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DEATH, REBIRTH, AND A SENSE OF EASE: HERMENEUTIC TRUTH AFTER HEIDEGGER

Abstract. By way of examining the shift in the development of philosophy as a system-building enterprise to a rhetorical practice, this essay investigates Martin Heidegger's contribution to communication and rhetorical theory as it pertains to the relationship between rhetoric and truth. Traditional correspondence theories of truth, wherein truth is the mere agreement of an assertion to its object, eclipse a more primordial truth, namely that of *aletheia* or uncovering. As a result, language and our rhetorical practices become but a mere tool for the establishment of correspondence. The essay suggests that Heidegger's articulation of truth as uncovering offers an accomplished way of understanding possibility, pathos, and shared world-disclosure as they are implicated in both truth and our ethical and rhetorical practices.

Keywords: Truth, rhetorical theory, philosophy, hermeneutics

*But surely it is true that rhetoric is, by
far, not yet a possible word for what it itself is.*

Hans-Georg Gadamer

I

To philosophize is to learn how to die. From the earliest meeting-places of philosophy, Plato's Academy, the Epicurean gardens, and the Painted Porch of the Stoics, among them, philosophy understood as the

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love of wisdom and as a way of life has been teaching us this lesson of finitude since the first day of class, so to speak. But when the death at hand is philosophy's itself, or, as we shall see, a particular incarnation of philosophy too long on its deathbed, the lesson appears to have gone unheard.

Calvin O. Schrag, adding to the conversation on the characteristics of thinking after the onset of postmodernity (that uncanny space where G-d, the author, and perhaps reason itself are dead), eloquently announces the death of philosophy in his *Rhetoric Resituated at the End of Philosophy*. Here, philosophy in its manifestation as a foundationalist project within the epistemological paradigm, that is, philosophy suffering Cartesian vestiges of thought and still in search of first principles and an unquestionable method, "dies so that rhetoric can be born."¹ All death is strange, wrenching us away from the world in its everydayness and throwing into relief and into question everything we once found meaningful, but this death is particularly so for its cause and redemption are the same. What dies is not the impetus of philosophy, the desire for and love of wisdom. Nor do the questions that give rise to philosophy – as Derrida puts it: "how to handle one's life and live well together" – cease to have their existential force.² The death of which Schrag speaks is the death of philosophy as an enterprise of system-building, a guarantor of certainty, and the privileged form of access to truth.

This death makes way for what was there from the start: philosophy's long-time interlocutor, rhetoric. Schrag continues, "There appears to be a curious serendipity in all this, for the birth of rhetoric is at once a 'rebirth,' and a return to the origins from which philosophy itself emerged. Is not the whole show started? Philosophy emerged out of rhetoric. We thus seem to become spectators of a rather remarkable homecoming."³ The beauty of this, of course, is the philosophy that

¹ C. O. Schrag, *Rhetoric Resituated at the End of Philosophy*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71(1985)2, 166.

² J. Derrida, *The Three Ages of Jacques Derrida*, Interview with Kristine McKenna, *LA Weekly*, November 14, 2002.

³ C. O. Schrag, *op. cit.*, 166.

dies and the rhetoric reborn are but versions of each as implicated in the other. In other words, the death of the foundationalist tendency in philosophy makes way for a rhetorically and hermeneutically savvy philosophy and a philosophically sophisticated conception of rhetoric. We are given over to the necessity of making a life with one another without recourse to any first principles or stable methods promising certainty – we are given over to the project of making a life, finally. Any thinking, or philosophy as a way of life, fitting to today's circumstances must hear once more the lesson of this death: Something is taken away only to be given back what we already had.

Few places show the dispute between philosophy as system-building and philosophy as a way of life – i.e., philosophy that always has rhetoric right alongside – than the battle over truth. What truth is, what it means, and how we are to arrive at it serves as a nexus around which we can come to understand the death of philosophy and its consequent rebirth. I want to argue here, contentiously perhaps, the role of the midwife in all of this is filled by Martin Heidegger. It is most clearly in his work where we can begin to see the contours of a rhetorically oriented philosophy and a rhetoric attuned to the lessons of philosophy. Perhaps this is a curious choice, given Heidegger's rare use of the term "rhetoric" outside of his 1924 lectures on Aristotle, but as I shall try to show, it becomes an articulation of the word he is trying most to say.⁴

