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## How Does Thinking Begin?

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*The following essay is an expanded version of a presentation I gave at the IWM Junior Fellow's Conference. To fit the occasion, I selected a theme which I thought would be of interest to everyone present, including the non-philosophers. When thinking about how I would prepare the expanded version, I chose to preserve the conversational tone rather than transform the essay into a format more suitable for an academic journal. This is by no means to be taken to mean that I have taken this essay less seriously than I would have otherwise. On the contrary, I believe that the more accessible style is better suited to stimulate philosophical thinking. Much of what follows is, admittedly, somewhat difficult to assimilate, despite the style. The subject matter makes this unavoidable.*

Let us address ourselves to the problem of thinking. The theme, being too large for compact treatment, needs to be narrowed somewhat. I propose that we think about thinking in its inception, in its first manifestation as thinking. Let us ask then, how does thinking begin?

When beginning to think one must necessarily begin with something. This something, offering itself to an intellectual concern, need, if it is to be thought or

investigated, stand before one affected in its givenness by a modality of apprehension which finds its linguistic counterpart in the form of a question. Amongst the multiplicity of question-forms recognized to be theoretical in character (e.g., 'How did X bring about Y?' and 'What is X made of?') one stands out for its simplicity, clarity and forcefulness of expression: 'What is X?' This question possesses the attribute of, considered in respect to its merely linguistic form, being common to both everyday life and that segment or modification of it which is theoretical in its orientation. In its practical guise, the question 'what is it?' and the related question 'what is that?' are normally addressed to another intelligent being with the view of acquiring some useful information in response. Though one could pose this question to oneself with the intention of stimulating one's memory so as to acquire useful information or else to initiate an inquiry which would culminate in the possession of such information, this type of act is derivative of the common communicative function, a function which presupposes an instrumentalization of the other. In its theoretical manifestation, however, the question is not to be understood in connection with the intention to acquire information from another. What is most striking is that this question can be, in its theoretical modality, posed to no one at all. This apparently incommunicative question 'what is X?' would seem to correspond to a type of interest which is non-pragmatic in character. Otherwise put, one may pose the question 'what is X?' from a theoretical interest which is detached from the presupposition that the content of the possible 'answer' is necessarily subordinated to some further end. Granting that a question is only posed in the hope of acquiring or making progress towards an answer, it follows that the interest here is that of knowing what something is for the very sake of that knowing.

It should be observed that many today deny that knowledge is desirable for its own sake. Before even attempting to take a stand on the issue of the good of pure theory, we should first attempt to understand what it is that is being repudiated. That is, we must first fill out our understanding of theoretical thinking. So, to continue, let us recall the obvious truth that all human labor is motivated. The spiritual (I am thinking of the German term *geistig* here) labor initiated with the posing of the question itself derives impulse from at least two exclusive types of psychic occurrence or attunement. I refer to curiosity on the one hand and to what may be termed amazement on the other. With the English term 'amazement' I translate the ancient Greek term *Thuamadzein*. I wish to proceed by first commenting on amazement and only later touching upon curiosity. Amazement is an affective response to the presence or experience of something questionable. By 'questionable' I do not mean worthy of doubt, but of being thought about, pondered, reflected upon, investigated, understood and of generally forming a point of concentration

for one's spiritual application. From the factual givenness of amazement, some have wished to infer that there is something about the thing or experience which is the cause, reason or ground of the value-determined quality of the event. We note that this perspective locates value outside of individual humans or at least places it in a relation which comprehends human and thing. Let me add that many will admit that what is commonly considered to be theoretical endeavor is given impetus very often by something better described as curiosity than amazement. The difference has far-reaching implications. In contradistinction to amazement, curiosity permits of the interpretation that the value of inquiry derives solely from the interests of the inquirer. In understanding the relation between interest and thing studied, one can proceed in either of two directions. First, one may move from a subjective state to the mistaken attribution of value to the object, an act perhaps motivated by something we can for present purposes call will-to-power, i.e. self-aggrandizement through the construction of a natural rank-ordering confirming or validating one's own preferences. Second, one can move from the veridical perception of value to a comparatively enfeebled motivation deriving from the contingent states of the individual subject. Suffice it to state here that the preferred derivation or point of orientation is not merely a matter of the contribution it would make to a larger theory of human nature or of being qua being. It is a matter of the values with which one begins to think. So to close this immediate line of thought, we conclude that when beginning to think, one not only begins with a thing and a question, but a set of values as well which includes an assessment of the relative dignity of thinking.

Putting to the side for the moment the question concerning the value of thinking, we may focus our problem by seizing upon one of the elements of its inception (thing, question, motive, values) and ask: How is a question of any sort possible? That it presupposes an acquaintance with a thing seems clear and acceptable to all or most people. We will come later to a possible objection to this otherwise reputable beginning. To continue with acquaintance as our starting-point: Granted that some have posed the question 'What is nothingness?' or some question akin to it, it nonetheless remains the case that the occasion of formulation was some type of experience in or through which the individual concerned formulated what seemed at the time to possess sense, i.e. to indicate or evoke something. More fully, the experience which enabled or else motivated the question was itself something definite had by a definite individual.<sup>1</sup> This provides us with the first clue into the ground of

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<sup>1</sup> One will note a parallel between the motivational function attributed to both the experience of amazement and the experience of nothingness. The latter, granting its possibility, would certainly be occasion for something which one with perfect justification could call amaze-

the possibility of a question, namely that it presupposes the experience or identification of something definite and, to be somewhat redundant, identifiable and experienceable. In consequence, the question concerning the possibility of a question itself introduces a question about the nature of both identification and of thinghood. Again, how do we identify things?<sup>2</sup> And what is a thing? The latter question can perhaps, in light our recent example, be given a more comprehensive formulation: what does it mean to be determinate?<sup>3</sup> I pose these latter two questions both to set up the attempt at sketching a framework within which one can approach offering a reasonable response to them and to inquire further into their own nature as particular types of theoretical question. To close this line of thought, I observe that it should be clear that not merely philosophy, but poetry and life itself begin with, or perhaps better in the case of life, are already under way by means of the identification of things. Philosophy responds to both the mere identification and the amazement it elicits in a definite way which is its own and which awaits further elucidation.

We began with the question 'how does thinking begin?' and then proceeded to the question 'how is a question possible?' and now have introduced the questions 'how do we identify things?' and 'what is a thing?'. In the process we have identified one question which is pre-eminent: What is X? We have also touched upon the question of the value of thinking and of the motivational impulse provided to it by curiosity and amazement. Before proceeding to tackle what is admittedly a large set of issues clustered around the notion of a beginning to thinking, I would like to add the following remark. If we grant that all or most questions require interpretations as answers and that all interpretations presuppose questions, it follows that, being interested in explaining the possibility of a question, we are at once inquiring into the conditions of the possibility of interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Hence this

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ment. Further, the putative distinction between substance and process does not affect the point being made which rests upon a determinacy common to anything identifiable.

- <sup>2</sup> I am especially indebted to my teacher Stanley Rosen for the approach being taken in posing this question. See his *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. He is, of course, not to be held responsible for my response to his philosophical recommendations.
- <sup>3</sup> Here, again, I wish to acknowledge the influence of one of my mentors, Kenley Dove, whose own approach to philosophizing and way of defining the questions has continued to exert an influence upon me.
- <sup>4</sup> I say 'all or most questions' because it is not clear at first how one is to understand the relationship between mathematics and interpretation. It seems that certain types of mathematical argument in which certain undemonstrated assumptions are utilized to construct the

essay may be read as an exploratory ground-laying for a contribution to contemporary discussions about hermeneutics. To return to the main thread, we have already stated that theoretical thinking and discourse begins with a question and that this is only ever articulated once one has identified a thing. For the purpose of articulating the concept of identification I introduce the concept of mere detection as a contrast because it seems to indicate the possibility of an acquaintance with something the properties of which have not yet been identified and for this reason seems to be a less articulate or developed psychological phenomenon. Such an acquaintance may take the form of something's first being detected or *merely* noticed as to its presence or possible presence. If the notion of an awareness of something which is not yet an awareness of any of that thing's properties seems paradoxical or empty on account of its being equivalent to an awareness of nothing, a notion comparable to that of an arrow pointing in no direction, then one may respond that the detection may take the form of an affective response, i.e. a feeling of the presence of something close at hand. Here, however, the question becomes 'Is something there?', a question which addresses itself to the presence or non-being of the thing.<sup>5</sup> This enables us to distinguish levels of acquaintance. On the one hand, there is one which concerns existence and which is a matter of detection and, on the other, there is one which concerns properties and which is a matter of identification. What is remarkable about the latter case is that the identification which is the necessary condition for the possibility of the question already brings with it a degree of determinacy or positive degree of content which would seem at first to render the question superfluous. It follows, at the very least, that to be in the position to genuinely pose the question is at once to be able to pursue an answer to it.

The paradox of already having identified that which we question is reminiscent of the paradox of learning in Plato's *Meno*. Since the paradox of the *Meno* seems to bear on our leading question we should briefly examine Plato's presentation of the problem. The paradox arises amidst a discussion about the nature of virtue initiated

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proof could be described as interpretational in character. Further, a domain of mathematics may always be connected with another allowing for a new interpretation of its properties. Finally, even in the case of a valid proof, interpretation is present in its construction in the form of the selection of premises. Nonetheless, mathematics provides us a clear example of how interpretation can be both restricted and enabled by universally valid structure -- however one determines the extension of universal validity.

