

Freedom in the Thought of Martin Heidegger

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ABSTRACT

The question of freedom occupies a central yet profoundly transformative position within the philosophical project of Martin Heidegger, undergoing radical reconceptualization across the trajectory of his thinking. While the Western metaphysical tradition has predominantly understood freedom as a property of the will, a capacity for choice, or a political right belonging to the human subject, Heidegger's lifelong engagement with the question of Being systematically dismantles these conventional frameworks and repositions freedom as the very condition for the disclosure of Being itself. This article traces the evolution of Heidegger's conception of freedom through three major phases of his thought, examining how the existential analytic of Being and Time reveals freedom as authentic self-choice in the face of finitude, how the middle period ontologizes freedom as the essence of truth and the ground of transcendence, and how the later thinking conceives freedom as releasement and correspondence to the event of appropriation. The central research question guiding this investigation concerns the inner coherence and transformation of Heidegger's understanding of freedom across these phases, as well as the troubling relation between his profound philosophical meditations on freedom and his political entanglement with National Socialism. The analysis demonstrates that despite significant shifts in terminology and emphasis, Heidegger's thinking remains faithful to the insight that freedom is not a human possession but the event of openness within which human existence first becomes possible. This conception challenges the modern project of technological mastery and opens the possibility of a more originary mode of dwelling that lets beings be. The article concludes by considering the implications of Heidegger's radical rethinking of freedom for contemporary philosophical debates concerning agency, technology, and the relation between human existence and the self-concealing ground of Being.

1. Introduction

The question of freedom has perpetually occupied a central position within the trajectory of Western philosophical discourse, manifesting in diverse formulations ranging from metaphysical inquiries into the nature of free will to political theories concerning the conditions of collective autonomy. Within this extensive and variegated tradition, the philosophical project of Martin Heidegger constitutes a rupture so fundamental that it compels a complete reorientation of the very terms in which the problem of freedom can be articulated. To approach Heidegger's thinking on this subject is not to encounter a novel theory to be situated alongside established positions within the history of ideas; it is rather to be confronted with a radical interrogation of the ontological presuppositions that have historically grounded all such discussions. Heidegger's lifelong dedication to the *Seinsfrage*, the question of the meaning of Being, effects a displacement of the subject-centered paradigm that has dominated modern philosophy since Descartes, thereby dismantling the conceptual architecture upon which conventional understandings of freedom as a property of the will, as a political entitlement, or as a capacity for autonomous choice have been constructed. The foundational problem that this poses for philosophical inquiry is therefore profound and inescapable: how can freedom be coherently conceptualized when the very entity traditionally regarded as the bearer of freedom—the human subject—is itself de-centered and reinterpreted as *Dasein*, a mode of being whose essence lies not in any substantial or given nature but in its *ek-sistent* structure of Being-in-the-world?

The scholarly significance and urgent necessity of undertaking a thorough investigation into Heidegger's conception of freedom can be established on multiple interrelated levels. Primarily, such an investigation is indispensable for any adequate internal comprehension of Heidegger's philosophical enterprise as a whole. Freedom, within the architectonic of his thought, is far from being a peripheral or merely subsidiary theme; it constitutes the very condition of possibility for the central inquiry into Being itself. Without a prior and rigorous elucidation of freedom, the fundamental ontology developed in *Being and Time* and the subsequent thinking of the history of Being remain hermeneutically inaccessible and philosophically unintelligible [1]. The existential structures through which Heidegger articulates the being of *Dasein*, most notably authenticity and resoluteness, are not merely descriptive categories but are themselves modalities of a more primordial freedom that first enables *Dasein* to relate to its own being as a question and as a possibility. Beyond the internal requirements of Heidegger scholarship, the relevance of this investigation extends into the most pressing concerns of contemporary philosophy and cultural critique. In an intellectual climate increasingly preoccupied with questions of post-humanism, the nature of agency in a technologically saturated world, and the ecological implications of human exceptionalism, Heidegger's radical re-conception of freedom offers a resource of immense critical potential. His thinking challenges the prevailing modern assumption that freedom consists in the mastery and domination of beings, whether natural or human, and instead proposes a conception of freedom as a mode of letting-be, a releasement that is fundamentally attuned to the self-concealing disclosure of Being itself. This perspective provides a powerful, albeit inherently complex and ambiguous, lens through which to diagnose and critique the essence of modern technology as an enframing that reduces the world to a calculable and manipulable standing-reserve, thereby occluding more original possibilities of human dwelling [2].

