# Rejoining *Alētheia* and Truth: or Truth Is a Five-Letter Word

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### I

**B**EGINNING WITH *Being and Time*, Heidegger was engaged in thinking the word truth (*Wahrheit*) in terms of the notion of unconcealment (*alētheia*).[1] Such thinking stemmed from a two-fold interpretation: (1) an etymological analysis of the Greek word for truth, stressing the alpha-privative; (2) a phenomenological analysis of the priority of disclosure, which is implicit but unspoken in ordinary conceptions of truth. In regard to the correspondence theory, for example, before a statement can be matched with a state of affairs, "something" must first show itself (the presence of a phenomenon, the meaning of Being in general) in a process of emergence out of concealment. This is a deeper sense of truth that Heidegger came to call the "truth of Being." The notion of emergence expressed as a double-negative (un-concealment) mirrors Heidegger's depiction of the negativity of Being (the Being-Nothing correlation) and his critique of metaphysical foundationalism, which was grounded in various positive states of being. The "destruction" of metaphysics was meant to show how this negative dimension was covered up in the tradition, but also how it could be drawn out by a new reading of the history of metaphysics. In regard to truth, its metaphysical manifestations (representation, correspondence, correctness, certainty) missed the negative background of mystery implied in any and all disclosure, un-*concealment*.

At the end of his thinking, Heidegger turned to address this mystery as such, independent of metaphysics or advents of Being (*un*-concealment), to think that which withdraws in the disclosure of the Being of beings (e.g., the Difference, *Ereignis*, *lēthē*). Now metaphysics is "left to itself."[2] At the same time, the terms "Being" and "truth" are now left to metaphysics. Consequently, the word truth (*Wahrheit*) is no longer thought in terms of unconcealment (*alētheia*). *Alētheia* is now thought on its own as a unique word, in terms of the essential hiddenness (*lēthē*) concealed in all disclosure, and the hiding of *alētheia* itself in the history

of metaphysics. The association with the word truth is thus put aside. There were two basic reasons for the dissociation: (1) Heidegger's desire to focus on what withdraws and not on what emerges, and to show that *alētheia* itself cannot be identified with any particular emergence or historical epoch; (2) the criticisms of his etymological claims about *alētheia* as a primal alpha-privative sense of truth prior to truth as correctness (*orthotēs*).

> To raise the question of *aletheia*, of unconcealment as such, is not the same as raising the question of truth. For this reason it was inadequate and misleading to call *aletheia* in the sense of opening, truth.
>     . . . we must acknowledge the fact that *aletheia*, unconcealment in the sense of the opening of presence, was originally experienced only as *orthotes*, as the correctness of representations and statements. But then the assertion about the essential transformation of truth, that is, from unconcealment to correctness, is also untenable.[3]

I see this direction in Heidegger's thought as an unfortunate one in some respects. It may indeed be appropriate for certain of his purposes: It can sharpen non-metaphysical thinking; it helps overcome quasi-metaphysical interpretations of *alētheia* as an "original" truth from which other forms of truth are "derived"; the word "truth" is fitting for disclosure, i.e., what emerges out of concealment, and *not* for what withdraws or is concealed within this emergence.[4] Nevertheless, Heidegger's direction here gives the impression of a "segregation" of *alētheia* itself on the one hand, and metaphysical thinking and truth on the other hand. Heidegger now seems to keep these two areas apart in some way.

I have two reasons for regretting this atmosphere of segregation: (1) The historical/etymological issue regarding the connection between truth and the alpha-privative sense of *alētheia* was surrendered too easily by Heidegger. Despite the fact that this matter may be difficult to defend decisively from a scholarly standpoint, Heidegger's position is not entirely without merit, either from an historical standpoint (Friedländer, for example, modified his criticism), or especially from a hermeneutical standpoint. This matter should not be considered a dead issue.[5] (2) The historical point could then continue to reinforce the phenomenological interpretation of truth as disclosure, unconcealment. This *connection* between the word truth and unconcealment is enormously important in my view. Why? First of all, the apparent separation in Heidegger's later thinking creates the impression that in focusing on some prior *lēthē* as such, he is proposing some singular "goal" of thinking, or some "resting place" or "source" too reminiscent of metaphysical thinking.[6] I am not convinced that he is, but such a charge would not be entirely unfair to the texts and could turn out to be warranted. But secondly, and more importantly, the apparent segregation drifts from what for me had always been the great power and promise of Heidegger's thinking, both in

[3]"The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," *ibid.*, p. 70.

[4]For an insightful discussion of these matters, see John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 176–86.

[5]For a helpful summary of the scholarly issues regarding *alētheia*, see Robert Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1985), pp. 15–27.

[6]This of course enters the territory of Derrida's critique of Heidegger. For an overview, with the significant references, see Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, pp. 153–71.

the early and later writings, namely, the insights it stirs for *all* our thinking about the *world*.

Heidegger should not have "given up" on the word truth (*Wahrheit*). The *relationship* between truth and unconcealment is an important matter, and I want to think the word truth in terms of this relationship. I say this not just because truth can mean unconcealment, but because unconcealment can mean more than unconcealment, it can mean truth. More: in some way it *should* mean truth. Along these lines, there are two reasons why the word truth should not be segregated from unconcealment, i.e., should not be reserved solely for the realm of beings (correctness, correspondence, etc.): (1) Thinking truth (in the realm of beings) as *unconcealment* shows that the disclosure of beings is not some "stable" realm simply with a hidden "origin." Metaphysics "left to itself" gives the impression that metaphysics simply is what it is, somehow distinct from the "negativity" of a mysterious origin. Truth-as-unconcealment gathers the fact that *all* forms of thinking, including the so-called hard sciences, show *in their activity* elements of unconcealment (mystery, groundlessness, negativity). Moreover, the process-character of unconcealment speaks to and fosters the dynamic, open elements in all thinking, which, despite metaphysical pretenses, has never been fixed or certain or closed (either diachronically or synchronically). Finally, the non-foundational character of unconcealment speaks against reductionistic judgments of one form of thinking by another (e.g., scientism). This permits a pluralistic model of disclosure that protects the "autonomy" of various forms of disclosure. (2) Thinking unconcealment as *truth* approaches the notion that unconcealment is more than hiddenness, mystery, negativity; it is disclosure. But more: it is not sheer groundless or unstable or arbitrary disclosure. Unconcealment can and should be integrated with the positive, "authoritative" sense of the word truth—not in the *same* way the word was taken in the tradition, but in *some* way. I will develop this point shortly.