<sup>5</sup> This statement brings to mind the familiar paradox involved in referring to the non-being of thing. I will not pause to examine this here.

by Meno, a rich, handsome boy who is both a student of the rhetorician Gorgias and a foreigner of Athens, the location of the exchange. Socrates is the second interlocutor and the discussion is carried out in the presence of the boy's servants, but in the possible absence, for a time, of any other free, hence educated Greeks. An Athenian named Anytus, later to be one of Socrates' accusers as depicted in the *Apology*, temporarily takes Meno's place for a time, only to depart in anger from his opinion that Socrates is mean-spiritedly slighting great men. It is not clear when he began to audit the discussion. So much for context. After having been reduced to perplexity in his efforts at producing a definition of virtue, Meno asks Socrates three questions (80D): The first concerns how the latter intends to go about searching for that of which he claims to know nothing at all (*ho me oistha to parapan ho ti esti*); the second concerns what sort of thing (*poion*) from amongst those he does not know will be established as the matter of inquiry; the third concerns how he would recognize the object of his search if he were unwittingly to chance upon it. As a set, the questions articulate the structure of inquiry, the first indicating the manner (*tropos*) in which the whole search is to be conducted, the second, the beginning of inquiry and the third, its end. Socrates responds to these questions by accusing Meno of having made a merely disputatious argument (*eristikos logos*) aimed at establishing the conclusion that it is impossible to investigate (*dzetein*) anything because one cannot investigate what one does not know and in the case of one's having knowledge of a thing, there is no reason to investigate it. Meno asks Socrates if the latter's own reformulation does not seem to him to be finely stated (*kalos soi dokei legesthai*; 81A). Socrates denies the force of the argument and, through an appeal to certain priests and priestesses, to Pindar and to other poets he claims that the soul is immortal. The immortality of the soul functions as a premise for concluding that there is no such thing as learning, but only recollection of things which the individual soul has originally come to know. Thus he concludes that 'investigation and learning are wholly recollection' (*to . . . dzetein . . . kai to manthanein anamnesis holon estin*).<sup>6</sup> The argument fails, not merely on the basis of the dubious assumption of the immortality of the soul, but because he fails to explain how each soul came to learn about each thing in the first instance. Further, even if we grant that all investigation is actually recollection, the problem has not been solved, for when beginning to recollect what one has previously learned, one must first identify that thing, if only within one's memory.

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<sup>6</sup> I have translated *dzetein* as 'investigation' rather than 'research', which is the word used in the translation I consulted. The latter conveys too scholarly a sense.

The standard or measure of knowledge would itself have to be known. I add that at the beginning of the dialogue Socrates ironically claims, when denying that he has any recollection concerning whether or not Gorgias seemed, when in Athens, to possess knowledge of virtue, to not have a good memory (71C). I pass over further, numerous connections that can be made. The point of the criticisms of the doctrine of recollection is not to 'refute Plato' but to uncover the ironic, dissimulative, character of the argument, the quality of which should already be plain from a philosopher's appeal to the wisdom of priests. That Socrates actually lacks the reverence for priests which he pretends to possess is evident from the fact that if he genuinely ascribed to them knowledge of the highest matters, then he would also maintain that they would have chosen to live in the manner best suited for humans and he, being a person who acts for the best, would himself be a priest. The relationship between the philosophical and the religious life is complicated for us by the historical fact of there having been philosophers of religious sentiment, some of whom have been members of a holy order. Perhaps it would be more appropriate in many cases to refer to religious men who also argued philosophically. To return to the *Meno*, in my opinion, Plato is indirectly directing us, by means of the paradox stated by Socrates and the subsequent priestly 'myth', toward at least two thoughts. The first is the thought that investigation and learning, far from being impossible, are the deepest expressions of the nature of the human soul, a nature which is somehow, as Plato indicates in the *Symposium*, between knowledge and ignorance.<sup>7</sup> Investigation stands somewhere between the two. This is progress toward a correct statement of the problem. Second, he has indicated, via the doctrine of recollection, that the soul either *is* all things or is at least receptive to them. The problem of identifying that which one wishes to investigate may be called the problem of the finite, i.e. limited, incomplete apprehension of form. I mention by the way that the concept of finitude, because it presupposes and incorporates negation, reintroduces the problem of non-being, a problem which will be touched upon in what follows.

The problem of identification, which is at once a problem with beginning to think, may be further clarified through examining more carefully the question-form 'what is X?'. An approach which comprehends questioning and identification is useful precisely because the two issues interanimate. Let us begin our analysis by examining the 'intrinsic nature' of the question, both its quality and function. We will later inquire into the origin of the concrete question 'what is a thing?', but

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Symposium*, 202A.

some of the details of this analysis will bear on the one which follows. 'What is X?' is a question-form which directs our attention towards providing a statement which indicates either the kind to which the thing belongs or else the properties which characterize it. I develop the following simple, and shamelessly Aristotelian account at the level of common sense in the deliberate attempt to develop a theoretical perspective out of things which are commonly known and recognized or at least generally intelligible. The following ways of indicating a spatio-temporal thing may serve as examples: 'This is a seal'; 'this is an aquatic mammal'; and 'this is gray.' The examples include reference to four predicates, two adjectives, 'aquatic' and 'gray', and two predicate nominatives 'mammal' and 'seal.' At the level of common sense, one may distinguish between the functions that the different types of predicates play with respect to providing information. In the first case the name 'seal' provides us with the name of the kind to which the thing belongs; in the second, the expression 'aquatic mammal' serves both to classify the thing more generally than the first case and to indicate the characteristic which always holds of a member of the more general class whenever that member is identical in type to the considered instance. In the third case the predicate 'gray' would inform us of a property which, if it were removed from the thing, would not provide any grounds for our denying that the thing were a seal, assuming that in fact it were one. Otherwise put, it is a property which has no bearing on what may be called the essence of the thing. What is interesting for our question is that to predicate of the demonstrative referring to a thing an expression of one of the types exemplified above and thereby to produce a true sentence implies (non truth-functionally) that the initial determinacy which makes the identification, and hence the question, possible is already in place. I emphasize that the ability to predicate *any* of the above in exclusion of the others would suffice to establish that something determinate is present. The implication is that rational speech is only possible when something determinate is present.

What is interesting for this analysis is that what is proleptically indicated through the interrogative 'what' is brought to a kind of terminus by only two of the three above cases, namely 'seal' and 'aquatic mammal.' The latter, to be sure, may be further refined so as to distinguish what is at hand, if it were a seal, from a whale or a dolphin. Nonetheless, it would strike any ordinary language user as indicating something relevant to what is asked, while only in rare circumstances would the predicate 'gray' be taken as satisfying – even though it *does* tell us something about the thing. Let us further note that though the answer 'this is a seal' could in many circumstances be taken as satisfying, it is always possible that one could respond to this answer by asking 'What is a seal?'. 'A seal is an aquatic mammal' is a response which is commonly thought to indicate something relevant. Note, however, that



the question 'what is an aquatic mammal?' (assuming for the moment that there were only one type) does not admit of the answer 'seal', except under highly constructed circumstances. The lesson to draw is that the interrogative 'what' functions in most circumstances to indicate either a desired classification or else further analysis (of whatever type) of given terms, but not the kind-term when the definition of a thing is already given. 'What' anticipates primarily that which intelligence ascribes to the thing as determining it and distinguishing it from other types of thing while drawing it in closer association with other things which share its properties; it anticipates a structuring of the heterogeneous field of life which transcends bare spatio-temporal relationality. The exceptions are not of relevance for the point being made, which turns upon the usual case.<sup>8</sup> The underlying assumption of my examination has been that our spontaneous understanding of language provides us with a reliable indication of some of the concrete intentions underlying theory. In coming to an understanding of the beginning of thinking, it is of the essence that we understand it in its emergence from the non-theoretical, i.e. the everyday world of practical activity, if we are to come to an understanding of thinking as a genuinely human phenomenon.