⁴ Recently the relationship between rhetoric and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology has been given the occasion for re-inspiration with Daniel Gross and Ansgar Kemmann's 2005 publication of *Heidegger and Rhetoric*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2005 a keen collection of essays and interviews pertaining to the subject in light of examining Heidegger's 1924 lecture course, *Grundbegriffe der Aristotelischen Philosophie (Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy)*, trans. R. D. Metcalf, M. B. Tanzer, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2009), on Aristotle's astounding body of work wherein he devotes significant attention to the *Rhetoric*. See additionally the work of R. E. Ramsey, *Listening to Heidegger on Rhetoric*, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 26(1993)4, 266–276; M. J. Hyde, *The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and the Question of Rhetoric*, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 27(1994)4, 374–396; P. Ch. Smith, *The Hermeneutics of Original Argument: Demonstration, Dialectic, Rhetoric*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill. 1998; J. Crosswhite, *Mood in Argumentation: Heidegger and the Exordium*, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22(1989)1, 28–42; H. Johnstone, *Rhetoric and Communication in Philosophy, Validity and Rhetoric*

II

With its publication in 1927, Heidegger's *Being and Time* unquestionably altered the ground of philosophical thought. Regardless whether one finds sections of the text problematic, or the political activities of its author disheartening to say the least, it is a work that cannot be bypassed. Raising anew the question of the meaning of being, as being is something about which during the unfolding of thought we have become "perplexed," Heidegger undertakes a radicalizing project of fundamental ontology. This questioning of the meaning of being finds its way in an examination of Dasein (human being, the being of the "there"), the being for whom being is itself an issue, the being for whom experience is meaningful. Although there is no dearth of readings one can give to *Being and Time*, I will approach the text from the standpoint of meaning. In the reading I offer here *Being and Time* is a text foremost about meaning, about the way in which the world and things and others are meaningful, how such meaning is possible, and how meaning is socially negotiated. It offers a hermeneutic phenomenology, viz., a description of the conditions for meaningful experience. Were we to rephrase this in the language of a transcendental question, *Being and Time* asks: what are the conditions for the possibility of meaning?

For Heidegger, the question of meaning leads to an examination of truth. In Section 44 of *Being and Time*, some 250 pages into the text, Heidegger raises the hefty question of truth in relation to being.⁵ Not directly mentioned earlier in his analysis of the constitutive ways of being-in for Dasein (to wit: state-of-mind, understanding, and discourse), Heidegger asserts here that turning to truth is neither uncalled for nor late-coming, for truth had been under examination all along: "from

ric in Philosophical Argument, Dialogue Press of Man and World, University Park, Pa. 1978.

⁵ Although Heidegger makes mention of truth (*aletheia*) in his 1924 lectures, it receives fuller treatment in *Being and Time*. As a result, my examination of the relationship between rhetoric and truth, and the way in which this shift in philosophy hinges on understanding truth otherwise, finds its primary grounding in that text rather than the 1924 lectures.

time immemorial, philosophy has associated truth and Being.”⁶ As a result, our perplexity about being and the consequent misunderstanding of its meaning extends to truth; indeed, in tracing the unfolding of being so too we discover the manifestation of truth. Our perplexity, on Heidegger’s account, arises from the traditional conception of truth as correspondence and this articulation of truth is shot through with a calculative impulse at full force throughout modernity and, I shall argue, still very much at-work today. Heidegger departs from the traditional conceptions of truth in an attempt to “lay bare” the ontological ground upon which that conception rests. He declares no intention of giving a history of the concept and its going awry, but rather strives to offer a thorough explication of how this traditional conception of truth is appropriated by a more primordial truth. Heidegger tells us, “There are three theses which characterize the way in which the essence of truth has been traditionally taken and the way it is supposed to have been first defined: (1) that the ‘locus’ of truth is assertion (judgment); (2) that the essence of truth lies in the ‘agreement’ of the judgment with its object; (3) that Aristotle, the father of logic, not only has assigned truth to the judgment as its primordial locus but has set going the definition of “truth” as ‘agreement.’”⁷ This passage illustrates the tenets of the dominant conception of truth and is worth working our way through carefully.

