

Throughout a lifetime of writings, despite other fairly radical changes of perspective, Heidegger has always consistently maintained that being is finite. To say that something is finite generally means that it is limited. Although this is consonant with what Heidegger means, it by no means exhausts or even gets close to his view. Given his conception of time and space, a conception that is quite different from traditional views, finitude cannot mean only that something objectively present has limits in space and time. To begin with, being is in no possible sense of the word a being or a thing. Thus, these two points—the radically altered conception of time and space, and the fact that being cannot be represented as an objectively present being or thing—make it necessary to inquire into a meaning of finitude that goes beyond mere limitation in time and space.

Heidegger first became known in this country through the theologians who thought that being might be equivalent to God. For example, the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich said that the only nonsymbolic statement that could be made about God was that God was being. Heidegger, for his part, once said somewhere: How can we talk about God when we don't even know what being is? Apart from this, Heidegger stated in *Being and Time*:

We do not need to discuss in detail the fact that the traditional concept of eternity in the significance of the 'standing now' (*nunc stans*) is drawn from the vulgar understanding of time and defined in orientation toward the idea of 'constant' objective presence. If the eternity of *God* could be philosophically 'constructed,' it could be understood only as primordial and 'infinite' temporality. Whether or not the *via negationis et eminentiae* could offer a possible way remains an open question.¹

However, Heidegger never pursued the question of primordial and infinite temporality, but adhered stringently to the finitude of being for the rest of his philosophical life.

If the finitude of being does not lie in its being limited in time and space as they have been traditionally conceived, we might more properly look for it in the dimension of truth. Truth, for Heidegger, does not mean the traditional correspondence theory of truth where something is true if the idea that I have in my head corresponds to an object in the outside world. This correspondence theory of truth states that truth is having a correct idea of an object that corresponds to the actual object. For Heidegger, truth consists in the fact that things are disclosed to us at all in the first place. Thus, truth is something very much akin to revelation, or, to use a more neutral and less biblical term, to unconcealment. But things are never simply unconcealed or disclosed to us; they are at the same time concealed, hidden from us. This is generally Heidegger's view, and it may point to some sort of duality in his conception of being. This duality may be the condition of all disclosure: There can be no disclosure or unconcealment without simultaneous concealment. If this is so—and it probably is—then we need to inquire further into the implications of this.

On the other hand, there is a fundamental term in late Heidegger corresponding to disclosure and unconcealment that does not appear to have a counterconcept. That term is '*Lichtung*', 'clearing' or 'opening.' In the course of conversations with Heidegger about translation problems, it became increasingly evident that he was very excited about this word, which indicated, to me at least, that he had discovered something new that went beyond his general concept of unconcealment. It is not a question of 'development' here, from unconcealment to *Lichtung*; both terms are used concurrently.

However, the overwhelming evidence is clearly on the side of concealment as lying at the heart of being. Any attempt at developing the implications of *Lichtung* conceived as free of concealment, which will be explored later in this study, goes beyond what Heidegger actually said and, as such, must remain purely speculative.

In the lecture course *The Basic Concepts of Metaphysics*, given in 1929–30, Heidegger discusses three concepts: world, finitude, and solitude or individuality. Fascinating as these lectures are (especially the sections on animals), they do not tell us very much about finitude. Finitude is thought primarily with regard to human being, not with regard to being itself. In fact, there is little emphasis on being itself in these lectures, which may well be the reason why Eugen Fink regarded them so highly, repeatedly urging Heidegger to publish them.

Although it is one of the three concepts constituting the title of these lectures, finitude is not developed in them to any significant degree. We are told that it is the root of the other two, world and solitude or individuality, and that it consists fundamentally in the brokenness (*Gebrochenheit*) of *Dasein*. By the brokenness of *Dasein* Heidegger means that the expanse of *Dasein*'s horizon is broken by the moment which brings it to authentic existence. Here we see that it is precisely its finitude that enables *Dasein* to attain authentic existence. Finitude is never simply a limited, 'negative' characteristic for Heidegger, especially since the 'positive' counterpart, infinity, is totally absent from his thought.

The most significant statement about finitude in these lectures occurs in the context of a critique of Kant and Hegel—more specifically, a critique of a presumed infinity obtained through the use of dialectic. We should recall that already in *Being and Time*, Heidegger had called dialectic "the embarrassment of philosophy."

Hegel's step from Kant to absolute idealism is the sole consistency of the development of Western philosophy. This development is *possible* and *necessary* through Kant because the problem of human *Dasein*, finitude, did not become a real problem for him and thus not a central problem of philosophy because Kant himself—as the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* shows—encouraged the path of working his way out of an uncomprehended finitude to appeasing himself with infinity. . . . This consistency is necessary and admirable in the way Hegel develops it, yet as consistency it is already the sign of a presumed infinity. In-consistency belongs to finitude, not as a lack or an embarrassment but as an active force. Finitude makes dialectic impossible, shows it to be illusion. In-consequence, lack of ground and fundamental concealment belong to finitude.²

Kant did not take finitude seriously as an ultimate characteristic of human being not to be overcome. Hegel dispensed with it altogether. The step from critical to absolute idealism simply threw out the thing-in-itself and let it appear as the development of Absolute Spirit. In rejecting this step, Heidegger names three characteristics of finitude which will play a major role in his later thought: in-consequence, lack of ground, and fundamental concealment. We have here a first indication that finitude fundamentally has to do with concealment.