Let me address a possible criticism. One could claim that my choice of the question-form 'what is X?' is an inappropriate one for thinking about the beginning of thinking, because it was only introduced into the philosophical lexicon with the relatively late emergence of Socrates and for this reason presupposes a tradition within which thinking can be identified independently of a central place being accorded to this question. The tradition of thinking indicated, according to the interpretation motivating the objection, actually prepared the ground for the elevation of this question to the first rank of importance. Hence, taking our bearings by common sense in fact masks rather than reveals the beginning of thinking, if by beginning we mean not any beginning, but the truly original manifestation of philosophical thinking in its emergence from pre-theoretical modes of life. I cannot offer a complete response to this objection, but two points are relevant. First, the question-form pre-existed the life of Socrates and enjoyed a usage independent of any philosophically sophisticated interpretation of its practical and theoretical functions. Further in this connection, the practice of Socrates as depicted in the dialogues was to pose a question of this form to non-philosophers, a practice which

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<sup>8</sup> For example, one may respond to the question with 'that's nothing' or else by means of a definite description. The latter class forms common type of referring device, but is not important for this study which is directed at outlining a structure of identification which itself makes definite descriptions possible.

indicates that he, or at least Plato regarded it as a natural transition point between everyday discourse, which moves and is satisfied within the domain of opinion, and philosophy, which attempts to transcend opinion by following up on what is merely implied in it. This opinion seems quite reasonable. So minimally we can reasonably maintain that thinking can begin, in some deeper sense, with or by means of the question-form 'what is X?'. In other words, historical subsequence is not a sufficient reason for denying that the question-form 'what is X?' can stimulate a genuine beginning of thought. The second point is that since its introduction as the most important question, which is not equivalent to its simple introduction or use within a theoretical framework, the question-form 'what is x?' has enjoyed its exalted position effectively without cease. That is not to say that its position is beyond question, but that is a matter for another investigation. So we proceed with our chosen model.<sup>9</sup>

Let us now examine the concrete question 'what is a thing?'. We will examine it both with respect to its intrinsic quality and to its origin for the purpose of further clarifying the beginning of distinctively philosophical thought. The first thing that one may note is that in contradistinction to the question 'what is that thing?', a question which may be either practically motivated or else be stimulated by curiosity, the question 'what is a thing?' is one which allows, or even requires itself to be associated with the phenomenon of amazement. One who poses the mere question need not be amazed, but we would not be surprised if this person informed us of being or having been amazed. When seen in this light a further point appears as even more interesting than it would otherwise. The question does not allow of the kind of answer that one would give in the case of the question 'what is that thing?' because it does not ask into the nature of something individual or circumscribable within experience; amazement seems to attend that which somehow exceeds 'practical', localizable experience. It asks into the nature of thing-hood, hence into the qualities which define and structure anything whatsoever. The terms 'thing', '*Gegenstand*' and '*pragma*' are peculiar in that they are, like being or unity, seemingly predicable of all things.<sup>10</sup> For this reason they may be associated with what the

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<sup>9</sup> But see Aristotle's account of the emergence of the concept of *eidos* in Greek philosophy, *Metaphysics*, I, iii; 983b24—984a24.

<sup>10</sup> The terms are not, however, interchangeable, for '*Gegenstand*' is understood in contrast to '*Subjekt*' which indicates that opposite of which the *Gegenstand* stands. 'Thing' seems to have no contrary or correlative term. 'Being', on the plain of language, seems to be contrary to 'non-being.' Plato and Aristotle in fact deny that being, i.e. the individual being -- not the word 'being' -- has a contrary.

medievals called transcendentals. Even if we accept the suggestion that these terms are not predicable of the soul or self-consciousness, the 'places' in which things appear, then the crucial point, which remains to be stated, holds. These terms indicate and derive their sense from a level of reflection which is both beyond the things and remains in connection with the things. To restate, the question directs us beneath the surface but in a manner which inevitably leads us back to it, though in a way, it is needless to add, which allows for a more precise understanding and intuitive apprehension of what appears and occurs in everyday life. That the attainment of *this* level of reflection is the occasion for something which we name with 'amazement' is matter for some reflection.

An answer to a question such as 'what is that thing there?' itself offers information, the form of which is relevant for our understanding of the question 'what is a thing?'. We have already concluded that the 'what' in the first question anticipates in the first instance the determining nature of the thing in question, at once limiting it in type and associating it with other instances of that type. The *Greeks* had a word for this aspect of the thing: the *eidōs*, i.e. the look of the thing. Hence, one may suggest that to be a thing is to exhibit an *eidōs*, to have some look or other, i.e. to be determinate. It is important to note that looks do not themselves share a common look, but a common function, that of determining the identity of the things of which they are looks. Thus we arrive at a distinction between levels of analysis, that at which one analyzes individual things and their kinds for the purpose of identifying them and that at which one analyzes the structure in accordance with which things are determined in accordance with how they look. Each thing, insofar as it is a thing, may be said to have or exhibit the structure determined at the level of what I will call ontological constitution and analysis. The relation between the two levels of structure is a further question which seems to offer itself from the matter itself. Our approach to the theoretical formulation from the standpoint of the pre-theoretical permits us to see how a certain everyday understanding is both transcended and carried over from the practical to the theoretical, indicating a continuity underlying the discontinuous attitudes or valuations which underlie each type of question, respectively.

Let us now address ourselves to the nature of this transcendence, for the purpose of placing it more securely within the context of the common sense world. From this perspective we may note the following in connection with the question 'what is a thing?', but the points may be held to be equally valid for the question 'what is

being?', *the* question of metaphysics.<sup>11</sup> First, the question does not occur to all humans. Second, even by those to whom it is addressed it is often discounted or not understood, i.e. not seen as a *question*, as asking something. The second case is indeed essentially the same as the first. Further, it is not the case that everyone would without protest describe the transition to the theoretical level of posing the question as a matter of 'transcendence', a term qualified with positive value. Some would positively condemn the question 'what is a thing?' on the grounds of its being, at best, empty or, worse, an expression of a defect in character (or both together). We need not look immediately to intellectual schools in order to perceive this response. By looking to humankind as such we take a step towards understanding philosophy as a human phenomenon, that is as an expression and in this case partial transcendence of man's political nature, rather than merely as an academic activity, something defined by (solvable) problems of a highly abstract and technical character. To proceed, one can easily imagine a politician casting scorn upon a person posing this question on account of its manifest uselessness. It would at best yield an answer which would lead nowhere, but politics in its comprehensive sense is oriented towards future action, even if that be directed at merely preserving things already established. Generally speaking, politics is qualified by the need for *constant* activity. In making these observations I do not assume that investigation is actually capable of ever coming to a stable point of rest, as Aristotle would claim, but that the non-philosopher would assume that the point of a question is to acquire a clear answer to it.<sup>12</sup> The only knowledge with which politics is concerned is that which will assist it in carrying out political projects or actions, be they legislative, military, civic or juridical. An answer to the question 'what is being?' would not, on the face of it, make any such contribution. One may, of course, attempt to orchestrate one's politics around the end of making metaphysics possible, but this orchestration would not put the content of metaphysics to use. Further, one could ask the politician the question 'what is the end of politics?' and he could answer: The good life for the citizens of the state, freedom, national security and prosperity, or military glory and political prestige, but in only an extremely rare case would the answer to a question, much less the pursuit of an answer to a question, be offered as the purpose of politics; one may legitimately doubt that a politician who would

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<sup>11</sup> Some would deny their equivalence and I would ultimately argue for a distinction and very close relation. I add that what follows does not seem to hold *in toto* for the question 'what is the human good?' despite the prevalence of relativistic opinions at the level of common sense reflection on these matters, at least in the United States.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* VII, iii, 1325b15-21.

offer this answer has ever existed. The impossibility of such a statesman would seem to hold in principle: The man of lesser rank would lack all conception of what philosophy is, while the statesman of the first rank would likely regard himself as an exemplification of the highest human type. But it is not merely the politician who would respond to the question 'what is a thing?' in a manner other than positive. The contemporary man who occupies himself with matters of family and business might regard the question 'what is being?' as silly or, in some cases where the individual is somewhat humble, as somehow beyond him, conveying as it does a rather large, religious theme.<sup>13</sup> Doubtless there are other types of response. We will forego any further enumeration and finer analysis of what has thus far been exhibited, for what has been stated suffices for the present purpose. The point we arrive at is this: The question is met with an almost universal opposition or discomfort; nonetheless the one who poses it persists in his interest in the face of this virtually universal disapprobation. This alone indicates that he regards the pursuit of a theoretical matter to be more important than the good opinion of his fellow humans. Indeed he must hold his fellow humans in a kind of contempt, for one cannot help but condemn those who one regards as holding shallow opinions; nor could one help but pity such people. Hence the question occurs at the level of a transcendence of an interest in everyday political realities and seems to be connected with a consciousness of a significance which overshadows, in the mind of the one so affected, questions of a practical sort, at least when the latter do not immediately involve matters of life and death and basic material necessities. But this is extraordinary: The question 'what is being?' seems, for some, to possess a significance which at least approximates to that of practical questions concerning life and death; 'approximate', that is, so long as we recognize that its weight differs essentially in the way that hope does from fear. Otherwise put, seriousness is an element of human experience which is differently inflected depending on whether hope or fear, and desire or aversion accompanies and qualifies it. I remark in passing that the seriousness of theory need not exclude a kind of playfulness, while there is nothing playful about the possibility of death. Finally, the fear of death must be assigned a rather slight degree of honor as a motivation, though all grant its approximate universality and the urgency of its end, mere existence. But no one wills to exist simply, since that is compatible with continuous misery. Hope for knowledge about being, on the other hand, seems both a higher thing and to point at something which would make life worth living, noting that there may be a plurality of choice-worthy ways of life. Let it be clear that we

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* I, iv, 1095a26-27.

are describing the phenomena (with the assistance of the imagination) without intending to make recommendations about how one ought to live. So much for the political aspect of the beginning of thinking.