Rejoining truth and unconcealment is important because it permits an *application* of Heidegger's insights to the full range of thinking about the world; it interconnects those insights with a very important word, truth. There is a two-fold mutual effect here. Truth-as-unconcealment "loosens" all forms of thinking from the constraints of traditional assumptions about truth. Unconcealment-as-truth "tightens" unconcealment and mystery in the midst of world-disclosure and connects Heidegger's thinking with the authoritative way in which the word truth works (something Heidegger's early writings did not in fact ignore).

If Heidegger's meditation on *alētheia* as such is said to be thinking the Opening, the unconcealment of Being itself out of a primal concealment, apart from the thinking of beings, then the following problem arises. For Heidegger, Being and beings can never be separated from each other, despite some confusion on this point in his writings.[7] But this should mean that Being and beings at every level must always be thought *together*. And if, as Heidegger claims, Being and truth belong together, then the same relational thinking ought to apply to truth as well. Unconcealment and ordinary truth should also not be separated. This would have to go further than simply saying unconcealment allows the "unfolding" of

[7]See Joseph Kockelmans, *On the Truth of Being* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 56–57 and 82.

ordinary models of truth. There should be a thinking "in between" unconceal-
ment and ordinary truth, the two thought *together* in some way—i.e., not just
unconcealment and not just ordinary truth, and not just the two "along side"
each other, but rather the "aletheic" feature of all thinking which at the same
time is not without an authoritative sense of the word truth.

In my view, the notion of unconcealment shown in the Greek word *alētheia* is
the most important term in Heidegger's thought, because it effectively gathers
and expresses what he was searching for from the beginning: the Being of beings
which is not reducible to any state of beings. But un-concealment, in its positive-
and-negative character, should be seen as an indivisible word, a continual posi-
tive-negative interplay and tension. Its negative aspect shows the elements of
mystery, non-foundationalism, pluralism and process. Its positive aspect shows
more than mystery or unconcealment alone, it shows *what* is disclosed and *how*
it is disclosed. Here we have "process" and "product" indivisibly together.
Moreover, the historical point that the word *alētheia* came to mean or was taken
to mean truth in the sense of correctness suggests that the process of unconceal-
ment should also be thought, in *some* way, in connection with the authoritative,
decisive atmosphere of the word truth. So I want to explore the possibility of
thinking truth-as-unconcealment-and-unconcealment-as-truth.[8]

<div align="center">II</div>

Taking a lead from Heidegger's contention that disclosure happens in language,
the "house of Being," we can take up this question in terms of the ways in which
the word truth can and does work, what it can and does show. Since language
should be no more fixed and determinate than Being, we should not assume that
the meaning of the word truth is fixed, in terms of either the traditional assumption
that truth as correctness is the bottom line, or the reactive assumption that since
the word works only in the traditional way, then a post-metaphysical thinking will
have to pass beyond the word truth to accomplish its task. Either alternative
amounts to assuming that the word is boxed in. To conclude that truth and
unconcealment can *not* work together is to presume that their meaning is fixed in
some way.

First, can the word truth show a meaning of unconcealment? The historical
connection with *alētheia*, of course, speaks of this. But *alētheia* is a Greek word.
Can the German word *Wahrheit* or the English word truth show something
comparable? Etymologically, there are some ways in which they can: for exam-
ple, the connection between *wahr* and *wesen* (in the sense of unfolding), and the
English suffix -th, which relates to the movement or coming to pass of something,
which could suggest "truthing," a sense of process also indicated in the phrase
"to true up."[9] Our language shows something interesting in the phrase "the
moment of truth," which does not connote correspondence or correctness or
even any vague conception of a ground for knowledge, but rather a situation in
which there is an uncertain anticipation of an important occurrence. So the word

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[8]Regarding both parts of this complex, I do not see myself going against Heidegger in any strict
sense. A good deal can be found in his early and later writings which can help me articulate this issue.

[9]I am indebted to Kenneth Maly for these and other relevant points, from an unpublished paper,
"On the Way to *Aletheia* and *Its* 'Truth.' "

truth may show a connection with unconcealment in terms of the process of disclosure and thereby reflect a nonfoundational emergence prior to correctness. And given the implicit pluralism of unconcealment, the word truth can accordingly work in areas that have to do with coming-forth rather than with correctness, one example being art.[10]

But the second question I have is this: Is unconcealment enough? Can we, should we not think unconcealment as truth as well? Once truth is related to unconcealment, we should perform the return gesture and relate unconcealment to the authoritative sense of the word truth. Once again, the historical movement of *alētheia* to the notion of correctness shows this. But that movement must be modified in terms of the "loosening" effect of truth-as-unconcealment. Nevertheless truth is needed so that unconcealment is not "let loose," as random, chaotic, arbitrary emergence. The English word truth can display a number of lived meanings that fit this purpose, and without any theoretical sense of strict correctness or certainty: for example, steady and faithful staying, what properly belongs to something, to fit properly, loyalty, a mutual pledge.[11] To speak of unconcealment-as-truth is to suggest some kind of authority and the possibility of judgments in various forms of disclosure.