For Heidegger, truth understood merely as agreement or correspondence is a rather “empty” understanding, even though it is in a sense at least touching upon primordial truth as a derivation from it (i.e., primordial truth is the condition for the possibility of truth as agreement). The first thesis – the locus of truth is assertion – is demonstrated by his reading of the traditional interpretation of Aristotle’s claim that “the soul’s ‘Experiences,’ its ‘representations,’ are the likening of Things.”⁸ The locus of truth, that is, the place where or at which truth occurs, is

⁶ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson, Harper and Row, New York 1962, 256.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁸ *Ibid.*

in the moment of assertion. In a tellingly titled section *Assertion as a Derivative Mode of Interpretation* Heidegger lays out assertion as having three significations: (1) pointing out, (2) predication, and (3) communication. The first signification, of pointing out – what Heidegger terms the primary signification – is often eclipsed by the giving of character (predication) to things and the sharing forth of as communication the pointing-out and definite character. Heidegger is careful to show that the latter two significations of assertion are built upon that which is often overlooked in our accounting for truth, pointing out. That is to say, assertion, from the very start, is a hermeneutic enterprise as the world must show itself or be disclosed before any predication or communication can occur. Returning to his three theses on truth, this assertion – or the locus of truth – must agree with, be in accordance with, correspond to, et cetera, the object about which the assertion is being made (thesis 2). To give historical contextualization for this thesis, Heidegger turns to Kant's statement in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that truth is "the agreement of knowledge with its object" and we would do well to remember this understanding is overlaid with Cartesian overtones.⁹ Here knowledge has been added to the conception making truth an epistemological, rather than ontological, matter and this is where things start to go awry because knowledge presents itself as true rather than as implicated in the truth. In other words, knowledge itself, as a collection of assertions, becomes, via correspondence, truth rather than intimately tied to, connected with, truth and a derivation thereof (thesis 3). Truth becomes a matter of propositions and proofs furthering the epistemological paradigm offered by a certain reading of modernity and philosophy as system-building.

Furthermore, with this interpretation of truth language in general and rhetoric in particular consequently become mere mediums and methods for the transmission of information; truth becomes inseparable from fact. Even in the best case scenario rhetoric understood from this perspective becomes nothing more than variations on the crafting of a situation to align or correspond, to the object under discussion with

⁹ Ibid., 258.

what is being said about it, claiming it as ‘true,’ and hoping others will be persuaded by such claims, as many a modern critique of rhetoric has argued. Moreover, and stepping back to examine communication at large, language loses its force because it becomes something that can be ‘figured out’ in full given a sufficient amount of time and wherewithal. Language when tied to a correspondence theory of truth can never be infinitely problematic and perplexing to the core but only more or less clear, more or less in agreement. Further, language only has meaning if it too corresponds objectively; indeed, language becomes the mere tool of establishing correspondence. This understanding of language is contrary to our actual experience of a meaningful world; under the rules of modernity, language works only in a reflective or mirroring manner, rather than as a way of our being-in-the-world, an understanding that Heidegger’s 1924 lectures and *Being and Time* – indeed the whole of Heidegger’s work – brings into relief.

An example might make the correspondence theory of truth clearer. Imagine for a moment that you are sitting in a diner and order a cup of coffee. Receiving your cup of coffee, you make the assertion that the coffee is hot. This assertion takes the shape of something being pointed-out (the world disclosure that brings the coffee into relief), the coffee is given definite character (“it *is hot*”), and the assertion then communicated in the sharing of the statement. Your assertion (“the coffee is hot”) agrees with its object (the cup of coffee) and thus you would say that statement about the cup of coffee being hot is true. Though correct, this for Heidegger is problematic as a description that claims to be describing something primordial because this assertion and agreement covers over what is truly being demonstrated, “solely the Being-uncovered (*Entdeckt-sein*) of the entity itself” and this demonstration is confirmed in the entity’s “showing itself in its selfsameness.”¹⁰ In other words, this assertion demonstrates first and foremost not the agreement of your assertion of the coffee being hot to the corresponding cup of coffee (i.e., the correspondence of your predication to the object as present-to-hand), but even more primarily, that the cup of

¹⁰ Ibid., 261.

coffee is *uncovered* as itself (as hot) in a situation wider and infinitely more complex than can be articulated by an assertion about the coffee's relative temperature. This occludes the preliminary pointing-out upon which the assertion is grounded. Moreover, the assertion passes itself off as describing something primordial when instead it is speaking to the correspondence predicated upon this uncovering. What the long history of thinking on the question of Being and truth has continually overlooked, on Heidegger's account, is this underlying phenomenon of the entity showing itself, its coming forth in unconcealment before Dasein such that it can be pointed out, given definite character, communicated – i.e., asserted. When dealing with coffee cups and diners, perhaps the primordial truth is not particularly pressing or especially powerful; however, the same dependency on correspondence has saturated our talk about everything. The truth of some of our most profound experiences becomes reducible to a mere collection of propositions and predications: love marked by the composition of chemical secretions, sadness by the quantity of tears, freedom by the number of available choices, death by the volume of the last drawn breath. Is it all that difficult to imagine?