Let me add some observations about amazement as I believe that that phenomenon must have occurred amongst the Greeks.<sup>14</sup> It is a unity of a sense of greatness or weight of significance in and through the asking of the question and of the slightness of one's own stature in one's present state of ignorance. It is indeed, in some deeper sense, the occurring of the question itself. In any case, the question involves a certain humility (as do all questions which are not hidden commands), but in addition it involves more fundamentally a certain pride in the conviction that one is worthy or suited to knowing the truth about being.<sup>15</sup> I am not referring to a sentiment of universal human dignity, but of pride in one's perceived rank. I also note in passing that persons of democratic sentiment instinctively interpret the classical philosopher on this point as having succumbed to a vain delusion of the imagination. Traditionally, knowledge of the truth about being, 'wisdom' by another name, has been conceived as a thing either reserved for or possessed by gods.<sup>16</sup> From these observations we may venture the following as an hypothesis concerning the nature of the philosopher or at least of that philosopher who poses the question 'what is being?'. The philosopher embodies what may be called: impious humility.<sup>17</sup> This refers to the understanding of his ignorance through the spontaneous posing of the question and the belief of his being above other men, indeed of being worthy to 'dwell amongst gods.' I add that the spontaneity of a question and the principled absurdity of posing it to another in the absence of a prior understanding that the person addressed is also interested in philosophical matters provides us with the sufficient criterion for distinguishing philosophical

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Metaphysics* I, ii, 982b10--983a25; *Theaetetus*, 155Cff.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Metaphysics*, I, ii, 982b30ff. Aristotle is here indirectly substantiating the fact that philosophy is based on pride by interpreting the nature of the god in a manner which masks the impious intentions of the classical philosopher: "Indeed if the poets are right and the Deity is by nature jealous, it is probable that in this case He would be particularly jealous, and all those who excel in knowledge unfortunate. But it is impossible for the deity to be jealous . . ."

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, I, ii 983a5--11.

<sup>17</sup> I distinguish piety from humility in a deliberate effort to place the irreligious philosopher at a distance from those whose humility is inflected by the belief in a greater power endowed with personality. I do not believe that it makes sense to speak of piety in absence from a belief in gods or God; furthermore the use of humility instead of piety opens a way for us to see how the philosopher is more fundamentally characterized by pride.

from every other type of spiritual activity with the possible exception of poetry. It follows that Heidegger was certainly justified in affirming a deep connection between philosophy and poetry.

Let us move back to the question of the relation between question and thing. It seems that one could challenge the claim that when thinking begins it under all circumstances begins with something which offers the independently given focal point of theoretical interest. The presupposition of this claim is that the thing makes the question possible while excluding the possibility that the question makes the thing possible.<sup>18</sup> But the founding of a new mathematical discipline involves asking a question about a hitherto unthought, hence arguably non-existent object. Curved space and transfinite numbers offer two well-known examples. A similar point can be made in connection with the formation of political constitutions, new styles and genres of art and with the history of science and of philosophy itself. Some would go further and suggest that different problems, doctrines, sets of laws and myths found and constitute different worlds or perspectives and the things which populate them. The latter claim is often supported with an appeal to the putative fact that there is no access to the things independently of language and a way of life which structures how one sees and acts in relation to them. By the constitution of the thing through language and a way of life, I refer precisely to its status as *thing*, i.e. as a separate and identifiable (to modify the Aristotelian formula for substance) unit with definite properties. Let us call this position historicism. It seems to me to be subject to a decisive objection. To perceive it one must first note that all reasonable people maintain that a culture is something that emerges in history. From this it follows that there must have been a pre-history to culture which itself enabled and brought it about. The claim that this pre-history was *thingless*, because cultureless, implies that culture, now understood as comprehending man, nature and gods, itself emerged out of nothing, a silly opinion which may be dismissed. A restatement may nonetheless be of service: At this *empirical* level of reflection, culture is treated as one thing amongst others and as one which emerges in history, hence from things which pre-exist it, so cannot itself constitute the things.

The relativistic thrust of the argument may, however be taken up at a deeper level. One may reasonably maintain that we can not even refer to the concept

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<sup>18</sup> The alternative is reminiscent of that offered by Kant in the so-called objective deduction of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*: "Es sind nur zwei Fälle möglich, unter denen synthetische Vorstellung und ihre Gegenstände zusammentreffen, sich auf einander notwendiger Weisen beziehen und gleichsam einander begegnen können: entweder wenn der Gegenstand die Vorstellung, oder diese den Gegenstand allein möglich macht." (B 124--125)

'thing' without invoking and grounding its appearing in subjectivity, be this divine or transcendental subjectivity or else *Dasein*, i.e. being-in-a-world,<sup>19</sup> for the thing as a determinate focal-point of sense already implies that to which it appears. With this suggestion we mark the transition from vulgar historicism to metaphysics and we will henceforth ignore the former. The metaphysical position may indeed seem compelling or at least interesting enough to motivate us to examine it more carefully. The problem is that of conceptualizing or making clear a *given* relation between experiencer and thing in which each term functions as an element or aspect of a unitary structure. Let us distinguish the different conceptual possibilities. All of the following positions maintain that there is a necessary relation between a thing, considered as determinate and identifiable, and that to which a thing at least potentially appears. First, one may claim that the thing as thing is constituted by subjectivity through the application of rules to a material which is not yet differentiated into distinct things. The reader will recognize that this is the effective center-piece of Kantianism. Second, one may claim that a thing as thing, though not constituted by subjectivity, only ever appears as *thing* to that which experiences it, both being given in a unitary and indissoluble event which necessarily underlies and makes possible the very intelligibility of the distinction between subject and object. This is a central feature of Heideggerianism. There is a third position which is directed against the first two: The being of the thing is distinct from its presence before some subject or other, and for this reason it is neither in its being dependent upon the constituting power nor the circumspective presence of a subject. This position corresponds to common-sense rationalism, what commonly goes by the name of Platonism. The argument, however, will incorporate, within a Hegelian framework, elements of all of the positions which have been and will be discussed. It is clear that dependence has two different meanings in the first two cases respectively, that of constitution and that of 'being given along with.' For the purposes of the following argument I will assume the existence of universals (whether as things or not is not here relevant), because an encounter with nominalism is beyond our present scope.

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<sup>19</sup> The Heideggerian concepts of *Dasein* and *In-der-Welt-Sein* have provided orientation for the following account of the holding together of identification and ignorance, i.e. the position from a which the posing of a question has a point. The account will depart from Heideggerianism in an important ways. Let it be added that, though Kant and Heidegger certainly understood themselves as having rejected relativism, each, to be sure, in their own way, one can nonetheless charge them with having introduced more sophisticated forms of relativism. The following argument will lend support to this claim.



Let us begin by posing for and to ourselves the question 'what is being?', a question which directs us to the aforementioned ontological level of analysis at which we inquire into the thing-hood of the thing, a level of abstraction which places us in the midst of obscurity, a state which will give way to clarity as our analysis progresses. It is clear that at this level of conception we do not begin to think with our attention focused on the beings given to perception, but with the categories which we inevitably employ whenever we think about any beings whatsoever, be they perceptible or otherwise. Simple being as being without further qualifications is, as Hegel maintained, nothing of which one can say anything definite; for the very articulation of the ostensible concept involves a looking away from the properties of any single kind or individual being. By beginning with the bare thought of being we arrive with Hegel at nothing.<sup>20</sup> The next step indeed closely resembles Hegel's own but is in fact different than it, because it does not derive content from the *act* of thinking the relation between being and nothing, as Hegel attempted to do. We may make the next least possible assumption.<sup>21</sup> To be is to be some definite thing. Hence to be is to be some quality, not yet a perceptual quality, but anything which is identifiable.<sup>22</sup> A determinate quality is something which excludes other qualities; this holds in principle, for the determinacy of the thing requires that it exclude that which it is not. Consequently, at the level of form, there cannot be a single existent quality. For this reason a quality implies the category of difference. Hence, at the ontological level of constitution, a thing is internally related to that which it is not. We will examine the concept of an internal relation when we come to a closer examination of Hegel. To continue with our reasoning: If something is different

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<sup>20</sup> "Seyn, reines Seyn, -- ohne alle weitere Bestimmung. In seiner unbestimmten Unmittelbarkeit ist es nur sich selbst gleich, und auch nicht ungleich gegen anderes, hat keine Verschiedenheit innerhalb seiner, noch nach Aussen. . . . Es ist nichts in ihm anzuschauen . . . Das Seyn, das unbestimmte Unmittelbare ist in der That Nichts, und nicht mehr noch weniger als Nichts." Hegel, G.W.F., *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Vol. 21, *Gesammelte Werke*.

<sup>21</sup> I don't believe that Hegel's beginning of the *Wissenschaft der Logik* is a cogent argument, but that is a matter to be dealt with in another paper.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, X, ii, 1053b 24—27. Aristotle interprets quality as merely one category amongst others, but confronts difficulties when attempting to distinguish it from secondary substance. This is due to the fact that he wishes to distinguish secondary from primary substance despite the fact that the definition of secondary substance is predicable of any of its instances. Cf. *Categories* 3b10--25. This alone indicates that Aristotle's restriction is unacceptable. I follow Hegel in ascribing it a greater universality. It corresponds to Kant's concept of the transcendental object. "*Das Objekt, worauf ich die Erscheinung überhaupt beziehe, ist der transzendentale Gegenstand, d.i. der gänzlich unbestimmte Gedanke von Etwas überhaupt.*" B 253.

from other things, then it must be identical to something; for difference is defined in contrast to identity. It cannot be identical to that than which it is different, therefore it must be identical to itself. Further, identity is the identity of something. Hence being, i.e. a determinate something, and identity are necessarily given as inextricably interwoven. Finally, we must distinguish between the internal complexity of the ontological structure of thinghood from the internal complexity of the thing at the level of real properties. The implications of the former will be examined in what follows, but the precise connection between the two levels of complexity is another matter which will not be addressed in this essay. It is clear at this stage that the ontological level implies the real level as a domain of structure, since the very content of the categories anticipates it. This is not to say that it determines the way that that domain is constituted in every detail. The inter-animation of intelligible structure at the real level may, after Plato, be named the community of forms. I point out that the result of this line of reflection converges with our analysis of the question-form 'what is X?', because the latter asks into the properties or kind which define or name a thing's look.

