Inständigkeit*, the later version of resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*]), inceptual remembrance [*Andenken*], essential thinking, and intimations (of the concealed divine). He also writes:

Heedfulness—as inceptual thinking ... is outside of all ‘reflexion’ and every ‘systematics’ and ‘science’. The plight and necessity of heedfulness constitute the

³⁶ Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, Trans. A. Mitchell and F. Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 59.

steadfastness of Da-sein; i.e., they constitute the experience of Da-sein itself out of the greeting of the beginning. (§320)

Heedfulness [*Aufmerksamkeit*] is the heedful [*aufmerksame*] name for essential thinking, the changed ‘title’ for ‘philosophy’. (§321)

This set of relations, especially the relations of attention to steadfastness and inceptual thinking, connects attention to virtually every major concept in the text.³⁷

Texts produced in the aftermath of these two works include significant pronouncements that importantly involve attention (indeed, references to attention, especially in the form of *achten*, abound throughout the later work). For instance, in *Parmenides* (WS 1942-43, GA54) and *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister”* (SS 1942, GA53), we see the relation between attention and essential knowing:

Everything depends on our paying heed [*achten*] to the claim arising out of the thoughtful word. Only in this way, paying heed to the claim, do we come to know the dictum. What man heeds [*achtet*], what respect [*Achtung*] he gives to the

³⁷ In Section VII entitled “The Event and the Human Being,” we see again the relation between attention and care: “The event is the consigning of the human being into that entity which has to preserve ... and ground the truth of being.... The preservation [*verwahren*] and protecting [*Hut*] of the event. The solicitousness [*Behutsamkeit*] of stewardship. The heedfulness [*Aufmerksamkeit*] of the stewards [*Wächter*]” (§196). “The appropriating event ‘is’, ‘the fact that’ human beings ‘are’, which now means steadfast in the clearing and in its stewardship” (§205). We also see the relation between attention and *Ereignis*: “*The simple experience of appropriation* [*Ereignung*]. Heeding [*Aufmerken*] that ‘we’ can never *not* think being. Attending [*Achten*] to the question-worthiness of that which we heed in such heeding [*was wir, so aufmerkend, merken*]. Attentiveness [*Achtsamkeit*] to this simplicity and to the pain of enduring the difference” (§210).

heeded, how original and how constant [*stetig*] he is in his heedfulness, that is what is decisive as regards the dignity allotted to man out of history.

To think is to heed the essential. In such heedfulness essential knowing resides.³⁸

We shall attempt the wholly “precursory” task of becoming attentive [*aufmerksam*] to Hölderlin’s poetry.... Thoughtful reflection [*Nachdenken*] is meant to awaken our attentiveness [*Aufmerksamkeit*].... Even the will to knowledge itself is not yet attentiveness in the sense of a fundamental attunement from out of which we always have a sense only for the essential and have the sole vocation of marking out [*herauszumerken*] the essential from everything else so as to retain it in the future, to “attend [*merken*]” to it.³⁹

Additionally, in the essay “*Die Einzigkeit des Dichters*” from *Zu Hölderlin–Griechenlandreisen* (1943, GA75) we see the relation between attention, time, and original remembrance,⁴⁰ and in *Country Path Conversations* (1944-45, GA77) we see the relation between attention and waiting

³⁸ *Parmenides*, Trans. A. Schuwer and R. Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 3.

³⁹ *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister”*, Trans. W. McNeill and J. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 13.

⁴⁰ “The question alone is whether we remain heedless [*achtlos*] with regard to time, which is always and authentically the time to come, or whether we learn attentiveness [*Achtsamkeit*] and, from it, the original remembrance of what is to be considered.... But how do we learn attentiveness, we who are the late-born of an inattentiveness that has endured for centuries? We learn attentiveness by peering into the inconspicuously simple, appropriating it more originally over time and turning ever more awestruck by it.” See *Zu Hölderlin – Griechenlandreisen*, ed. C. Ochwadt, 2000, 42-43.

(as noted above).⁴¹ Clearly, then, attention is a major concept in Heidegger beginning with the turn of the 1940s. However, thus far we have primarily seen sketches and pronouncements from Heidegger on the nature of attention. After a relatively fallow period following his post-war dismissal from the university system, the first lecture series after reinstatement was the 1951-52 *What is Called Thinking?*, which contains a much more systematic treatment. Here Heidegger translates Parmenides' $\nu\omicron\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ as *in-die-Acht-nehmen*, compared to its translation as *Vernehmen* in the 1935 "Introduction to Metaphysics," which is further indication of the emergence of attention in the form of *achten* at the turn of the 1940s.