My aim is to think truth as a *process of disclosing various settings which open up regions of beings*. This shows itself to be a three-dimensional complex: (1) unconcealment; (2) settings—where the word is meant in the sense of a background, an environment, like a scene setting in the theater—i.e., various "paradigmatic" assumptions or orientations or models or narratives that set the stage for thinking (e.g., different settings in science, art, morality, politics, religion); (3) beings, i.e., the ways in which the world is shown in the light of various settings. The three dimensions should be seen as inseparable, indivisible, and inter-related. Accordingly, with truth-as-unconcealment, all three dimensions have an aletheic character. The settings and unfolding of beings are pervaded by elements of mystery, negativity, process, tension and plurality. The settings are not fixed, grounded, isolated or stable within themselves. Truth in some positive sense, however, can still happen and work. Unconcealment-as-truth can show the appropriateness of the settings and the ways in which the world is shown; it can speak to the "authority" of these showings and the ways in which they "claim" us, which makes our commitment to them more than arbitrary. So truth is not fixed or certain, it is ungrounded, a dynamic process, a tension (truth-as-unconcealment), but not on that account without some authority (unconcealment-as-truth). The word truth can work "in between" unconcealment and traditional conceptions of truth. The word and its uses can show the meanings, functions and relations that permit this and that are important for our thinking about the world.

Let me illustrate some applications for this bi-directional approach. To begin with, consider typical problems in philosophy and science regarding primary

[10]Heidegger, of course, pursued this matter, especially in "The Origin of the Work of Art," found in *Basic Writings*. For a helpful treatment of the basic issues involved, see Charles Guignon, "Truth as Disclosure: Art, Language, History," in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28, Supplement (1989), 105–20.

[11]Maly, "On the Way to *Aletheia* and *Its* 'Truth.' " See under "true" and "truth" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

assumptions. How can the correspondence theory of truth *itself* be said to be true? To what does it correspond? The model of empirical verification in science cannot *itself* be empirically verified. What is *its* justification? How can any principle of justification itself be justified? The problem of circularity or the underivability of primary principles can be attacked as a vicious circle and hence a frustration for thought. But truth-as-unconcealment allows us to talk of the truth of primary assumptions in a special way, as simply disclosed, as simply "given." Unconcealment expresses the givenness at certain levels of thought, but insists on naming the negativity here as well (i.e., "given" means arising from "nothing" else; so a "given" will not mean something like "immediately certain" or "beyond question"). With an aletheic sense of givenness, underivability can then be a "virtuous" circle.

In general terms, we should not segregate the implications of unconcealment from science. We should focus on elements of these implications that are at work *in* science, e.g., its process-character, its appropriate sense of limits, its historical nature, its dimensions of mystery and groundlessness, the ways in which creativity, imagination and intuition operate in science, the "unsettled" character of science, especially in terms of revolutionary upheavals.[12] But this should not go only in one direction. *Relating* unconcealment to science should also call for thinking unconcealment in relation to the positive atmosphere of truth in science.

Truth-as-unconcealment is not enough. We need some kind of link with those authoritative features of the ordinary sense of truth. Though always working in the non-foundational process of unconcealment, though never fixed, the disclosure of settings and their features can give us the right to talk about truth, and hence the viability of judgments in some way. Why is this necessary? Because the lived world, the analysis of which generated Heidegger's insights regarding the negativity of Being in the first place, *also* shows and requires some sense of the positive, decisive tone ringing in the word truth. This is not just an arbitrary linguistic preference. We need to retain the word truth without limiting it to correctness and without slipping back into metaphysical models. In the light of unconcealment and its "destructive" implications, we still need to be able to say that scientific, moral, and political assumptions, for example, are true in *some* sense, in order to give an effective response to various radical versions of skepticism, relativism, phenomenalism, conventionalism, humanism, anarchism, or nihilism. To do this, we must link unconcealment in *some* fashion with the way the word truth has worked in the tradition and does work in ordinary, familiar ways.

If we consider truth in terms of its "alterity," its contrast-relation to an "other," we can get a better sense of its meaning and mark the transition to the next section of this essay. In an "ontological" sense (unconcealment), truth's

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[12]Much can be gained from a dialogue between phenomenological hermeneutics and philosophers of science like Kuhn who are trying to loosen fixed assumptions about the nature of science. For example, see Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivity and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, Praxis* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Theodore Kisiel, "Heidegger and the New Images of Science," *Research in Phenomenology* 7 (1977), 162–81, and "Scientific Discovery: Logical, Psychological or Hermeneutical," *Explorations in Phenomenology*, edd. David Carr and Edward Casey (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), pp. 263–84; Joseph Rouse, "Kuhn, Heidegger and Scientific Realism," *Man and World* 14 (1981), 269–90.

other is concealment. In an "ontic" sense, truth's other is not only that which is false, but also arbitrariness, and mere opinion. Truth in the settings would be shown in their *appropriateness* to phenomena, i.e., the sense that they are not mere fabrications, inventions, or conventions. This does *not* eliminate process, negativity, mystery, limits, or reintroduce foundations, or fix settings, or segregate them. Nor does it ignore the insights of deconstruction regarding negative relations and warnings about closure. I take truth to be dynamic, i.e., "moments of truth" that emerge, change, struggle within settings and between settings, that shift between settings and overlap settings—because this is what always *has* happened and *does* happen in our thinking about the world. But at the same time, in our lives, in the lived world, "taking hold" of something in some way is also shown, is also essential, and must involve something more than mystery, groundlessness, free play, or the undecidability of signs. We need a sense of truth, which I do not take to be a master name, but rather a working word.

<p style="text-align:center">III</p>

Every truth involves unconcealment. But not everything "disclosed" involves a truth. This is not to say that truth is something primary or prior to unconcealment (as in traditional metaphysics). The negativity of concealment and the process-character of unconcealment are "primary" in the sense of never being resolved or closed off. But in our lived engagement with the world, a priority given to truth in *some* sense is essential. For example, saying that art is a form of truth, in the sense of being unconcealed, should say something more than simply "something is disclosed." What is disclosed will *mean* something, something appropriate, important, sharable.[13] Also, radical skepticism can be said to involve unconcealment, i.e., it emerges in thought, it proposes to disclose something significant. But is it suited to various practical confidences that work in our lives? Metaphysical frameworks have emerged out of concealment. But since they have missed the "priority" of unconcealment, cannot their assertions of closure be called "untrue" in a sense? Are there not instances of thinking that "emerge," that we nevertheless challenge or judge in some way?

