

ONTOLOGY OF HUMAN ACTION
(Aristotle's *Eth. Nic.* VI and
Heidegger's commentaries)

Alexei Chernjakov

The topography of the truth.
How the soul "discloses the truth."

My deep conviction, which I share with many contemporary authors, is that it is the *corpus Aristotelicum* that contains the most important clues for the solutions later developed by Heidegger. P. Ricœur writes that "a certain reappropriation of Aristotle under the guidance of Heideggerian concepts can lead back in turn to a better apprehension of the leading concepts of *Being and Time*." However, this is, I believe, too modest a description of the state of affairs concerning the relationship between Heidegger and Aristotle¹. Heidegger himself in his books and lecture courses interprets a large body of Aristotle's texts. It is not our goal in this research to evaluate, whatever the criteria of such an evaluation might be, whether Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle is "authentic" or not. Much more important is the task of observing and studying how Heidegger's ideas, and even terminology, "grows out" of this interpretation.

In the winter semester of 1924–25 Heidegger delivered lectures on Plato's *The Sophist*²; almost one third of this lecture course was devoted to interpretation, or rather variations on the theme, of Aristotle's reasoning in *Eth. Nic.* VI. Here Heidegger discusses the ontological foundation of the concept of *truth* and interprets the Greek ἀλήθεια (a *privativum*) so: *nicht mehr verborgen sein, aufgedeckt sein* ("to be no more concealed," "to be uncovered"). (PS 16)

Ἄληθεϊ ψυχῆ, "the soul achieves or discloses the truth," says Aristotle.³ As an "area" where the truth is disclosed the soul has its own topography, described (or rather constructed) by Aristotle in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle mentions here five ways in which the soul *discloses the truth* (ἀληθεϊ) through affirmation or negation. These are: art or technical skill (τέχνη), science or scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), prudence (φρόνησις), wisdom (σοφία) and intelligence (νοῦς).⁴

Later on in Heidegger's language there will be a consistently used term to designate the Greek ἀλήθεια: *Unverborgenheit*, "unconcealment". Aristotle's phrase ἀληθεϊ ψυχῆ is now rendered as "human *Dasein* remains in unhiddenness and unlocks the entity;" and

ἀληθεῖν means “to be uncovered,” “to free the world from closeness and concealment.”⁵

Thus the truth is one of the characteristics of the entity itself insofar as it goes out to meet us, but in the proper sense of the word it is a determination of being of human Dasein. (PS 23)

I intend to show that Heidegger’s search for *primordial* thinking about being, which underlies the project of “fundamental ontology,” depends in many respects on Aristotle’s “onto-psycho-logical” approach developed in the treatise *On the Soul* and, first of all, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The lengthy commentary by Heidegger creates a common textual space in which we can observe an amazing kind of “transfiguration” of Aristotelian discourse into Heidegger’s conceptual system, of Aristotle’s Greek into Heidegger’s “German”.

The most important result of the analysis of Aristotle’s text is the discovery of different and equally primordial (having fundamental ontological significance) ways of arriving at the truth and abiding by the truth in its uncoveredness, i.e. of encountering entity in its being, of drawing entity in its being from hiddenness into unconcealment.

Eternal and temporal truth (αἰών and καιρός)

“In a sense the soul is all beings”, says Aristotle (*De anima* III 8, 431b21). “The soul is all beings” means that the forms of the things without matter are (potentially) located in the soul as in a “place of forms.” Aristotle distinguishes the “parts” (functions) of the soul according to the ontic character of the entity *manifested and brought to light* by their means.