WCT is an important text because Heidegger argues that thinking and Being are the Same, that they belong together.⁴² When thinking is understood as taking heed (in conjunction with gathering) the implication is that attention and Being are the Same. Heidegger asks "What is called thinking?" in four ways, the most fundamental of which is "What calls for thinking?" He concludes that we are called on to attend the presencing of what comes into presence, and that attending belongs essentially to that presencing, thereby enabling the more profound manifestation of Being.

⁴¹ "Yet if you don't consider that in Logos, as the gathering toward the originally all-unifying One, something like attentiveness [*Achtsamkeit*] prevails, and if you begin to ask yourself whether attentiveness is not in fact the same as the constant waiting [*Warten*] on that which we named the pure coming, then perhaps one day you will sense that ... the essence of the human as the being that waits is experienced." (*CPC* 146)

⁴² In the *Der Spiegel* interview, Heidegger says: "Perhaps I may refer here to my lectures which appeared in 1954 with the title, *What Is Called Thinking?* Perhaps it is also a sign of the times that this book of all my publications has been read the least." See Stassen, M., Ed., *Martin Heidegger: Philosophical and Political Writings*, (New York: Continuum, 2003), 42.

II. Attention and Presence

WCT consists of twenty one lectures that were given during the winter and summer semesters of 1951 and 1952. In the last six lectures Heidegger discusses fragments of Parmenides which involve νοεῖν, which is typically translated as thinking. The focus of these lectures is the relation between νοεῖν and λέγειν, which Heidegger translates as attending and gathering. We see this gathering in the notion of concentration that is associated with the focusing of attention, as the staying with an activity results in the orientation of our factual being to the accomplishment of a task. As Heidegger puts it,

Man learns when he disposes everything he does so that it answers to whatever essentials are addressed to him at any given moment. We learn to think by attending [*achten*] to what there is to think about. (*WCT*, 4, trans. modified)

The effort of attention can thus be characterized as a staying with that enables a gathering.⁴³ We stand in readiness to deploy the associated resources when we are attentive. This is one sense in which our manifestation is more profound when we are gathered in this manner.

I wish to show that for Heidegger, sustained and acute attentiveness (steadfastness) enables a deeper, more profound manifestation of and relation with encountered beings. This can be seen in terms of the hermeneutical circle. Attention is guided by understanding to encounters which are further constitutive of the understanding, which in turn is the basis for the further guidance of attention. It is essential to recognize, however, that although understanding *guides* attention, it is

⁴³ “In attending we collect ourselves toward what lies before us, and gather what we have taken heed of” (*WCT* 209, trans. modified).

not determinative of what it encounters. It is the possibility of acute and sustained attention that enables transcendence. We are called on to be ever vigilant so as to stay open to a more profound understanding. That vigilance offers the possibility of going deeper:

To keep clear of prejudice we must be ready and willing to listen. Such readiness [*Bereitwilligkeit*] allows us to surmount the boundaries in which all customary views are confined, and to reach a more open territory. (*WCT* 12-13)

The effort is not staring or “mental” concentration, but is rather a waiting, a staying with, tarrying, or dwelling, as McNeill has argued. That is, the present understanding which is ultimately constituted by the understanding of Being may be transcended by a “leap” into “more open territory” by way of extraordinary attentiveness.⁴⁴ In fact, this is what Heidegger calls for, preparation for such a leap by way of a lifetime of practice. This is the way to go from the surface of things, from deeply engrained views of the nature of things to a deeper understanding and experience of what is.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ “We must explore to reach the point where only the leap will help further. The leap alone takes us into the neighborhood where thinking resides.... The leap takes us abruptly to where everything strikes us as strange.... All would not be well if the strangeness were due only to the fact that you, the listeners, are not yet listening [*hinhören*] closely enough....” (*WCT* 12-13).

⁴⁵ A related theme is that of getting underway: “Hence our need and necessity first of all to hear the appeal of what is most thought-provoking. But if we are to perceive what gives us food for thought, we must for our part get underway to learn thinking.... What we can do in our present case, or anyway can learn, is to listen closely” (25). Thus we must first learn to listen to the appeal of what calls for thinking in order to be able to get underway, which learning requires attention itself. Heidegger also says that once underway, “we must give particularly close attention [*achten*] to that stretch of way on which we are putting our feet. We meant to be attentive [*acht zu haben*] to it from the first lecture on....” (45-46), and “if we are to remain underway we must first of all and constantly give attention [*beachten*] to the way” (170).