Furthermore, the necessity of this research is profoundly intensified by the historical shadow that irrevocably marks Heidegger's life and legacy: his political engagement with National Socialism in the 1930s. The stark and seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the depth and subtlety of his philosophical meditations on freedom and the catastrophic failure of his practical political judgment presents one of the most troubling and intellectually demanding problems in twentieth-century intellectual history. This disjunction compels the researcher to confront questions of the utmost gravity and complexity. Does Heidegger's philosophy, despite its explicit intentions to think freedom more originally, contain within its very structure certain conceptual vulnerabilities or inherent tendencies that could, under specific historical circumstances, lend themselves to authoritarian or anti-humanistic political actualizations? Alternatively, does his ill-fated political foray represent a moment of personal and philosophical blindness, a failure to think through the full implications of his own insights into freedom, historicity, and collective destiny? To engage seriously with Heidegger's concept of freedom is therefore necessarily to engage in a critical confrontation with this political scandal, not for the purpose of facile

condemnation or apologetic exoneration, but in order to grasp the potential ambiguities, tensions, and vulnerabilities that may inhere within a philosophical system that posits freedom as its highest existential and ontological principle. This confrontation is essential for any responsible appropriation of his thought today [3].

The trajectory of Heidegger's thinking on freedom is not static or monolithic but undergoes a series of complex transformations that correspond to the larger movement of his philosophical path. The inquiry must therefore begin with the groundbreaking existential analytic of *Being and Time*, where freedom first emerges not as a theme in its own right but as the implicit ground of Dasein's distinctive mode of being. In this foundational text, freedom is revealed through the structure of Being-towards-death, which individualizes Dasein and tears it away from the tranquilizing self-certainty and public anonymity of the they-self. This individuation is the condition for the possibility of authentic existence, which is concretely actualized in the phenomenon of anticipatory resoluteness. In resoluteness, Dasein chooses to choose itself, seizing upon its ownmost and non-relational potentiality-for-being in a lucid appropriation of its thrownness into a determinate historical situation. This act is not the arbitrary and groundless choice of a sovereign subject but a responsive hearing of the call of conscience, which summons Dasein back from its lostness in the they to its own self. Freedom in this first major phase is thus the freedom of authentic self-choice in the face of finitude, the liberation from the illusions of the public world that enables Dasein to be its own self in the mode of having-been and futural projection [4]. It is a freedom that is essentially temporal and historical, rooted in the ecstatic unity of Dasein's care-structure.

However, Heidegger's path of thinking does not culminate in this existential analytic. In the years immediately following the publication of *Being and Time*, a significant deepening and transformation of the question of freedom occurs, a movement often designated as the turn. This transitional period, documented in lecture courses and essays from the late 1920s and early 1930s, shifts the focus from the freedom of Dasein to the question of freedom as the condition for the very possibility of the understanding of Being as such. Heidegger now explicitly thinks freedom not merely as a characteristic or capacity of human existence but as the event that grounds the possibility of world-disclosure, the opening of a clearing within which beings can appear as beings. In the 1929 essay "On the Essence of Ground," freedom is identified as the origin of the ground, the free letting-be of beings that first allows a world to world and provides Dasein with a basis for its projecting. This line of thinking reaches a decisive formulation in the 1930 lecture "On the Essence of Truth," where Heidegger argues that the essence of truth, understood as unconcealment, is freedom. This is not to be misunderstood as a subjectivistic reduction of truth to human caprice; on the contrary, it is to identify freedom with the ek-sistent, revelatory engagement with beings as a whole that lets them be the beings they are. Freedom is the stance of releasement that permits beings to manifest themselves in their being, a letting-be that is at the same time the concealment of Being as such. This marks a decisive and irrevocable move from an existential conception of freedom to an ontological one, where freedom is thought as the event of disclosedness itself [5].