And let it be assumed that there are two parts which possess reason (λογος) – one by which we contemplate the kind of things whose principles cannot be otherwise, and one by which we contemplate variable things. ... Let one of these parts be called the scientific and the other the calculative, for to deliberate and to calculate are the same thing, but no one deliberates about what cannot be otherwise.⁶

As regards the entity disclosed, the distinction between the scientific and calculative parts of the soul is drawn on the basis of the following *differentia specifica*: the “scientific part” makes manifest the entity, “the first principles of which cannot be different”. Such principles belong to the invariable and the eternal (ἄιδιον). The other part, the circumspective and calculating one, relates to *the first principles which admit of variation*, i.e. it discloses the changeable, the eventful, the situational being, that which gets unlocked in a single “moment (καιρός) of vision.”⁷ The time of choice, the time of action is not the moment of “now”; it is a “twinkling of an eye,” a blink of an instant (GP 409 ff.), not τὸ νῦν, but καιρός, about which Pindar says: καιρός πρὸς ἄνθρωπον βραχὺ μῦτρον ἔχει⁸ – it is not made to human measure, it is too brief, too narrow, too acute; καιρός is the only appropriate moment, the fleeting moment of opportunity. The καιρός of the revelation and recognition

of the truth (ἀναγνωρισίς) in Greek tragedy is the most striking example of such a disclosure. Oedipus, approaching the culminating point of the plot and the cutting edge (ἄκμῃ) of his fate, utters: ὅς ἐστι καὶ ἡρῶσθαι τῷδε (OT 1050) – “the hour hath come to clear this matter up”.

For us the most important distinction is that between the two “virtues” of the scientific and calculative parts of the soul – between wisdom (*sophia*) and prudence (*phronesis*).

Wisdom is the clearest insight into the first principles of what-is, the principles that cannot be different.

It follows that the wise man must not only know what follows from the first principles, but must also disclose truth about the first principles. (1141a18f.)

To see what follows from the first principles means to be able to deduce conclusions from premises, i.e. to master the art of demonstration (ἀποδείξις). It is intelligence (νοῦς), which is capable of disclosing the first principles. Both these faculties – the art of deduction and intellectual insight – belong to the scientific part of the soul, and *sophia* is their fulfilment and completion.

Therefore wisdom must be intellectual comprehension (νοῦς) combined with knowledge – knowledge of the highest objects, [the intellectual contemplation,] which has received as it were its proper completion. (a19f.)⁹

And what about prudence? Any virtue is the best disposition of the soul, completeness, maturity, fulfilment, *entelecheia* of its definite constituents, those dispositions “which will best qualify them to disclose the truth” (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1139b13). And yet a virtue as such is an ability or potentiality (*potentia secunda*) with respect to the actuality of the action proper to it (τὸ ἄργον τὸ οἰκεῖον).¹⁰ In this action the “second *entelecheia*”, the fullness of the truth *proper to this part* of the soul, is reached.

With regard to prudence (*phronesis*), ἀληθεύειν means to arrive at truth-unconcealment so that human good acquired in an appropriate action becomes visible (and can be interpreted and articulated in a peculiar way):

ὅσπερ ἐν ἀγῶνι τὸν φρονήσιν ἕξιεν εἶναι μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῶς περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἀγαθὰ πρακτικῆν – It is, therefore, necessary to consider prudence to be a disposition or state of the soul which partakes of logos and discloses the truth, being concerned with action in relation to the things that are good for human beings. (1140b20 f.)¹¹

Principles of action

Now after this preliminary outline of the “topography of the soul” we shall proceed to the discussion of the “ontology of human action”. Aristotle’s reasoning always remains connected with the “first philosophy” and its main question: *What is being as being?* His ethical writings make no exception to this rule: Aristotle is interested in the ontology of human action subject to

ethical determination. We shall see further on that such an entity as an action or a doer (insofar as he performs moral actions) does not, in a certain sense, “fit into” the system of basic principles of “first philosophy.” For Aristotle himself this circumstance is an occasion of reservations and added detail; for Heidegger interpreting the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is one of the motives for a radical revision of the foundations of metaphysics connected with a re-posing of the question of “the meaning of being” in *Being and Time*.

How can the ontology of human action be fitted into the conceptual system of the *Metaphysics*? Aristotle says (1139a31–33):

πρῶτος μὲν ὁ ἀρχὴ προαίρεσις, ὅθεν κίνησις ἀλλ’ ὁ ἕνεκα.
 προαίρεσις δὲ ὁρεξις καὶ λόγος ἕνεκα τινος.

