Kant had proceeded some 600 pages into the first Critique before he had reached this problem of abysses. He had faithfully followed out the Enlightenment’s search for foundations, its peculiar form of the recherche de la vérité, as it was called. He had deployed the schemata of the Enlightenment’s beliefs. Transcendental arguments, always, at least in Kant, were regressive. “If knowledge is to be possible” — it postulated a complete picture of knowledge as well as possibility. And, no one doubted it — let alone Kant, for whom Newton, Galileo, and Euclid provided the texts for an archive of pure reason. The systems, the principia were introjected: the schemata for synthesis — the bringing of the manifold of sensation into a unity, the necessary unity of knowledge, of concepts, of judgment, and thereby, of objects. And, consistently, self-critically, and the anathema to all neo-Kantianism, Kant’s Dialectic would not allow these grounds to go themselves ungrounded. Reason seeks the conditions of the conditions, a higher unity that might ground the certainty of the understanding. The search for grounds, for justification, for legitimation, for necessity is not tangential to what had gone before: it is necessary. A final grounding is requisite that might satisfy the search, providing a complete determination or ground for logical and ontological possibility such that it might be affirmed, finally and ultimately, that “everything which exists is completely determined.”\(^1\) Being thus could be claimed to be fully rational, that is, both orderly and intelligible.

It was Kant’s peculiar twist, trope perhaps would be adequate here, to have recognized that this project, the project of all metaphysica rationalis, was part and parcel theological. The foundation that would found logic and ontology must also be inherently theological. In short, as he put it, the project of rationality was onto-theo-logical. The object of this search would contain by implication the sum total of all possibility. It would be the omnitudo realitatis. Because all particularity (manifoldness) would be a limitation of it, it would be the primordial being (ens originarium). As the condition of the conditions it would be the highest being (ens summum). And, because everything that is conditioned is subject to it, it would be the being of all beings (ens entium).\(^2\) With this ultimate grounding metaphysica rationalis would have found completeness. Bacon’s foundations would have finally hit bedrock. Transcendental logic as a logic of truth would have been vindicated. Objectivity would have finally been assured in accordance with a necessity that had driven the search after truth since Plato’s dialectic.

Kant recognized this was fundamental to the project of pure reason, unavoidable to the problem of certainty; implicit to the problem
of bringing the dispersion (the manifoldness, the divided being) of a
finite knower to certainty. It was, consequently, fundamental and
unsurpassable. Natural was Kant’s word for it, and it would bring
Hegel’s response that it still smacked of an indefensible psychology. And yet, equally unavoidable was the fact that this search implicitly
contained as well a certain delirium. Its search involved an illusion, that
transcendental ideas could receive the Sinn und Bedeutung, as Kant was
the first to call it, of what he also called experience. Such a Being, albeit
necessary and inevitable to Reason’s search, was merely a focus
imaginarius. But it was not merely a necessary delusion, in the sense of
the postulates of practical reason, somehow. It was a delusion that
struck at the heart of Reason itself. This was the delusion of its project,
the failure of the foundation that ultimately justified what had gone
before. It was, after all, the ground of all grounds. And Kant, despite
all his commitment to philosophical modernism and the heroes of the
Enlightenment, did not fail at least to blink, to use a Nietzschean phrase,
at what he had wrought: “Unconditioned necessity, which we so
indispensable require as the last bearer of all things, is for human reason
the veritable abyss.”5 “Der wahre Abgrund,” the combination expresses
the paradox, the undecidable of German idealism. Wahre Abgrund. True
abyss. The truth of grounding, to be without grounds. A truth that arises
from grounds: to be without, to be Abgrund. It is a peculiarity of German,
Hegel believed, a “delight to speculative thought”—and he referred in
fact in this context to this word—to have a “twofold meaning.” And,
it must be kept in mind throughout:”6 Heidegger appealed to it as well,
saying at the same time that, “we must avoid uninhibited word-
mysticism.”7 If it does not occur in English (abyss) or French (l’abîme),
it is there in their etymological past (a byssos).

II

Notwithstanding the circumflexes and peculiarities of ‘those who
come after’ Kant, he does not merely mention this word with twofolded
meaning, but bends it again, fully cognizant of what had transpired.
It involves, he claims, a thought that “(w)e cannot put aside, and yet
cannot endure…” Namely, that:

All support here fails us (Hier sinkt alles unter uns); and the greatest
perfection, no less than the least perfection, is unsubstantial and
baseless for the merely speculative reason, which makes not the
least effort to retain either the one or the other and feels indeed
no loss in allowing them to vanish entirely.8
It is a curious passage: a thought that cannot be put aside—namely, that of the ultimate ground, the ultimate truth, the true Abgrund—and at the same time, a thought that cannot be endured. And yet, speculative reason "makes not the least effort" to retain the order that it implies. Kant's whole effort in the succeeding pages will be to reinstate the shell of metaphysica rationalis as a hypothesis: what cannot be determined will be regulated, reflected, understood 'as if' it were so.