In the tradition, truth had been the vehicle for judgment. I do not aim to restore metaphysical conceptions of truth or the primacy of correctness. I want to propose a sense of truth that is both expressive of the negativity of unconcealment and responsive to the need for judgments. Accordingly, I will suggest a special set of "conditions" for truth. But to avoid setting the wrong tone, and in keeping with Heidegger's image of thinking as a "way," I will suggest a set of "signs" for truth—in the sense of road signs—i.e., ways in which the language of truth can work in a dynamic, pluralistic process of disclosure, and without metaphysical guarantees.

I must establish two points at the outset. First, I am focusing primarily on how these signs can work for the settings which open up various regions of the world. Moreover, these signs can work in *any* setting (e.g., in both art and science). Different forms of truth would simply be shown in the extent to which and the way in which the signs work in the different settings. Second, nothing in what

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[13]This would engage the question of significant art vs. *any* creation. Cf. Heidegger's analysis of Van Gogh's painting and a Greek temple in "The Origin of the Work of Art."

follows is meant to reflect a closed structure or even an aggregate of different, closed structures. The notion of unconcealment forces our thinking to accommodate not only an element of mystery, but also limits, finitude, openness, and especially tension. The "ontological" tension between concealment and unconcealment is reflected in an "ontic" tension—both between settings and within settings (diachronically and synchronically). In other words, there is always an "alteric" element in truth, a tension with an other (e.g., scientific findings are *not* emotional descriptions, religious belief is *not* a description of ordinary events), or with an opposite (sense is *not* nonsense), or with radical challenges in times of upheaval. The movement of thought does not begin or end in *sheer* concealment. The movement of emergence and concealment is at the same time a continual relation to an "other." This alteric element is essential not only for understanding the meaning of a truth, but also for appreciating the way in which a truth unfolds or comes to pass or changes. Truth is not the elimination of alterity; it is an occurrence in an ongoing tension.[14] An other will persist and at times dominate and bring about dislocation. This accounts for the limits, failures, and tragic element in life, but it also accounts for openness, movement, and innovations. The signs of truth simply show that in the midst of unconcealment and alterity, truth still happens and works; there are moments of truth. But accordingly, any of the "positive" signs I propose must always be balanced by conditional postscripts: at *some* time, to *some* extent, in *some* way.

The signs for truth are in two groupings, one positive (disclosure), one negative (the limits of disclosure). The two groupings are mutually related, they modify each other, and the whole is meant to be an indivisible complex. (Also, at appropriate points I will suggest certain terms from Heidegger's writings that can reflect the meaning I intend.) So, regarding what we can say "truthfully" about the world, there are:

1) *Inhabitive signs*, which show ways in which the world is a "dwelling," in line with Heidegger's sense of *Wohnen*, that is to say, ways in which we are situated and find our place in the world:

a) *appropriateness*. Truth is an event of appropriation (cf. *Ereignis*), where what we say is "fitting" for phenomena, where there is a sense of appropriate showing, where the world responds back to our saying. This has nothing to do with objectivism.

b) *reliability*. Truth is "steady," in the sense of having a kind of continuity, rather than being utterly unstable or instantaneous or "only once"; we can "go on" with it. This has nothing to do with "eternal truth," or strict certainty, or constant universals.

c) *workability*. Truth is effective; it permits us to engage the world, and the world likewise permits that engagement (cf. *Zuhandensein* and *Zeugganzheit* in *Being and Time*). Truth has a pragmatic element, which is not to say, however, that truth is only pragmatic.

d) *agreement*. Truth is sharable, communicable (cf. *Mitsein*, *Mitwelt*, and *Mitteilung* in *Being and Time*). Agreement is a sign that something is displayed *to* us, and is not simply a particular, subjective belief. This is not to say that

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[14]Cf. Heidegger's use of rift and strife (*Riss, Streit*) in "The Origin of the Work of Art."

agreement is sufficient (the three signs above show that agreement is not simply a "convention"), or that something like complete agreement (the myth of pure objectivity) is even a viable thought. But, for example, we can agree about the limits of agreement.

e) *sense*. Truth gathers the world (cf. Heidegger's interpretation of *logos* as gathering) into a shape that gives a kind of coherence to particulars. This has nothing to do with rigid, systematic coherence or an inviolable order. But, for example, acknowledging and understanding the limits of sense can be said to "make sense" out of elements of non-sense in existence.

f) *existential meaning*. Truth expresses and reflects the lived world, the significance of lived engagement, the concerns that animate our comportment toward the world (cf. being-in-the-world and the structure of care in *Being and Time*).

These inhabitive signs express truth in the sense of showing a kind of "transcendence"; in other words, what is said is not arbitrary, not mere opinion, and not merely subjective (either in the individual sense or in the collective sense of being merely a human projection or construction). Truth involves the ways in which the *world* is shown and shows itself.

2) *Aletheic signs*, which in the atmosphere of unconcealment, express the limits of disclosure. As with some road signs that tell us what we can *not* do, these signs tell us that truth is:

a) *non-foundational*. Truth involves a mystery; it can not stem from or refer to a fixed source or determinate ground or essence; there are no ultimate explanations.

b) *non-reductive*. Truth is pluralistic and inclusive. No one setting can stand as the measure for other settings.

c) *non-uniform*. Truth is multi-dimensional. No setting is fixed in one form within itself (e.g., *one* method in science), or sealed off from other settings. There is interpenetration and overlap among the settings (e.g., certain values indigenous to science).

d) *non-imperial*. Truth is a letting-be (cf. *Seinlassen*). No setting can crowd out or absorb or dominate or banish other settings that are appropriate in their fashion.

Inhabitive signs refer to disclosing regions of the world, and they permit affirmative statements. Aletheic signs indicate the limits of these statements (I include the element of alterity), an openness to mystery and change, and a pluralistic openness to the different regions and settings. In this way another kind of truth is expressed, which can therefore permit certain statements and even negative judgments (e.g., a foundationalist or reductive claim can be said to be *not true* in this sense). For example, with a material setting, where physical and empirical descriptions are said to be true, the inhabitive signs can all be followed. But if the aletheic signs are "disobeyed," in other words if a material setting becomes material*ism*, the inhabitive signs cannot be followed; such a reduction cannot make sense out of significant phenomena (e.g., brain-state language cannot work in conveying the meaning of the ideas on this page). Accordingly, both from

an aletheic and inhabitive standpoint, we can say that materialistic statements are not true.