This understanding of truth as unconcealment is neither new nor without precedent, but has instead been eclipsed by the traditional and dominant conception of truth as correspondence. Heidegger turns to the ancients, in this case Heraclitus, and argues for a recollection of truth as *aletheia* or unhiddenness, uncoveredness. Truth as unhiddenness is the condition for the possibility of anything like a correspondence theory of truth. Said otherwise, the average, everyday understanding of truth that we have as agreement or correspondence – that is, the understanding of truth that we take as natural, what we term truth as such – is secondary and grounded. This is, in this given epoch, the truth of the Anyone (*das Man*) under critique in *Being and Time*. Despite our attempts (and no amount of time or freedom will do), we cannot first abstract truth away from the world, truth is embedded in/as the disclosure of world itself. Likewise, we ourselves cannot be abstracted from the world, even in an experiment of thought, for we are who and

how we are as being-in-the-world. Truth is discursive, communicative, hermeneutic.

This undoubtedly undermines various historical claims to certainty. Yet, it is still of these secondary understandings of truth that we speak when we say truth is socially constructed, and how not, for this truth is developed in the assertion's agreement with its object as articulated through language (understood as a social phenomenon). Theorists concerned with the social construction of our reality might raise the question: But what of truth as unhiddenness, is it too socially constructed? On my reading, this is an ill-fitting question but not because it wishes to undermine the tyranny of objectivity. The Being-true as Being-uncovering – the primordial truth – is “ontologically possible only on the basis of Being-in-the-world.”¹¹ Heidegger continues, “Uncovering is a way of Being for Being-in-the-world [Dasein]. Circumspective concern, or even that concern in which we tarry and look at something, uncovers entities within-the-world. These entities become that which has been uncovered. They are ‘true’ in the second sense. What is primarily ‘true’ – that is, uncovering – is Dasein. ‘Truth’ in the second sense does not mean Being-uncovering (uncovering), but Being-uncovered (uncoveredness).”¹²

Truth, then, is grounded in the Being-uncovering of Dasein. Being-uncovering is a mode of being for Dasein. Dasein is (in) the truth. As Heidegger says elsewhere, “Dasein is its disclosedness.”¹³ One can see here how speaking of socially constructed truth becomes rather difficult. As pertains to the primordial truth of Being-uncovering, we cannot say it is socially “constructed,” but that truth is there. This truth is, however, implicated in the social even if it is not constructed per se because Dasein is always Dasein-in-the-world-with-other-Dasein (*Mitdasein*) and never ontologically alone. Unconcealment, then, is never the act of an individual, even if unconcealment occurs in solitude. Truth, instead, is the uncovering of world by Dasein, always already in

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 263.

¹³ Ibid., 171.

the plural; in this sense truth is a social, because always already a shared, phenomenon.

With an understanding of truth as uncovering at hand, Heidegger returns to the three theses that constitute the traditional conception of truth and demonstrates how they are in relation to and enfolded within the more primordial truth of uncovering. We can see here the curious interplay between rhetoric and truth because the locus of truth is not in assertion but rather the opposite: The locus of assertion is in primordial truth.¹⁴ Moreover, agreement of the assertion to the object is achieved only by way of disclosedness. Disclosedness, that is, the being of the site where world is uncovered, is the condition for the possibility of meaning. In discourse, of which rhetoric is a part, Dasein expresses in the assertion, an assertion that is about something: the uncoveredness of the entities themselves.¹⁵ Heidegger tells us, “What is expressed becomes, as it were, something ready-to-hand within-the-world which can be taken up and spoken again.”¹⁶ Thus, in the assertion we find both the uncoveredness of the entities as well as the possibility for the assertion to be taken up and spoken again (as truth in the secondary and derivative sense) and in the process cover over the having-been-uncovered and uncovering, i.e., disclosure itself. It is not Heidegger’s intent here, nor mine, merely to debunk traditional understandings of truth; he admits of course they have their value in certain circumstances and we would be wise to agree. There is a place for calculation and correspondence, to be sure, but its place is not every place, nor is it the only way of disclosing the world.¹⁷ Heidegger rather is striving to show that beneath what we are taking for “truth” is indeed a more originary or primordial truth, that of uncovering itself. This uncovering, in its mysterious having-been-granted, is truth, and rhetoric is how that truth

¹⁴ Ibid., 269.