The end result circles back on one of the axioms of Kant's position, but in this text it is stated in a form whose anticipations are over-determined. "The thing itself (die Sache selbst) is indeed given, but we can have no insight into its nature." That is, in a radical split between the phenomenal and the noumenal, between the a priori and the a posteriori, we are barred from the thing's essence, divided by the appearance of the sensation, that event that both 'gives' the thing and withdraws it. And this sensation, consequently, just is that "element in the appearances...that can never be known a priori, and that therefore constitutes the distinctive difference between empirical and a priori knowledge," one that "cannot be anticipated." The thing itself ist gegeben, but as divided, and screened beyond, as appearance and its other that is given without appearing, just as the positivity of the appearance itself remains divided already between the a priori and the a posteriori, as effect in the distinctive difference that constitutes it: dividing, ultimately, the thing itself from our grasp, dividing all presence from within, and finally, dividing the finite subject internally, interminably.

And yet in the preceding passage, where all support fails, speculative reason seems content to let the play of imagination loose. Speculative reason, for just a moment in blinking before this opening, seems content, as he put it in the Anthropology, to have that state of affairs in which the "imagination runs riot," as it is "richer and more fertile in ideas than sense." And the corresponding state, the noesis, if you will, might be characterized by what Kant calls "amentia (Unsinnigkeit)...the inability to bring one's idea into even the coherence that is necessary to make experience possible."12

Kant's abyss did not sink from sight in those who come after him. Schelling was perhaps right that this "abyss" that "all men are warned of" is a consequence of "mechanistic philosophy...in its highest expression." There is a sense perhaps in which metaphysica rationalis and the postulate of complete determination could be systematically (if not successfully) completed only under the hypothesis of mechanism—as Laplace and those who come after him understood. Consequently, Schelling attempted to do away with the hypothesis, transforming
Naturphilosophie from within. "[P]ursuing speculative philosophy into its bottomless abysses in order to dig out its deepest foundation," he hoped to mine an abundance whose possibility could be questioned no further.\textsuperscript{14} The abyss which resulted was then construed to be both the Urgrund of freedom and the emergence of a new transcendental cosmogony. The metaphysics that resulted was however neither more successful nor more rational—if it did rely on the very underdeterminability Kant’s analytic had sought to escape.\textsuperscript{15} Even Kant’s mechanistic schemata were, after all, just his interpretation, his proviso on finitude. And the point was that others were possible, that no finite cognitive act could ultimately determine or ground. Consequently, although acknowledging that what was at stake involved precisely a transformation in our view of the Cosmos (Weltanschauung), what the Copernican turn itself enforced—the sublimity of the starry heavens above notwithstanding—was precisely the failure of such solutions. "The observations and calculations of astronomers have taught us much that is wonderful; but the most important lesson that they have taught us has been by revealing the abyss of our ignorance that otherwise we could never have conceived to be so great."\textsuperscript{16}

Hegel, on the other hand, remained more convinced by Schelling than Kant. Armed with the metaphysics of Realizierung, he attempted to overcome the problem of this abyss, by regulating it in the economics of Aufhebung, that other German word whose polysemy was to bespeak a speculative truth. In the Science of Logic, recounting in fact the chapter on grounds, Hegel stated:

[T]his end itself, this falling to the ground (Zugrundgehen) of the mediation, is at the same time the ground from which the immediate proceeds. Language...combines the meaning of this downfall (Untergang) and of ground; the essence of God, it is said, is the abyss (Abgrund) for finite reason. This it is, indeed, in so far as finite reason surrenders its finitude and sinks its mediating movement therein; but this abyss, the negative ground, is also the positive ground of the emergence of simply affirmative being, of essence that is in its own self immediate; mediation is an essential movement.\textsuperscript{17}

Hegel’s Abgrund, as one might expect, is controlled, an economics of truth with its own economics of signs. The negative is implicitly the positive, the negative and positive in the economics of Aufhebung. One always buys the whole package in Hegel. On the basis of it in the Lectures on Philosophy of Religion, with Kant clearly in mind, Hegel was content
to reinstate the ontological argument.\textsuperscript{18} In a sense, however, the Logic had always already presupposed it, the function of Kant's onto-theology. It was, after all, "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of the world."\textsuperscript{19} And, within it the same economics that regulates positive and negative mediates inner and the outer, the sensible and the intelligible, the phenomenal and the noumenal.

III

For Nietzsche, consequently, Kant became "a delaying par excellence," who sees but does not see "what stands at the door."\textsuperscript{20} Only recently, perhaps, have we begun to see Nietzsche as post-Kantian, notwithstanding all that he himself stated. If Hegel was able to transform Kant's abyss into infinite self-affirmation, Nietzsche intended to cut loose all intention to ground. Indeed post-Kantian in this respect, in the words of Kant, Nietzsche maintained "not the lease effort to retain either the least or the greatest perfection." Nietzsche entered the abyss, neither to despair, nor simply to nihilate (it is, after all, nihilism that stands at the door), but to affirm infinitely its groundlessness, its heterogeneity, to use a Kantian term.