With respect to any statement, we can ask "Is it true?" in terms of the following questions: Is it appropriate, reliable, workable? Is there agreement, sense, existential meaning? Is it foundational, reductive, uniform, imperial? We can then work at various answers regarding its truth or untruth.[15] Here we can say more than simply "something is disclosed"; we can say "it is true." I should add that since I take the signs of truth to be an indivisible complex, then "being true" is ultimately a complex matter. Even with the simplest empirical statement, its meaning can be traced throughout the entire complex. And the aletheic signs show us that "being true" not only refers to what can particularly be said of something, but also includes the *limits* of what can be said, and the need for and the relation to *other* kinds of saying. Truth, then, can never ultimately involve one statement, but a constellation of many statements gathering positive, negative and relational elements.[16]

The various settings that disclose the world in different ways can thus be called true in some sense; they are not arbitrary, or fictions, or mere conventions. We can speak of the "authority" in some of the things we say, and speak against something like radical skepticism, relativism, phenomenalism, anarchism, or nihilism (all of which stem from the subjectistic atmosphere of Western metaphysics). But the aletheic (and alteric) element in truth shows that this is not a return to correctness, foundationalism, or essentialism. Truth is not fixed, nor is it the absence of conflict. But truth can still work and happen. We must simply sort out the ways in which this is so.

If the word truth were *not* seen in terms of its authoritative atmosphere, then it *would* make sense to segregate it from unconcealment—in other words, if truth were simply a synonym for unconcealment, this would cause confusion. But if there are good reasons for using the word truth in connection with unconcealment, then it should be thought in terms of its authority. If there is any justification for linking truth with unconcealment, especially in terms of the historical relationship between *alētheia* and truth-as-correctness, then the proposal to think unconcealment *in relation to* an authoritative element in the word truth can receive some reinforcement. But beyond historical considerations, from a phenomenological standpoint we continue to use, and need, the word truth. Often, when asked "Is that true?" in areas that are not a matter of correspondence, we reply "Yes." Do we ever have a right to say that? By way of the proposed signs, we can say that we do (i.e., it is appropriate, reliable, etc.). Even in a conversation about a most radical rejection of truth claims (e.g., a deconstructive critique), we might find ourselves saying "Yes, that's true." Is that a slip of the tongue, a *faux pas*, a vestigial lapse, a mere semantic convention that we either do not notice, or, out

[15]Emphasizing the word "true" rather than "truth" is perhaps the better focus, since that would reflect the ways in which the adjective works in our sentences, and would avoid the impression of reification that can accompany a focus on nouns.

[16]For example, a scientific claim involves the inhabitive signs and also the aletheic signs (e.g., the limits of what can be said, the fact that a scientific setting is not itself a scientific claim, that science cannot justify itself, that science is not fixed and certain), and a relation to other settings, e.g., aesthetic and moral elements in science (an "elegant" proof, honest work).

of generosity or indifference, simply "let pass"? Or is such a response ever appropriate?

If the word truth is understood in an open way, with sensitivity to the problems of reification and closure, then in the light of the proposed signs the word can be *used* and have meaning. It need not be a "dirty word" or a taboo. We need neither abandon it nor replace it with obscure, unworkable neologisms (both of which would presume that the word *is* fixed). I do not think that my proposal is an arbitrary linguistic exchange of a traditional meaning for a brand new meaning (witness the non-theoretical meanings cited earlier). Nor do I think it involves a stubborn retention of, or "nostalgia" for, an old word. There is nothing wrong with an old word like truth, as long as it is understood and used properly. Moreover, there are times when we are better off with it than without it (or with some esoteric replacement). We need an open sense of truth that also carries some authority. There are times when something calls for, and receives, our *commitment*.[17] Although in an ultimate sense nothing "holds," sometimes we "take hold." The word truth works at these times. It may be that truth in the expanded sense I want to give it is misleading and might be dispensed with or replaced. But I do not think so. The word can and does function in the ways I have suggested. Retaining the word in the light of the signs permits its positive function in our discourse. It speaks when something calls for, and can receive, an affirmation.[18]

IV

At this point I will suggest some ways in which this sense of truth can work in particular settings. I have already mentioned how the aletheic aspect of truth can function with respect to the problem of circularity. The underivability of primary assumptions was often expressed in the tradition by way of the term "self-evident," meaning immediately certain, beyond question, a fundamental starting-point or reference-point. But if an assumption does not "follow" from anything, then self-evidency can imply an *abyss*. There are a number of ways in which traditional philosophy can be seen responding to such an issue: The assumptions can be traced further to a divine mind (hence the maintenance of a God concept in philosophy and even in science up until the nineteenth century); the *problem* of a possible abyss can be ignored (e.g., positivism); the truth of the assumptions can be challenged or denied (e.g., skepticism, nihilism). But these options all maintain in one way or another the traditional standards of truth. Aletheic truth can work here, in that the implications of mystery, process, and uncertainty are *affirmed* in this sense of truth. A primary assumption is simply disclosed in the midst of concealment. Aletheic truth amounts to a positive transformation of

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[17]Cf. Heidegger's use of the term *Bindung* in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, tr. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), p. 192, and *Entschlossenheit* in *Being and Time*.

[18]Certain references in Heidegger's early writings can reflect the aims of my analysis here. For example, the relationship between assertion and disclosedness in section 44 of *Being and Time*, and the following passage from *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*: ". . . assertion, as communicative-determinative exhibition, is a mode in which Dasein *appropriates* for itself the uncovered being as uncovered. This appropriation of a being in a true assertion about it is not . . . a merely subjectivistic apprehending and investing of things with determinations which we cull from the subject and assign to the things. . . . Assertion is exhibitive letting-be-seen of beings" (section 18, p. 219).

what would be a flaw by traditional standards. But beyond the fact that a basic assumption is ultimately "groundless," we must *add in* the inhabitive signs to show that the assumption is not arbitrary.