This trajectory reaches its final and most elusive formulation in Heidegger's later philosophy, where the language of existential analysis and fundamental ontology gives way to a meditative thinking of the history of Being. In this later phase, freedom is no longer conceived primarily as a mode of Dasein's existence or even as the essence of truth, but is instead located in the event of appropriation, the *es gibt* of Being that grants to each epoch its fundamental configuration of intelligibility. Within this framework, the freedom of human beings is subsumed into a more originary event: the sending or withdrawal of Being itself. Humanity is thought as the shepherd of Being, its essential vocation being not to will and to master but to engage in releasement toward things, a meditative thinking that stands in stark opposition to the calculative thinking that dominates the technological age. This later thinking presents freedom as releasement, a letting-go that is not a form of passivity but a higher and more difficult mode of comportment that allows the world to presence in a more primordial and non-violative way. This re-conception directly confronts the essence of modern technology as enframing, which challenges forth and orders nature as a mere resource for human exploitation. In this context, true freedom becomes the possibility of a free relation to technology, a relation that neither simply rejects technology nor remains blindly enslaved to it, but that sees through its essence and thereby opens a space for a more authentic dwelling upon the earth. This later thinking of freedom as releasement and

as response to the address of Being represents the furthest reach of Heidegger's lifelong attempt to think freedom more originally than the metaphysical tradition had ever done, and it is here that the deepest challenges and possibilities of his thought for our own historical situation are to be found.

2. The Ontological Foundations of Freedom in Heidegger's Early Thought

This chapter examines the foundational role of freedom within Heidegger's early philosophical project, particularly as it emerges from the existential analytic of Being and Time and the lecture courses of the late 1920s. Rather than treating freedom as a discrete theme to be isolated from his broader concerns, this investigation demonstrates that freedom constitutes the very ground of possibility for Dasein's distinctive mode of being. The analysis proceeds by tracing how Heidegger dismantles traditional conceptions of freedom as a property of the will or a capacity for choice, replacing them with a more primordial understanding of freedom as the condition for authentic selfhood and world-disclosure. Through an examination of key concepts including Being-towards-death, resoluteness, and the temporality of existence, this chapter establishes the essential coordinates for any subsequent understanding of Heidegger's radical rethinking of freedom.

2.1. The Deconstruction of the Traditional Subject and the Emergence of Dasein

The point of departure for any serious engagement with Heidegger's conception of freedom must begin with his radical and systematic destruction of the Cartesian-Kantian subject that had dominated modern philosophy for nearly three centuries. This deconstruction is not merely a negative or destructive gesture but is undertaken with the positive aim of uncovering a more primordial ground for understanding human existence and, consequently, for rethinking the meaning of freedom itself. The tradition stemming from Descartes had conceived of the human being as a subjectum, a substantial ground or underlying foundation that possesses consciousness, reason, and will as its properties. Within this framework, freedom is understood as a predicate of this subject, specifically as a property of the will. The question of freedom thus becomes the question of whether this substantial subject possesses the capacity to initiate causal chains spontaneously, to choose between alternatives without external determination, or to legislate moral laws autonomously for itself. Heidegger's fundamental objection to this entire tradition is not that it provides incorrect answers to these questions but that it begins from an inadequate and ontologically unexamined conception of the kind of being that the human being essentially is [6]. The subject, whether conceived as Cartesian *res cogitans*, Kantian transcendental unity of apperception, or Husserlian transcendental ego, remains oriented by a conception of being derived from the ontology of presence-at-hand, treating the human being as a thing-like entity endowed with special properties. This orientation, Heidegger argues, systematically obscures the distinctive mode of being that characterizes human existence and thereby forecloses from the outset any possibility of grasping freedom in its primordial essence.

In opposition to this tradition, Heidegger introduces the term Dasein to designate the kind of being that each of us is and that raises the question of being for itself. This terminological choice is itself philosophically significant, for it avoids the connotations of subjectivity, consciousness, and personhood that had accumulated around terms like subject, ego, or person, and instead points toward the fundamental characteristic of this being: that its being is an issue for it. Dasein is not a present-at-hand substance with determinate properties but is rather characterized by existence, by the fact that it has its being to be in one way or another. The being of Dasein is not given but is always at issue, always a matter of possibility and projection. This ontological recharacterization has immediate and profound implications for the question of freedom. If Dasein is not a substance but is defined by its possibilities, then freedom cannot be conceived as a property that this substance sometimes exercises or fails to exercise. Rather, freedom must be understood as coextensive with Dasein's very mode of being, as the condition that first enables Dasein to relate to its own being as a question and as a task. Heidegger expresses this by saying that Dasein is that being for which, in its being, that being itself is at issue. This being-at-issue is not an occasional state but the very constitution of Dasein's existence, and it is in this constitution that the primordial phenomenon of freedom is to be sought [7].