The principle of action, as the source of movement, not as the “for-the-sake-of-which” [guiding the action], is choice; the principle of choice is desire and the logos manifesting the “for-the-sake-of-which”.

The action *is* insofar as it is actually performed. The ἀρχή, i.e. the foundation or cause of the action, is designated by the word προαίρεσις, *deliberate* (i.e. *conscious, responsible, not blind*) choice. The choice is based on deliberation (consideration of reasons, assessment of possible consequences of the action), but most of all on consideration of the means of achieving the desired goal. “We deliberate not about ends, but above all about means.” (*Eth. Nic.* III 5, 1112b12f.). And the decision is made concerning things which are in our power. Yet all this does not suffice to perform the action. The actual choice adds resolution to decision. The choice is connected with ὁρεξις βουλευτική, a desire (which is in a certain way determined through deliberation) to carry out the decision made, resoluteness manifesting itself in a proper action. This carrying out of the decision, which attains and fulfils (in the sense of Aristotle’s term ἐντελέχεια) the goal, is the κίνησις of the action; this word is used strictly as a special term and designates the actuality (*energeia*) or completeness (*entelecheia*) of a potentiality, qua potentiality.¹² Yet now a slight transformation of meanings of the key metaphysical terms must not escape our attention. “Potentiality” is to be understood as something disclosed and projected in the element of *I can*, insofar as it is revealed to me as *my possibility*, as something “in my power”, as something dependent on the agent himself: ἐπ’ αὐτό.

According to Aristotle’s well-known remark in *Physics*, every movement takes place “from something into something else” and has *that-towards-which* as one of its formal determinations. And this “towards-which” is nothing but the *fullness of presence* at the end, as the result of the movement, of what had been predelineated at its beginning. This is the goal (τέλος), the *for-the-sake-of-which* (τὸ ἕνεκα) of the movement.

Aristotle distinguishes movement from coming into being and perishing because the former supposes an invariable substratum, an entity of the first category (*substantia*), that underlies the changes in quantity, quality or location, whereas coming into being or perishing, understood absolutely, is a change in the category of substance, i.e. appearance or destruction of a certain (always self-identical) form *in matter*.

Can we really say that moral action is movement (in Aristotle's sense)? Are we not dealing here with coming into being of a certain state of affairs, of certain circumstances, which are considered good or bad? No, Aristotle answers, since when an action aims at creating something which lies outside of this activity itself, we are dealing with making or production (ποίησις), not with action (πρᾶξις) as subject to a possible moral evaluation.

"Among things that can be otherwise," Aristotle says, "are included both things made and things done; making and acting are different" (1140a1f.). What is done is done by art, mastery. The ontological meaning of art is that of ἀληθεῖν; τῆς χυνη is a way of disclosing the truth, the faculty of the soul to which the *first principles* of the entity, which is brought to light in (creative) making, are revealed. And these first principles may be different each time, because such an entity appears neither necessarily nor naturally, but originates with the maker (*Eth. Nic.* VI 4), in an arbitrary way. This holds true for moral action too, only the acts of the master, his work (ἔργον), in contradistinction to the doer's deed, are carried out towards a result lying *outside* of the activity itself. Each making is directed to an external goal. He who makes something always has some further end in view. The act of making is not an end in itself; it is only a means and only proceeds for the sake of something else (1139b1ff.)¹³. Aristotle says that a work of art, when it is completed, exists *apart* or *alongside* of the act, not *in* it¹⁴.

τῆς μὲν γὰρ ποιήσεως ἕτερον τὸ τέλος, τῆς δὲ πράξεως οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο. ἄλλο γὰρ αὐτὸ ἐπὶ προαίτιας τέλος.

For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for goodness of the action itself is its end. (1140b6ff.)

The thing created (ποιητὸν), alienated from the act of creation, acquires its own being independent of the master. The work when it is made, the ἔργον, exists separately from activity (ἐνέργεια) of making as its result, but with moral action the situation must be different; human action considered from the ethical point of view is itself a certain *energeia*. In what follows I shall make this statement more precise.