For Heidegger, the common meanings and prejudices which capture attention prevent thinking from going deeper. Only the effort of acute and sustained attention enables us to break out of the circle and go deeper into the nature of the things themselves, to hear them speak:

Language likes to let our speech drift away into the more obvious meanings of words. It is as though man *had to make an effort* to live properly with language. It is as though such a dwelling is prone to succumb to the danger of commonness.

(118-19, italics added)

This means that attention (synonymous with the *staying with* [*Aufenthalt*] of dwelling) is confined to the surface of things because it is captured by the superficial meanings which in turn reflect the shallowness of our own dwelling. This theme appears in several other contexts. For instance, Heidegger says that ideas as commonly formed provide only “the appearances of surfaces and foreground facets” (82), that only a readiness to listen (13) allows us go beyond “the tendencies of the age” which “always remain only in the foreground of what is” (55). Even the thought of Nietzsche himself “speaks only in the foreground, so long as we understand it exclusively in terms of the language of traditional thinking, instead of listening for what remains unspoken in it” (55). But we ordinarily do not wish to waste time tarrying (*aufhalten*) over the sense of individual words (127), and indeed it is very difficult for us to pay heed (*achten*) to what the words say (130). The only hope to be able to “reach what *is*” (66) lies in acute and sustained attention. It is listening to what is unspoken that enables us to go deeper than the common meanings.

This is why Heidegger so often calls for direct apprehension, freshness and depth of experience, and more profound intuition of particulars that are encountered. After a discussion of attending directly to a tree, where we *are* together (41), he considers how a mother might deal with a wayward son:

It will be easier the more directly [*unmittelbarer*] she can get him to listen—not just condescend to listen, but listen in such a way that he can no longer stop wanting to do it. And why? Because his ears have been opened and he now can hear what is in accord with his nature. (48)⁴⁶

Such direct apprehension enables us to encounter things as the unique entities that they are in their Being, in a fresh manner:

To acknowledge and respect consists in letting every thinker's thought come to us as something that is in each case unique, never to be repeated, inexhaustible—and being shaken to the depths by what is unthought in his thought. (76)

The thesis is that we are not attending to objects that are present-at-hand, but rather that entities come into presence by way of attention. The acuity of the attention determines the depth of the manifestation. This is why he says regarding the showing that is associated with saying,

Words are wellsprings that are found and dug up in the telling, wellsprings that must be found and dug up again and again, that easily cave in, but that at times also well up when least expected. If we do not go to the spring again and again, the buckets and kegs stay empty, or their content stays stale. (130)

⁴⁶ The relation between attention and direct apprehension is also evident in the following thinking on the Parmenidean fragments: “But we prefer to give our attention [*achten*] directly [*unmittelbar*] to what is recounted here, and in and through it raise the question what it is that is addressed to him, rather than prove from the outside [*von außen*], and at length, and fundamentally in vain, that what speaks here is something like a calling” (175).

This is the effort that must be repeated again and again to preserve the meaning of words that have been retrieved, which is the essence of care-taking. Heidegger is pointing here to another relation with language by way of extraordinary attentiveness.⁴⁷

In order to see how he makes the case for the possibility of depth that is associated with attention, it must be recognized that any such claim depends on an associated metaphysics. That is, the very understanding of a depth dimension comes out of the metaphysics that Heidegger himself proposes. Since he contests the predominant metaphysics, he does not employ a traditional form of logical argumentation, for that is associated with the very metaphysics that he seeks to overcome. For Heidegger logical argumentation is limited when it comes to the true stuff of philosophy, for the very assumptions that are essential for such argumentation are in

⁴⁷ We see numerous examples of Heidegger discussing attention as enabling a deeper listening to what words *say* rather than approaching matters by way of universals and abstractions. For instance, “we give specific attention [*achten*] to what the word says” (128), “When we hear directly [*unmittelbar hören*] what is spoken directly [*unmittelbar*], we do not at first hear the words as terms, still less the terms as mere sound” (129), “Attention [*das Achten*] to what words tell us is supposedly the decisive step and directive on that way of thinking which is known by the name philosophy” (131). Other examples are “we attend [*beachten*] to the word as a word” (128), and “let us give close attention [*achten*] to what the words thinking, thought have to tell” (133). Discussing how assertions speak, he says “we must even now pay attention [*aufmerksam machen*] to the question posed for us by the assertion when we consider the way in which it speaks, or how it speaks” (37). In the accompanying essay “Moira,” we see “By placing its enigmatic key word at the beginning as predicate, the saying calls on us to dwell on the word attentively [*aufmerksam*], returning to it again and again.... Therefore we are compelled to focus our gaze relentlessly upon the preferred position of τὸ αὐτό, the Same....” *Early Greek Thinking*, Trans. D. Krell and F. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 92. Referred to as *EGT*.

question.⁴⁸ Each metaphysics comes with its own possibilities regarding claims and their validation; what is required is a means of adjudication between the views themselves.