Note that in reasoning in this way, we have not made any appeal to self-evidence, but have simply attempted to follow the most reasonable and reputable path from our selected beginning with the concept of being. Those who claim that only self-evidence provides the true measure of philosophical discourse confront the difficulty that it is not self-evident from the standpoint of human life that only those propositions which admit of self-evidence, if only at some late stage of investigation, are worthy of our intellectual attention. Quite on the contrary, we have determined that a common element to all thinking is the question; the very perception of the meaningfulness or necessity of responding to it indicates that the value of thinking is already established in its indemonstrable beginning. To be sure, the perception of value in the posing of a question is not equivalent to the reputability of an uncertain but eminently reasonable judgment, but the obstacle to seeing the significance of the latter is removed once it is allowed that nobility inevitably attaches to that which is indemonstrable. Thinking itself, not the thinking of a self-evident proposition, is the locus of value. Of course, thinking may and does run a-ground and, in my opinion, is very often unpleasant, but these are possibilities which attach to that which in its very inception is perceived to be good. This perception itself may motivate a claim to self-evidence, but, in my opinion, this claim must be qualified by the observation that there are other forms of putative self-evidence which cancel its exclusive claim to truth (though not its content) and are themselves cancelled in turn. The point is not that the individual who has an opinion about the noble ought to remain open to baseness, for all

reasonable people take their bearings by their deepest perceptions of value. What I point out is that everyday experience and history attest to multiple types of perception of the noble. We have already had occasion to comment on the close relation between philosophy and poetry as well with religiosity. But we digress. The point of relevance for the argument being carried out is that we are justified in proceeding with confidence relying on nothing more than what we determine to be the most reasonable opinion amongst available alternatives. This stated, we may return to the main line of the argument.

Not everyone will share the opinion that these concepts possess sense and many would claim that in using them we have relapsed into 'dogmatic' metaphysics. I believe that anyone holding this opinion is in error for the following reasons which may be viewed by beginning a dialectic which is grounded in an observation about propositional truth. For any two arbitrarily selected things one may truly state 'This is different than that.' Every language user understands it and only a madman would deny that it is true. If it is true, then the state-of-affairs to which it refers is in fact as it states it to be. Therefore one thing is different than another and, for reasons stated above, the same as itself. Now the important question may be asked: Is the category of difference a real relational attribute of the things or is the truth of the predication founded upon a primordial constitution of the things? Let us examine the second, 'Kantian', concept of constitution from the position of common sense:<sup>23</sup> Is the individual being (hence concrete identity) constituted through

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<sup>23</sup> I would be the first person to insist that when studying Kant one must place him within the philosophical tradition to which he was responding. He is paradigmatically a figure of the 'history of philosophy.' My intention here is different: to demonstrate and utilize the common sense element present in a philosophical position of scholastic complexity, without which a philosophical doctrine becomes unintelligible, hence useless for human beings. This procedure is subject to two objections. First, a treatment of any Kantian concepts independently of a consideration of the full complexity of his argument cannot be offered as establishing a definitive conclusion; second, by beginning with ordinary language concepts, as we have done throughout this essay, we condemn ourselves to an unrigorous discussion. In response to the first objection, I refer the reader to the remarks which immediately follow in the main body of the text. The response to the second objection is obvious. One who attempts to begin to think with definitions and axioms merely conceals the fact that the formulation of his propositions began in the domain of ordinary language. It is the fact of the transition out of the latter as the resource of formalization which establishes that domain as the appropriate and inevitable starting point for thinking. This by no means excludes the usefulness of doctrines which presupposed the existence of other doctrines for their own formulation, nor that of the various logical calculi which have been developed to the present day. But looking away completely from the resources of ordinary language offers a merely seeming rigor at best, or else a collapse into unreflective historicism at worse.

the application of rules to a structureless field of interpretational possibility? Any meaningful use of the term 'constitution' implies some material from or out of which a thing is constituted. In the case of thing-constitution we must postulate some primordial material out of which things are made.<sup>24</sup> One may wish to object that we have begun by taking the analogy with an everyday sense of constitution too seriously. The reply to this is easy: The denial of any and all validity to the analogy between thing-constitution and everyday constructive activities would deprive the theoretical use of the term 'constitution' of point. So we are compelled to proceed: That which is constituted into a thing is either something or nothing. If it is the latter, then there could be no beginning to thought, for something cannot arise out of an unqualified nothing. Hence the primordial material must already be determinate, i.e. a unified, self-identical thing whose nature is concealed by the things which appear. We may conclude that it is not the case that things as things are always constituted by a subject through the application of rules and that we are justified in predicating categories of non-constituted things, i.e. if by 'constitution' one means the determination of an object through an application of rules to something which is determinate independently of and prior to acts of thing-constitution.

Of course one may simply insist that categories are imposed upon material or materially dependent things. It may be replied that the very act of denial invokes the concept of a thing through referring to that which serves as the object of imposition and that the idea of a thing itself implies unity, identity and difference. Otherwise put: The denial of the intrinsic connection between things and categories presupposes in its act the categorial structure of the things which are to serve as the subjects of the imposition. Further, to claim that things can't possess properties such as unity, identity and difference is obviously to beg the question.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In the second edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant attempts to remove the problem of the thing-in-itself or noumenon as a cause or ground of appearances by interpreting it as follows: "ein Grenzbegriff, um die Anmaßung der Sinnlichkeit einzuschränken und also nur von negativem Gebrauche." (B 255) Such a cause would affect the faculty of receptivity and thereby furnish material for conceptualization, i.e. thing-constitution. This noted, Kant must, so long as he maintains a doctrine of object-constitution in company with the claim that human beings, as finite, are receptive to that which underlies the appearances, accept the existence of a primordial material.

<sup>25</sup> We will come to qualify the relation between things and categories as one not best described as involving property-ownership. The argument nonetheless holds if we reformulate the relation as one of necessary presupposition.

We have stated the decisive point for our investigation, but we should nonetheless continue to examine the position under consideration assuming the results so far gathered, for the discussion will generate numerous points of interest for our problem. The results of this examination will provide material which will partially inform and partially indicate the way toward positive conceptions of the ontological constitution of the thing, the possibility of identification, the question and the phenomenon of amazement. Let us begin by drawing out the implications of the claim that the thing, when related to subjectivity, is concealed behind its appearance. For this to occur, the subject would have to alter the look of the thing. How would this alteration of appearance result in a world which is populated by multiple types of appearance each taken to present numerically different things? There must be some principle of differentiation which can account for this change in not merely the way the thing looks, but in the number of looks. This principle cannot be the primordial material, which if it is to be worked into a complex set of appearances must be an internally complex and single look, so it must be subjectivity. But what is subjectivity? If it is simply a set of rules, no differentiation could possibly ensue, for a set of rules lacks life. Hence it must be alive, an active principle of differentiation, and it must exist in some primordial relation to the primordial material, the look of which is altered and differentiated. If the individual subject is always related to a world of appearances and this relation is grounded in a primordial material which is subsequently differentiated, then relationality belongs to the being of subjectivity, that is, it is always at bottom related to a thing, a relation which, at a higher level of structure, translates into the appearance of multiple things within a shared context of appearance, i.e. a world. Now the thing, to repeat, though in itself one and in appearance many, is nonetheless complex and articulated. One may imagine as an analogue to the structure of (non-temporal) transformation an animal dissected into smaller pieces each of which is then falsely taken to be a self-standing individual. How does the product stand to the original? It is not a representation of the original since it no longer resembles it or indicates it (as a word would), though it may be arrived at through a process of inference. How does life succeed in reconfiguring the look of the primordial material? Does not life itself have to be a thing if it is to have an effect on something other than it? First of all, it seems that if it itself were a thing, it would not be able to view or behold the thing which it transforms and differentiates, for its own nature would exclude that of the other, in the same way that the identity of a pineapple excludes that of a mango.<sup>26</sup> But need

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* III, v, 429a18ff.