In-consequence (*In-konsequenz*, or *Un-folge*), which is less specifically developed in Heidegger's later thought than lack of ground and fundamental concealment, points to the fact that the manner of occurrence of finitude cannot be neatly fitted into anything like the dialectical scheme of 'in itself', 'for itself', 'in and for itself'. This scheme permits the derivation and calculation of each step from its predecessor. Such a calculating prediction is incommensurable with the nature of finitude.

'Lack of ground' (*Grundlosigkeit*) is a more precise and at the same time more comprehensive formulation of what Heidegger was getting at with the term 'in-consequence'. Philosophy should stop trying to give reasons why for everything, in the sense of explaining everything in terms of the objective presence of a connection of cause and effect. The fullest discussion of this question can be found in the lecture course *Der Satz vom Grund*. The movement is to be away from explanation, in the direction of clarification and Heidegger's own unique brand of hermeneutical interpretation: emplacement (*Erörterung*). Lack of ground is epitomized in Angelus Silesius's poem:

The rose is without a why;
it blooms because it blooms.

The rose has no why; it just blooms since that is what roses 'do'.

The lecture course that really grapples with the question of finitude as concealment is the one on Parmenides. There we discover that concealment itself is profoundly ambiguous. It has a positive and a negative function; Heidegger does not explicitly distinguish them from one another, nor does he even relate them to each other. This might be his intention; on the other hand, it is certainly something that bears looking into. The question becomes, What is the meaning of concealment, what does it mean that there is concealment in being?

Heidegger's own articulation of the question of *aletheia* gives us four directives. We state these four in order to gain clarity as to his particular approach. Then we want to distance ourselves from them, to a certain extent, by adopting a slightly different perspective on the same factors he is analyzing. Heidegger's articulation of the four directives is as follows:

1. *un-concealment*. The emphasis is on concealment which is itself subdivided into:

- a) concealment as covering over
- b) concealment as protecting
- 2. *un*-concealment. The emphasis is on the *un*-, the negation of concealment which itself is subdivided into:
 - a) removal of concealment
 - b) keeping concealment at bay, not allowing it to arise
- 3. *aletheia* as the strife between concealing and unconcealing
- 4. the Open

We take the division between (a) and (b) in (1) to be a substantive distinction between distortion and preservation. The shift in emphasis between (1) and (2), the shift between *un-concealment* and *un*-concealment, can be transposed to (3) as the question of the emphasis in strife. Four is the directive that interests me the most and is almost impossible to document authentically: the Open or Opening (clearing) as being itself. Thus, the order that we wish to pursue is as follows:

- 1. concealing as preservation
- 2. strife between concealing and unconcealing
- 3. concealing as distortion

These three different emphases show that there is no single univocal meaning for the term 'finitude' in Heidegger. All that we can be certain of is that he maintained that finitude without exception. The question for this study then becomes, What did finitude ultimately mean, for Heidegger?

Bearing in mind Heidegger's fundamental distaste for questions of value and for value judgments in general—a distaste that expressed itself very early and in no uncertain terms in *Being and Time* with the refusal to deem inauthenticity inferior to, or less desirable than, authenticity—one tends to be hesitant about assessing these different senses of finitude. But, inevitably, the following thoughts might come to mind.

re 1. Concealing as preservation is a desirable and acceptable meaning. Being should not be thought as something that depletes and exhausts itself in giving; it should be thought as having the resources to preserve and renew itself. After all, there is nothing negative expressed in Heidegger's favorite Heraclitus fragment, "Nature loves to hide." The fragment rather expresses the intriguing thought that there is something playful about Nature. Playfulness is nothing negative. It abounds in Hindu thought and can even be richly documented in Heidegger himself.

re 3) Concealing as distortion is a disturbing and disquieting, if not downright ominous, meaning. Two possible explanations for this tendency of distortion come to mind. Based on the habit of theological thinking, one could infer the existence of something like evil in being. Or one might have to draw the conclusion that there is some kind of impotence, some kind of inability to prevent distortion.

re 2) The strife between concealing and unconcealing lends itself less easily to such value judgments. Yet one would eventually have to ask what it means that there is such a duality between concealing and unconcealing in being itself. The theologian Paul Tillich dealt with this problem of duality with regard to being and nonbeing by stating that being without nonbeing would be a lifeless, static reality incapable of revealing itself and by asserting that being itself is ultimately beyond the duality of being and nonbeing and includes them both. But Heidegger is no theologian and his answers do not fit as neatly as Tillich's.

Lastly, we shall embark upon the speculative and questionable enterprise of inquiring into the clearing as being itself. Before that, we shall have to say something about concealing as (1) a process and (2) a structure. This will complete the scope of what this study is trying to do.