

1 Introduction: Heidegger, Place, and Topology

But poetry that thinks is in truth the topology of Being. . . .

—Heidegger, “The Thinker as Poet”¹

This book has its origins in two ideas: first, that a central, if neglected, concept at the heart of philosophical inquiry is that of place; and, second, that the concept of place is also central to the thinking of the key twentieth-century philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Originally the material dealt with in these pages was intended to form part of a single investigation into the nature and significance of place. As work on that volume proceeded, however, it soon became obvious that it would be difficult to deal with the Heidegger material in a way that did justice to it while also allowing the development of the broader inquiry into place as such. As a result, the volume that appeared with Cambridge University Press in 1999, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, while it included some brief discussion of Heidegger, was focused on the task of establishing the philosophical nature and significance of place, leaving the main investigation of the role of place in Heidegger for another work—a work that was projected in the pages of *Place and Experience* under the title “Heidegger’s Topology of Being.”

The title may have changed slightly, but the present volume aims to make good on that original commitment and can be regarded as something of a companion volume to *Place and Experience* (in fact, since I am now working on a third volume, *Triangulating Davidson*, that will develop a place-oriented reading of Donald Davidson’s work on language, mind, and understanding, the original project now seems to have turned into a trilogy of works). Moreover, while Heidegger is a central focus here, and the work aims to provide an account of the role and significance of place in relation to Heidegger, the book also contains material that can be viewed as expanding and supplementing elements of the original analysis in *Place*

and Experience. This is especially so as regards a number of methodological issues surrounding the idea of what I have called “topography” and that appears in Heidegger as “topology.” In this respect, *Heidegger’s Topology* can be viewed as providing, not only a particular way of reading Heidegger’s thought in its entirety, but also a more detailed investigation of the way in which the concept of place relates to certain core philosophical issues such as the nature of ground, of the transcendental, and of concepts of unity, limit, and bound, as well as a further defense of the philosophical significance and legitimacy of place.

In taking place as the central concept in Heidegger’s thought, the aim is to be able to arrive at a more basic and, one hopes, more illuminating understanding of that thought and so also, perhaps, a more basic and illuminating appropriation of it into an English-speaking context—an understanding, moreover, that shows how that thought originates, not in some peculiar and special “intuition” of being, but rather in the simple and immediate grasp of being in our own “being-in” the open-ness of place. In this respect, what I offer here is a very specific “reading” of Heidegger, one that aims to understand him as responding to a particular problem or set of problems and that aims to bring to the fore an issue that is otherwise not always directly apparent in Heidegger’s thinking either as he himself formulates it or as it is interpreted by others, but which is nevertheless foundational to that thinking. The aim, in fact, is to bring to light something in Heidegger’s thinking that perhaps he could not have himself fully articulated and that indeed remains, to some extent, to be “recovered” from that work. That the task of reading Heidegger will indeed involve a certain “struggle” both with Heidegger, and sometimes even against him, seems to me an inevitable result of any attempt to engage with Heidegger as a “live” thinker rather than a mere “text.” It also means, however, that my account may be viewed as simply putting too much stress on certain elements at the expense of others. This is a criticism that I am happy to accept, although I leave it up to the reader to judge whether the way of reading proposed does not bring certain advantages with it—not least in terms of advancing the understanding of the underlying concepts and problems that seem to be at issue here.

The plan of the book is fairly simple inasmuch as it follows the development of Heidegger’s topology through three main stages: the early period of the 1910s and 1920s (up to and including *Being and Time*) centered on the “meaning of being” (chapters 2 and 3); the middle period of the 1930s and extending into the 1940s, centered on the “truth of being” (chapter 4);² and the late period from the mid-1940s onwards in which the

“place of being” comes properly to the fore (chapter 5). The chapters that are of most importance in explicating the dynamics that underpin the shifts in Heidegger’s thinking across these three broad stages are chapters 3 and 4, and it is these that focus most closely on what may be viewed as the more “technical” issues of Heidegger interpretation—issues that are likely to be of greater interest to Heidegger specialists than to the general reader. Indeed, readers whose interest is more on place than on Heidegger as such may wish to be more selective in their reading of these two chapters and perhaps give closer attention to chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6—it is in the latter two chapters (5 and 6) that the idea of Heideggerian topology is most fully articulated.

1.1 The Significance of Place

Heidegger’s work is of special relevance to any place-oriented thinker. As Edward Casey has so admirably set out in his *The Fate of Place*,³ the history of place within the Western philosophical tradition has generally been one in which place has increasingly been seen as secondary to space—typically to a particular notion of space as homogeneous, measurable extension—and so reduced to a notion of position, simple location, or else mere “site.” The way in which place relates to space, time, and other concepts and the manner in which these concepts are configured has seldom been the object of detailed philosophical exploration. Although Casey argues that place has reemerged in recent thought through the work of a number of writers, of whom he takes Heidegger to be one, the way in which place appears in Heidegger’s thought seems to me to be especially significant and also quite special. Unlike Casey, who views Heidegger as proceeding to place by “indirection,”⁴ I take Heidegger to have attempted a thinking of being that is centrally oriented to the concept of place as such. In this respect, I concur with Joseph Fell when he writes that, “The entirety of Heidegger’s thinking turned out to be a protracted effort at remembering the place in which all human experience—practical or theoretical, willed or reasoned, poetic or technical—has always come to pass.”⁵ Indeed, I would argue that Heidegger’s work provides us with perhaps the most important and sustained inquiry into place to be found in the history of Western thought.

In this latter respect, the significance of Heidegger as a thinker of place is evident, not only in terms of the way in which spatial and topographic concepts figure in his own work, nor even the way in which he might be taken as a focus for exploration of some of the problematic aspects of these

ideas, but in terms of the manner in which spatial and topographic thinking has flowed from Heidegger's work into that of other key thinkers over the last sixty years or more, both through the reaction against those ideas, or against certain interpretations of them, as well as their positive appropriation. This is an aspect of Heidegger's work that is gradually being explored in more detail. Stuart Elden, for instance, has argued for a significant Heideggerian influence, specifically in relation to ideas of spatiality, on the work of Michel Foucault;⁶ while if one accepts Casey's claim that recent philosophy has seen something of a resurgence in the concept of place, much of that resurgence has to be seen as due to the pivotal influence of Heidegger's thought and of Heidegger's own focus, particularly in his later work, on notions of space and place. Understanding the way such notions figure in Heidegger's work may thus be viewed as foundational to understanding a good deal of contemporary thinking, and recognition of this point seems to be evident in the appearance of a small but steady flow of works over the last few years that do indeed take up aspects of spatial and topological ideas in Heidegger's work. Stuart Elden's book on Heidegger and Foucault, referred to above, is one example of this, while Julian Young's work has been especially important in tracing ideas of place and dwelling in Heidegger's later thinking, particularly as these ideas arise in relation to Heidegger's engagement with the early nineteenth-century German poet Friedrich Hölderlin.⁷

Nevertheless, while there is an increasing recognition of the importance of space and place, it remains the case, especially so far as place itself is concerned, that there has been relatively little analysis of the way in which spatial and topological concepts operate in Heidegger's thinking as a whole.⁸ Undoubtedly, this is partly a result of the fact that Heidegger's early thought has always tended to command more attention than the later, and in that early work, as I discuss further below (see chapter 3), space and place have a problematic status, while in Heidegger's later thinking, in which topological notions are more explicitly to the fore, the focus on place comes as part of what has often been seen as an obscure and barely philosophical mysticism. At a more fundamental level, however, the apparent neglect of place in Heidegger's work undoubtedly reflects the more general neglect of place that Casey brings to our attention and so the relative lack of analytical attention that has hitherto been paid to place as such. Although concepts of space and place have become commonplace in recent discussions across the humanities, arts, and social sciences, there have been few attempts to provide any detailed account of what these concepts actually involve.⁹ This is true even of such influential thinkers of

place and space such as Lefebvre and Foucault in whose works spatial notions, in particular, function as key analytic tools and yet are not themselves investigated in any detailed fashion. More generally, and especially in regard to place, the tendency is either to assume the notion, or to assume some specific reading of it, or else to view it as a secondary and derivative concept. Indeed, all too often, place is viewed as a function of human responsiveness or affectivity,¹⁰ as a social or cultural “construction,”¹¹ or else as nothing other than a sort of neutral “site” (perhaps understood in terms of a more or less arbitrary region of physical space) that draws any qualities it might have from that which is located within it.¹² The neglect of place that is evident here can be seen, to some extent, as a result of the seeming “obscurity” that attaches to place as such—place seems an evanescent concept, disappearing in the face of any attempt to inquire into it¹³—we are thus easily led, no matter how persistently the concept may intrude into our thinking, to look to articulate place in other terms (within a Heideggerian frame, the “obscurity” that attaches to place may be seen to reflect the same “obscurity” that attaches to being as such). In some ways, in fact, this is a tendency to which Heidegger himself seems to succumb (at least around the period of *Being and Time*).

Yet what place is and how it ought to be understood is just what is in question—and while the obscurity of place may render answers to such questions all the more elusive, those questions are no less pressing or significant. Building on the foundations already laid in *Place and Experience*, the present book aims to go some way toward providing more of the analysis that seems to be needed here, and in doing so, to go a little further in establishing the centrality and necessity of place, not only in Heidegger, but in all philosophical inquiry. In attempting to address the question of place as such, the analysis advanced in the following pages should not be seen, any more or less than the analysis in *Place and Experience* that preceded it, as *necessarily* incompatible with those many other accounts that deploy spatial and topological notions in analysis and description from more specifically sociological, anthropological, geographical, political, economic, linguistic, literary, or cultural perspectives.¹⁴ In this respect, the hope is that any general account of place will be complementary to the more specific accounts that arise within particular disciplinary approaches (which is not to say that it will be consistent with all such accounts or that it will be inconsistent with all of them either), providing a broader framework within which the analytic and descriptive use of spatial and topological notions can be guided and better understood. Certainly such a hope underpinned my own earlier work in *Place and Experience*, and the same is

true of the investigations that are pursued here in more direct relation to Heidegger.