This opens up the possibility of pluralism, of affirming the truth of other settings that are likewise "groundless," but then no less suspect, no less "self-evident" (in an aletheic manner). Here we find a way around some familiar critiques of moral, aesthetic, and religious claims, e.g., that these claims cannot satisfy the conditions of truth (correspondence with empirical facts or conceptual principles). An aletheic element opens up truth for these settings too, since the supposedly more "exact" settings are no more "secure" at their deepest levels. From an aletheic standpoint, exclusionary assertions can be judged to be *wrong*. But again, if we add the inhabitive elements, then moral claims, for example, can also be something more than simply "disclosed." They can in their way exhibit a comparable sense of inhabitive truth, which has a kind of authority and claim, which is not simply arbitrary or a matter of subjective preference or human projection. Phenomenologically speaking, when we *practice* science or *hold* moral values or *respond* to beauty or *engage* in philosophical inquiry, such activities are not taken to be simply a subjective projection upon a neutral or unknowable world. The direction is not taken to be coming solely from "us," but also from the environment in which we are engaged. A certain "claim" upon us is the catalyst for the language of truth.

I want to say, for example, that there is truth in the sphere of ethics, that moral settings permit judgments. A moral setting can follow the signs of truth, both inhabitive and aletheic. The elusive "groundlessness" of moral claims, which has usually been considered a problem, now has aletheic truth. In fact, this also helps us overcome assumptions about "grounding" ethics in "subjective preferences" and opens up morality to its environment, its inhabitive truth. The "transcendence" implied in inhabitive truth helps make sense out of what can and does show itself in moral situations. Are my objections to torture simply a matter of subjective preference? If my objections are shared, is the agreement here simply a matter of collusion or a collection of individual preferences? Disagreement or the lack of settlement that can accompany moral issues is often cited as a reason for turning to inner attitudes: If one and the same act can be considered moral by one person and immoral by another person, how can the moral "property" inhere in the act or in the world? It must, then, stem from a subjective state.

But the assumption here is that limits and disagreement are a threat to truth. But that is so only by traditional standards of strict objectivity and certainty. Moreover, such an assumption has never been in line with the actual course of human thinking anyway, in *any* form. Scientific inquiry, both diachronically and synchronically, is marked by limits, disagreement, controversies, and dissettlement at various levels. One might distinguish between science and morality in terms of the *degree* of agreement, but one cannot divorce truth from morality on the grounds of disagreement. Disagreement and various other limits and tensions are not a threat to truth; they are a part of truth and its unfolding.

The idea of truth in morality fits in with Heidegger's objections to the term "value," which he renounced not because moral settings have no meaning, but because designating them as values ruins their authentic meaning by making them

simply a human estimation.[19] They must be more than that. Take the following moral claim: "The Nazis should not have exterminated millions of people." Is this claim true? By some interpretations, it is neither true nor false, since it does not fit into the scheme of certain truth conditions (e.g., empirical or conceptual). But should not we want to say it is true in some sense? To say it is simply a matter of preference(s) is both problematic (what about the Nazi preferences?), and from a phenomenological standpoint counter-intuitive (I take it as a *response*, not just the projection of a "feeling"), and in a way grotesque.

Well, how can we say it is true? Simply that it is disclosed? That this is just the way we happen to think? Can this really work? After all, the converse can be disclosed and thought too. Even though I take the claim to have a kind of "self-evidency," sorting out the ways in which the claim and its moral setting fit the inhabitive signs of truth can give us a more decisive answer to the question. Moreover, the aletheic signs help us even further. In the background of the Nazi atrocities was a totalistic, reductionistic, exclusionary picture of certain human groups (primarily Jews, but other groups as well), a picture which essentially "fixed" these human beings in a certain construct, and utterly denied them. Aletheic elements of truth can speak to the irreducible mystery of the human person, which enables us to make negative judgments of the Nazi viewpoint, i.e., they were *wrong*, and our objections can be called true in this sense.[20]

This does not mean that a moral claim can be "justified" by a purely objective, rational or fixed standard. Nor does it eliminate limits, disagreement, or an alteric tension from the moral sphere. In an existential sense, a moral stance is never free from the tension of certain counter-forces in ourselves and in the world. The moral *life* is pervaded by a dynamic alterity that makes it a continual "achieving." This also applies to the fact that there are moral dilemmas and conflicts between differing moral agents or groups. This does not mean, however, that there is no way that we can use the word truth in the sphere of ethics. The inhabitive signs help in this regard. And even though morality is uncertain and a constant field of tension, at a certain point there is a decision, a commitment. In my view, the phenomenon of commitment does not make much sense if morality is simply a matter of preferences or subjective states. Do we commit to, or make sacrifices for, an "opinion"?

The word truth is essential for the phenomenology of commitment. My analysis here has nothing to do with a moral "theory," but with the *way* in which we take up a moral principle in lived engagement, and what this means regarding the appropriate uses of the word truth. Not only is moral truth not a matter of

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[19] Kockelmans, *On the Truth of Being*, p. 258; see also p. 261.

[20] The negativity of human existence (cf. the Nothing, the transcendence of Dasein, potentiality, etc.) can serve to defend many of our moral, social and political principles. Many attitudes and abuses which we want to reject are driven by a fixed and closed picture of what a human being or group "is." For example, objections to racism, sexism, slavery and tyranny need not require traditional principles or universal reference points or alternative models of what a human being "is." Objections can follow from seeing human existence as *not* fixed in or closed by any determination. The "error" of racism and sexism involves the closure of a person in terms of physical or biological properties or roles; in slavery there is the reduction of a person to a function; in tyranny there is the constraint and closure of human thinking and possibilities. Consequently, the *truth* of certain "democratic freedoms" can be defended in terms of the implicit negativity of unconcealment. For more on this in another vein, see my "Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning," *The Personalist Forum* 3 (1987), 91–111.

uniformity, certainty, or objectivity (moral options are chosen, and one does not "choose" an objective truth); it also is not a matter of something like relativism. From a phenomenological standpoint, relativism (in the sense that different moral claims are equally valid and thus defensible in some sense) is an impossible term when it comes to certain moments of commitment. For example, the "authority" of our principles and objections to the Nazis was, in the end, not a matter of "justification." Rather, it was shown in a collective deed, in our decision and commitment to *fight* the Nazis. One does not fight something and *at the same time* affirm its truth. Even though the Nazis had "their own" values, and even if they had *won*, that would not change anything. There *is* such a thing as evil, and there is always tragedy.