But first I would like to retell a remarkable story by Hans-Georg Gadamer. He reports that Heidegger in his Aristotle seminar of 1923 attempted to show that τῆς χυνη as a mode of abiding by the truth unlike φρονησις has its internal limitation: „ihr Wissen (we would say now – „ihr ἀληθεῖν“) sei kein volles Entbergen, weil das Werk, das sie zu erstellen verstehe, in das Ungewisse eines unverfügbaren Gebrauchs entlassen werde.“ Man kam bei der Interpretation an den Satz, der der τῆς χυνη, nicht aber der φρονησις eine Λήθη zuspricht: „Als wir an diesem Satz unsicher und ganz in die griechischen Begriffe verfremdet heruminterpretierten, erklärte er brüsk: „Das ist das Gewissen!“¹⁵

Ἐπὶ προαίτια, ἐπιδαμονία and *Eigentlichkeit*.

Let us consider what the term ἐπιδαμονία could signify. This is neither just “well-being” or “well-doing” in the everyday sense nor “benefaction” as alms or a service rendered kindly; it is a characteristic of *the way of doing itself*. We

translate it “the goodness of the action.” But what does the goodness of action consist in? Let us come back to the “specific difference” which underlies the Aristotelian distinction of making and acting. We find the ground for this distinction in the first lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The specific difference is manifested in relation to the ends to which human activities aim. In some cases the activity is itself the end, whereas in other cases the end is some product (the “work” – ἔργον) over and above the mere exercise of the art. The ends which are themselves activities must be called *energeiai* in complete conformity with the Aristotle’s metaphysical scheme.

Ἐπιπραξία is the goal of the action (i.e. one of its ontological foundations) and at the same time *the doer’s way of being* manifested in every action, a special *energeia* of human action and a special *energeia* of the agent’s self-manifestation. The “goodness of the actions” defines the character of my being, i.e. of my life (since for a living creature, as Aristotle remarks, *to be* means *to live*). Ἐπιπραξία belongs to the ends which cannot be separated from activity itself, and which according to this peculiar inseparability determine the action as being *perfect* or *complete*. Thus *eupraxia* is a certain *energeia* of human action. As activity-actuality it presupposes a definite potentiality. The potentiality in question must be understood as “disposition” (ἔξις) or a state of the soul. This state is, of course, a virtue or excellence (ἀρετή). And this is what the term *prudence* refers to.

Now it is thought to be a mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of things conduce to health or to strength, but about what sort of things conduce to the good life in general (πρὸς τὸ ἐπιζῆλον ἄλωξ).¹⁶

The prudent person *is able to deliberate well* because he clearly sees the grounds and sources of his decisions in his whole life. In Heidegger’s translation the words of Aristotle πρὸς τὸ ἐπιζῆλον ἄλωξ are transformed as follows: (... *was zuträglich ist*) für die rechte Weise des Seins des Daseins als solchen im Ganzen (“what is advantageous for the correct way of *Dasein*’s being”). Later on in Heidegger’s commentary and finally in *Being and Time* the “correct way of being” will become *Eigentlichkeit*, meaning *authenticity*. The formal characteristic of *Dasein*’s being is its peculiar character of being “in each case mine” (SZ 42); the “essence” of *Dasein* lies in the fact that in each case it has its being to be, and has it as its *own* (SZ 12f.). “And because *Dasein* is in each case essentially its own possibility it can, in its very being, choose itself and win itself” (SZ 42). To choose itself means to choose *was zuträglich ist für die rechte Weise des Seins des Daseins als solchen im Ganzen*. But this is nothing other than a translation from Aristotle’s Greek. Only in so far as *Dasein* has this possibility of a radical choice, radical προαίρεσις, can it be *authentic*.

As modes of being, *authenticity* and *inauthenticity*... are both grounded in the fact that any *Dasein* whatsoever is characterized by ‘mineness’ (*Jemeinigkeit*). (SZ 42f.)