For this purpose let us consider how to make the case for the claim in traditional fashion, using metaphysical assumptions that are employed in the cognitive science literature. This is appropriate because attention is the subject of intensive study in that discipline, which in turn is informed by mainstream (Anglo-American) philosophical assumptions. It is first necessary to define the terms that are involved; the three key notions are attention, being, and depth of manifestation and relation. Under this metaphysics beings are mind-independent, invariant to the orientation of attention. In Heideggerian terms this means that an entity is constantly present, present-at-hand, subject to observation that does not affect its being. We also assume, following this literature, that attention is a selection mechanism that enables one to focus on a subset of the stimuli which impinge upon the senses at any given time, thereby enabling the formation of representations of the real world. We thus see that attention is also recognized as essential for intuition in this literature, even if the encounter is only the transmission of information from

⁴⁸ Heidegger offers many comments regarding the limits of logical argumentation, starting with the oft repeated derivation of the notion of logic itself from the Greek understanding of *λόγος*. Rather than assertions, more attention is called for. Instead of moving forward in the ordinary sense of progress, Heidegger wants to move “back” to origins. In *WCT* he says to “burn your lecture notes” (158), that attention in the form of listening “is always up to us alone.” Rather than “proving things from the outside, and at length, and fundamentally in vain” (175), we must “give our attention [*achten*] directly [*unmittelbar*]” to the matter at hand; that is, direct apprehension in the manner indicated by McNeill of tarrying or dwelling. Rather than proceeding from assumptions that are deemed to be unproblematic, Heidegger says that absolute validity is a faith, whereas we must stay with the problematic character of thinking (177; see also 212).

object to subject. Subjects passively receive environmental information and act on the basis of the representations that are produced.

However, the problem arises immediately that the notion of manifestation of entities is not intelligible on this view, and therefore that the Heideggerian claim cannot be argued on this basis. Entities appear differently from different perspectives, but that has nothing to do with the nature of the entity in itself. So the claim must be restated to fit the metaphysics, along the lines of “attention enables insight into entities in the course of scientific investigation, and more attention means more insight.” Depth of manifestation now becomes depth of cognition. It is easy to argue that persistent attention to an object yields more information about it; this is not problematic at all, in fact it is commonly accepted. Although subject and object are free-standing and independent, physical and physiological processes enable the flow of information from entities to the subject which is filtered by the mechanism of attention, and more attention directed at entities generally means more information.

But we see that scientific investigation and its associated theories depend upon observation and hence attention, which is in turn guided by the understanding that is associated with scientific/theoretical cognition. That is, since scientific investigation has its own praxis, it follows that the associated objects are not purely present-at-hand, contrary to the associated metaphysics.⁴⁹ For scientific understanding determines how attention is deployed in selecting observations for processing. That understanding is continually updated as stimuli are processed,

⁴⁹ Heidegger says in *BT* (153) that the task of grasping the present-at-hand is essentially unintelligible, meaning that all worldly engagement is accompanied by understanding.

which is the basis for further observation. These assertions are uncontroversial, and indeed perceptual cycles are well recognized in this literature.⁵⁰

However, the metaphysical basis for the scientific understanding, which includes the assumption of invariance of subject and object to the transmission of information, is not in question, and therefore the deliverances of scientific attention do not serve to validate that metaphysics. It is rather taken on faith. This is in contrast to other dimensions of the understanding which *are* put in question, and which exhibit considerable historicity. The more obvious case is when there is a paradigm shift, but even incremental progress will result in a change in focus and an associated change in the way that the objects of investigation come into presence for the researchers. In such an event the stance of the researchers is altered toward the objects, they have a different theoretical and experimental focus, and they see different things as the objects respond to new experimental conditions. Ultimately such a dynamic is the only basis for validation of the metaphysics itself, for there is nothing more for us than how we understand the objects—how they are made manifest in many ways as we engage with them—which includes of course any theoretical perspectives. Since for Heidegger there is always a (concealed) depth dimension to an entity, this would imply that there is always the possibility of a more profound emergence and therefore an enhanced understanding; or, alternatively, that there is also the possibility of erosion of the understanding as attention is otherwise deployed.