¹⁵ Ibid., 266.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See in particular M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, in: M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt, Harper & Row, New York 1977, 3–35.

comes to be shared and negotiated within the social complex. Rhetorical theory then, at least from one perspective, is the way in which this sharing and negotiating is brought into relief and guarded against the reifying mechanisms of objectification and calculation. We might argue Heidegger is here undertaking a radical project of denaturalizing and de-reifying truth. Perhaps Heidegger explicates it best in saying “Dasein, as constituted by disclosedness, is *essentially* in the truth.”¹⁸ Namely, as the being-there where disclosure occurs, Dasein is in the truth. Pushing it further he states, “Disclosedness is a kind of Being which is essential to Dasein. ‘*There is truth only in so far as Dasein is and so long as Dasein is.*’”¹⁹ Truth and human being-in-the-world are mutually inclusive of each other. In disclosure we find truth and in truth disclosure – in each we find the other.

In his later works Heidegger freely takes up the language of essence with respect to truth and other traditional concepts but it is an essence twisted-free from its modern metaphysical qualms. Of particular importance to this project is his 1949 essay *On the Essence of Truth* where he extends the insights derived from Section 44 of *Being and Time* with which we have been thinking.²⁰ Carefully working through the traditional conceptions of truth by way of a discussion of accordance and correctness, Heidegger speaks again of *aletheia*, this time in a slightly different, perhaps more poetic, tone. Uncovering or unhiddenness becomes understood through an “openness of comportment.”

¹⁸ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 269 (italics mine).

¹⁹ Ibid. (italics Heidegger’s). This is not to say that before Dasein certain things that we hold to be so did not exist. Heidegger clarifies in saying, “To say that before Newton his laws were neither true nor false, cannot signify that before him there were no such entities as have been uncovered and pointed out by his laws. Through Newton the laws became true and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to Dasein. Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were. Such uncovering is the kind of Being which belongs to ‘truth.’” (Ibid.).

²⁰ M. Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, in: *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell, Harper Collins, New York 1977, 111–138.

Heidegger says there, “The essence of truth is freedom.”²¹ Essence, for Heidegger, extends beyond what something is abstracted as a mere object and relates to how something endures in its selfsameness through time. Thus, we might say, through freedom is truth, or truth endures in freedom. Of course, as with so much that we encounter in Heidegger’s work, freedom is not what we typically think. Freedom is not human caprice, the absence of constraint, the mere ability to do something; nor even is freedom something that can be either “positive” or “negative.” Freedom, rather, is “engagement in the disclosure of beings as such.”²² Said otherwise, freedom “[lets] beings be.” Heidegger clarifies, “To let be – that is, to let beings be as the beings which they are – means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself.”²³

In other words, the essence of truth in freedom is the letting-presence of the world in the presence of Dasein. Truth and freedom become the open space where the world is disclosed/discloses itself. This places human beings always already in the space of reception and occasion, in an open and engaging comportment toward the world that allows the world to show itself and Dasein to co-respond, a correspondence that is not a mere matching-up or accordance, but the mutual interplay of Dasein as being-together and/as world. Such a comportment is not one of passivity, but an engagement with, i.e., a participation in, world disclosure. We share our being-together in truth “before” we exchange assertions. This is significantly otherwise than the Cartesian understanding of human beings as initially world-less subjects over and against the world, with the world serving therein as an object to be manipulated (even if in the most benevolent of ways).

Heidegger describes this open comportment as “state of mind” or “attunement” [*Stimmung*], returning us to the fundamental ontology laid bare in *Being and Time* as the constitutive features of Dasein inc-

²¹ Ibid., 123.

²² Ibid., 126.