Here *authenticity* amounts to a certain transparency of existence, which makes manifest “my own ἰδίον” and allows *my own* being to be fulfilled in

the world into which it has been thrown. In his “Greek,” etymologically dissected and transformed into German, Heidegger renders thus Aristotle’s definition of prudence (slightly paraphrased): ἕξις ἰληθῶς μετὰ λογου πρακτικῶ περι τὰ ἄνθρωπων γαθῶ: *ein solches Gestelltsein des menschlichen Daseins, daß es über die Durchsichtigkeit seiner selbst verfügt*¹⁷ (such an attitude of the human *Dasein* in which it possesses transparency for itself). Εἰπραξία is thereby identified with transparency, complete visibility of *Dasein* for itself – to be more precise, with such a character of actions which proceeds from this transparency and manifests it. In SZ such a character of existence is called “anticipatory resoluteness” (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*).

Aristotle actually does say (*Eth. Nic.* VI 5, 1140b11–20) that temperance preserves (literally “saves”) prudence (σοφροσῶνη σῶζει τὸν φρονησιν),¹⁸ that is, preserves the notion (ἰπλημς) of human good. It follows that intemperance (say, excessive pleasure or suffering) destroys this notion. And this destruction is of a special kind: for the notion that the sum of the angles of a triangle equals two right angles is in no way subject to destruction as a result of excessive pleasure or suffering. Only notions connected with action are subject to such “destruction.” What happens when they are “destroyed?” What gets lost in the process? – The understanding of the foundations and the first principles of the action.¹⁹ What are these foundations? – That *for the sake of which* the action is done. So temperance preserves the unconcealment (ἰλήθεια) of the first principles of the action. This unconcealment, this manifest character of the *for-the-sake-of-which* is the activity-actuality of *prudence*, not of intellectual contemplation (“*phronetic*,” not “*noetic*” *energeia*).

Thus does prudence disclose the truth. Yet the first principles and foundations spoken of here “can be such and can be different,” and besides, in contradistinction to creative activity, the action always has the being of the agent himself as its goal, the being of every doer.²⁰ As was already said, the first principles of an action cannot be known in the sense of ἐπιστήμη, i.e. retained in supratemporal self-identity befitting knowledge. It would seem that this precludes for us any possibility of further analysis. If there actually are no *universal* foundations of good in any sense whatsoever, then only one universal formula (the last refuge of theoretical ethics) still remains true: the only good of man consists in the *transparency* of his own being, his being as a doer, his being for himself.

That is why, Heidegger concludes, prudence as a way of disclosing the truth is connected not with the vision of this or that *eidōs* which must be posited as the foundation of the action according to some universal law, but with the *possibility of seeing* itself, with *Dasein*’s transparency for itself. Strictly speaking the metaphor of vision (intelligent vision) must give way here to the metaphor of hearing: the understanding of the authenticity of existence is connected in *Being and Time* with *the call of the conscience* or *the call of care* which one must be able to hear.²¹ The conscience *bears witness* to the authentic, proper ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*). Thus the τῶ εἰζῶν ἰλως of Aristotle becomes, in Heidegger, a special internal acoustics of *Dasein*.²²

The soteriology of “temperance” spoken of by Aristotle consists, according to this interpretation, in acquiring this transparency, “sonority” of the “whole life.” The end of the action, its ultimate *for-the-sake-of-which*, is *Dasein itself*

insofar as it is disclosed (*erschlossen*) for itself in its resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) to be itself. And on this primordial disclosure Heidegger hinges all the other kinds of truth, including “scientific” truth as traditionally understood. Actually this is what the project of fundamental ontology consists in. Fundamental ontology, building on the basis of the Aristotelian ontology of human action,²³ has as its object “the how” (*das Wie*) of the disclosure of *Dasein*’s being for *Dasein* itself; the structures of this disclosure are called *existentia* in *Being and Time*; their prototypes are (among other things) the soul’s “ways of disclosing the truth” listed by Aristotle in *Eth. Nic.* VI.

Yet, the subject of ethics proper as understood by Aristotle is in danger of getting lost when things take this turn.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* begins with the words:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.