Just like those others normally called post-Kantian, Nietzsche had little use for the notion of the Ding-an-sich: "The spot of Kant's critical philosophy has gradually become visible even to dull eyes: Kant no longer has a right to his distinction 'appearance' and 'thing-in-itself.'"\textsuperscript{21} The thing-in-itself involves "the scientific prejudice," the last of the prejudices of the Enlightenment to be dissolved:

Against the scientific prejudice.—The biggest fable of all is the fable of knowledge. One would like to know what things in themselves are; but behold, there are no thing-in-themselves! But even supposing there were an in-itself, an unconditioned thing, it would for that very reason be unknowable! Something unconditioned cannot be known; otherwise it would not be unconditioned!\textsuperscript{22}

The scientific prejudice is precisely this belief in unconditioned facts, unconditioned grounds. But it is a consequence of Kant's Abgrund that there are no such unconditioned grounds. And the grounds that buttress Kant's architectonic are no less implicated in this failure: "The categories are 'truths' only in the sense that they are conditions of life for us: as Euclidean space is a conditional 'truth.'"\textsuperscript{23}
What arises then is a play of conditions from which one cannot escape. This itself, in fact, is identified by Nietzsche as the new “infinite.” The perspectival character of existence extends indeterminately—in *inde infinitum*, as Kant would say.24 Whether existence without interpretation makes any sense cannot be decided, for to decide it we would have to get around our own perspectives, interpretations, etc. But “(w)e cannot look around our own corner.”25

Truth then must be put in scare quotes, variously characterized by Nietzsche now as a ‘reduction,’ a ‘fiction,’ a ‘lie’; as ‘ugly,’ an ‘inertia,’ an ‘error,’ ‘falsification,’ a ‘schema,’ the ‘greatest error ever committed,’ ‘nonsensical,’ a ‘seduction’—but in any case a failure, one that accompanies a belief in knowledge-in-itself, a world-in-itself, and especially an in-itself that might be set over against a ‘for-us,’ a fiction, falsity, and so on. Furthermore, it is not a question of positing appearance over against the in-itself or the real, a positive over against its negative limit, the dissolution of the positive and the negative into some third more real thing, removing thereby the screen between accident and essence. Abolishing the system of exclusion that constituted the element that differentiated the ‘real’ dissolves its opposite, the ‘positivity’ of the apparent as well.26 What results, then, is another infinite play of affirmations.

Nietzsche’s affirmation, however, transgresses the affirmations of Hegel, or even those of the tradition that precedes him. Hegel had himself blinked at this chasm precisely before introducing its dissolution by means of *Aufhebung*. Speaking of the problem of grounds that link the determinations of reflection, binding *explanans* and *explanandum*, he declared: “In fact one finds oneself in a kind of witches circle (Hexenkreis) in which determinations of reflection, ground and grounded, phenomena and phantoms, run riot in indiscriminate company and enjoy equal rank with one another.”27

Nietzsche instead refused to reduce the Other to the Same. It is, rather, the affirmation of difference, of chance, and the possibilities of the ‘irrational’ that are to be faced. Reason itself has become unquestioned belief. Moreover, there is a refusal to reduce all attributes to a univocity. A refusal, therefore, of ontology, of ‘Being.’ All now is interpretation and exegesis. The world itself, in short, has become an abyss. Nietzsche’s abyss, however, is neither a negative ground for a positive emergence (as was Hegel’s) nor one that can countenance a philosophy that proceeds as if it had not been met (as did Kant, whose regulative employments following the failure of foundations made him in this regard a ‘scarecrow,’ for Nietzsche). It is a chasm of infinite alterity, the infinite return of this Other without a Same. It is the return
of the Other, of becoming, of the identity of difference. "That everything recurs is the closest approximation of the world of becoming to a world of being." The confrontation of all this is in fact Zarathustra's mission. Facing this perfect circle, this eternal return that refuses all reduction, Zarathustra proclaims at the decisive conclusion of part III, "I call you my most abysmal thought!" (Dich rufe ich meinen abgrundlichsten Gedanken!)  

What remains then, Nietzsche proclaimed, is merely the infinite play of life itself, precisely as this play of alterity. Otherwise stated, what remains, or rather becomes without being, is precisely the will to power. And, it is the will to power that infinitely interprets. In this sense, nature—as well as the problem of its 'synthesis'—becomes a play of forces, one that, to borrow from Kant's characterization of the moral law, 'possesses us rather than we possess it.' 

IV

Just as Schelling and Hegel had transformed the material into the spiritual from within, Nietzsche transformed the paradigm of mechanism in arriving at the will to power, a monadology now without center:

The victorious concept "force" by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as "will to power," i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive, etc.  

Still, it is not the case, certainly, that Nietzsche is to be taken as a physicist. The account of the will to power is not simply a new Naturphilosophie—if it cannot be understood without it. Drawing on the distinction between explanation and interpretation, however, Nietzsche becomes one of the first philosophers to consider (or fear) that, far from reserving a justified domain of enquiry for the Geisteswissenschaften, the problem that emerges with interpretation is one regarding the 'universality' of interpretation itself. Neither domain, consequently, would function as a grounded domain of enquiry. Physics, too, might turn into interpretation. "It is perhaps just dawning on five or six minds that physics, too, is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us if I may say so!) and not a world-explanation..."  