⁵⁰ E.g., Neisser, U., *Cognition and reality* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1976), and Weizsäcker, V.V., *Der gestaltkreis. Theorie der einheit von wahrnehmung und bewegung* (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1940).

The implicit assumption on the standard view is that physical objects are not subject to change due to shifts in the understanding of human researchers. To be clear, however, the notion of a physical object must be defined, and it must be recognized that “the physical” is itself a conception that is subject to change. What *is* such an object? Perhaps it is an inanimate entity that has all of the known physical properties. But the problem here is that we can learn more about physical properties, which would lead to alternative modes of manifestation of such an object, as indicated above. This approach does not address the question of its ultimate nature. So what then is the basis for the standard view on physical objects? An idealist position would be anathema to these theorists; no, this is a realist metaphysics. What then can such an object be but what is encountered in the course of activity, which is understood within the context of all involvement, i.e., the world? We engage with a wide range of animate and inanimate objects, all of which are made manifest in various ways. The vaunted presence of regularities and predictive power has limited purchase regarding questions of the ultimate being of these entities. What are they if not how they are understood in such a manner, which includes but is not exhausted by such regularities? All that we have is Being as presencing, what is made manifest in the course of activity, which changes as attention provides deliverances that reconstitute the understanding, for objects animate and inanimate alike.⁵¹

⁵¹ Being is understood here as presencing, although Heidegger does gesture toward *Ereignis* when he says: “There is no assurance such thinking will clothe the presence of what is present, in words, with all possible clarity and in every respect. Even more, it remains undecided whether in the “presencing of what is present” there will appear That which constitutes the presencing of what is present. It would be a mistake, then, for us to take the view that Being of beings meant merely, for all time, the presence of what is present. Of course the essential nature of presence along gives us enough to think about. And even *this*—what the presence of that which is present might mean in its Greek sense—has not been adequately traced in our inquiry” (*WCT* 235-36). We can thus take

Another test of the metaphysics is to consider the treatment of attention itself. In cognitive science the virtually unanimous position is that attention is not a unitary phenomenon, but is rather a “catch-all term for how the brain controls its own information processing,” and “a characteristic and property of multiple perceptual and cognitive control mechanisms.”⁵² This can be contrasted with our everyday understanding of attention, which James characterized by the famous “Everyone knows what attention is.” We implicitly know what attention is, we know what to do when someone asks for our attention; or rather, when someone asks for our attention they already have it if we hear what they say. It is simply part of everyday experience, and we know when people are not paying attention to us or when our attention is called for. The response to this sort of “folk psychology” on the part of cognitive scientists is to dismiss any such experience as irrelevant to the findings of rigorous experimentation which themselves rely upon unspoken metaphysical assumptions. On the other hand the Heideggerian view on attention associates it with intuition, with the encounters with particular objects that fill our lives. When we are gathered and extraordinarily attentive in such an encounter there is a unitary experience that provides insight into what attention indeed is.

As a species of understanding, any metaphysics is subject to the hermeneutical circle, and such an understanding must stay open to the deliverances of attention. Heidegger’s metaphysics takes into consideration exactly this requirement. We are called on to stay open in order for the depth

Heidegger’s thinking on *Ereignis* into account by understanding Being as *how* things come into presence. We also take account of how Being needs us and how we belong to Being in what follows.

⁵² See Chun, M., Golomb, J., & Turk-Browne, N., “A taxonomy of external and internal attention,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 62 (2011):73–101.

dimension to be made more manifest. For Heidegger this is the philosophical quest, to seek a deeper understanding of Being, which is the ultimate assumption in any argumentation. He puts it well when he considers what it is to stand before a tree in bloom in a meadow:

The tree and we meet one another.... This face to face meeting is not, then, one of those “ideas” buzzing about in our heads.... We *are* now, men who have leapt, out of the familiar realm of science and even ... out of the realm of philosophy. Where have we leapt?... On that soil upon which we live and die, if we are honest with ourselves. We must first leap onto the soil on which we really stand. (*WCT* 41)

Heidegger is saying that the scientific world view is so powerful that it requires a leap to get to the essentials of experience. He asks how science decides which dimensions of the tree are considered to be real; is it the tree viewed at the cellular level, or as a mechanical system of sustenance, or is it the tree as we directly experience it? Indeed, how does science derive the authority to opine on such matters?