²³ Ibid., 125.

ludes attunement alongside understanding and discourse.²⁴ Attunement allows for the mood of Dasein. Not just any mood, but mood itself which is inescapable and allows for the possibility of any particular mood. The world can only show itself to Dasein-with-mood because as so attuned, that is, “thrown” into the world and finding itself in the midst of its many projects, Dasein is open to the uncovering of world. Mood is comportment and openness to disclosure. Dasein is never without mood, without world, or without truth. Moreover, and with this in mind, Heidegger’s remaining comments about rhetoric in *Being and Time* sound in a different register than previously able. He states Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, “must be taken as the first systematic hermeneutic of the everydayness of Being with one another. Publicness, as the kind of Being which belongs to the ‘they’ not only has in general its own way of having a mood, but needs moods and ‘makes’ them for itself. It is into such a mood and out of such a mood that the orator speaks. He must understand the possibilities of moods in order to rouse them and guide them aright.”²⁵

Within this passage we see truth and rhetoric intimately entwined even if the connection is not made explicit. As being and truth have gone together, so to have truth and rhetoric. That is to say, rhetoric has been waiting patiently in the background of this essay and is implicated in what we have said about truth. It is into and from within the truth that the orator speaks in the attempt to guide the moods. *Pathos*, then, takes on a more radical tone; it is not simply the guiding of emotions but the play of openness toward disclosure, the very way in which we come to understand and dwell within the world. Said differently, rhetoric – or the mode of discourse oriented toward the other – is the most accomplished form in which the openness of comportment endures in truth and freedom by way of Dasein’s inescapable being-attuned.

²⁴ Attunement, *Stimmung*, is translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as “state-of-mind.”

²⁵ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 178.

III

What is unveiled in truth, as disclosure of world, is the coming to and laying bare of possibility itself. The freedom that Heidegger articulates above is freedom as an openness towards possibility. It is the letting-be of the coming to possibility. This openness to possibility is rhetorical. In a word: rhetoric is how we share in the truth and its disclosure of possibility.

As we recall in *Being and Time*, Heidegger begins with the world as experienced and works his way from there toward an understanding of how the world becomes understood objectively or as present-to-hand. This is perhaps his greatest critical phenomenological offering: he radically reverses the way in which we understand our understanding of the world. Rather than saying science and objectivity – the vestiges of Cartesian thinking – are the ground from which our everyday thematic understandings of the world occur, he demonstrates precisely the opposite: that our scientific/objective propositions are grounded within our everyday, phenomenological experience of being-in-the-world. The sheer force of this statement cannot be emphasized enough: objectivity itself is shown to be grounded in our experience of the world. In other words, the world is disclosed practically, that is, disclosed in our making our way in the world through a series of projects and undertakings, consequently making the role of rhetoric all the more profound for its domain is that of the practical, possible, and contingent. Before we can make claims of certainty or correctness we must acknowledge our rhetorical situatedness as it is only out of this situatedness that such claims can be made.

In *The Hermeneutics of Original Argument: Demonstration, Dialectic, Rhetoric*, P. Christopher Smith aligns Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology within his own project of uncovering a more sophisticated understanding of communication at work in the philosophical tradition. Thinking-with Heidegger, in particular his course on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as well as giving a thorough reading of the communicative insights of *Being and Time*, he aptly summarizes what he sees to be Heidegger's position on the relation between rhetoric and

claims of objectivity. He states, “As Heidegger saw it, theoretical speech’s detached propositions about an objectified reality merely lying on hand before us in static presence were an abstraction from what we say to each other in our engaged, practical taking care of things [*Bersorgen*] from within the world in which these things, and other people there with us in the world, meet up with us [*uns begegnen*]. As he saw it, science’s *apodeixis* or demonstration was an abstraction from dialectic’s *dialegesthai* or talking something through theoretically, and dialectic’s *dialegesthai* was, in turn, an abstraction from rhetoric’s *peithein* or convincing. (...) Theoretical instruction and demonstration occur only once the art of practical conviction has been suspended.”²⁶

In other words, both demonstration and dialectic are dependent upon rhetorical practices borne out of our everyday concern. This significantly undermines the historical force of claims to certainty. In understanding truth not as correspondence but as disclosure, a kind of hermeneutic humility is both required and brought into relief. Attempts at objectivity can no longer legitimately understand themselves as the possessors of truth, but as situated within and derivative of rhetorical practices first and foremost. As a result, there seems no reason for rhetoric to be relegated to the wastelands of thinking (nor need it attempt to justify that this is not where it belongs nor must it ask permission for its existence as a discipline), rather it finds itself at the very core of thought and action, indeed it finds itself in the truth as a mode of world disclosure oriented toward attuned discursive being-with others.