Rather than providing the instantiation of classical certainty and justification, physics, too, would become an interpretation of the infinite affirmation of the eternal return. It too would posit a sign for the process in which
it participates, without being able to look beyond its own corner: “The mechanistic concept of ‘motion’ is already a translation of the original process into the sign language of sight and touch.”\textsuperscript{33} Scientific discourse would be part of the infinite series of translations and interpretations of the ‘original process’ in which language tropes the world of becoming. And, ‘truth’ persists within it only as a rigidified effect in this ‘mobile army of metaphores.’\textsuperscript{34}

Will to power is itself original assertion, a force that, Nietzsche himself was willing to trope, belonged to every body in that each “strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (—its will to power) and to thrust back all that resists its extension.”\textsuperscript{35} But all, in any case, share in the life force of interpretation (again attributed synonymously to all bodies): “the essential priority of the spontaneous, expansive, form-giving forces that give new directions...”\textsuperscript{36}

And all evaluations here must proceed accordingly, affirming what enhances, liberates, breaks down, experiments, enjoys uncertainty—all, in short, that refuses to confine the will to power within the myth of knowledge and the correlate that similarly bifurcates the world into good and evil. Indeed, in one of those loaded statements that perhaps overcomes the tradition by twisting it, that ruptures truth while connecting it to the moral or the immoral, that denounces logic by connecting it to force, that delivers all justification to its practice, Nietzsche proclaimed: “The criterion of truth resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power.”\textsuperscript{37}

V

This shift haunts the legacy of the Nietzschean (and perhaps Kantian) text, dividing it from within. But what is its status? Does this ‘Wahre Ab-grund,’ this deflected truth that enjoins force in Nietzsche, that defies logic for practice, that exchanges the timeless for the contextual, does it form a correction for truth or its dissolution? Does it mark a limit, a transformation, or a simple substitution?

Ordinarily, as Martin Heidegger noted, such a question would be ‘monstrous’ (ungeheuerlich).\textsuperscript{38} There is a whole archive in Western thought for dealing with the skeptic, the sophist, the misologist who would give up truth for rhetoric, for ‘persuasion,’ in short, for force. Moreover, it might be argued that Heidegger himself did not face the issue seriously enough. “Truth” in any case, has become a problematic marker. And faced with recent events even in post-Kantian fortresses of certainty, that is, philosophy of science and epistemology (but equally elsewhere), it might appear that the question of truth in any strong sense now just
needs to be forgotten—for the sake of the artist’s faith, Nietzsche might say, but as well, because we simply cannot escape our practices or paradigms. If, consequently, we cannot get around the issue of certainty, perhaps we can just get rid of it, because we can at least straighten out our references, if not truth: our assertibility conditions, if not justification in the strict sense. Beyond this scope, the problem of truth or Being simply seems to make no sense. And, all of this seems to authorize the substitution of pragma for truth, reminding us as well that the history in which Nietzsche participates still needs to be written along with those others who would claim of truth that it is the expansive or the ‘expedient,’ as James put it.\textsuperscript{39}

What haunts the interpretation of post-Kantian thought in this regard is just the status of the primat it grants to the practical. It is a primacy that, marking the limits of speculative thought, unleashes the scepter of its nihilism. It occurs perhaps for the first time in that conflict between classical science and classical metaphysics outlined previously that issues in Schelling’s proclamation resounding throughout the nineteenth century’s commitment to practice; namely, that “Will is primordial being.”\textsuperscript{40} This primat granted to practical reason, to praxis, and to Realizierung marks both the end of metaphysics and the need for its overcoming. ‘Ueberwindung,’ a Nietzschean word, is to be found equally at the center of later thought: explicitly, in Heidegger or Derrida, certainly, but also in Wittgenstein or Carnap, who used it in ‘overcoming’ Heidegger.\textsuperscript{41} Implicitly nonetheless it occurs in any number of thinkers who have felt of late the effect of history and its ‘conditioning,’ becoming worried once more that ‘physics,’ just as much as what came ‘before’ it, ‘metaphysics,’ may be a form of eisegesis.

VI

Nietzsche had overcome the scientific prejudice, the prejudice of foundations and, ultimately, metaphysics itself by an appeal to that which underlies it, the force that it constrains, the will to power. Enhancement, like efficacy or expediency, was seen to underlie truth, and thus ‘truth’ and ‘truths’ were seen as transferences or rigidified effects of the forces or practices from that they merge. Hence, Nietzsche claimed in 1885, “logic does not stem from the will to truth,” but from a fundamental falsification that stems itself from will to power.\textsuperscript{42}

But what sense can this claim that denies claims, this assertion that denies ‘assertion’ make? Martin Heidegger, who has perhaps faced this issue in Nietzsche’s text as strongly as anyone, provides an exacting comment for this passage:
That is surprising. According to Nietzsche's own conception, truth is indeed what is firm and fixed; but should not logic emerge from this will to fixate and make permanent? According to Nietzsche's own conception, it can only derive from the will to truth. If Nietzsche nonetheless says, "Logic does not stem from the will to truth," then he must unwittingly mean "truth" in another sense here: not in his sense, according to which truth means error, but in the traditional sense, according to which truth means agreement of knowledge with things and with reality. This concept of truth is the presupposition and principal standard for the interpretation of truth as semblance and error.\textsuperscript{43}

In what sense is this 'truth' to be understood in Nietzsche? Is it to be understood as what 'truly' is, or as what is valid in all judgments or life? In calling truth a lie what must be presupposed? Nietzsche himself had claimed that logic was, at best, an organon, or, within the problematic of force or of willing, an imperative. And consistent with this, in a move not unheard of \textit{vis à vis} the collapse of correspondence theories, he turned to coherence, and once again to practice, and what was 'taken' as true. The claim that the axioms of logic are \textit{adequate} to reality therefore "contains no criterion of truth, but an imperative concerning what \textit{should} count as true."\textsuperscript{44} Still, Nietzsche reminded us that such a world is not the real world but the apparent one, the one that must also be abolished if we are to surpass Kant.