We are today rather inclined to favor a supposedly superior physical and physiological knowledge, and to drop the blooming tree.... The thing that matters first and foremost ... is not to drop the tree in bloom, but for once to let it stand where it stands.... To this day thought has never let the tree stand where it stands. (*WCT* 44)

This means that staying with the experience of the tree enables it to come to full fruition, to be made manifest more profoundly. What could be the basis for such an assertion? It can only be the experience of standing before the tree itself in a stance of extraordinary and acute presence,

and seeing what is thereby made manifest. For, as we have seen, for Heidegger attention is “essential knowing”—the ultimate basis for inquiry into the nature of things as they unfold.

Heidegger’s argument for the depth dimension is that on the standard assumptions temporality is not properly considered, and that the very manifestation of an entity is ignored in considering its essence. But how is such a claim to be adjudicated? Ultimately it must be experienced; but is it possible to experience the very coming into presence of an entity? Heidegger claims that it is, that while we are typically absorbed in the objects as they come into presence and therefore unaware of their manifestation, it is possible to become aware of the presencing itself by way of acute attentiveness. That awareness of presencing is necessary in turn for a deeper manifestation and relation with encountered entities. In the companion piece to *WCT*, “Moirai,” which was developed from an undelivered portion of the lecture series, Heidegger notes the dependence of attention ($\nu\omicron\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$) upon gathering ($\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu$), and concludes that attention is a bringing forward into view that *completes* [*vollbringen*] *the gathering* that is called for by $\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\nu$ (the duality of individual beings and Being), which is why $\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\nu$ needs efforts of human attention that are directed in the appropriate manner.⁵³ We belong to Being because the manifestation of entities depends upon the effort (or lack thereof) of attention—the presencing of Being would not be the same without us. We emerge out of Being; Being needs the presencing of attention, which need binds it to the Presencing of beings.⁵⁴ It is for us, and we belong to it. There is no external perspective for

⁵³ *EGT* 91.

⁵⁴ “Being is present to man neither incidentally nor only on rare occasions. Being is present and abides only as it concerns man through the claim it makes on him. For it is man, open toward Being, who alone lets Being arrive as presence. Such becoming present needs the openness of a clearing, and by this need remains appropriated to human being. This does not at all mean that Being is posited first and only by man. On the contrary, the following

what Being might otherwise be. Thus it is only by way of effort of attention itself that it is possible to test the claim about attention and the associated possibility of depth of presenting of Being.

III. Implications

We have seen the approaches that come out of the two alternative metaphysics. On the standard view it is assumed that we are fundamentally isolated from the surrounding environment. It is only by way of signals that are emitted from objects in our vicinity that representations of their natures are formed; otherwise we do not enjoy direct access. It is taken as self-evident that subject and object are invariant to the effects of attention, which is seen as a mechanism in a world of physical and physiological processes. Heidegger, on the other hand, puts forward another metaphysics that offers the possibility of gathering the attention and thereby entering into direct and more profound relation with the things of this world.

What are the stakes here? On the one view humans do not belong, living in a universe where presence-at-hand is the prevalent ontology and relating to beings indirectly by way of representations. Heidegger has elaborated in considerable detail how such a position has come to predominate. Alternatively, he brackets all such assumptions by opening the question of Being, asking what *is* and holding the question open with extraordinary attention.

becomes clear: Man and Being are appropriated to each other. They belong to each other.” *Identity and Difference*, Trans. J. Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 31-32.

If we accept the claim that steadfastness and acuity of attention enable more profound presencing, then it follows that we belong, that we are related to all that is because we are involved how things are made manifest. Heidegger also suggests that being open to a more profound presencing may offer hints of the divine. So the stakes are high. Thus the question is, is it true that we belong, that listening/attending (*hören*) and belonging (*gehören*) are related? The question can only be put to the test of attention itself.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR WORKS OF HEIDEGGER

BT: *Being and Time*, Trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

Pagination from the German, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993).

CPC: *Country Path Conversations*, Trans. B. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

EGT: *Early Greek Thinking*, Trans. D. Krell and F. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

OEL: *On the Essence of Language*, Trans. W. Gregory and Y. Unna (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

TE: *The Event*, Trans. R. Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

WCT: *What Is Called Thinking?*, Trans. F. Wieck and J. Gray (New York, Harper & Row, 1968).