I have already noted the way in which spatial and topological notions have a problematic status in Heidegger's early work, and there is no doubt that the idea of topology emerges as an explicit and central idea for Heidegger quite late in his thinking. Yet the claim I will advance here is that what guides that thinking, if only implicitly, almost from the start, is a conception of philosophy as having its origin in a particular idea, problem, and, we may also say, experience: our finding ourselves already "there," in the world, in "place." The famous question of being that is so often referred to by Heidegger himself as the primary focus for his thought thus has to be understood as itself a question determined by this starting point. In his book on the young Heidegger, John van Buren writes that:

Heideggerians in their search for "Being" have for years been after the wrong thing. Despite Heidegger's continued use of such phrases as "the question of being," "being as being," and "being itself," right up until the unfinished introduction to his collected edition, his question was never really the question of being, but rather the more radical question of what gives or produces being as an effect.¹⁵

Much of my argument here could be put in terms of the idea that the question of being is indeed underlain by a "more radical question"—namely, the question of place—so that, in van Buren's terminology, being has to be understood as, one might say, an "effect" of place. Strictly speaking, however, I would prefer to say that being and place are inextricably bound together in a way that does not allow one to be seen merely as an "effect" of the other, rather being emerges only in and through place. The question of being must be understood in this light, such that the question of being itself unfolds into the question of place. Moreover, one of the intriguing features of van Buren's work is that, while he does not thematize the concept of place in any significant way, he nevertheless paints a picture of Heidegger's early thinking in terms of a proliferation of ideas and images of place, home, situatedness, and involvement¹⁶—even suggesting, at one point, that "in 1921 Heidegger already used the term *Dasein* in the sense of a site of being."¹⁷

There is much in van Buren's work, then, as well as in that of Theodore Kisiel on which van Buren often draws, that is important for filling out the place-oriented character even of Heidegger's earliest thought—and van Buren and Kisiel will be important sources for my discussion of the early Heidegger. Yet just as van Buren does not thematize the topological character of Heidegger's early thought, so his work differs from mine in a

number of important respects. While van Buren takes the early Heidegger to be an “an-archic” and even “anti-philosophical” thinker, I see Heidegger, through his career, as concerned to engage with philosophy’s own topological origin. As a consequence of this, my reading of Heidegger is probably a rather more unified and systematic one than van Buren would find congenial. On my account, then, and in contrast with van Buren’s, the Heideggerian project is to find a way of adequately responding to and articulating the *topos*, the place, that is at stake in all philosophical thinking. Heidegger’s engagements with the mystical tradition, with medieval theology, with Christian personalist thinking, with the foundations of logic, with phenomenology, and with German idealism do not constitute merely different elements or strains in his thought (there is in this sense, *contra* John Caputo, no mystical “*element*” in Heidegger),¹⁸ instead all are part of the one attempt to think philosophy, and the most basic philosophical concerns, in as essential manner as possible—which, on my reading, means to think philosophy in terms of place. In drawing on these various sources, Heidegger can be seen to be working through a topology of Western thought that aims at unearthing the fundamentally topological character and orientation of that thought. One of the reasons for Heidegger’s significance to place-oriented thinking is thus the way in which his work can be seen as just such an “unearthing” or “working out” of the topological character of the Western philosophical tradition—a character that is present throughout that tradition, as Edward Casey’s work suggests, and yet is so often present as something overlooked or obscured.¹⁹

In discussing his own “transcendental” reading of the early Heidegger and the contrast between that reading and the reading offered by John van Buren in his book *The Young Heidegger*, Steven Galt Crowell writes that:

Readers of Heidegger quickly sense the presence of two voices in his work. There is, first, the Heidegger who seeks the proper name of being; the Heidegger who, in spite of his best insights into the ontological difference, often seems to imagine being as some primal cosmic “event,” a hidden source or power. Seeking the “meaning of being,” this Heidegger appears to want philosophy to “eff the ineffable.” There is, second, the Heidegger who is concerned with the reflexive issue of the possibility of philosophy itself, the Heidegger who constantly chastises other thinkers for not being rigorous enough, for succumbing to metaphysical prejudice and losing sight of the things themselves. This Heidegger seems precisely to shun the excesses of what the first Heidegger appears to embrace . . . Van Buren gives the palm to the first, “mystical” and “antiphilosophical,” voice, while I follow the second “transcendental” and “critical” one.²⁰

My own approach can be seen as taking something of a middle path between van Buren and Crowell—an approach that aims to hear these two voices as one and the same. Both the mystical and the transcendental have to be understood as focused on the same question, namely, the question of the place, the “situatedness,” of philosophy and the place, the *topos*, of being as such. One might argue that mysticism places its emphasis on the need to retain a sense of the originary unity of that place and its essential ungroundedness in anything other than itself, while the transcendental focuses on the attempt to articulate the structure of that place and the way place functions as a ground. Yet it turns out that these two approaches converge. The mystical and the transcendental do not constitute different ways of taking up the same question except inasmuch as they have come to be seen as different ways because of the way they have emerged as separate within the philosophical tradition. Yet the transcendental is no less concerned to preserve the originary character of the place of being than is the mystical. Indeed, when we understand the real character of the transcendental, both in terms of that which it aims to address and the manner in which it aims to do so, then the transcendental and the mystical can be seen to speak with a single voice. If the transcendental drops away in Heidegger’s later thinking, it is not because we cannot understand Heidegger’s later thought in those terms, but rather because Heidegger himself adopts a particular conception of the transcendental as tied to the concept of transcendence and that notion does prove to be problematic in the way Heidegger comes to understand matters. Yet we can also maintain a sense of the transcendental, and the hermeneutic and phenomenological, as continuing into later Heidegger, so long as we maintain a core conception of the transcendental, and the hermeneutic and phenomenological, as essentially topological in character.²¹

That place is indeed at issue here, at least in the way Heidegger views matters, is evident from the way Heidegger takes philosophical thinking to itself arise out a certain sort of situatedness (something that will be the focus for much of my discussion in chapter 2 below); but it also becomes evident fairly quickly once one begins to explore Heidegger’s understanding of the question of being that, van Buren’s comments notwithstanding, he clearly takes as the fundamental question of philosophical inquiry. As I noted in discussing van Buren above, my claim is that the question of being already implies (“unfolds into”) the question of place, and it is worth setting out, if only in summary form, how this connection seems to emerge, and, indeed, how it is already evident in the way Heidegger understands the question of being as such.

Although many discussions of Heidegger's work begin by trying to say just what is the question of being—and so trying to give some account of what “being” itself “is”—it should be clear that there is a certain difficulty associated with such attempts since the meaning of the question, and so how being itself should be understood, is precisely what is at issue. We can certainly say how being has been understood historically, and Heidegger does this on many occasions, but this does not answer the question of being so much as provide a way into that question. We may also give a preliminary account of the understanding of being that seems to be developed in Heidegger's thought, but if this is taken as a way of establishing the character of the question to which Heidegger's work provides an answer, then the risk will always be that an appearance of circularity will be the result—as Heidegger himself acknowledges.²² Yet the appearance of circularity is only that—an appearance—and reflects the fact that thought must have some orientation to its subject matter if it is even to begin.

To a large extent, however, when it comes to the question of being, our orientation to that question is first given as a certain form of disorientation. For while we can talk about being, there is indeed a question as to what such talk—what “being”—means. In this respect, the fact that we look for some account of what being is as a way into Heidegger's thinking is itself indicative of the difficulty that the question of being itself presents from the start. It is just this difficulty, this “disorientation” with respect to being, that is indicated by the passage from Plato's *Sophist* that Heidegger places at the beginning of *Being and Time*: “For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression ‘being.’ We, however, who used to think we understood it, have become perplexed.”²³ In some ways, then, the proper starting point for thinking about being in Heidegger is simply its questionability—indeed, such questionability is itself central to Heidegger's understanding of being as such. It may seem trivial to say that there can be no question of being in the absence of questionability, but the point is nevertheless an important one in the Heideggerian context. For what is at issue in the question of being is, in the simplest terms, how anything can be the thing that it is. For something to be what it is, however, is for the thing to stand forth in a certain fashion—to stand forth so that its own being is disclosed. Yet to be disclosed in this way is also for the thing to stand forth in such a way that its being is also open to question—for it to be possible for the question “what is it?” (in Aristotle, the question of the “*ti esti*”) to be possible.

One way of moving forward in the face of such questionability is, as I noted above, by reference to the way the question of being has been

understood within the preceding philosophical tradition. Heidegger, of course, looks especially to the Greek understanding of the question as determinative of the understanding of being within the Western philosophical tradition as a whole, and for Greek thought, the focus of the question of being is what Aristotle called "*ousia*," the really real, the primary being, "substance." Heidegger claimed that one of the great breakthroughs in his own thinking was to realize that this Greek understanding of being was based in the prioritization of a certain mode of temporality, namely the present, and so understood the being of things in terms of the "presence" or "presencing" of things in the present²⁴—in terms of the way they "stand fast" here and now. The way in which temporality comes to be at issue here (and so the connection between "presence" and "the present") is important, but its entrance into the discussion should not distract us from the way in which the issue of being is indeed tied here directly to the idea of presence or presencing as such. The introduction of this idea of "presence" or "presencing" is indicative of a key problem in contemporary discussion of Heidegger's thought—although it is an issue that, for those not especially interested in the details of Heideggerian interpretation, may seem somewhat obscure. Yet the issue is one that is important to address before I proceed much further. The interpolated excursus on presence that follows is thus something that some readers may choose merely to skim or completely skip over—but I would hope that it is a discussion to which such readers would later return.