"Truth" then is to be seen as the attempt to master multiplicity. "The character of the world in a state of becoming," however, Nietzsche stated, is "incapable of formulation," is "false," and "self-contradictory." Knowledge and becoming exclude one another. "Consequently, 'knowledge' must be something else: there must first of all be a will to make knowable, a kind of becoming itself must itself create the deception of beings."\textsuperscript{45} Truth becomes "truth"; knowledge becomes "knowledge." And, the will to power becomes. But it is just here that Heidegger grows uneasy. Why are there no scare quotes around this 'will to power,' this marker for becoming that "creates reality" through the axioms of logic? And, what in the end is the relationship between the signs of Nietzsche's metaphors and the becoming they indicate? What in the end is the relationship between this becoming and these 'lies,' these falsehoods that are, terribly, Nietzsche's truth? What voice speaks from \textit{Ecce Homo} to proclaim with the same deflection, "[T]he truth speaks out of me—but my truth is terrible for so far one has called lies truth."\textsuperscript{46} What Sphinx proclaims three years earlier all the while that there is no truth, that "[t]here are many kinds of eyes. Even the
sphinx has eyes—and consequently there are many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there is no truth.”

VII

Nietzsche nihilated Being for the sake of what becomes. He turned the truth of Being to a fable, its verification into falsification. Heidegger, however, had refused this simple transformation that would exchange one side of the polarity for the other, Becoming for Being. Kant, as has been seen, had similarly bifurcated the world into the sensible and the intelligible, the real and the apparent, a dichotomy that Nietzsche had attempted to overcome. Yet, at the same time, Kant himself was unable to simply limit reason to the apparent, to the sensible, to the experience of physics. No more, then, could the bifurcation hold in Kant’s own text. Human reason was inherently, ‘naturally’ metaphysical. It inherently surpassed the limitations that reason placed on its own endeavors. What can be thought inherently transcended what reason might be certain about. “Being,” which Kant attempted to confine to mere position, to mere positing, problematically and yet indeterminately extended always further than any possible conceptualization or schematization. Inherent to Kant’s position, then, as Heidegger argued in his work on Nietzsche, is precisely a notion of Being that eludes the classical determination that would grasp it as ground, as stasis, as receptacle of all predicates. In this regard, in this overcoming that lies beyond but within metaphysics, Kant’s abyss is likewise the abyss of Being itself.

But the celebrated “universal” significance of “Being” is not the reified emptiness of a huge receptacle into which everything capable of transformation can be thrown. What misleads us in the direction of this notion is our long-acustomed way of thinking that thinks “Being” as the most universal determination of all and that therefore can admit the manifold only as the sort of thing that fills the vast empty shell of the most universal concept.

Metaphysics at its end could no longer conceive Being as a set of predicates in terms of which all entities might receive determination. It could no longer fulfill the requisites of metaphysica rationalis. It would instead be forced to face the indeterminacy or underdetermination of Being with respect to all positing, but also to affirm the overdetermination of Being and—in accord with an ancient archive—an abundance that transcends all predication. What becomes ‘imperative’ for Heidegger,
then is precisely to grasp this Janus head (*Doppel-gesicht*) of Being and the discord it initiates between representing and understanding, between using and relying on, between retaining and forgetting, and finally saying.\(^5\)

The overcoming of metaphysics is consequently not to be found in the creativity whereby the will to power would make manifest the becoming of beings. It is rather the thought of ontological difference between Being and the emergence of beings, that ontological differentiation that was for Kant a natural disposition, the differentiation of categorization and what always eludes any and all presentation.

Surpassing the failure of metaphysics, then, means precisely remaining open to the surpassing in Being itself, remaining open to the otherness in which Being itself erupts or departs. In fact, on this account, what constitutes human authenticity in its own most or most proper possibility involves precisely remaining open to what is disclosed in the encounter with Being. Truth becomes then not a fable, an entity without time, nor even a being in itself. Rather, it involves remaining free within the revelation of Being, a freedom that is itself the letting-be of Being in its Otherness.\(^5\) And, it is precisely this freedom before Being, this surpassing that calls on human response, this difference that beckons human freedom. Freedom remains consequently both ungrounded and yet (the paradox retains a certain Hegelian overtone) acquires foundation precisely in what withdraws from its grasp. In *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, a text that directly concerns this problem of foundations, of grounding, Heidegger states:

> Freedom is not a ground in any one of the ways of grounding, as we are always inclined to think, but is the grounding unity of the transcendental dispersion of grounding. As this kind of ground, however, freedom is the abyss (*Ab-grund*) of Dasein, its groundless (*grundlos*) or absent ground. It is not as though the only kind of free behavior were groundless (unmotivated) behavior. Instead, as transcendence, freedom provides Dasein, as “potentially for being,” with possibilities that gape open before its finite choice, i.e., in its destiny.\(^5\)

Heidegger’s abyss then became the event of Dasein’s freedom, an event that it receives in transcendence. This freedom is, therefore, as much receptivity as spontaneity. Human Dasein is ‘thrown’ into freedom, a word still with Nietzschean overtones.