Prudence (the ability to determine what is *good for man*) forms the subject matter of the book VI. Finally, the last book (*Eth. Nic.* X 6–7) deals with “happiness” (εὐδαιμονία), which is declared to be the goal of all human activity. According to Aristotle, happiness is not a state or disposition of the soul, which serves as a possibility of activity and determines its specific internal character with respect to the good, but the activity-*energeia* itself. Happiness is listed among the activities (*Metaph.* 1048b18–35) that are defined as *energeiai in contradistinction to movements*. The inner form of such activity is complete at any moment and does not require temporal duration to be fulfilled: εὐδαιμονεῖ (ἄμα) καὶ εὐδαιμονηκεν – “someone is experiencing happiness and is already happy” (b26). The *praesens* and the *perfectum* are declared to be identical. Thus happiness is activity (*energeia*) in accordance with virtue (*Eth. Nic.* 1177 a 12). This activity is not directed towards something other, but is self-sufficient; and it deserves to be chosen not for the sake of something else, but for itself. Consequently it is this *energeia* that constitutes the ultimate εὐ ζῆν ἄλως, *die rechte Weise des Seins des Daseins*.

The chain of identifications – τὸ εὐ ζῆν ἄλως = εὐδαιμονία; τὸ εὐ ζῆν ἄλως = *Eigentlichkeit* – inevitably leads to Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle’s “happiness:” “εὐδαιμονία” is to be translated into the language of the existential analytic of *Dasein* as “authenticity” (*Eigentlichkeit*) of the being of *Dasein*. This interpretation is by no means a pure arbitrariness or exaggeration. After having identified εὐδαιμονία with the contemplation of the first ontological ἀρχαί Aristotle proceeds with the statement²⁴ that the ability to abide (in θεωρία) by the first principles of being is the highest thing in man; and one ought to do all that man may in order to live in accordance with the highest thing in him.

It may even be held that this is true *self* of each, inasmuch as it is the dominant and better part; and therefore it would be a strange thing of a man to live not *his own* life but the life of some other than himself.

Now, if βίος is “the being of *Dasein*,” then αἰσθησις βίος is *Dasein*’s own, authentic being; and εὐδαιμονία constitutes the authenticity of this authentic being:

Sie (sc. εὐδαιμονία) macht die Eigentlichkeit des Seins des Daseins aus. (PS 172)

For Heidegger, it is *conscience* understood ontologically that bears witness to the *authenticity*, which amounts to the disclosedness of the ownmost ability-to-be. Yet in the conscience *Dasein itself* bears witness to itself; it is at the same time voice and hearing; it is, according to Heidegger, an entity projecting itself, stretching itself towards the future, and thus always possessing irreducible temporal “length,” a lengthy call from afar unto afar (SZ 271). Heidegger does not admit openly (at least in *Being and Time*) a *universal* source of the calling voice. *Virtue* and the *good* of Aristotle become, as was already said, not that which must be heard by all together, and not even that which must be heard by every one, but a special acoustics of *Dasein*, a permeability for giving-to-understand which originates with *Dasein* itself. Virtue as mastery in disclosing the truth becomes the absence of noisy talk (*das Gerede*) in which the articulation of one’s own ability-to-be is constantly lost in everyday idle chatter of the “they.” Parmenides’ *mortals* who listen with an ear deafened by noise and Heraklitus’ *the many* or *sleeping ones* unable to hear the Logos, become Heidegger’s *das Man*.

On the contrary, for Aristotle himself happiness as *energeia* gets its status of a higher goal from the ontological hierarchy of the principles, the hierarchy which has already been established in the *Metaphysics*. Happiness must be connected with the most divine part of the soul, which can perceive the most divine. This part of the soul is the intellect, which contemplates the first principles of entity as entity. It is contemplation by *sophia* as “first philosophy” fulfilled, i.e. actualised in the “intellect of the soul”, that constitutes happiness according to Aristotle.²⁵

On the other hand, an attempt to understand ontology as a special Heideggerian version of phenomenology is connected with the necessity to *reject* (or rather to refrain from accepting) any previously established ontological hierarchy and to bear the burden of solitude, the burden of responsible thinking which cannot be shared with anybody. To be more precise, the hierarchy of foundations is constructed anew, and in this hierarchy the being of *Dasein*, non-indifferent-for-itself, becomes the first principle. Within the framework of Heidegger’s existential analytic, it is *Dasein* itself that gives witnesses on behalf of itself and bears witness to itself.