this hold, given what we have indicated above about the internal relatedness of beings? To restate the conclusion, to be something is to exclude that against which that something is defined, hence, at the ontological level, to be internally related to that which is excluded. Internal relatedness and the reciprocal inclusion of qualities at the ontological level does not imply an includedness at the real level. Otherwise put, a pineapple does not exhibit all of the properties of a mango, but their exclusion requires the reciprocal inclusion of the categories which account for the structure of their relation. Viewed from this perspective, certain parallels between subjectivity and ontological categories exhibit themselves. First, both cases are universal in scope. They differ insofar as one predicates ontological categories, but not subjects, of things. We note in passing that an Hegelian would argue, against this last statement, that the proposition 'substance is subject' expresses the truth in germ, a claim that is equivalent to stating that each being instantiates a logical structure which is immanent in self-relating *Geist*. Second, subjectivity seems to belong in some way to the very being of the thing, a conclusion which is unavoidable if one grants that the thing, as determinate, is in principle intelligible, i.e. accessible to some possible mind. Third, the openness of subjectivity to the beings and the categories of being resembles the relation of ontological categories to their respective opposites with the distinguishing feature of subjectivity's *self-conscious* relation to itself and other beings. One is tempted, then, to understand the subject as standing in a close relation with the fundamental categories of being. This leaves open for the moment the question of how the subject re-configures the look of the original thing, a problem which can only be addressed when we come to demonstrate the inadequacy of the idea of a fundamental material. Before proceeding to a new line of reflection which will bring us to that point, we will draw two further conclusions from this 'revised-Kantian' line of thought: First, the subject involves openness to an other *as* other, that which the subject may *take* to be (merely) other than it; second, as self-identical activity, the subject *must be singular*. As relating to itself, it bounds itself off from other things; and as essentiality an activity, anything which could count as a universal defining its intelligibility would itself necessarily exhibit activity; thus it would be another singular subject. One may suggest that Aristotle's God provides a model for a philosophical conception of a singular being which also performs a universal function, i.e. as the model of individuality itself.<sup>27</sup> Conceding for the moment the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Metaphysics*, I, ii, 983a9--10. "For (a) all believe that God is one of the causes and a kind of principle" and X, ii, 1054a10ff. "It is obvious, then, that in every genus "one" is a definite entity, and that in no case is its nature merely unity." One may extrapolate that God is the

possibility of developing this account, the point at issue nonetheless holds, for even in this case the relation is between two numerically distinct beings. With this remark, we neither deny that human subjectivity is in some way universal, nor that there is some connection between Divine and human subjectivity. Our line of reflection indicates that universals, at least in the case of human subjectivity, *must be individuals*. This is a thought which leads us in the direction of Hegelianism.

We have stated the immediate implications of the idea that subjectivity relates to and conceals that to which it relates. Now let us examine more closely the idea of the relation and non-temporal transition from the being of the original thing to the appearances of the everyday world. How are we to conceptualize this transition? There seem to be, *prima facie*, three generic alternatives: First, the appearances are distinct from the thing by a matter of degree; second, they are distinct from the things by virtue of a rearrangement; or else, third, they are distinct in virtue of type of appearance. Let us begin with the last alternative. If the appearances differ in type from the thing, then it is difficult to say how they could have been derived from it. One may ascribe some genetic relation between appearance and thing, but this would effectively eliminate the status of the appearance as appearance and replace it with a genetically derived look which is fundamental as a look in its own right. Let us then move to the second alternative, namely, that one may also affirm a reconfiguration of the parts of the thing in the form of a newly constituted look. This implies either that the original thing exhibited properties or elements of its look which were subjected to a primordial 'abstraction' and reconstituted in some other arrangement, or else that it is only apprehended partially. The former alternative implies that the subject is, at the ground of its own structure, in effect possessed of comprehensive knowledge, and so, as subject, both wise and ignorant. Differently stated, it is at once divine and finite subjectivity. It is clear that this model must include an explanation of not merely the reconfiguration of appearances, but of the fact that the greatest part of the elements of the original thing are left out entirely in the consciousness of the individual subject. The process of alteration is at once a process of limitation and selection. Without an explanation of why this limitation must occur, this model cannot be accepted. Worse, it must seem absurd. Granted that our rejection of the said model is justified we arrive again, through an independent line of thought, at the idea of finite apprehension. We originally affirmed that it constitutes an indispensable condition for the

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primary unity of substance. Substance, to be sure, is not a genus, but that only underlines the need to provide a distinctive treatment for it.

beginning of thinking and now we have gone further to locate it at the ground of experience. *Finite apprehension is a fundamental act of human experience.* What follows from this line of thought is that all thinking beings necessarily have at least an acquaintance with a limited number of parts of the look of the original thing, but subject to distorting conditions which will be discussed below. Let us label the idea of a finite apprehension of the thing that of a perspectival view. The connection is justified because a limited apprehension is individuated by excluding other types of apprehension, while a perspective is individuated by excluding other perspectives.<sup>28</sup> It strikes us as more than a remarkable coincidence that the idea of an internally articulated perspectival view corresponds with that of the necessary singularity of the self-relating subject. At this stage this is nothing more than a suggestive connection. As far as the first alternative above, that of the appearances differing in degree, it is compatible with the model of finite apprehension and will be substantiated in the following discussion which sets out to further refine our conception of the given relation between the thinking, experiencing being and the thing to which it is open.

Towards this end we may examine the model we have inherited from our quasi-Kantian position, namely the opposition of an individual subject with the primordial material to which it relates in finding itself in and partially constituting the world. I believe that the rigid opposition between subject and object leads us to a false conception of the relation in question and that despite the almost universal assumption of this model, that it is subject to a powerful criticism. We have already made the reasonable assumption that the relation between the thing and that which is open to it is mutually implicatory. Consequently, it is improper to conceive of this relation on the basis of any analogue which would imply a possible dissociation of the terms involved. I suggest that a tacitly employed geometrical analogue underpins and motivates the distinction between subject and primordial material and the representation of the two as meeting as if almost by accident. Indeed we have denied that the relation is accidental, but this only provides a ground for re-conceptualizing the relation in a more satisfying manner. We derive a further ground from the observation that the external relation between subject and primordial material could only obtain in a 'space' comprehending the two. If the subject, that

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<sup>28</sup> If I were arguing for an *identification* of the two concepts, the argument would fail, because the inference would be invalid. The concept of perspective is a *refinement* of the idea which we have until now designated with the expression 'finite apprehension.' The *word* opens up a perspective which allows us to perceive the inner structure of the idea of 'finite apprehension.'



which is open is not outside that to which, in its ground, it is in relation, then, assuming that the disjunction applies, it must be inside it, so to speak, but not inside it as a thing in an enclosed space. The 'inside' relation must involve five moments: first, *negatively*, the opening for the appearance of things is a limitation on a field of independently given determinate structure, the community of forms and ontological categories already referred to; second, *positively*, it is the viewing of the individuals which are intelligible by means of the forms, the intelligible points of illumination which make the beings available for thinking; third, it is an activity of identifying itself against that from which it distinguishes itself and, for this reason, is structured by the same categories that structure the things; fourth, as thinking the categories it is, though in no way *more* universal, in a sense connected with the second moment more fundamental by virtue of being the place of the thinkability and presence of the categories themselves; fifth, as reflective it comprehends its identifying, distinguishing relation in thought and thereby transcends it to the Whole in which that relation occurs. Self-relation is self-transcendence. Consequently, the possibility of amazement is given with being an intelligent self-relating being. In accordance with this conception, we should replace the term 'primordial material', here conceived as a thing, with the term 'Whole' as the former derives from a false conception of the relation of humans to the ground of intelligibility. The relation to the Whole referred to in the fifth point is not a relation to a thing, hence is non-intentional, but it does not for that reason fail to qualify as a type of understanding. I add that this type of understanding is accessible through a philosophical reflection on the structure of beings and man and should not be severed from this starting point. The Whole *includes* finitude in its openness to and opposition with things as one of its elements and does not itself stand opposite to a thinking thing. Openness may be analyzed into the modalities of the perceptual, the affective and the cognitive.<sup>29</sup> If we accept this line of thought, Heidegger was correct to undercut and underpin the subject-object distinction with the concept of *Dasein*, which can be literally translated as 'being here', a being which is conceived as '*In-der-Welt-Sein*.'<sup>30</sup> To state this is, or course, not at once to endorse the full argument of *Sein und Zeit*. This being in the world may, in accordance with the vocabulary here developed, be called 'self-relating finite openness to the whole.'

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<sup>29</sup> I include 'cognitive' because the argument developed requires the affirmation of intellectual intuition, without which the beings could not be understood as to their types.

<sup>30</sup> The word is more commonly translated as 'Being-there' or 'There-being.' The demonstrative 'there', however, is most frequently used to indicate something which is distinct from the individual using the demonstrative. That is precisely the wrong connotation.