And yet, this thrownness belies Nietzsche. This Being that perpetually escapes is not created, not simply ‘effect,’ nor is its force
simply one form of Becoming. There is Being. ‘Es gibt Sein,’ Heidegger pointed out is again another fortuitous idiom (‘There is Being,’ ‘It gives Being’) whose twofold meaning portends the necessary overdetermination of speculative thought—and Being itself, as has been seen. And it opposed all that Nietzsche stood for. As the latter proclaims clearly and consistently in Thus Spoke Zarathustra: “It is given’ (Es gibt sich)—that is also a doctrine of submission. But I tell you, you comfortable people: it is taken (es nimmt sich) and will be taken more and more from you.”\(^{53}\)

VIII

Although it is true that no one has more forcefully faced the challenge of what has been limited here to Nietzsche’s question, Heidegger’s treatment is not uncontroversial. Jacques Derrida, for example, despite his differences with Heidegger’s Nietzsche books, using words he employs sparingly, characterized it as “Heidegger’s mighty tome (le grand livre de Heidegger).”\(^{54}\) Gilles Deleuze, on the other hand, claimed that “Heidegger gives an interpretation of Nietzschean philosophy closer to his own thought than to Nietzsche’s.”\(^{55}\) Both may be true, even though they still disagree.

Derrida’s interrogation of the Heideggerean reading of Nietzsche has centered precisely on the machinations of authenticity in the Nietzschean abyss. First of all, however, it should be said that he has in fact affirmed the problematic of the Heideggerean question. For example, commenting on Nietzsche’s claim that the truths of his books remain his truths, Derrida began: “The very fact that ‘Meine Wahrheiten’ is so underlined, that they are multiple, variegated, contradictory even, can only imply that these are not truths. Indeed there is no such thing as a truth in itself. But only a surfeit of it. Even if it should be for me, about me, truth is plural.”\(^{56}\) There can be no ultimate decidability in the exchange between the true and the false. But again, Derrida queried, what sense can be made of ‘truth’ if there are no ‘truths-in-themselves’? Once this abyss has become pluralized, all oppositions become in the strict sense indefensible. Moreover, Derrida claimed, this includes the opposition of an ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ response, reading, or hearing of ‘Being.’ ‘Being’ and ‘beings,’ what exceeds and what erupts, presence and absence become lost in an infinite labyrinth of exchanges. Still, the gift of Heidegger’s Es gibt is, seemingly, precisely that proper, that standard, that origin in terms of which one may still, in accord with the scientific prejudice, adjudicate between the authentic and the
inauthentic, the true and the false, between what gets revealed and what gets covered up.

Heidegger hoped to restore the authenticity of the origin, of Being, by a recourse to a property of the abyss of Being itself: "The noble or the worthy Appropriation of the origin is the unique release as Appropriation of freedom, which is unconcealment of concealment, because it belongs to the abyss, das Eigenthum des Abgrundes." Derrida aptly questioned whether Heidegger's whole understanding of Being, of its withdrawal of the abyss itself, does not have built into it a privilege, a proper, a bifurcation that is itself indefensible, that remains, in line with its speculative (Hegelian) ancestry, positive. In all this it remains, Derrida charged, despite all the critical resources of the ontological question, pre-critical: "in its relation to the signified, in the return to the presence of the spoken word, to a natural language, to perception, to consciousness, and its phenomenological system." Still, one must tread carefully even on this site, granted the Derridean choice of markers here. The very meaning of critical and precritical itself, after all, emerges only from the history of transcendentalism. It is not, again, the case that this history is being dissolved—even if it is to be overcome—as is evident from a text in Of Grammatology:

I believe that there is a short of and a beyond of transcendental criticism. To see to it that the beyond does not return to the within is to recognize in the contortion the necessity of a pathway (parcours)... Without that track, abandoned to the simple content of its conclusions, the ultratranscendental text will so closely resemble the precritical text as to be indistinguishable from it.

And yet, for Derrida, this ineffaceable within of the transcendental text already contains its beyond in what exceeds it. Like Kant's own unconditioned necessity, indispensably required as the last bearer of all things, the first ground of transcendentalism too becomes the veritable abyss. Speaking of the event of freedom's appropriation, an event that Heidegger himself equally describes as Being's expropriation (Enteignis) of itself in its withdrawal, Derrida stated:

Finally, then, once the question of production, doing, machination, the question of the event (which is one meaning of Ereignis) has been uprooted from ontology, the property or appropriation is named as exactly that which is proper to nothing and no one. Truth, unveiling, illumination are no longer decided in the appropriation of the truth of being, but are cast into its bottomless abyss.
as non-truth, veiling and dissimulation.... The property of the abyss (das Eigentum des Abgründes) is necessarily the abyss of proper-ty, the violence of an event that befalls without Being.