In the very late lecture "Time and Being," Heidegger tells us that "Ever since the beginning of Western thinking with the Greeks, all saying of 'Being' and 'Is' is held in remembrance of the determination of Being as presencing which is binding for thinking,"²⁵ and again, "From the early period of Greek civilization to the recent period of our century, 'being' [*Sein*] has meant: presencing [*Anwesen*]."²⁶ But this seeming identification of being with presence or presencing (which has not always gone unchallenged),²⁷ nevertheless leaves open as a question just what is meant by presence as such and whether what Heidegger means by presence is always one and the same. The matter is also complicated by the range of terms in German that can be used to refer to presence including: (*das*) "*Anwesen*," (*die*) "*Anwesenheit*,"²⁸ (*das*) "*Anwesende*," (*das*) "*Präsens*," and (*die*) "*Gegenwart*" (which refers to the temporal "present" as well as having a sense that can be used to mean just "presence"). Does "presence" always mean just the presence of things in the present? Might not this Greek understanding of presence itself call upon, and yet at the same time obscure, a sense

of presence that extends beyond one single mode of temporality? Might “presence” be ambiguous between that which is present as present and the coming to presence, the “presenting” or “presencing,” of what is present?

It seems to me that Heidegger does indeed tend to think of being always in terms of presence, but that presence does not always mean presence in the sense of standing fast in the present, and so, when Heidegger refers to the way in which being has always meant “presence” or “presencing,” what remains at issue is just how “presence” should be understood. In fact, “presence” encompasses both presence or “presentness” (in the sense of that which is present *as* present) and the happening of such presentness (as the presenting or presencing of that which is present). Thus Heidegger comments, again in “Time and Being,” that “Presence means: the constant abiding that approaches man, reaches him, is extended to him. . . . Not every presencing is necessarily the present. A curious matter. But we find such presencing, the approaching that reaches us, in the present, too. In the present, too, presencing is given.”²⁹ This distinction between two modes of presence is close to the distinction between presence and that which presences for which Julian Young also argues. Young writes that: “being is, as Heidegger puts it, ‘presence,’ or sometimes ‘presencing.’ Presence (*Anwesenheit*) is contrasted with ‘what presences [*das Anwesende*].’ Since the essence of a being is that it is something present, noticeable, capable of being ‘of concern’ to us, ‘what presences’ is just another name for beings.”³⁰ Not only does Young distinguish between presence (what I have termed presencing) and what presences, however, he also argues for a distinction between two senses of presence, presence as intelligibility and presence as the unintelligible in which intelligibility is grounded: “For many readers [of Heidegger] . . . *all* there is to say about *Sein* is that it is ‘intelligibility.’ I oppose this view of things. Though there is indeed *a* sense of *Sein* in which it is just presence (truth as disclosure, ‘world’ in the ontological sense, intelligibility), there is another sense in which what is crucial about it is precisely the opposite—unintelligibility (‘un-truth’).”³¹ Young uses “being” and “Being” to mark out these two senses (“being” is being in the sense of intelligibility and “Being” is being in the sense of the unintelligible ground of being). Perhaps the main difference between Young’s account and mine is that I take “presence” itself to be ambiguous between both the entity that presences (what Young refers to as “what presences”—“*das Anwesende*”) as well as presencing as such and thus take it to be ambiguous between beings and being,³² as well as between that which is intelligible and that in which intelligibility is grounded—so we do not need both the distinction between “what presences” and “presence,” as

well as a distinction between two modes of “presence,” but just the distinction between two senses of presence, which can itself apply in at least two different ways.

Yet in drawing attention to these distinctions, it is also important to recognize that they do not provide a simple and unequivocal tool with which to analyze Heidegger’s texts—indeed, this is one reason why I would rather say that there is one distinction here (between presence and what presences) that plays out in at least two ways (in terms of being and beings, as well as between the ground of intelligibility and what is intelligible), rather than that there are two separate distinctions (between presence and what presences and between two senses of presence). In this respect, although I wholeheartedly agree with Young that being cannot simply be equated with intelligibility but also encompasses a certain “unintelligibility”—it encompasses both clarity and opacity, or, in the language of “The Origin of the Work of Art” (see the discussion in chapter 4 below), both “world” (or “clearing”) and “earth”—I do not see the distinction Young presents in terms of the distinction between the two senses of “presence” or of “being” as quite so clear-cut as it might seem—there is a constant play between shadow and light here, between intelligibility and its ground, so that what may appear as intelligible may also appear as a ground for intelligibility, while sometimes what appears as ground may appear as, even if only partially, that which is intelligible (a particularly good example of this is “world,” which sometimes may appear as intelligible and sometimes as that which grounds intelligibility even while not being fully intelligible in itself). Indeed, I would view the distinctions that are in play here—between being and beings, between presencing and what is present, between the ground of intelligibility and intelligibility—as having an irreducible equivocity to them (what I refer to below as “iridescence”) that is common to many of Heidegger’s terms and in accordance with which they always have a tendency to shimmer and shift in relation to one another, sometimes overlapping, sometimes not. Consequently, and dependent on the particular context, Heidegger may use “being” or “presencing” to refer either to intelligibility, or its unintelligible ground, or to the complex of both; he may use some variation on “presence” to refer to “what is present” either in the sense of some entity that is present or to the world as that which presents itself as the horizon of intelligibility. While it is important to be aware of the possible distinctions here and not to construe Heidegger’s language in ways that are oblivious to its various facets, it is equally important not to treat those distinctions in too rigid a fashion and to recognize the way those facets reflect one complex of thought.

If this distinction between these two senses of “presence”—presence as that which is present *as* present and presence as the happening of such presentness—is accepted, then much of Heidegger’s thinking can be seen as an attempt to recover the latter of these two senses and, in so doing, to recover the necessary belonging-together of the former sense with the latter. The ambiguity that attaches to talk of both being and presence here means that we can understand how Heidegger may indeed be said, in *Being and Time*, to reject the idea that being is presence, while nevertheless insisting, in his later writing, that being means presence.³³ In *Being and Time*, the focus is on a rethinking of being against the prevailing, and especially Greek, understanding of being as presence in the present. This does not entirely disappear in the later thinking,³⁴ but *Being and Time* takes this issue up in a very specific way through the focus on the role of temporality that is already evident in the connection between presence and the present (where “the present” is itself equivocal between the originary “present” as it figures in the ecstatic unity of originary time and the “present” as it is ordinarily understood). *Being and Time* is directed at the articulation of the meaning of being in terms of time and so also at a re-thinking of time in terms of directionality and possibility—in terms of the “ecstatic” unity of past, present, and future. It is this specific focus on temporality as giving the proper meaning of being that largely disappears from Heidegger’s later thinking, in which there is no longer the same imperative to re-think the idea of presence in its specific relation to temporality (as presence in the present), and in which the focus is on understanding presence as a coming to presence in terms of what is already indicated in *Being and Time* in the idea of “disclosedness” (*Erschlossenheit*).³⁵ As a result, in the later work, “presence” is more often employed in its broader senses in which it is not tied to the idea of presence in the present and in which there seems to be a clearer and stronger emphasis on keeping open the way in which presence captures something central to the understanding of being.

The idea that being and presence are connected is especially significant for the inquiry into the connection between being and place. Presence does not mean being in some indeterminate or general sense—presence is always a matter of a specific “there.” Similarly, disclosedness, whether as it appears in *Being and Time* or elsewhere, does not occur in some general or abstract fashion but always takes the form of a certain “clearing”—a “*Lichtung*”—it is indeed the establishing and opening up of a “place.” Thus Heidegger’s inquiry into being always takes the form, almost from the very beginning and certainly to the very end of his thinking, of an inquiry into

presenting or disclosedness as this occurs in terms of the happening of a “*Da*,” a there, a *topos*. Inasmuch as “presenting” always involves such a “placing,” so the presence or disclosedness that is the focus of Heidegger’s inquiry into being is never a matter simply of the coming to presence of a single being—as if presence was something that could attach to a single self-sufficient entity. The presenting or disclosedness of a being is always a matter of its coming to presence in relation to other beings. This is why, for Heidegger, presenting or disclosedness is inseparable from the happening of a world. When Heidegger tells us, as he does in *Being and Time*, that what is at issue in the inquiry into being is the inquiry into that by means of which beings can be the beings that they are, this does not mean that he aims to inquire into the way the being of each being is somehow separately determined, but rather that what is at issue is how beings can emerge in a way such that their own being is both in the midst of, and yet also distinct from, that of other beings. The question of being concerns the presenting of beings as what they are, and so as they emerge both in their relatedness and their differentiation.

The question of being does not, at least not initially, require any distinction between beings such that the question of being must be seen to privilege some beings over others. Yet inasmuch as the question concerns all and every being, so our own being is not excluded from the question either—the question of the presenting of things is indeed a question that encompasses both the way in which other beings come to presence in relation to us, as well as to one another, and the way we ourselves come to presence also. This means that the question of being will always involve our own being. Yet this does not imply that the question of being should therefore be construed as simply a question about the possibility of *knowledge* since what is at issue is the original presence that is necessary if that specific type of relation to things that is called “knowledge” is to be possible. Neither should the question of being be construed as already, from the start, a question only about how things can be present to human beings. The question of being is the question of how beings—any and every being—can emerge in their relatedness to, and their distinctiveness from, one another. The question of being concerns, in short, the possibility of “world.” It soon becomes apparent, of course, that in the possibility of world human beings play an essential role. In *Being and Time*, in fact, it looks as if the being that is characteristic of human beings is actually that in which world is grounded, although this cannot be so in any straightforward sense since the question of that in which the ground is grounded also points toward a question about the ground of human being as such.³⁶

Yet the way in which human being comes to be itself at issue here should not be taken to mean that the question of being as Heidegger understands it is somehow already a question, from the start, about being only as it stands in relation to human being. Rather, it turns out that the question of being is itself always a question in which human being is necessarily enmeshed. This is so simply in virtue of the way in which Heidegger understands the question of being as indeed a matter of the happening of presence, where presence is not some simple “standing there” of the thing independently of all else, but is, indeed, a matter of coming into relatedness with things in their sameness and difference, in their unity and multiplicity.³⁷ This coming into presence is what Heidegger refers to in a variety of ways in terms of disclosedness or unhiddenness, and for much of his thought, it is seen as identical with the happening of “truth.”