This is a cumbersome expression, so let us encapsulate the idea with the more familiar and resonant term 'human.' Two observations may be derived from the concept of finitude, both of ethical-political significance: First, a human, in virtue of its being the being that it is, tends towards mistaking the contents of its limited apprehension for 'all that matters'; it assumes that its horizons of significance exhaust the meaning of the whole, not because it has posed itself the problem 'what is being?' but precisely because it has not done so; second, as limited a human is necessarily positioned in a context of limitation which commonly goes by the name of space-time. The beings in space-time appear as a mixture of ordered and chance arrangement, and for this reason a human is systematically deprived of any certain point of orientation to which it could appeal in connecting, through reason and the imagination, the brute given and accidentally related elements of its apparent world into a web of relations in which it can find its way around. The human is placed in the position where it is *always* open to it to ask a question about any given being. The reference to order implies that the lack of a certain point of orientation is not equivalent to unqualified confusion. I have already argued that we may reliably affirm the existence of pure categories structuring the things and that the logic of the ontological categories automatically implies a further level of determinacy, the patterns of the concrete looks of things, which help explain identification and the actuality of both rational discourse and, one could add, madness. The elements of the whole (natural and artificial beings, actions and events, space-time, abstract attributes, etc.) which are differently interpreted and assembled by different communities and individuals are determinate independently of any constructive activity and as such offer stable points of structure upon which to fasten when 'getting one's bearings.'<sup>31</sup> To connect this up with an earlier observation, we may not infer from the determinacy of that which is identified, hence the determinacy of the content of awareness in the act of identification to the conclusion that identification is equivalent to knowledge. Identification is the condition for both knowledge and ignorance. The position being developed helps to clarify, though not remove this paradox. Let us add that a human is not merely an on-looker within the Whole but an interested participant in its happenings, so consequently it views the beings from perspectives defined by those interests, be they directed at pleasure, honor, popularity or intellectual satisfaction. I note that the concept of

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<sup>31</sup> One may find the inclusion of artificial beings somewhat counter-intuitive. However human labor modifies the shapes of the beings, the result is always something which was at first possible on the basis of things given independently of human intervention.

perspective must include the categories of perception and culture as well. For the reasons stated, a human's position of openness to being is at root a holding together of intuitive and discursive intellect, imagination and being. It is intuitive intellect because it must first identify something if ever it is to think; it is discursive intellect, because it must establish reliable connections between the elements given to its multi-leveled perspectives; it is imagination because it exercises its freedom in relating, arranging, extending 'beyond' and complicating what is part-way determined by chance; it is being, because without the givenness of structure, nothing could ever be questioned or thought. I add that the idea of difference by degree follows immediately from the exercise of the imagination, which always potentially reshapes, in accordance with the various types of continuity, what is given to it. To close this line of reflection, I conclude that interpretation is possible only on the supposition that it is always in the region of the given beings, i.e. the measures of truth.

Let us now address ourselves to the Heideggerian idea of the unitary givenness of the thing and that which experiences it. Stated more fully, the thesis involves the claim that there is only being for that which can think about being. The idea has the advantage of conceptualizing--or perhaps 'evoking'--the connection between thinker and thing in a way which accounts for the latter's thing-hood as something which only makes sense in connection with a being for whom there is thing-hood and appearing, so consequently sense and truth. Second, it brings to the fore what seems to be the feature of both the thinking being and the beings experienced, namely, that they are not accountable for their own being. This is not to say that their being is to be understood in contrast to their being nothing. Nor is it to conceptualize the ground or indispensable condition of their being as itself some other being. The thought is that of the there-ness, the positioned-ness and determinacy of the beings which in their power to affect the other beings are powerless to effect their own being in its ground.<sup>32</sup> There-ness names the limit to the thinking of the power of a being, a limit which leads 'beyond' the beings. For this reason it converges with the givenness of the beings, i.e. their *being* positioned as an act which is both beyond their power and which makes their very power possible, hence is 'along-side' the beings while systematically failing to draw attention to itself. I would like to divide this account into two parts so as to accept one and reject the other. Name these co-givenness and simple givenness respectively. The co-givenness

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<sup>32</sup> I note that the human is open to its ground, though not responsible for it. This is why the human is free.

of the thing and the human has the following consequence which is difficult to reconcile with an indispensable element of common sense. If the givenness of an indissoluble duality is the condition of sense for statements such as 'before the existence of human-kind the solar system developed into its present known form', then it follows that we ascribe properties and being to that which pre-existed the existence of the indispensable condition of sense. Consequently, we claim that being is given independently of the presence of the thinking being, in contradiction to the thesis under scrutiny. I believe that we may hold to the thesis of the givenness of being, while distinguishing between the determinacy and the sense of the beings. Sense only obtains when a human being is given along with the beings, but the determinacy of the beings as the ground of sense is given whether or not human being is given with it. The alternative is to deny that certain propositions about which we reason, namely all those referring to times in which human being is not present, can be true or false on account of their attempting to conceptualize something which is non-sensical, namely, the being and determinacy of beings which are not present for human being. In short, the thesis examined is too radical in its attempt to overcome the split between subject and object. In consequence, I argue for a distinction between being and presence corresponding to the distinction between determinacy and sense.<sup>33</sup> The problem becomes that of understanding the connection between being and presence, on the one hand, and determinacy and sense, on the other. We have already offered some statements concerning the relation between human being and the ontological categories of being which provide us with some orientation for thinking this problem.<sup>34</sup>

Let us begin a new dialectic which will bring us to an examination of ontological categories. We begin with an objection. One could object to my argument that the truth of a statement indicating the difference between two things implies that the things referred to are actually ontologically distinguished by the category 'difference' on the ground that the truth of the statement 'President Clinton is not

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<sup>33</sup> I set up this parallel only to qualify it. One could argue that the Whole is Being but is nonetheless indeterminate or indefinite. Further, despite its indefiniteness it seems to convey sense, not, to be sure, as a thing, but as 'what' is affectively 'related to' in an event of self-transcendence. (Note the connection with the aforementioned question 'what is nothingness?'.) Finally, its presence is precisely that of absence. In short, one may propose that the Whole is Being in the Heideggerian sense, not a being.

<sup>34</sup> Craig Nichols' paper in this volume and a discussion he and I led about it helped me formulate my criticism of the Heideggerian position. His view is opposed to mine and is represented in that paper. In distinguishing between being and presence, I follow Stanley Rosen, 1993.

the leader of the Chinese' is true because he possesses the property 'not the leader of the Chinese.' So arguing, one affirms the existence of negative properties and so of non-being. This involves the contradiction of something's both being and not being, for what is not is in this case owned and what is owned must be. We brushed up against the problem of non-being earlier and more will be said about subsequently. In any event, one may answer the objection as follows. We have distinguished properties without which a thing could not be a thing, those without which it could not be the kind of thing that it is and those with which it could dispense without changing its identity or look. The case of the negative property can correspond to either of the last two types, i.e. essential and accidental properties. In the case of a thing's not having the properties of a kind of which it is not a member, the predication of the non-possession of the property can be explained through appeal to the level of ontological categorial constitution. For this reason we need not affirm a negative property, but we are compelled to acknowledge ontological boundedness expressed in the category of Otherness, that is, one thing's not being another, hence 'negativity' in a sense which is closely related to that of Hegel's, as will be shown in what follows. Differently stated, this ontological level enables us to explain the truth of a predication on the basis of categories which do not positively correspond to the terms of the predicate, but which nonetheless involve an understanding of non-being, but not as something owned. One might say that difference is an ontological element which contributes to the very possibility of a thing's owning or having (or perhaps simply being an ordered set or mixture of) properties. The reader may be somewhat surprised to be informed that I have no intention with these or any of the preceding remarks to deny Nothingness or Non-being as such, that the mention of which immediately embroils us in paradox. If I may appeal to an observation of Stanley Rosen's, the sense of the injunction to avoid all mention of Nothingness presupposes its antecedent intelligibility.<sup>35</sup> What I am denying is the need to affirm the existence of negative *properties* such as 'not a whale' or, if you will, 'not-whale'— the distinction makes no difference to the point. As far as the non-being of accidental properties one may, without appeal to possible worlds, appeal to the notion of potentiality as that property of a thing which makes it a suitable basis for such-and-such not yet realized states.<sup>36</sup> One may then go on to explain the predication on the basis of

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Stanley Rosen, 1988.

<sup>36</sup> For a fine discussion of this concept see Josef Stallmach, 1959. I leave it for another occasion to demonstrate the falsehood of his claim that the potentiality of a being is erased when it achieves the actuality which corresponds to that potentiality.

(unrealized) potentiality. This is itself a problematic category,<sup>37</sup> but in this case the predication of the potentiality rests upon (modern) induction and so is better supported than a claim to the existence of negative properties. There is not space to address Hume's critique of induction.<sup>38</sup> Let me close this line of thought by stating that the doctrine of potentiality is more involved than I can here indicate, but that what has thus far been stated is sufficient for replying to the considered objection.

Before making a final proposal for understanding how thinking begins, let us address the question of the status of the ontological principles of being, those principles which constitute the thing-hood of the thing. Are these things? And, if not, when beginning to think with them have we not violated our statement that to begin is to begin with something, i.e. some-thing? With what do we begin when beginning to think the principles of being? There appear to me to be two ways in which to deny that principles are beings. First, one can follow Aristotle in arguing that principles are not beings in the sense that individual beings of definite types are beings, because they are commonly predicable of a plurality while individual beings are not predicable of anything whatsoever. The same, of course, would hold as well for real properties, such as rational, tall or white. Second, one could adopt the suggestion above that Otherness is not a thing, but an ontological category which constitutes the (real) possibility of a thing as a determinate focal-point of sense, and extend this claim to all other ontological categories. As principles they make the acquaintance with properties and predication possible and though predicated of things are so only as ways of indicating the thing-hood of the thing, not as mirroring a thing's structure. The difficult part of this suggestion concerns the conceptualization of their relating to things in a way other than that of being a property; further, one must both distinguish an ontological category from and connect it with real properties. Positively, this way of drawing the distinction would correspond with the aforementioned difference between the question 'what is this thing?' and 'what is a thing?'; thus, it would assign different types of sense corresponding to the different possible types of affectivity, curiosity and amazement, which attend thinking's beginning.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Stanley Rosen. 1988, pp. 173–182. He did not make precisely this point in this essay, but it can easily be supported by his discussion.