Perhaps truth's abyss as non-truth, propriation as appropriation/a-propriation, the declaration become parodying dissimulation.⁵⁰

The truth of grounds hence becomes the abyss of truth. It is, that is, the abyss of truth as nontruth, the dissolution of all truth, of all immediacy, of all origins. In a sense Derrida has forsaken the Heideggerian text for its Nietzschean ancestry—but wholly on Heideggerian grounds. Still, in defining truth as revealment, as aletheia, even if no final interpretation renders a sign complete, did not Heidegger himself guarantee truth, because there is nothing more primordial to being Da-sein—as revealing, disclosing?

Even Heidegger himself had wavered before this abyss. It was, he related in his 1964 UNESCO address (and Derrida's preceding text depends on it), "inadequate and misleading to call aletheia in the sense of opening, truth."⁵¹ In this hasty identification, truth and Being are still too much thought together, thought too much within the coupling that links together the opening of presence with the simple correctness of statements and judgments, too much abstracted from the event itself. Being, after all, withdraws without fully presencing, without, therefore, being fully 'adequatable.' It is precisely in this sense that Derrida's abyss is Heidegger's as well. Where is truth to be placed in this event that appropriates and 'depropriates' at the same time? Heidegger's own query, following his own destruction and retrieval of the Greek origins of the tradition, that is, takes us to this limit itself:

**Aletheia**, unconcealment thought as the opening of presence, is not yet truth. Is aletheia then less than truth? Or is it more because it first grants truth as adequatio and certitudo, because there can be no presence and presenting outside of the realm of the opening?

This question we leave to thinking as a task.⁵²

IX

But then what is to be made of the belonging-together of Being and Truth? What is it that remains undecidable in aletheia? And, what is it that remains insurpassable, that leads this abyss, this Ab-grund to be connected time and again with the problem of truth or its loss?
In 1927 Heidegger in fact had seemed sure of all this:

Why must we presuppose that there is truth? What is ‘presupposing’? What do we have in mind with the ‘must’ and the ‘we’? What does it mean to say ‘there is truth’ ("es-gibt Wahrheit")? ‘We’ presuppose truth because ‘we’ being in the kind of Being that Dasein possesses, are ‘in the truth’... It is not we who presuppose ‘truth’; but it is ‘truth’ that makes it at all possible ontologically for us to be able to be such that we ‘presuppose’ anything at all. Truth is what first makes possible anything like presupposing.63

A strange passage. One that marks again the passage of truth to ‘truth,’ fully cognizant that this truth as well cannot be the truth of certitudo or adequatio. And it enframes, also, the same appeal to transcendentalism and its conditio sine qua non with which Heidegger had met Nietzsche’s own quotation on truth.

But then why is it not classical, this appeal to the ‘es gibt’ once again? Is this not an appeal to grounds, the ‘presupposing’ that ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are always already in harmony? Should we not hear Nietzsche’s roar that the appeal to a subjective necessity does not prove ‘truth,’ that roar that was to shake Kant’s faculties and synthetic a priori judgment to the ground?64 Is not Dasein’s “presupposing” to be taken, after all, as Dasein’s? After all, it was Heidegger, too, who was quite willing to say that “There is’ truth only in so far as Dasein is and so long as Dasein is.”65 Es gibt or es nimmt? Constituted or revealed? The problem remains, it might be said, assuming the Heideggerian genre once more, “undecided,” the legacy of the undecidable Transcendental Ideal.

What remains true, however, is that this ‘truth’ which always already includes its own deferment cannot ground this abyss, but derives from it. Similarly, it cannot solve the problem of modernism and its search for unequivocal grounds or foundations. Reason in the end functions beyond foundations. All judgments are conditional, ‘presuppose’ a prior framework, and the ensuing ‘truths’ are by no means commensurable de juris. There is clearly no truth in itself, any more than there could be a knowledge in itself.

And these other, remaining ‘truths,’ this labyrinth without decidability? Here, as Heidegger consistently claimed, “A skeptic can no more be refuted than the Being of truth can be ‘proved,’”66 Scare quotes again; 1927 again. Notwithstanding his later, perhaps hasty characterization, Heidegger’s ‘truth’ never was the truth of modernism, the truth of proof, of certainly, of adequation. If his story then
sometimes flirted with neo-Kantianism in its search for the *conditio sine qua non* of truth, the resulting quoted, troped ‘truth’ was in this respect perhaps ‘already’ Nietzschean. And his later works would depart from *Fundamentalontologie* faced with the abyss at which it unavoidably arrived. Fourteen years later, in “Recollection in Metaphysics,” he would claim little else in stating that the truth of Being cannot be proven and “is inaccessible to every explanation,”—at least not from the perspective of beings, of totalization, foundation and completeness. One must look rather to that thought of what exceeds: “What ‘is’ Being? May we inquire into Being: as to *what it is*? Being remains unquestioned and a matter of course, and thus unthought. It holds itself in a truth that has long since been forgotten and is without ground.”