With this provocation in mind, philosopher and communication scholar Ramsey Eric Ramsey in his essay *Listening to Heidegger on Rhetoric* draws out the praxially oriented telos of rhetoric with respect to the hermeneutic situatedness of everyday life; his articulation therein assists in preventing truth from becoming the abstract concept we wish to avoid.²⁷ In rhetoric’s being concerned with the other, with questions of the social, Ramsey turns to Heidegger’s articulation of personal care [*Fürsorge*] as a way to make richer an understanding of rhetoric facili-

²⁶ P. Ch. Smith, op. cit., 16.

²⁷ R. E. Ramsey, op. cit.

tated by fundamental ontology. Heidegger says of personal care and its relation to being-with, “Everyday Being-with-one-another maintains itself between two extremes of personal care – that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates.”²⁸ Ramsey argues that as a mode of discourse determined by being-with, rhetoric has a similar relation to personal care in that there are rhetorical situations where one is leapt-in-at (e.g., solicitation of medical advice) or where leaping-ahead occurs (e.g., genuine conversation). We must pause and notice that what is being dominated or liberated is another Dasein in his or her possibilities in being. That is to say, that which is dominated or liberated is someone’s ownmost potentiality for world disclosure, their potentiality for truth and meaning. The various forms of leaping-in and leaping-ahead are embedded in the disclosure of Dasein as truth/as the space where truth occurs. In other words, leaping-in covers over this truth while leaping-ahead allows it to show forth in unhiddenness or presencing. Differing rhetorical practices fall within the continuum of leaping-in and leaping-ahead in the way in which possibilities are disclosed or covered over.

The possibilities covered or uncovered in the situation are articulated by way of the listener’s ability to respond and the ways in which those possibilities of response are either limited or liberated. Moving out from this, Ramsey develops an understanding of “listening-while-speaking” that cultivates a response by leaving open the space for it. He states, “Leaping-ahead as ‘listening-while-speaking’ is a leaping that lands, not deafened or unwilling to hear, but rather open and ready to be leapt over in response.”²⁹ Said otherwise and oriented within the language of truth and disclosure with which I have been working, “listening-while-speaking” allows for truth because it lets-be the disclosure of possibility. Particular attempts at persuasion can be judged on their ability to listen, that is, their ability to open the space for response on the part of the other.

²⁸ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 159.

²⁹ R. E. Ramsey, op. cit., 272.

As Heidegger already made clear in *Being and Time*, the orator speaks into and out from the mood of the audience in an attempt to guide them toward a particular telos. Furthermore, as Ramsey suggests, rhetoric's relation to personal-care is such that possibilities can be disclosed – i.e., moods can be guided – along a continuum of more or less restricted or accomplished manners. *Pathos*, understood here as mood rather than the emotions, takes on a more prominent role in rhetorical situations. *Pathos* becomes the very openness to possibility, and as such is a kind of being-attuned, a listening. Daniel Gross, who extends this insight via the 1924 lectures, notes, “*Pathos* provides the very condition for the possibility of judgment, or *krisis*. (...) The *pathe* are no mere afterthought. They are, one could say, before-thought.”³⁰ In other words, *pathos* as a comportment of openness or listening serves as the through-which judgment – the telos of rhetoric – occurs. It is the openness or listening that makes space for the uncovering of world; it is the listening that makes way for truth.

In spite of all of this, rhetoric understood in its everydayness has had a history of being known as often less than truthful and this association cannot be ignored. However, this “leveled-down” conception of rhetoric, for example the fear that rhetoric is little more than punditry or an instrument of crass manipulation, does not account for the entirety of its possibilities. It seems that there are two ways to address this issue of deceit and distortion. First, we could limit the boundaries of rhetoric to include only situations in which truth is disclosed. This, however, ends up being nothing short of an impossible and unhelpful demarcation because if we take rhetoric to be implicated in the truth, even the most horrific of lies is still implicated in the truth, as dependent upon trust and truth so as to be a lie, thus making the boundary infinite.³¹ It is the lie above all that is most dependent upon truth be-

³⁰ D. Gross, *Being-Moved: The Pathos of Heidegger's Rhetorical Ontology*, in: *Heidegger and Rhetoric*, op. cit., 30.