If we begin with the question of how it is that things can first come to presence, are indeed first “disclosed,” then our starting point would seem to lie in what can only be referred to as a fundamental happening that is the happening of presence or disclosedness—the happening of world—as such. It is this happening that turns out to be at the very heart of Heidegger’s “question of being.” This “happening” is not some abstract or standardized occurrence—of the sort, for instance, that we may attempt to repeat in a laboratory experiment or that we may reduce to a mathematical equation—nor does it lie in a realm removed from ordinary experience. Instead, the “happening” that is at issue here is the “happening” of the very things that we encounter in our concrete and immediate experience of the world. The sense in which the “question of being” does indeed lie at the center of Heidegger’s thought is just the sense in which this question of the “happening” of the presence or disclosedness of things remains the question that always preoccupies him. Yet inasmuch as this question is central, so the attempt to address that question forces us to reflect upon the character of the happening that is at issue here. In doing so, what soon becomes evident is that this happening of presence or disclosedness is always the happening of a certain open realm in which, not only things, but we ourselves are disclosed and come to presence—in which we are gathered together with the things around us. This does not reflect a subjectivist bias on Heidegger’s part but rather the simple fact that what we find given to us from the start is a disclosedness in which we are already involved. The inevitable starting point for any question about the happening or gathering that occurs in the disclosedness of things, regardless of what we may conclude later, is thus a happening that encompasses ourselves as well as things.

This happening or gathering is, moreover, not something that occurs in some general and anonymous fashion. What is gathered is always gathered in its concreteness and particularity—it is “I” who is gathered, together with this thing and that—and so is itself constituted as a gathering that has its own particularity, its own character, its own unity and bounds. It seems natural, and inevitable, to describe such a gathering as a gathering that occurs in and through place since place names just such gathering in particularity. The idea and image of place, particularly as understood through the idea of topology, is indeed just the idea and image of a concrete gathering of otherwise multiple elements in a single unity—as places are themselves gathered into a single locality (and in Heidegger’s later thinking, notably, as we shall see in chapter 5 below, in the late essay “Art and Space,” this idea of the gathering of place in place, the happening of the “settled locality” or “*Ortschaft*” becomes an important theme). As it functions to embody and articulate the idea and image of such a gathered unity, so place embodies and articulates an idea that Heidegger takes to be central to the thinking of being as such—the idea of unity. It is this idea, understood in one way in terms of the Aristotelian claim concerning the equivocity of being (“being is said in many ways”), to which Heidegger famously refers as providing the initial inspiration for his thinking, but the emphasis on unity, its necessary relation to difference, and the way this is intimately connected with the question of being occurs throughout his thinking, often specifically in connection with Greek thought but in a way that also makes clear its wider relevance. Thus, in 1969, he says that “To be able to see the parts (as such) there must be a relation to the unity . . . since Heraclitus, this unity is called $\epsilon\tilde{\nu}$, and . . . since this inception, the One is the other name of being,”³⁸ and before this, in the 1940s, he comments that:

Greek thinking equates beings, $\tau\acute{o}\delta\upsilon\nu$, early on with $\tau\grave{o}$ $\epsilon\tilde{\nu}$, the one, and, indeed already in pre-Platonic thinking being is distinguished by “unity.” Until today, “philosophy” has neglected to reflect at all upon what the ancient thinkers mean with this $\epsilon\tilde{\nu}$. Above all, it does not ask why, at the inception of Western thinking, “unity” is so decisively attributed to beings as their essential feature.³⁹

One way of understanding Heidegger’s thinking in its entirety—a way of understanding that also picks up on the supposed importance of the Aristotelian equivocity of being—is in terms of the attempt to articulate the nature of the unity that is at issue here, since that task is at one with the question of being. The claim I would make, however, is that this attempt is one that is already determined, in Heidegger’s thinking (and I would

suggest in all thinking), by the necessary role of place.⁴⁰ Thus, in addressing the matter concerning the unity of Heidegger's thought as such, Joseph Fell responds by saying that "The answer to [Heidegger's] early, and only, question about what is common to the manifold uses of the word 'Being' is precisely his later meditation on the 'single,' 'simple,' and 'remaining' place, the common place where every being is 'as' it is."⁴¹ The path along which Heidegger's thought moves is a path that constantly turns back toward this place, and in which the place-bound direction of that thinking, sometimes in spite of itself, becomes ever clearer. In this latter respect, however, while my (and Fell's) emphasis on Heidegger's thinking as essentially determined by the thinking of place implies the assertion of a fundamental unity and consistency to Heidegger's thinking as such, it is a consistency that is fully compatible with the character of that thinking as exhibiting certain breaks, shifts, misunderstandings, and even certain misrepresentations,⁴² as it constantly articulates and rearticulates the "question" of being as it arises in terms of the "experience" of place. Heidegger's thinking is thus always "on the way" (*unterwegs*), but that which it is on the way toward is the place in which it already begins.

1.2 The Problem of Place

If place is indeed a significant concept both for philosophical inquiry and for the understanding of Heidegger's own thought, it is also, however, a concept that brings certain characteristic problems with it—problems that often threaten to block the investigation of place right from the start. This is especially so for any attempt to take up place as it relates to Heidegger's work, and in large part it arises out of Heidegger's well-known involvement with Nazism. Heidegger became a member of the National Socialist Party ("saying yes" as he put it "to the Nationalist and the Socialist"⁴³) in 1933, and a little later in the same year, he was appointed rector of the University of Freiburg by the National Socialist Party, but resigned the position in 1934, after having apparently found it increasingly difficult to accommodate himself to the demands of the new regime.

There has, over at least the last twenty years, been an ongoing debate, not merely over the nature and extent of Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism, but also over the extent to which that commitment compromises or taints his thinking as a whole.⁴⁴ Yet there has also been a strong tendency to assume that, whatever the exact details of Heidegger's involvement, his entanglement with Nazism is itself tied to his espousal of a mode of thinking that emphasized notions of place and belonging. At

this point, it becomes apparent that far from being merely a question of Heidegger's own politics, what is at issue here concerns the politics of place as such. Indeed, Heidegger's Nazi associations, coupled with the evident centrality of place and associated notions in his thinking (especially notions of belonging, rootedness, homeland, and so forth), seem often to be taken as providing a self-evident demonstration of the politically reactionary and "dangerous" character of place-based thinking.

A particularly clear example of this approach is to be found in the work of the geographer and cultural theorist David Harvey. In his influential text *The Condition of Post-Modernity*, Harvey writes that:

The German philosopher Heidegger . . . in part based his allegiance to the principles (if not the practices) of Nazism on his rejection of a universalizing machine rationality as an appropriate mythology for modern life. He proposed, instead, a counter-myth of rootedness in place and environmentally-bound traditions as the only secure foundation for political and social action in a manifestly troubled world.⁴⁵

And later in the same work Harvey writes of the "sorts of sentiments of place, Being, and community that brought Heidegger into the embrace of national socialism."⁴⁶ Harvey's comments are echoed by another major figure within geographical theory, Doreen Massey. Although her work has also been important in bringing ideas of place and space to greater prominence in contemporary theory, nevertheless, Massey explicitly criticizes what she takes to be the "Heideggerian view of Space/Place as Being" and raises a variety of objections to such an account, claiming that:

There are a number of distinct ways in which the notion of place which is derived from Heidegger is problematical. One is the idea that places have single essential identities. Another is the idea that the identity of place—the sense of place—is constructed out of an introverted, inward-looking history based on delving into the past for internalized origins. . . . Another problem with the conception of place which derives from Heidegger is that it seems to require the drawing of boundaries. . . . [Another aspect of] the Heideggerian approach, and one which from the point of view of the physical sciences now looks out of date, is the strict dichotomization of time and space. . . .⁴⁷

While Massey is concerned to argue against Heidegger precisely because of the rise of Heideggerian-influenced notions of place and space within geography and cultural theory (and to argue for certain alternative conceptions), it is clear that she regards this as problematic, not only because of a supposed incompatibility of these notions with modern physics,⁴⁸ but more properly because of what she appears to view as the theoretically

conservative and politically reactionary character of the Heideggerian concern with place.⁴⁹

More recently, and from within an architectural frame, the architectural theorist Neil Leach argues against the Heideggerian idea of “dwelling” (closely associated in the later thinking with notions of place), and associated notions, on grounds that echo the criticisms found in Harvey and Massey. Following on from Jean-François Lyotard’s critique of Heidegger in “*Domus* and Megalopolis,”⁵⁰ Leach claims that Heidegger’s appeal to notions of, for instance, “*Heimat*” (a term sometimes, although somewhat inadequately, translated as “homeland”):

would appear to be part of a consistent nationalistic outlook in his [Heidegger’s] thought, which is echoed in a series of forced etymological strategies in his writings which attempt to lend authority to the German language by tracing the origins of certain German words to ancient Greek. All this would seem to infer that there is a potential nationalism that permeates the whole of his thought, a nationalism which in the context of prewar Germany, shared something in common with fascism.⁵¹

Leach goes on to argue more specifically against the emphasis on the notion of dwelling (an idea that will be explored in more detail in chapter 5), which he presents through Lyotard’s term “*domus*” as an essentially mythic concept that does not acknowledge its own character *as* mythic:

The *domus* . . . can be seen as a myth of the present, and it is within this framework that we can now also begin to understand regionalism as a movement grounded in myth. Thus what purports to be a sentimental evocation of traditional forms can be seen as part of a larger project of constructing and reinforcing a regional or national identity. We might therefore recognise within regionalism not only the potential dangers inherent in all such calls for a regional or national identity, but also the essential complicity of the concept within the cultural conditions of late capitalism. . . . These values are particularly suspect in an age when there has been a fundamental shift in the ways in which we relate to the world. Not only must we question the primacy of a concept such as “dwelling” as a source of identification, but we must also ask whether a concept which is so place-specific can any longer retain much authority. . . . All this begins to suggest that there is a potential problem in too readily adopting a Heideggerian model as the basis for a theoretical framework for a new Europe. . . . For the *domus* as domestication is potentially totalitarian.⁵²

Leach opposes the concepts of dwelling and the “*domus*” with the ideas of the urban and the cosmopolitan, arguing that these provide a more politically positive and productive source for thinking about contemporary architecture, especially in the fractured landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe.⁵³

It is notable that neither Harvey nor Massey, nor even Leach, pays much detailed attention to Heidegger's texts as such.⁵⁴ Indeed, one of the intriguing features of these comments is that they seem to be directed at a Heideggerian position—one that gives explicit emphasis to ideas of place and also “dwelling”—that only becomes evident in Heidegger's thinking in the period after 1935, and most clearly not until after 1947. Thus the addresses from the early 1930s in which Heidegger seems to align himself with elements of Nazi ideology combine the vocabulary of *Being and Time* with ideas and images also present in Nazi rhetoric, including notions of “Volk” and of “*Blut und Boden*,” but they do not deploy any developed notions of place or dwelling as such (and the distinction is an important one, both within Heidegger's own thinking and within thought, politics, and culture more generally). Talk of “*Blut und Boden*” seems to feature in Heidegger's vocabulary in only a few places,⁵⁵ and although the notion of “Volk” does have a greater persistence and significance,⁵⁶ it too is almost entirely absent from Heidegger's postwar thought. Significantly, it is in his engagement with Hölderlin, immediately *after* his resignation of the rectorate, in 1934–1935, that ideas of place and dwelling begin to emerge more explicitly (though still in a relatively undeveloped form) as a focus for Heidegger's thinking. Moreover, the influence of Heidegger on contemporary thinking about place does not stem from the work of the 1920s and early 1930s, but rather from that of the middle to late 1930s and, especially, of the period from 1945 onwards, particularly essays such as “Building Dwelling Thinking.”⁵⁷ In this respect, the strategy that appears in Harvey, Massey, and Leach seems to be one that attempts to discredit ideas explicit in the later thinking largely on the basis of the political engagement apparently present in the earlier.⁵⁸

If there is an argument that seems to underpin the criticisms of Harvey, Massey, and Leach, among others, it would seem to be that notions of place and dwelling are politically reactionary because they are somehow intrinsically exclusionary. Yet there seems very little in the way of any general argument that is advanced to support this claim. Certainly an exclusionary politics presupposes the idea of that from which “others” are excluded, but this does not establish that place is an intrinsically exclusionary or reactionary idea, only that it may be employed to reactionary or exclusionary ends—and this would seem to be true of just about any important concept one may care to name. Yet although there is certainly much with which one could take issue in the passages from which I have quoted above, both in terms of their reading of Heidegger and of the “politics” of place,⁵⁹ my aim in quoting from these writers is not to initiate a sustained

critique of their work as such, so much as simply to demonstrate the way in which, particularly in relation to Heidegger's thought, place has indeed emerged as politically problematic. Heidegger's entanglement with Nazism has thus provided a powerful base, irrespective of the actual strength of the arguments advanced,⁶⁰ from which to inveigh against place-oriented modes of thinking.⁶¹ Yet having established that place does present a *prima facie* "problem" in this respect, it is worth attending, in more general terms, to the connections that might be at issue here, as well as to the possible connections that might exist, both in Heidegger and more broadly, between ideas of place and reactionary, perhaps even totalitarian, forms of politics.

It has to be noted, from the very start, that there is no doubt that there are elements of Heidegger's thought and action that those of us who are committed to a broadly liberal, democratic form of life must find repugnant. It is not merely that Heidegger seems himself not to have been a committed democrat (declaring in the *Der Spiegel* interview of 1966 that he remained unconvinced that democracy was the political system best fitted to the demands of the modern technological world),⁶² or that he was willing to use people and situations to his own personal-political ends,⁶³ but that he also seems to have espoused a set of political commitments, at least in the 1930s, that were indeed consonant with elements of Nazi ideology, including the commitment to the special role of Germany in the world, to the role of the "Leader" (*der Führer*) as the focus for the people and the State, and to the need for Germany to expand her borders in order to allow for the expansion of the German nation.⁶⁴

The fact of such commitment is certainly a reason for caution, and even suspicion, in dealing with Heidegger's work, yet equally, the fact of such commitment does not, as such, tell us very much about how we should then regard Heidegger's philosophy. In this respect, there is a tendency in many discussions of the issues at stake here to assume a fairly simplistic view of the relation between the elements that make up a body of thought, and between philosophical thinking and the political and personal involvement of the philosopher. Although we may wish or hope it to be otherwise, possession of a measure of philosophical insight and erudition is no guarantee of the possession, in like measure, of qualities of personal courage, compassion, or even moral conscience, let alone of political judgment or ability. This would seem to be a simple fact of human psychology that is unaffected by general claims about any sort of necessary connection between philosophy and the philosopher. Moreover, to the extent that there will always be some connection between philosophical and political

commitments, or between philosophical theory and personal actions, the connection will be no different in kind from the connection that obtains between the various components of individual psychology more broadly—and that means that there will always be a measure of inconsistency and indeterminacy, as well as scope for interpretation and reinterpretation. Just as we may well find that elements within Heidegger's philosophical writings are inconsistent with one another, or else fail to display the interrelation that might be claimed or expected, so the same will be true of Heidegger's political pronouncements and actions.

Of course, it is often argued that Heidegger himself asserted the inextricability of philosophical thinking with the personal life of the philosopher, and so, even if the assertion of a strong connection does not hold in general, we are nevertheless obliged to assume some such connection in Heidegger's case. Here, however, not only does such reasoning seem at fault in formal terms (there is no reason why we cannot simply say that Heidegger was mistaken on this point—in his own case as well as in general), but more importantly, inasmuch as Heidegger does assert such a connection, this line of argument also involves a misunderstanding of the nature of that connection as Heidegger seems to have intended it. The way in which philosophical thinking connects with, or is grounded in, the life of the philosopher is not primarily at the level of a consistency of ideas, but rather in terms of the way philosophical thinking has its origin, and so is determined as philosophical, in the philosopher's own personal "situatedness." This will turn out to be an important point in the topological character of Heidegger's thought, but it certainly does not warrant the idea that there is a simple passage from the content of Heidegger's politics or his personal life to the content of his philosophy or vice versa. Neither does it rule this out, of course, but it provides no basis for the assertion of any such connection independently of actually working through the ideas at issue. Thus, on purely general grounds, it seems that neither Heidegger's politics nor his personal actions, no matter that we may find them distasteful and even abhorrent, preempt the need, if we wish to understand his thinking, to engage with his philosophy. There can be no "shortcuts" here.

A large part of the story of Heidegger's politics in the 1930s certainly involves his adoption of a set of reactionary ideas, common among many Germans of the period, including writers and intellectuals, that harked back to the notions of German greatness and "mission" prior to the First World War (the so-called ideas of 1914).⁶⁵ In Heidegger's case those ideas were also coupled with a conviction that the advent of the Nazi "Revolu-

tion" offered the chance for a radical reform of the German universities, and so, presumably, of German science and culture, under Heidegger's own leadership.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, there seems little doubt that the underlying philosophical basis for Heidegger's political engagement in the 1930s, and so for Heidegger's engagement with Nazism as such, was his particular understanding of the idea of a "folk" or "people" (*Volk*) as of central historical-political significance.⁶⁷ This is the point at which the connection with the idea of place comes into view since the idea of a people is itself a notion tied up, certainly in Heidegger's thought, as well as in the ideology and rhetoric of National Socialism, with the idea of a particular "place" or "homeland"—in German, "*Vaterland*" (Fatherland), or, more appropriately in Heidegger's case, a "*Heimat*" (one's "home," sometimes translated as "homeland," but lacking any exact English equivalent)—to which that people belongs.

The racial ideology of Nazism took the idea of the people and the connection with the "homeland" to be one based in race: the "homeland" was understood as the particular geographical space or region in which the racial identity of the people was formed—hence the near-literal use of the language of "blood and soil" (*Blut und Boden*) as exemplifying the relation between people and place. Heidegger, however, never seems to have himself subscribed to such biologically based notions. His conception of both the "people" and the "homeland" appears to have had its foundation in notions of "spirit," "culture," and "community"⁶⁸ understood as quite separate from notions of race and biology (a distinction for which there could be no place within Nazi ideology), or, indeed, of mere geographical location. Indeed, James Phillips has argued that while the idea of "the people" was the basis for Heidegger's involvement with Nazism, it also turned out to be, in large part, the basis for his disengagement from it (as I noted above, Heidegger's engagement with Hölderlin, and so with the ideas of place and dwelling that come to the fore there, also plays an important role here).⁶⁹ The biologicistic and racist character of Nazi thinking about the concept of the "people," and so of the connection between the people and their "place," is evident in many writings from the period. It is, for instance, clearly evident in the writing of Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, whose book *Die nordische Seele: Eine Einführung in die Rassenseelenkunde* (The Nordic Soul: An Introduction to Racial Psychology) was first published in 1932 and in a number of editions thereafter. In this work, Clauss presents a view of the soul as both determined by the landscape in which it is located while also determining that landscape in a more basic fashion. Thus Clauss writes that:

The manner in which the soul reaches out into its world fashions the geographical area of this world into a “landscape.” A landscape is not something that the soul alights upon, as it were, something ready-made. Rather it is something that it fashions by virtue of its species-determined way of viewing its environment. . . . It cannot, of course, arbitrarily fashion any landscape out of any kind of geographical area. The area is the matter, so to speak, into which the soul projects its style and thus transforms it into a landscape. But not every matter lends itself to the same formative activity of the soul. . . . When. . . . persons whose inner landscape is the north succumb to the enticement of the south and stay there and settle down . . . the first generations will live in opposition, albeit unconsciously, to the landscape which is alien to their kind. Gradually, then, the style of the souls undergoes a change. They do not change their race, they will not become Mediterranean people . . . but their Nordic style will undergo a transformation which will ultimately make them into a southern variety of Nordic man. . . . The landscape forms the soul, but the soul also forms the landscape . . . every authentic racial stock is bound up with its space.⁷⁰

Given what we know about the subsequent history of the Third Reich, the last sentence of this quotation is ominous. “Every authentic racial stock is bound up with its space,” writes Claus. What then of a “racial stock” or a people that lack such a space? The conclusion, presumably, is that they are not an “authentic racial stock”—not an authentic people—at all. Such a conclusion was readily employed to justify the Nazi persecution and, ultimately, the destruction of those deemed to be of Jewish “stock.” Dispersed throughout Europe and the Middle East, the Jews could have no homeland, no landscape, no space nor place of their own. Thus the stereotype of the Jews as cosmopolitan and rootless fed into a view of individual identity as tied to racial identity, understood in terms of geographical and territorial locatedness, that left them with no authentic identity at all.⁷¹

Claus might seem to provide an excellent example of the reactionary character of place-based thinking. It is important to notice, however, the way in which the type of argument advanced by Claus depends, not only on the assertion of a connection between human identity and place, but, perhaps more importantly, on the ideas that the way in which place and identity are connected is by means of *race*, and so by the “species-determined” soul that itself “reaches out” and fashions its landscape (which is itself understood in terms of certain general forms—the landscape of the “south,” of the “north”), and that there is such a thing as “authentic racial stock.” All of these latter claims can readily be contested without touching the idea of a fundamental connection between place and identity. Indeed, it is significant that in Claus’s account and in Nazi ideology more generally, the key concept is not that of place as such, but

rather of race, or the “species-determined” soul.⁷² Moreover, in Clauss, and in Nazism, the tendency to understand human identity as based in general forms, whether of “racial stock” or of landscape type, can actually be seen to constitute a move that diminishes the significance of place—it is the *general type* that is important in Nazi ideology, in contrast to which the thinking that is oriented toward place typically gives emphasis to the specific and the local.

This latter issue turns out to be a crucial point of difference when one looks to the way Nazi ideology is related to the German “*Heimat*” tradition. Although there has been a tendency in the past simply to assimilate this tradition (which, in common with “folkloric” movements elsewhere, including Great Britain, has its origins in developments in the nineteenth century that are partly reactions to developing urbanization and industrialization) to the same “folkish” and nationalist ideology that is present in Nazism, more recent research has emphasized the distinction between them. In many cases the *Heimat* tradition in Germany was connected with reactionary, even racist political tendencies, but this is not always true, and the connection does not, therefore, appear to be an intrinsic one⁷³—Christine Applegate, whose work has been particularly important here, argues that such a connection did not generally hold true in the Pfalz region that is the focus for her study,⁷⁴ while William Rollins argues that the *Heimatschutz* movement in late nineteenth-century Germany represented “a bourgeois-progressive alternative to the Wilhelmine order.”⁷⁵ Indeed, while the Nazi attempt to appropriate to themselves all things German meant that they also attempted to take up elements of the *Heimat* tradition, in doing so they also tended to undermine its local and associational elements. The result, as Applegate writes, was that

although *Heimat* cultivation did persist in the Third Reich, its meaning—politicized, paganized, and nationalized—became ultimately abstract. All that had once been vital to *Heimat* cultivation, from civic pride to a respect for the particularity of local life and tradition, had little resonance in a regime attentive to national grandeur and racial, not simply local, pride. *Heimat*, because it implied little about race, tribe, or any of the other categories favoured by Nazi ideology, became a term of distinctly secondary importance: the locus of race, perhaps, but not its essence, and not a concept with any intrinsically prior claim to the loyalties of the German Volk.⁷⁶

The subsumption of the individual to the State, the Nation and to the “People” that is characteristic of fascist, and totalitarian, politics would thus seem to be in tension with the emphasis on the particular and the local that is characteristic of the *Heimat* tradition. The way in which the Nazis, and others, nevertheless, tend to draw on that tradition need not

be taken to be indicative of the fascist character of the tradition as such, but rather of the need to find content for the otherwise rather nebulous and abstract notions of “nation” and of “people.” In many respects, the tension that seems to exist between the emphasis on the local and the particular that is associated with the *Heimat* tradition and the overarching nationalism and totalitarianism associated with the idea of “the people” as the focus for political-historical thinking itself seems to arise as a source of tension in Heidegger’s own work.

My point here, however, is not so much to defend the *Heimat* tradition (although it does seem to me that there are important elements in that tradition that deserve further exploration) as to indicate the complexities that surround the various forms in which notions of place, belonging, and identity may be articulated. Such complexity is often overlooked. This is so, not only with respect to the historical appearance of such notions, but also with respect to the way they play out in more mundane contemporary thinking across almost the entire political spectrum. Whether we inquire into what it is to be “English” or to be “Australian” (both important topics of discussion in the contemporary English and Australian media), the importance of respecting indigenous connections with the land, or the value of regenerating local communities through the regeneration of urban parkland and streetscapes, what is at issue in all such cases are questions that give priority to notions of place, and yet they do not thereby automatically predispose us to a specific political orientation. It is often claimed that to take place as a focus for ideas of identity and belonging is already to presuppose a homogeneity of culture and identity in relation to that place, as well as to exclude others from it—this is the core of the argument that is often used to demonstrate the supposed politically dangerous character of place-oriented thinking. Yet this claim is usually only advanced in particular instances—it is seldom directed, for instance, against indigenous modes of understanding—and typically depends, not so much on the idea of place as such, but rather on a particular, and already rather contentious conception of place (and so of the relation to place) that is often based on the sort of ideas that Massey lists in the passage I quoted above: “single essential identities . . . an introverted, inward-looking history based on delving into the past for internalized origins . . . the strict dichotomization of time and space.” In other words, the argument for the reactionary character of place often seems to depend on already construing place in a politically reactionary fashion.

The real question, however, is just *how* place should be understood. And this is an even more pressing question because of the way in which place,

and notions associated with place, are indeed given powerful political employment across the political spectrum. In this respect, simply to reject place because of its use by reactionary politics is actually to run the risk of failing to understand why and how place is important, and so of failing to understand how the notion can, and does, serve a range of political ends, including those of fascism and totalitarianism, as well as of progressivism. Thus, just as Heidegger's own politics cannot be taken, in itself, to undermine his philosophy in any direct way, neither can we take the fact that Nazi ideology and rhetoric invoke notions that are connected with ideas of place and belonging as evidence for the politically unacceptable character of the notions of place and belonging as such. Indeed, just as the Nazis deployed other notions that have a power and significance in human life—including ideas of virtue, of ethics and morality, of courage, care, and commitment (even if in ways that seem to invert the very meanings of these ideas)—so the fact that they also deployed notions of place and belonging attests more to the power and significance of those notions than provides any evidence of their essentially reactionary character. In pressing this point, however, the most that can be achieved is to clear a space in which the question of place can be raised as a significant one deserving of further inquiry. In my own case, I have already set out some of the considerations relevant to such an inquiry in my previous work. The task here is to undertake that inquiry with specific reference to Heidegger, and one of the reasons for undertaking such a project, quite apart from the attempt to advance the understanding of Heidegger's thinking, is precisely because of the way in which place appears central to Heidegger's thought, and yet also the way it appears as a problem in his thinking.

1.3 The Language of Place

So far I have used the term "topology," as well as "space" and "place," without any explanation as to what exactly I take these terms to involve. Although the exploration of the meaning of these terms is a large part of what I will be attempting in the pages to come, some preliminary clarification is also required now—all the more so given the German sources that I will address. For the most part, my use of "space," "place," and "topology" draws heavily on the analysis that is set out in *Place and Experience*. In that work, I distinguished place from space, while also allowing that there is a sense of dimensionality to place that also makes for a necessary connection between the two concepts, as well as between place and time. Indeed, in *Place and Experience*, I took place to be a more encompassing

notion than either space or time, the latter two being presented as complementary modes of dimensionality tied to simultaneity and succession respectively.⁷⁷

One of the difficulties in clarifying the relation between space and place is, not only that the two are necessarily connected (inasmuch as place carries a spatial element within it even while space is also a certain abstraction from out of place), but that there has been a pervasive tendency for place to be understood in terms that are purely spatial. This is a point that I noted above—a point that is a key element in Casey's account of the history of place—and it means that place is most often treated as either a certain position in space or else as a certain portion of space (formally specifiable in both cases through a framework of coordinates). This way of understanding place is itself tied to a particular conception of space as identical with physical space, that is, with space as it is articulated within the system of the physical sciences, and so as essentially articulated in terms of the measurable and the quantifiable. Heidegger himself comments on the modern concept of space and the way it has come to dominate the idea of place, thus: "For us today space is not determined by way of place; rather, all places, as constellations of points, are determined by infinite space that is everywhere homogeneous and nowhere distinctive."⁷⁸

The concepts of place, and of space, that are at issue for Heidegger cannot be assumed to be identical with any narrowly physicalist conception, nor can it be assumed that place can be taken as derivative of space, or as identical with spatial location, position, area, or volume. In this respect, place should not be assumed to be identical with the "where" of a thing. Although this is one sense of place, it is not the only or the primary sense—place also refers us to that open, cleared, gathered "region" or "locale" in which we find ourselves along with other persons and things. Yet when the concept of place does appear explicitly in early Heidegger, it is often in terms, not of this sort of cleared region, but in terms of location or position. Similarly, there is often a tendency for Heidegger, again more so in his early work, to view space in terms that are tied to a physicalist conception of space—a tendency that is itself tied to the way in which, especially in *Being and Time*, Heidegger associates the prioritization of spatiality with Cartesianism. Nonetheless, there is clearly a topological structure already at work even in Heidegger's early thought, while so far as space is concerned, for the most part, Heidegger sees the physicalist conception of space as secondary to more existential conceptions. Thus in *Being and Time*, as we shall see, there is a notion of space that is directly involved with the character of *Dasein* (being-there) as "being-in-the-world."