Although I have laid out certain "positive" features that can show how truth can work (the inhabitive signs), the aletheic and alteric elements also show how truth is never separated from limits, tension, failure, even tragedy. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of commitment reveals how the word truth can still work in the midst of all this. In the final section of this essay, I want to work with the notion of commitment to round out my general analysis and also offer some remarks about Heidegger and Derrida.


                                          V


The traditional conception of truth, which follows from metaphysical conceptions of ground, foundation, or fixed structure, and which is governed by the desire for certainty, should be rejected. But this does not mean that a *different* sense of truth cannot be defended, one that operates in and reflects a non-foundational atmosphere, and that can exhibit *some* aspects of the affirmative tone of the word truth. I have attempted a sketch of such a sense of truth which neither reverts to foundationalism, nor rests in mystery or withdrawal or unconcealment alone, nor disperses into an undecidable play of signs.[21]

[21]There have been a number of contemporary attempts likewise to think of truth in ways that are neither foundationalist nor purely mysterious nor wide open, the most notable example being the work of Gadamer. For an insightful analysis, see Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivity and Relativism*; for the differences between Gadamer and Heidegger, see Theodore Kisiel, "The Happening of Tradition: The Hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger," and David Ingram, "Hermeneutics and Truth," both in *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. Robert Hollinger (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1985). For a rich collection on the confrontation between Gadamer and Derrida, see *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, edd. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). Although I see much to support in Gadamer, I see my approach as being more open than his and other comparable projects, which I take to be guided more by a traditional hope that there is at least *something* universal in the human condition that can bring us together, no matter how finite, historical, or dynamic that condition may be. Nothing in my analysis is meant to suggest such a thing; I am too much influenced by Nietzsche for something like that. I think Gadamer is bound by traditional *aspirations*, even if he sees the limits in the tradition (I concur with Caputo's critique in *Radical Hermeneutics*, pp. 108–15). My signs and settings are not meant to suggest a possible "convergence" or "fusion of horizons" or any kind of common, universal reference that can sort everything out into some kind of overarching order. I simply propose that the word truth can make sense in some fashion and to some extent. In various ways, there are instances of "ordering," but there is nothing common or universal or organized about this. In my view, "chaos" is not waiting to be finally resolved, and tragedy shows a truth that can never be erased.

In regard to Heidegger and Derrida,[22] the tack of my defense of truth is as follows: Certain elements in *Denken* and deconstruction seem to have drifted from the "situatedness" of the lived world, that which generated the hermeneutics of existential-phenomenology in the first place. Traditional philosophy was called away from its abstract detachment from pre-theoretical engagement back to the lived world, and that reorientation dismantled the pretense of strict objectivity, certainty and fixed foundations. But the lived world also shows moments of commitment, and such moments are a focus for my appropriation of the word truth. In a way, I am calling for a retrieval of some of Kierkegaard's insights regarding moments of choice, decision and commitment that we face in life. Have Heidegger and Derrida drifted from something that Kierkegaard rightfully refused to ignore? When faced with a Heideggerian "meditation" on Being, *lēthē*, withdrawal, etc., or with a deconstructive analysis of "texts," might it be that the lived world has been eclipsed again? Has the old detachment returned in some way here? Perhaps. But part of my approach to truth can be understood in terms of the *complementary* relationship between Heidegger's and Derrida's thinking. Each can serve as an effective counter-weight to the other, and as such feed into my intentions.

Derrida's critique of Heidegger is useful for at least two reasons. First, his analysis of supposed "priorities" in Heidegger that wind up deconstructing themselves is extremely important. For example, the priority of Being is said to be inseparable from, and dependent on, beings in its meaning; it could be that *beings* come first.[23] My attempt to think the word truth as an inseparable interrelation of negative and positive elements, of *alētheia* and truth, without proposing truth as some kind of ontological priority, is at least trying to work from such a notion of "interplay." Secondly, Derrida's deconstructive reading of Heidegger's texts is a needed warning about the dangers of slipping into closure in any form, and about the mistakes that metaphors like "rest," "withdrawal" and "origin" can perpetuate. Derrida wants to keep thought open and ever-dynamic, and Heidegger's tone and usage often suggest a departure from the alteric strife that is shown in thought and life. Here too, my analysis is trying to pay heed to the openness, tension and dynamism that occupy Derrida's thinking.

But when Derrida gives the impression of overdoing openness and seems to speak against my sense of settlement, things have gone too far. If Derrida's approach to truth, for example, is limited to a retrieval of a Nietzschean-like denial of truth in favor of a Dionysian play of "fictions,"[24] if this is meant to be *more* than simply a polemical counter-weight to traditional conceptions of truth, my pause at this is a catalyst for my reappropriation of truth.[25] I see this

[22]In my remarks about Heidegger and Derrida, I am not suggesting that their thinking cannot or does not reflect some of the things I am advocating. In fact, it has been my reading of Heidegger and Derrida that has led me in the direction I am going, a direction that I do not take to be incompatible with either writer. My intention here is to contrast my position with certain tendencies in Heidegger and Derrida, or with certain interpretations of their writings.

[23]See Briankle G. Chang, "The Eclipse of Being: Heidegger and Derrida," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1985), 133–37.

[24]See *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, tr. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978).