The question is whether this is enough and what sense is to be made of it. Is not one person’s abyss another’s ground, one person’s listening another’s response, one person’s authenticity another’s inauthenticity, and even one person’s *es gibt* another’s *es nimmt*? Has not Heidegger simply exchanged reason for taste, philosophy for poetry? Recall that Carnap, too, praised Nietzsche in his *Überwindung*, precisely for having realized that metaphysicians were bad artists who masked their emotional commitments. Now finally we were in a position to clarify science and send the metaphysicians to art school. A modernist concern, perhaps, retaining its commitments to the purity of reason and the univocity of methodology but also one that stands at the center of understanding rationality after their default.

**X**

Heidegger’s response is first a claim about the modernist project itself and its commitment to a “technical scientistic view of language,” reducing ‘Being’ to a frame, a metalanguage through which reality might become pictured or, under the guise of the latter’s failure, in an appeal to ontological relativism, claim that—as Quine put it—‘to be is to be a variable.’ It forgets, thereby, the ontological difference in an antinomy, to speak Kantian, that grants either too much or too little, “both” sides claiming “more than it knows.” Further, from Heidegger’s standpoint it thereby functions on the ground of nihilism as, “the essence of nihilism is the history in that there is nothing to Being itself.”

Still, the other side of what Heidegger called philosophy’s “most extreme counterpositions,” termed by him “the speculative-hermeneutical experience of language,” cannot provide a simple or easy alternate. If language here is the ‘house of Being’ the place of the occurrence of the ‘*es gibt*’, it must involve anything but the simple Absolute of the
The idealist tradition it stands on. Heidegger, certainly, had learned the failure of that event of Will, of realization, that would get around Kant's dilemma. There is no final proof in all this for Heidegger, not even the proof of practice.

Rather, it is the thought of Being—and its difference—that are to prevail now. "Thought" is a speculative mark that may still descend from the machinations of German idealism, however. It is, as Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe has noted, "the word of greatest proximity to Hegel," and consequently, "the word of greatest danger." If Being is to be authentically disclosed and divided, it is to be received in thought—"speculative hermeneutical" thought, two words that, in other arenas, Heidegger might have rejected. If, however, Heidegger dissolved the proof of this Being, if he forced the recognition that there is no final foundation, no final proof for the matter of thought, this does not deny that there is a strictness to thought. Using characterizations that echo to Husserl's notion of *Strenge Wissenschaft*, and a text that Heidegger claimed is "much too neglected today," he stated:

This multiplicity of possible interpretations does not discredit the strictness of the thought content. For all true thought remains open to more than one interpretation—and this by reason of its nature. Nor is this multiplicity of possible interpretation merely the residue of a still unachieved formal-logical univocity which we properly ought to strive for but did not attain. Rather multiplicity of meanings is the element in which all thought must move in order to be strict thought.

And ultimately, this strict thought, underdetermined, incomplete, groping, interpretative, remains 'true' thought precisely to the extent that it responds to this Being without proof. Notwithstanding the failure of science or the failure of metaphysics, then, Heidegger remained committed to "thought," to strictness, to the matter of thinking every bit as much as Hegel with his own "element of thought" *(Elemente des Denkens)*—and all the baggage of its metaphysical commitments: to the intelligible or the spiritual versus the sensible, the inner versus the outer, the essential versus the accidental.

Still, this 'strict' thought cannot remove itself from its own contingency, presuppositions, possibility, and historicity—which is why *aletheia*, as Heidegger ultimately realized, must mean more than truth (*Wahrheit*), must mean more than the safeguard of Being, as he sometimes allowed. There remains the problem of abysses. There remains the problem of alterity, that risk that turns all perception, all
Wahrnehmung, as Heidegger ironically liked to hyphenate it, into a mere phantasm. It is this perhaps that inextricably haunts phenomenology, like all commitments to the immediacy of the given; namely, in a fundamental repetition of Kant once more, that "the thing itself (die sache selbst) . . . is and remains inscrutable." In this respect there remains the Nietzschean question, overdetermined in its reference, and unavoidable in its force:

"Is seeing itself—not seeing abysses?"

And, what holds for the pure seeing of the given must likewise stand perhaps for Heidegger's 'matter of thinking,' which, he believed, can remain in the former's disappearance. Certainly this is why the Heideggerian text for all its strength remains problematic and, as no one knows better than Jacques Derrida, a bit comic in the 'strictness' of the disclosure of its magnum mysterium.

Still, it is not a question of alternatives, of oppositions: the logic itself has become overdetermined. A simple dismissal here would be fallacious in its implicit appeal to a story about certainty and the sure progress of knowledge that has been put in question. We should not, consequently, dismiss the Heideggerian text too fast. Heidegger perhaps does not say it often enough; often enough, he says the opposite. But he too knew the theoreticians's dilemma that concerns the abyss of truth and freedom: "Whether the realm of the truth of Being is a blind alley or whether it is the free space in which freedom conserves its essence is something each one may judge after he himself has tried to go the designated way, or even better, after he has gone a better way, that is, a way befitting the question."