Place is, as I noted above, a problematic concept in the early work—although it is not absent, it is not generally thematized as such, and it is only in the period after the 1930s that it comes to be an explicit focus of attention. When Heidegger does take up place directly in this way, then it is place as a certain gathered, but open “region” that is indeed the focus of Heidegger’s attention. This conception of place connects, in English, with the way in which the term “place” is itself derived from Greek and Latin roots meaning “broad, or open way,” as well as with the sense of “place” associated with the way in which the intersection of roads in a town or village may open out into a square that may itself function as somewhere in which events and people may gather and perhaps even as the center for the town or village as such. The idea of place as tied to a notion of gathering or “focus” is also suggested by the etymology of the German term for place, *Ort*, according to which the term originally indicated the point or edge of a weapon—the point of a spear, for instance—at which all of the energy of the weapon is brought to bear.⁷⁹ Indeed, Heidegger himself makes use of this connection in his 1952 essay on the poet Georg Trakl, writing that “Originally the word *Ort* meant the point [*Spitze*] of a spear. In it everything flows together. The *Ort* gathers unto itself into the highest and the most extreme.”⁸⁰ Inasmuch as this notion of place implies a certain unity to the elements that make it up, so, in Heidegger, it also implies a certain very specific form of boundedness, but it is a form that is quite distinct from the boundedness of which Massey complains—it is a form of boundedness tied to the idea of that from which something begins in its unfolding as what it is, rather than that at which it comes to a stop; a concept of boundary as *origin* rather than as *terminus*.⁸¹ Significantly, both this idea of boundedness and that of focus or gathering are themselves closely tied to a conception of place as constituted through a gathering of elements that are themselves mutually defined only through the way in which they are gathered together within the place they also constitute. This latter feature of place, although it may seem initially somewhat obscure, turns out to be a key element in the Heideggerian conception of place and is something about which I shall say more shortly.⁸²

The English term “space” can usually be taken as the straightforward translation of the German term “*Raum*”—a translation that fits most of Heidegger’s uses of the term—although the German term can sometimes be translated also by the English “room” (as in “room to move”), as well as figuring in the verb forms “*räumen*” (to make empty, evacuate), “*aufräumen*” (to clear out, to make an end of), and “*ausräumen*” (to empty out).

"Place" is rather more complicated, however, as the term can—and is—used to translate a number of different, if sometimes related, terms. The most important term is that which I mentioned briefly above, "*Ort*,"⁸³ and, with it, the related form "*Ortschaft*" (often used to mean a village, town, or other settled locality). Heidegger uses this term as his usual translation for the Greek term "*topos*" (which appears in the English "topology" and "topography"). Significantly, both "*Ort*" and "*Ortschaft*" become more important terms in Heidegger's thinking as place is itself taken up more directly. Consequently, these terms do not appear with the same frequency or emphasis in the early thought as in the later (when Heidegger does talk of place in the earlier writings, it is often by using terms such as "*Stelle*" or "*Platz*"). There is, however, one other term that Heidegger employs, on at least two occasions, in a way that does suggest connections with his later use of "*Ort*" and "*Ortschaft*": "*Stätte*," usually translated simply as "place," but often having the connotation of "home," is used by Heidegger in the 1935–1936 essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," as well as in other works, principally from the 1930s and early 1940s, most notably in some of the Hölderlin lectures.⁸⁴ The term does not, however, seem to be used in any significant way outside of works mostly restricted to the 1930s and 1940s. The employment of "*Ort*" as a term that relates to *topos* is itself indicated by the way in which both terms figure in ways that can be used to designate a discussion or focus of inquiry. This is true of the English word "topic" and so the idea of "topology" in Heidegger's thinking can sometimes be viewed as relating as much to the idea of a literary or textual "site" as to a place as such.⁸⁵ The German term "*Erörterung*," which contains "*Ort*" within it, also means a debate or discussion, but Heidegger employs it in a way that plays on the sense of "situating," "locating," or "placing" that it also connotes.⁸⁶ This is significant, not because it somehow shows that Heidegger's talk of "*topos*" or "*Ort*" is really a reference to something linguistic, but rather because of the way it is indicative of the intimate connection between language and place (something I discuss further in chapter 5, especially sec. 5.4 below).

In *Being and Time*, the concept of place appears most directly in the ideas of "*Platz*" and "*Gegend*." "*Platz*" usually refers to a particular place in the sense of *location* (typically in relation to other things, although it also has a use in which it comes close to space or "room") and is a term whose significance is largely restricted to the framework of *Being and Time* and the discussion of equipmentality—"equipment has its place [*Platz*]." ⁸⁷ "*Gegend*" is often translated as "region" (John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson also suggest "realm" or "whereabouts").⁸⁸ The term appears in Heidegger's later

thinking to refer to a region as it gathers around a particular place (and in this sense may be taken to relate more closely to “Ort” or “Ortschaft,” although referring to a more encompassing domain), but in *Being and Time* the term refers to the larger realm within which items of equipment are placed in relation to one another (in, for instance, the workroom) and so to what is more like a network of “places” (*Plätze*)—this use of “*Gegend*” in relation to “*Platz*” is indicative of the way “*Platz*” usually indicates a position or location within a larger ordering. Another term that has a similar meaning to “*Platz*” is (*die*) “*Stelle*,” although in the same paragraph in *Being and Time* in which he introduces the idea of the “*Platz*” of equipment, Heidegger uses “*Stelle*” to refer to the way equipment “has its position [*Stelle*] in space” in a way that suggests a contrast between the two notions. Yet in both cases, there is a similar sense to the way in which “*Stelle*” and “*Platz*” always refer to a larger region or domain of positions or locations, whether that be the realm of extended spatiality or of the organized workroom. “*Stelle*” is connected to the verb “*stellen*” (to put or to place), which plays a key role in a number of terms, including “*Ge-stell*” (Heidegger’s word for the essence of modern technology), and in this respect the connection of “*Stelle*” with spatiality is itself significant (as will be evident in the discussion in chapter 5). Another term that has a similar sense to “*Platz*” and “*Stelle*,” in the broad sense of location or position, is (*die*) “*Statt*,” which appears in the verb “*stattfinden*” (to take place).

It is crucial to recognize the differing senses that attach to these spatial and topographic terms since failure to do so could lead one to seriously misread the role of place in Heidegger’s thinking—all the more so if one is reliant on English translations of Heidegger’s text that are not sensitive to the underlying issues of topology at stake here. For the most part, the important distinction is between terms such as “Ort” and “Ortschaft” (and to a lesser extent “*Stätte*”), and terms such as “Platz” and “*Stelle*.” All of these terms may be translated as “place,” and yet although “Ort” and “Ortschaft” can be used to refer to place in the ontologically significant sense that I have already outlined above (place as the open region in which things are gathered and disclosed), “Platz” and “*Stelle*” invariably refer to place merely in the sense of location or position—usually the location or position of some already identified and determined entity. One of the difficulties, in this respect, in moving from Heidegger’s earlier to his later thought is that earlier he tends not to employ “Ort” or “Ortschaft” in any significant way, but instead, when place is an issue, often talks in terms of “Platz” or “*Stelle*.” Of course, this means that it is location or position that is thereby thematized rather than place as such, and since both location

and position are, in a certain sense, “secondary” notions (they depend upon the idea of the region or domain and, in a deeper sense, as will become evident below, on the opening up of such a domain that occurs through place), so they cannot take on an especially central role. Moreover, since the ideas of position or location always refer us to the position or location of some entity, they will always be notions tied more to beings (or perhaps to the being of beings) rather than to being as such (to use the language of the ontological difference).

Thus, while in later Heidegger we can follow the development of a place-oriented mode of thinking much more directly, through Heidegger’s appropriation and deployment of notions of place and *topos* as such, in his early thinking, the task is much more difficult. The exploration of the topological character of Heidegger’s early thought, including that of *Being and Time*, requires that we be sensitive to the way such topology emerges, not so much in Heidegger’s use of the specific language of place, of *topos*, *Ort*, and *Ortschaft*, but through his employment of other terms. Most obviously, through his employment of terms such as “*Dasein*” (which I will translate as “being there” and with respect to which I shall have more to say in chapter 2 below, see sec. 2.2), “*Welt*” (world), “*Umwelt*” (environment, environing world), and “*Situation*” or “*Lage*” (both of which can be translated as “situation”), but also through temporally oriented terms such as “*jeweilig*” (meaning “for a time” or “for a while,” and which I have translated as “lingering”), and “*Ereignis*” (happening or event, also translated in Heidegger as “event of appropriation” or “enowning”). “*Ereignis*” will turn out to be a particularly important and (from a translational point of view) somewhat problematic term about which I will have much more to say (see chapter 5, below, sec. 5.1). So far as the immediate discussion of the language of place is concerned, however, what matters about the idea of “*Ereignis*” is that it carries with it some of the same sense of gathering and disclosing (as a happening is a unitary unfolding or disclosing) that is central to place in the significant sense I have deployed it here. Moreover, understood as tied to such gathering and disclosing, place already has to be understood as essentially dynamic, that is, as having an essential temporal character. Place, one should recall, is not to be simply identified with space.