Coming back to the ontology of moral action we have to admit that all that Heidegger says concerning *Dasein* itself can be applied to the way of being characteristic of action also: action’s essential determination is not exhausted by providing a certain external “what” (a description of the corresponding circumstances, the persons involved and their roles, a *record*). Its essence consists rather in the fact that it is a moment and a foundation of the *Jemeinigkeit* belonging to existence. The *whatness* (*essentia*) of this entity, insofar as it can be spoken of, must be understood from its existence (*existentia*) (cf. SZ 42). The essence of action, insofar as we can speak of it, is uncovered only

as a meaning, which outlines itself, projects itself into the future, postpones itself (“temporizes” and “temporalizes,” *zeitigt*) and starts to run in pursuit of itself. The action is one of the moments of the “projection” (*Entwurf*) of the future, of the opening-up of the temporal horizon into which *Dasein* as *desiring intelligence or thinking desire* (*Eth. Nic.* 1139a4f.) projects its being upon possibilities (SZ 148). This projection upon the possibilities is called βολησις (deliberation) by Aristotle. We deliberate about things that are in our power (ἐφ’ ἡμῶν) and are attainable by action (1112a30f.), and in addition not about ends, but about means (1112b11f.) according to our possibilities. The future is the only dimension in which desire (ὀρεξις) can exist.

He is prudent who can fore-see the development of the meaning of action in the open scope of the future, who prudently includes his choice in the temporal whole as an event of convergence, meeting or union of the three dimensions of time, the past, the present and the future. He is prudent who can inscribe the extremely concrete (τὸ σφαλτικόν) instant (the “twinkling of an eye”) of choice into *the whole of all life*. The meaning of action is performed (as a tragedy of Antiquity is performed) in the field of tension between the suddenness of choice and the whole of fate.

Still, the visibility, the transparency of this field with which the soteriology of temperance is concerned, belongs, according to Aristotle, only to the sphere of human things (τὰ ἀνθρώπινα 1141b8f.). Outside of it there are objects “rare, marvellous, difficult and divine” (b6f.) with which the “higher” soteriology (that of *sophia*) is connected. In *Metaphysics* the principles of being as being are proclaimed as the highest of the high. In Aristotle’s philosophy the object itself, being itself, which reveals itself in and through the activity of the soul (in *the soul’s disclosing of truth*), but keeps *in itself*, independently of the “human,” its own eternal principles and foundations, becomes the criterion of the “lofty character” of *contemplation*. For, indeed, the faculties of the soul have “a certain likeness or kinship with their objects.” That is why σοφία is said to be the highest virtue of the soul, and at the same time the moments (χρόνος μικρός)²⁶ of perfect contemplation are the glimpses of the highest pleasure and the best life, which God possess perpetually (εἰ) and we, the mortals, do only from time to time (cf. *Metaph.* XII 7, 1072b13–30).

Aristotle’s ontological decision in favour of *sophia* is well known. This verdict determines also the *logos* in which *sophia* discloses the truth (ἀληθεύει λόγος): this is the *logos* of first philosophy. Its matrix is Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, its text is European metaphysics. Heidegger’s fundamental ontology is an attempt to think differently yet, as I intend to show, within the same configuration of topics. Aristotle has already chosen the parties to the suit, and Heidegger wants to appeal against the verdict. The court where the appeal is made is the *crisis* of European metaphysics. Heidegger understands “the first object” of first philosophy in a way contrary to the Aristotelian project; his fundamental ontology is the ontology of *action* (πράξις) and creativity (ποίησις). Prudence and circumspective understanding become the first and the most fundamental way of disclosing beings in its being.