[25]In addition, an interpretation of Nietzsche as a proponent of fictions in place of truth is misleading and in some ways dead wrong. For Nietzsche, the radical denial of truth is no less problematic than the traditional affirmation of truth; in fact, radical denial is the most extreme *expression* of the

reappropriation as a reflection of a Heideggerian counter-weight to deconstruction, captured in the images of "dwelling" and "home." Heidegger's metaphors and poetic usages attempt to say something positive without falling into the trap of conceptual structures or fixtures. The image of language as the "house of Being" does suggest something that "stands," but no house is permanent or ever-present, and a home is not a fort. One need not be a "nomad" to be free of metaphysical fixtures. (Could language be the "mobile home" of Being?) Is the issue for deconstructionists that words themselves are the problem? That their mere presence or placement is a kind of crime of closure that requires a continuing counter-attack? But if the *words* of deconstruction can show us the limits and dangers of words, if language can speak to its own limits, then language need not always be a trap, and an over-prosecution of words may in some way be driven by the old assumption that words *are* fixed meanings. A deconstructive critique which insists on the continuing interplay of meanings is an extremely important contribution in the war against reductionism and closure, and in the promotion of openness (in thought and life). But a liberated attitude need not be nomadic; the decentering of meaning should not mean that we cannot dwell with a word. And dwelling with a word need not mean that limits, uncertainties, and tensions are ignored or overlooked or forgotten. Dwelling need not be a fixation. Heidegger used poetic metaphors to accommodate the needed openness. It is evident that my analysis has not always followed that path, especially in my retention of the word truth. But I suppose my point is that *any* word, even an old philosophical word, can be open too, and appropriated positively, as long as it is analyzed and understood and used properly.

I have attempted to think unconcealment and truth together and in between each other. I want to focus on unconcealment *without* an emphasis on *lēthē*, which would suggest some "    " that is somehow significant in itself. Unconcealment speaks the process-character of thought, which can express both a non-foundational emergence (Heidegger) and the negative tensions of thought (Derrida). But unconcealment and interplay are not enough. Both need to be connected in some way with the authoritative sense of the word truth (with the appropriate modifications). I say this not out of some conservative stubbornness, but because I think that otherwise the projects of Heidegger and Derrida might not *work* in the way that they should. If obscure neologisms and a kind of distance from important meanings in the lived world, in culture, and in the philosophical tradition are perpetuated, then Heidegger and Derrida may not make any *difference*, outside of their special group of followers.

I have couched the issue of truth in terms of the phenomenon of commitment. Critical renunciations of closure on behalf of mystery and interplay do pertain well to a treatment of philosophical theories and metaphysical constructions. But

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traditional view! (See my "Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning.") Moreover, Nietzsche never proposed the Dionysian as either separable from, or "superior" to, the Apollonian. Form and formlessness are inseparable and co-equal, both in tragedy and in thought generally. Finally, Nietzsche continued to use the word truth (the truth of becoming, "my truth"), albeit in a special way. Although this is not always evident in his writings, he did realize that the elimination of the traditional model of a "true world" also makes the idea of an "apparent world" meaningless, and hence the idea of "fiction" would likewise be meaningless (see *The Twilight of the Idols*, "How the 'True World' Finally Becomes a Fable," 6).

when it comes to commitment in lived engagement, such renunciations must be modified, which is where I think the word truth can be appropriate.[26] Both a Heideggerian *Denken* and a deconstructive critique should, *in* their projects, acknowledge and reflect the moments of commitment in life and thought, moments which, though not grounded in fixed foundations, are nevertheless not an utter mystery or mere nomadic interplay. For Kierkegaard, commitment never involved the overcoming of uncertainty and limits, but rather simply taking a stand, and dwelling in its uncertainty and limits as well. In regard to Kierkegaard's "either-or" as a critique of Hegel's existentially meaningless "both-and" dialectic, I wonder if he would be just as incensed with what might be called deconstruction's "neither-nor" and Heidegger's "no-comment." In life there are moments demanding an either-or, where we cannot have both (or have neither, or "take it back," or "hide"). We make choices in moral situations, political situations, intellectual situations (e.g., when to accept science and when not). A choice must affirm something, deny something, and in various ways the word truth can and should work here. Even in deconstruction, there are good reasons for preferring and choosing its methods.[27]

Truth-as-unconcealment-and-unconcealment-as-truth reflects a pluralistic, dynamic "family" of settings, variously appropriate at different times, in different situations, to different degrees. There are times when verification is to be chosen over intuition and vice versa, facts over mystery and vice versa, reason over emotion and vice versa, clarity over ambiguity and vice versa, order over freedom and vice versa, the group over the individual and vice versa. But there are also times when different settings overlap and penetrate each other. Moments of truth are shown in judgments about appropriateness and inappropriateness in these times. The art of thinking is to sort this out, but also to acknowledge and reflect the limits involved, the alteric tension, the radical changes that occur, the absence of complete consensus, and the sense of mystery within it all. But along this way, signs of truth guide us to places that are best called sojourns, momentary stays along the way.

[26]At times deconstruction seems like a case of academic indulgence. Is it nothing *more* than a method of reading texts, or rather, nothing more than a reflection of *academic* practice? Professional readers interpreting philosophy solely in terms of what *they* do alone? Is what has been called "interminable analysis" (Chang, "The Eclipse of Being," p. 126), and the priority of writing, simply another way of saying "interminable publishing"? Is "undecidability" simply open season for interpreters? Is there a kind of praxis-centrism here? Is the "seduction" of deconstruction (*ibid.*, p. 124) something like seduction in Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage, namely the absence of commitment? Would not lived commitments express moments in which deconstructive "undecidability" deconstructs itself? Would not this be consistent with deconstruction? If one were to reply that these moments, though evident, are not the province of a deconstructive reading of texts, then it would seem that here we have a curious return to the old detachment of philosophy from life.

[27]In fact, the inhabitive signs for truth apply well to deconstruction. It is *appropriate*, it fits phenomena (the critique is not forced on the text but is shown *in* the text). It is *reliable*, it continues to *work* throughout particular cases. There is *agreement* among proponents. It makes *sense* out of the elusiveness of sense. It obeys all the aletheic signs, more so than any other orientation. Accordingly, there is *truth* in deconstruction.