<sup>38</sup> But what I said above about judgments of a highly reputable character can be applied to this case as well. The person who rejects the scientificity of induction does so on the strength of its not offering self-evident or demonstrative truth. Again, this person must persuade us that we should only take into consideration judgments or propositions which are self-evidently true, i.e. scientific in the *strict*, not conventional sense.

A Hegelian would object to both appeals. First, he would repudiate the assumption that the model of predication offers the criterion by which we may separate principles from beings. Second, he would deny that ontological categories are not things with their own peculiar structure, a structure which, to anticipate, would allow for one to hold to the denial that ontological categories are strictly speaking *properties* of beings. By means of dialectic he would attempt to treat categories as beings which as a consequence of their negative activity produce and realize further beings which the Aristotelian mistakenly takes to be the only genuine beings, or those things alone which are separate and individual. The difference corresponds to the Hegelian distinction between logic and the philosophy of the real (Nature and Spirit). Hegel of course maintained that the separateness and individuality of a being is negated, preserved and defined through the very activity and structure of the negation which limits and connects a being with other beings. This is essentially what Hegel means by the identity of identity and difference and the contradictory nature of things.<sup>39</sup> Allow me to add here that it is wrong to claim that Hegel, by attributing contradiction to things, placed himself outside of the domain of rational discourse. He certainly never deliberately contradicted himself in the sense of both affirming and denying the same thing at the same time and in the same respect, and he certainly succeeded in making claims which hold beyond a reasonable doubt. For example, we all see immediately that identity is opposed to difference, essence from appearance and cause from effect. Hegel simply drew two novel, difficult, but to my mind justified inferences from something which everyone can see: First, the inter-definability of opposed terms implies the reciprocal inclusion of the terms related, a relation *for which there is no geometrical analogue*; hence the relation is merely intelligible and the study of such relationality must be purely intellectual; second, the simultaneity of identity and difference of opposed categories and the necessity of the relation thereby defined, implies that the conceptual elements related are not placed into relation by an act of will which could equally well not have occurred, but are the consequence of an act of the category themselves. This last point is both difficult to understand and to accept, so it must be restated: For a category to be both identical *and* different with its opposed term, such that the identity necessitates and explains the difference, while the converse holds as well, it

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<sup>39</sup> "Die denkende Vernunft . . . spitzt sozusagen den abgestumpften Unterschied des Verschiedenen, die bloße Mannigfaltigkeit der Vorstellung, zum wesentlichen Unterschied, zum Gegensatz zu. Die Mannigfaltigen werden erst, auf die Spitze des Widerspruchs getrieben, regsam und lebendig gegeneinander und erhalten in ihm die Negativität, welche die inwohnende Pulsation der Selbstbewegung und Lebendigkeit ist." (Hegel, 1992, p. 68.)

must be the case that this complex relation is equivalent to an *act* of identification and differentiation on the part of the categories concerned; each category is and is not its own opposite, so 'contradicts' itself. Hegelian contradiction refers to the internal relatedness of the opposed and not to a formal relation between predicative judgments. We must ward off an error in connection with this thought. It is not the case that the activity of the category follows from the mere fact that another category is perceived to be part of its intelligible constitution; rather, it follows from the fact that the category which is determinative of the identity of the first category is simultaneously *different* from it. A notational representation of this is impossible because it represents the relation as being something distinct from the terms. Relations are not beings which are distinct from other separate atomic beings, but are the beings which express the relationality of the categorial and real beings. Otherwise put, being is active relating and distinguishing from its own being. We note that this is one of the five moments of human being. As I believe that we must accept Hegel's analysis, this effectively establishes another connection between human being and ontological categories, hence with real properties and the individual beings. The problem which ensues is that of stating the structure of an opposition relation, a statement which always distinguishes what is originally identical and thereby arguably misrepresents it. Here allow it to suffice to state that Hegel thought that dialectic, and especially the logic of reflection in the *Doctrine of Essence*, overcomes this difficulty. Granting the validity of Hegel's two inferences, it nonetheless seems impossible to conceive how the concrete look of a certain type of thing can be implied by a category. Is there any sense in claiming that identity implies, through however involved a process, the essence of a crocodile? It is not at all clear how this could be the case. But the whole point of introducing the level of real properties, the intelligible looks of things, is to explain how we identify individual spatio-temporal things.<sup>40</sup> So, I conclude that ontological principles are

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<sup>40</sup> One may accept the existence of essences while denying the eternity of species. What comes to be through a process of evolution is nonetheless a determinate, identifiable thing. Further, even Aristotle provides a resource for developing a neo-Aristotelian account of the evolution of living organisms: The concept of spontaneous generation. Cf. *Metaphysics* 1035b5–8. If one is to hold to *both* the doctrine of evolution *and* non-reductionism, then one must allow that certain types of being emerge from pre-existent distinct types. Further, one would certainly have to allow a role for chance in determining the traits of a species. Nonetheless, a species should be a result of a process which is generically structured. For example, an animal has to acquire sustenance, it has defend itself and, for the species to continue, it must procreate or reproduce. Biological emergentism is an extremely complicated issue and one which, in my opinion, may likely require some cooperation between philosophers and scientists.



beings, but that there is a difference in type between them and the looks of definite kinds and hence a difference between the former and the individual beings which belong to the kinds. This corresponds to a difference in the modes of analysis: Dialectical for the ontological categories and definitional-analytical for real beings and kinds.

Let it be noted that the Hegelian line of reflection just finished seems to contradict the thought of the givenness of the beings by affirming the self-productive character of the beings, or at least the ontological categories. In response, one may point out that there is nothing contradictory in the thought of the givenness of activity itself. Suffice it to state that the Hegelian can only refute the thesis about the givenness of the beings by defending the immanent transition from the thought of Being and Nothing to that of something. I merely indicate a direction that I believe the reader's thought should take and will not scrutinize Hegel's argument here.

I would like to close this sustained reflection on thinking and its beginning by addressing the question of the rank-ordering of ends, hence of human types, given in the very phenomenon of amazement, the awakening of the individual's desire to know the whole, i.e. to be wise.<sup>41</sup> Philosophy necessarily begins, through the rank-ordering given with amazement, with both an understanding of the idea of comprehensive vision and of the latter's primary position in that ranking, a perspective which, one may reasonably maintain, is not reducible to an equivalence with all others, precisely on account of its comprehensive taking in and ordering of the beings which are given to it. The non-philosopher, of course, does in fact perform this reduction and, one might add, does so by nature. Nonetheless, the idea of the irreducibility of the perspective of the philosopher is accessible to the non-philosopher in the form of the individual who can accurately describe another person's perspective while explaining why he does not occupy it; the value attached to comprehensiveness has a root in common sense. To return to the case of philosophy: To view things from the mountain-top is to adopt a limited, yet more encompassing position on the beings. The metaphor is imperfect precisely because it leaves the most important and indispensable condition of that viewing out of the range of vision: The philosopher desiring to think the Whole. No picture can supply what is absent in the illuminating metaphor, for the reflexivity of thinking is not a picture; human being is open to beings precisely because it is open to its own being and thereby to the Whole. Human being necessarily transcends itself toward

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<sup>41</sup> *Republic*, 475B7--10.

the Whole, that which as neither reducible to the beings nor, arguably, to an order of beings comes itself to closely resemble Non-being. We have also seen at length that thinking shares the principle of self-relation with the beings. I suggest that this analogical connection of the beings with human being provides the leading thought which one may take up in thinking through the problematic, yet necessary connection between being and presence. In short, I suggest that the self-identity of the beings may be adopted as a rule for ordering the sum into a comprehensive vision of the beings which are given as in and with the Whole, a proposal which I take to be a modification of the Hegelian project. Human being, as the most fundamental of the universals, is taken as the rule of an order which, as so governed, is immediately included and grounded in the place for the presence of the beings. Amazement is given with a sense of rank-ordering which informs the entire process of reflection; the beginning of thinking is the anticipation of its satisfaction. Otherwise put, amazement is insight into philosophy. So much for this indication. I will close with a statement about the essential identity within difference of openness and spontaneity. We have seen that finite openness implies positionedness and accidentality hence the spontaneity of reason and imagination. What perhaps expresses what is deepest in this constellation is what Plato has attempted to show us with his myth of recollection and the idea of the knowledge of one's own ignorance. Human being, in thinking itself and the beings, transcends itself to the Whole and engages in the endless attempt at constituting a *taksis* out of the elements, inclusive of human being, which are given to it. Philosophy reaches its summit in a kind of lucid ignorance. Stated otherwise, perhaps the deepest expression of the unity of humility and pride consists in the thought of finitude, finitude within the power of its own thought as being along with the Whole. The most difficult implication of this line of reasoning is that the Whole, as inclusive of finitude, is itself finite:<sup>42</sup> Hence the being of ignorance, ugliness and evil in their overwhelming multiplicity. With this thought one steps away from the idea of thinking as a way towards a definitive solution to the problem of being human or else as itself bringing to a close all inquiries into the question 'what ought to be done?' and situates oneself in the perplexing half-light of truth.

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<sup>42</sup> The only way to reconcile finitude with the (ultimate) non-finitude of the Whole, hence with the possibility of wisdom in a Hegelian sense, would be to incorporate the types of finitude into an order which itself closes in upon itself, i.e. is circular, hence complete. The foundation for further thinking that I have been developing in this essay assumes that this is not a completable project. I have already stated what I believe that we ought to preserve in the Hegelian conception.

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