Notes

- ¹ Today we know that in the decade preceding the publication of *Being and Time* Heidegger worked at great length on Aristotle, to the point that Rémi Brague, in his excellent book *Aristote et la question du monde* (Paris: PUF, 1988, p. 55), states that in a sense Heidegger's opus magnum is a sort of substitution which takes the chair of a fundamental research on Aristotle.
- ² M. Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes*, GA 19 (Frankfurt a. M.: V. Klostermann, 1992). Cited hereafter as PS.
- ³ *Eth. Nic.* VI 3, 1139b15.
- ⁴ *Ibid.* 1139b15ff.
- ⁵ Heidegger refuses to translate in his commentary the verb εληθεύειν in order to avoid habitual connotations. He writes: "Wir wollen dies nicht übersetzen. εληθεύειν meint: aufgedecktsein, die Welt aus der Verschlossenheit und Verdecktheit herausnehmen. Und das ist eine Seinsweise des menschlichen Daseins." (PS 17)
- ⁶ 1139a6–14. Trans. W.D. Ross.
- ⁷ I refer here also to Heidegger's concept of "Augenblick," "the twinkling of an eye". The "Augenblick" is "the present that is held in resoluteness and springs from it" (GP 407).
- ⁸ *Pythian Odes*, IV 286. The verse has become a proverb analogous to the English saying: "time and tide wait for no man."
- ⁹ Trans. W.D. Ross.
- ¹⁰ *Eth. Nic.* VI 1, 1139a17.
- ¹¹ My translation.
- ¹² Cf. our discussion of the Aristotelian notion of *movement* in chapter 2.
- ¹³ Let me quote Heidegger's commentary on this passage: "Das εργον hat in sich die Verweisung auf etwas anderes; als τολος ist es *von sich wegweisend*. Es ist προς τι και τινος, 'zu etwas für jemanden.' Der Schuh ist hergestellt *zum Tragen, für einen Anderen*" (PS 41). We recognize immediately here the theme of the "ready-to-hand" (*des Zuhandenseins*), developed in *Being and Time*.
- ¹⁴ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* I 1, 1094a4ff. M. Heidegger, PS 42.
- ¹⁵ Vgl. O.Pöggeler, Heidegger in seiner Zeit, Wilhelm Fink, München, 1999, S. 67.
- ¹⁶ 1140a25ff. Trans. W.D. Ross (slightly modified).
- ¹⁷ PS 50.
- ¹⁸ *Eth. Nic.* 1140b11. Aristotle here follows Plato in the etymological "analysis" of the word σωφροσυνη: σωφροσυνη δ' σωτηρία ο συνδ' εσκαμμεθα, φρονήσεως (*Crat.* 411e4f.).
- ¹⁹ "A man who has been ruined by pleasure or pain, entirely fails to discern any first principle, and cannot see that he ought to choose and to do everything as a means to this end, and for its sake; for vice destroys the sense of principles" (*ibid.*).
- ²⁰ "Ein Resultat ist nicht konstitutiv für das Sein des Handelns, sondern lediglich das eâ, das Wie. Das τολος in der φρονησις ist der ενθροπος selbst. Bei der ποιησις ist das τολος ein anderes, ein weltlich Seiendes gegenüber dem Dasein, bei der προξις nicht" (PS 51).
- ²¹ See SZ §§ 54–60. "Das Rufen fassen wir als Modus der Rede. Sie gliedert die Verständlichkeit. [...] Die 'Stimme'[des Gewissens] ist aufgefasst als das Zu-verstehen-geben. In der Erschließungstendenz des Rufes liegt das Moment des Stoßes, des abgesetzten Aufrütteln. Gerufen wird aus Ferne in die Ferne. Vom Ruf getroffen wird, wer zurückgeholt sein will" (p. 271).
- ²² "Die 'Täuschungen' entstehen im Gewissen nicht durch ein Sichversehen (Sichver-rufen) des Rufes, sondern erst aus der Art, wie der Ruf gehört wird – dadurch, daß er, statt eigentlich verstanden zu werden, vom Man-selbst in ein verhandelndes Selbstgespräch gezogen und in seiner Erschließungstendenz verkehrt wird" (*ibid.*, p. 274).
- ²³ Among other things, to be sure.
- ²⁴ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* X 7, 1177b29ff.
- ²⁵ Cf. *Metaph.* XII 7, 1072b13–30. In particular Aristotle says: θεωρία τ' διστον και ριστον (l. 24).
- ²⁶ 1072b15.