Although place may appear the most everyday of terms, it is nonetheless, as should be evident from the discussion above, a term that carries a great deal of complexity within it—all the more so when we want to explore the workings of the concept as it moves across different languages. At least initially, however, the term “topology” appears somewhat more

straightforward—it is a direct translation of the German term “*Topologie*.” The connotations that attach to the English term are also more or less identical to those that attach to the German. Both “topology” and “*Topologie*” have a specific technical sense that refers to a branch of mathematical geometry that studies the nature of surfaces. Heidegger, however, drawing on the Greek roots that lie embedded in the term—*topos* and *logos*—takes it in the sense of a “saying of place” (*Ort-reden*). The real question—one might say that it is one of the central questions that concerns my project here—is what does it mean to talk of, and to attempt, such a “saying of place”? For the moment, all I can do is sketch out some of the background to this idea, before we move on to explore what might be at issue in more detail as it emerges through the larger analysis undertaken in the pages that follow.

Heidegger uses the term “*Topologie*” in only a very few places: in the Le Thor Seminar from 1969;⁸⁹ in a poem from 1947 (the line that stands at the head of this chapter);⁹⁰ and in his exchange with Ernst Jünger, “On the Question of Being” (originally “Concerning the Line”).⁹¹ However, the idea of topology is clearly very closely connected with the later Heidegger’s explicit focus on notions of place and particularly with the idea of his work as concerned to speak or articulate “the place of being” (*die Ortschaft des Seyns*). Indeed, Heidegger makes just this connection in the key passage from the Le Thor Seminar that I mentioned above. There he provides a brief summary of the passage of his thinking in a way that also suggests that this is a passage through which all thinking must go:

With *Being and Time* . . . the “question of Being” . . . concerns the question of being qua being. It becomes thematic in *Being and Time* under the name of “the question of the meaning [*Sinn*] of being.” Later this formulation was given up in favor of that of “the question of the truth of being,” and finally in favor of that of “the question concerning the place or location of being” [*Ortschaft des Seins*], from which the name topology of being arose [*Topologie des Seins*]. Three terms which succeed one another and at the same time indicate three steps along the way of thinking: MEANING—TRUTH—PLACE (τοπος).⁹²

This passage is a crucial one for my project here since not only does it bring together certain central concepts, but it also provides the outlines of the pathway that I aim to sketch out in more detail in the chapters to come.

One of the few places in which Heidegger’s idea of topology has been explicitly addressed is in the work of Otto Pöggeler, and especially in his book *Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking*. There Pöggeler writes that “Topology is the Saying (λόγος) of the abode (τόπος) in which truth as

occurring unconcealment gathers itself.”⁹³ Pöggeler’s elaboration of this admittedly rather dense statement establishes the way in which he sees Heideggerian “topology” as essentially a meditative concern with the way in which a particular environing “world” comes forth around a particular mode of “emplacement” in that world. Heideggerian topology can thus be understood as an attempt to evoke and illuminate that placed abode. In this respect, topology is an attempt to illuminate a place in which we already find ourselves and in which other things are also disclosed to us. Concerned as it is with a place of *disclosure*, the topology to be found in late Heidegger is continuous with the project pursued in Heidegger’s earlier work of uncovering the structure of disclosedness itself—and this is a continuity that will be pursued further in the explorations to follow. Understood as constituting a distinctive way of approaching the task of philosophy, or perhaps better, of thinking, the idea of topology provides a specific form of philosophical “methodology”—though not, as Pöggeler emphasizes, a methodology that establishes us as subjects in some special relationship to an object to be investigated. It is a methodology that begins with what is already present to us—the “phenomenon” of disclosedness as such, our location within a world in which not only ourselves, but the things around us, are accessible to us—and that looks, not to analyze the phenomenon at issue by showing how it is explicable in terms of some single underlying ground, but rather by showing the mutual interconnection of its constituting elements.

In this respect the idea of a “saying” of “place” or “abode” (a *logos* of *topos*) bears comparison with the idea of the writing or “inscribing” of place that is undertaken by the traditional topographer. The topographer who is concerned to map out a particular region and who has nothing to go on but the basic technology of theodolite and chain—along with a good eye, a steady hand, and strong legs—has the task of mapping out that region while located within it. Such a task can only be accomplished by looking to the interconnections among the features of that region and through a process of repeated triangulation and traverse—and a good deal of walking—on the basis of which such interconnections are established. Of course the topographer aims to arrive at a mapping of the region that will in some sense be “objective”—at least within a given set of cartographic parameters—but the topographer is always concerned to understand the region from within that region and by reference to the interconnectedness of the elements within it—an interconnection made concrete in the topographer’s case by the crisscrossing pathways that represent the topographer’s travels through the landscape. There is no reduction of the landscape down

to some underlying foundation from which the features of the landscape could be derived or in which they are founded. For the topographer, there is only the surface of the land itself—the topography is written into that surface and accessible from it, rather than lying beneath or being visible from some point far above.

It was this notion of topography that I chose to use in *Place and Experience* as a way of explicating the idea that, so I argued there and will also argue in more detail here, also appears in Heidegger as topology. The use of “topography” as the key term, and not “topology” (the use of “*grapheme*” instead of “*logos*”), came about, in part, because of a desire to avoid the narrowly geometrical and mathematical interpretation that is all too readily associated with the latter term, but, more importantly, in order to be able to highlight the conceptual and methodological aspects of the focus on place that are brought to light through the analogy with the practice of topographical surveying that is sketched out above and that I take to be key elements both of my own idea of a philosophical topography and Heidegger’s conception of a topology of being.⁹⁴ Inasmuch as this book is about the explication of the nature and significance of place in Heidegger’s work, so it is also about the nature and significance in that work of such a “topographical/topological” orientation and method.

The idea of a topology or topography itself has relevance, moreover, to the question of terminology and language that has been at issue in the last few pages. The idea of topology suggests that it is a mistake to look for simple, reductive accounts—whether we are exploring a concept, or problem, or the meaning of a term, the point is always to look to a larger field of relations in which the matter at issue can be placed. This means, however, that it will seldom be possible to arrive at simple, univocal definitions. Significant terms will generally connect up with other terms in multiple ways and carry a range of connotations and meanings that cannot always be easily or precisely separated out. This is especially so of the terminology that Heidegger employs, and it is one of the reasons why there is so much discussion of how to understand key Heideggerian terms such as “being,” “*Ereignis*,” “*Dasein*,” and so on. Thomas Sheehan suggests that one of the problems of contemporary Heidegger scholarship is that there is no clear understanding of what such terms mean.⁹⁵ I agree with some of Sheehan’s concerns here, notably the way in which so much contemporary writing on Heidegger seems to lapse into obscure and often impenetrable discourse accessible only to the initiated. However, it also seems to me that the sort of clarity that Sheehan seems to hold up as desirable here—a clarity that appears to consist in a certain supposed univocity of

meaning—is simply not achievable in discussions of Heidegger and may well constitute a mistaken philosophical ideal in general.⁹⁶ Heidegger himself seems to have regarded the character of language as “*vieldeutig*,” that is, capable of carrying multiple meanings or senses, as part of the very essence of language. His own use of language plays to this character such that he constantly uses words in overlapping ways, in ways that play upon their etymology, or similarity of sound or structure, in ways such that the same term will appear slightly differently depending on the other terms with which it is being deployed.

In this respect, the common criticism of Heidegger’s supposed reliance on dubious etymologies⁹⁷ often seems to misunderstand the way in which what is often at issue here is not the attempt to find the “real” meanings of words in their past histories, but rather to emphasize and pursue the multiple meanings that words may bear. It is thus a means to stimulate a way of thinking with language that is not restricted to the literal and yet is not simply metaphorical either. Sometimes, of course, this reliance on etymology is also taken to be associated with Heidegger’s claims for the philosophical priority of German, and thence with a nationalism that is proximate to National Socialism (as in the passage I quoted from Leach in the discussion above).⁹⁸ Occasionally Heidegger does allow that other languages can express certain ideas more appropriately than the German,⁹⁹ but there seems little doubt that there is a certain parochialism in Heidegger’s prioritization of his own language. One could put this down to simple narrow-mindedness on Heidegger’s part, as well as a preoccupation with his own German identity; more charitably, one might see it as a reflection of the intimate connection between philosophy and language and the priority that one will almost always accord one’s home language in any serious attempt at philosophical thinking—as Heidegger says in his essay on Anaximander from 1946: “We are bound to the language of the saying and we are bound to our own native language.”¹⁰⁰

Heidegger’s attempt to draw on words in the multiplicity of their meaning cuts across the usual dichotomy of literal and nonliteral—indeed, when Heidegger rejects the metaphorical reading of certain expressions (as he does in “Letter on Humanism”¹⁰¹), it is not in order to insist on the purely literal (whatever that may be), but rather to force us to focus on the concrete matters before us, as well as to undercut the certainty of that distinction itself. Heidegger’s interest is in the complex multiplicity of meaning out of which both literality and metaphoricity arise. Heidegger works constantly to evade and avoid the attempt at pinning down his language in a simple set of well-defined terms. Sometimes, it seems that this

may indeed serve Heidegger as a means to evade and avoid his readers, but often it reflects the character of the language, and the ideas, as such. Dieter Henrich once said of one of his own terms that "*es irisiert*"—"it iridesces."¹⁰² Almost all of Heidegger's language, especially the language of his later writings, is "iridescent" in the sense of constantly shining and showing different facets. The attempt to delineate the topology of thinking and the topology of being will always carry a certain "iridescence" of this sort. It is an iridescence that may also be compared to the "backwards or forwards" relatedness¹⁰³ that is to be found in hermeneutical thinking and that is also tied to the nature of the topological. It is a reflection of the iridescent, the multiple, shifting character of place as such.