³¹ I am struck here by the profundity of Jacques Derrida on this question. He states, “In testimony, truth is promised beyond all proof, all perception, all intuitive demonstration. Even if I lie or perjure myself (and always an especially when I do), I promise truth and ask the other to believe the other that I am, there where I am the only one able

cause truth must be assumed for the lie to perform as a lie to be believed. Moreover, the blatant lie still discloses world and possibility in its attempt to cover both over. Heidegger acknowledges this situation in *On the Essence of Truth* when he theorizes the “untruth” as a space in which Dasein always is along with being essentially within the truth. Untruth finds its articulation in the concealment of world.³² Noting that when unconcealing something, something else is inevitably covered over, Dasein is always simultaneously both in the truth and untruth. With this in mind, humans thus hold the possibility of erring, being mistaken, or going astray. Second, and I think more fruitful, rather than draw boundaries around what is or is not rhetoric, perhaps it is useful to articulate that specific rhetorical practices, as they can be more or less able to listen, can be more or less able to disclose truth, but all rhetorical practice finds itself grounded within and upon truth. Thus, returning to Ramsey’s essay, it is not merely that rhetorical practices that do not listen-while-speaking are outside of the truth, or devoid of all truth, rather they, as instances of leaping-in, serve more to cover over possibility rather than disclose it and they cover over the uncovering that is always happening. Certainly refiguring our conception of truth in such a manner will necessitate major refigurations about how we talk about the truth or falsity of our discourse and understanding.

Heidegger himself offers an alternate way of thinking about rhetoric in its everydayness beyond its association with falsity. In his reading of Aristotle’s conceptualization of *zoon logon echon* (the living being with speech) he offers the following insight, “At best, an approximately corresponding definition would be: the human being is a living thing that reads the newspaper. At first, that may sound strange to you, but it is what corresponds to the Greek definition. When the Greeks say that the human being is a living thing that speaks, they do not mean, in

to bear witness and where the order of proof or of intuition will never be reducible to or homogenous with the elementary trust [*fiduciarité*], the ‘good faith’ that is promised or demanded.” J. Derrida, *Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone*, in: *Religion*, ed. J. Derrida, G. Vattimo, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif. 1996, 63.

³² M. Heidegger, *On the Essence of Truth*, op. cit., 130–135.

a physiological sense, that he utters definite sounds. Rather, the human being is a living thing *that has its genuine being-there in conversation and in discourse*.³³ Said differently, human beings as being-there are the site of possibility and this possibility reaches its genuine potential through being-there with others in language as conversation and discourse. Our genuine potential is reached through rhetorical practice, the uncovering and disclosive power of truth.

IV

In talking about truth Heidegger often turned to poetry, primarily the words of Friedrich Hölderlin. Poetry for Heidegger was the space where language was able to speak its truths most freely, unencumbered by the calculation and instrumentalization of speech burdened by modern epistemological baggage. We might take a lesson from him here and turn to a poet of our own, that great poet-philosopher of learning to handle one's life and live well together, Walt Whitman. One might well pick any poem from Whitman's astounding corpus, but I shall conclude with his 1865 poem *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*. Whitman tells us,

“When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
 When the proofs, the figures, we ranged in columns before me,
 When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide and measure them,
 When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
 How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
 Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
 In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
 Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.”³⁴

³³ M. Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, op. cit., 74.

³⁴ W. Whitman, *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*, in: *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. M. Moon, W. W. Norton and Company, New York 2002, 227.

For the narrator, the astronomer despite all his charts and diagrams and knowledge, cannot get at the truth. The starry night, once divided and measured, no longer is what it once was, instead reduced to a series of calculations and proofs. Here we have an illustration of truth as a search for foundations via correspondence – philosophy as system-building promoting the finality of fact, a deathlike certainty, over the always beginning again, the natality, of disclosure and interpretation. We witness here the death and rebirth with which we began. The narrator leaves for unaccounted reasons, but we can see now why he could not stay: the truth of the astronomer, while claiming primacy and privilege, fails to get at the lived truth of being-in-the-world. It is only when the narrator leaves, when he looks and listens – and then speaks this poem having listened to the truth of *aletheia* – that he finds a sense of ease lacking in the lecture-room. He leaves not because the astronomer's calculations are incorrect; he leaves because for all their correctness they will never be true. Our narrator leaves in search of a way of life.

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