The existential analytic proceeds to articulate the fundamental structures that constitute Dasein's being, structures that Heidegger terms *existentialia* to distinguish them from the categories applicable to present-at-hand entities. Primary among these *existentialia* is being-in-the-world, which indicates that Dasein is not a subject that occasionally enters into relation with an external world but is always already

engaged in a meaningful context of involvements. Dasein's being is not encapsulated within an interior sphere of consciousness that then requires a bridge to an external reality; rather, Dasein is its world existingly. This structure of being-in-the-world already contains the seeds of a transformed understanding of freedom. If Dasein is always already in a world, then freedom cannot be conceived as a spontaneous act of a subject that posits its own representations or constructs its own world *ex nihilo*. The world into which Dasein exists is always a shared, historical, and meaningful world that precedes any individual act of choice. Freedom must therefore be understood in terms of Dasein's relation to this world, in terms of how it takes up, appropriates, or transforms the possibilities that are opened up by its historical situation. This situates freedom from the outset within the concrete context of thrownness and projection, of facticity and possibility, and prevents any abstract or formalistic conception of freedom as a property of an isolated subject [8].

Furthermore, Dasein's being is characterized by *mineness*, by the fact that its being is always in each case mine and cannot be understood as an instance of a universal kind. This structure of *mineness* implies that Dasein can relate to its own being either authentically or inauthentically, that it can either appropriate its own possibilities as its own or lose itself in the public interpretations of the *they*. This distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity is not a moral or evaluative distinction but an ontological one, pointing to different modes in which Dasein can exist. In inauthenticity, Dasein understands itself in terms of the world, in terms of the roles, norms, and expectations that are publicly available. It takes its possibilities from the *they* and lives in the tranquilized self-assurance that comes from doing what one does. In authenticity, by contrast, Dasein appropriates its own being as its own, seizing upon its possibilities in a way that is transparent to its ownmost potentiality-for-being. This distinction opens the space for a conception of freedom that is not a matter of arbitrary choice but of existential appropriation [9]. Freedom is not primarily the capacity to choose among objectively available options but the capacity to choose oneself, to take over one's own being as a task and to project oneself upon one's ownmost possibilities. This is the fundamental insight that will guide Heidegger's entire analysis of freedom in the early period and that distinguishes his approach from all traditional conceptions of free will [10].

2.2. Resoluteness as the Modality of Authentic Freedom

Within the architectonic of Being and Time, the concrete actualization of Dasein's freedom is thematized through the phenomenon of resoluteness, a term that designates the mode of disclosedness in which Dasein becomes authentically itself. Resoluteness is not a discrete act of will that occurs at a particular moment but rather a fundamental modification of Dasein's entire mode of being, a transformation in how Dasein exists in relation to itself, to others, and to the world. To understand resoluteness as the modality of authentic freedom requires tracing the complex path through which Heidegger arrives at this concept, beginning with the analysis of Being-towards-death and the call of conscience. Being-towards-death is not an anthropological observation about human mortality but an existential structure that reveals the fundamental finitude and individuality of Dasein's existence. Death, as the ownmost, non-relational, and certain possibility that is not to be outstripped, individualizes Dasein and tears it away from its absorption in the *they*. In the face of death, all the public interpretations and tranquilizing distractions of everyday life lose their hold, and Dasein is confronted with the stark fact that its being is its own to be. This confrontation does not produce a morbid preoccupation with dying but rather a liberation from the illusions of the *they*, a liberation that first opens the possibility of authentic existence. The freedom that emerges from this confrontation is not a freedom from death but a freedom for death, a freedom to take over one's own finitude as the horizon within which all authentic possibilities must be chosen.

This liberation through Being-towards-death is given concrete expression in the phenomenon of conscience, which Heidegger interprets not as a moral faculty that pronounces judgments on good and evil but as a mode of discourse that calls Dasein back from its lostness in the *they*. The call of conscience says nothing, pronounces no specific content, and issues no moral prescriptions. It simply calls Dasein forward to its ownmost potentiality-for-being, summoning it to be its own self. The call comes from Dasein and yet from beyond it, from the thrown ground of its existence that it never fully masters. In hearing this call, Dasein is summoned to a choice: either it can flee from the call back into the tranquilized self-certainty of the *they*, or it can let itself be summoned forth into authentic existence.

This choice is not a choice among options within the world but a choice concerning one's very mode of being. It is the choice to choose oneself, to take over one's own being as a task and to project oneself upon one's ownmost possibilities. This choosing to choose is the primordial phenomenon of freedom, more original than any particular act of choice among ontic alternatives. In this choosing, Dasein does not become the master of its thrownness but rather assumes it, takes it over as the ground upon which it must project its possibilities. Freedom is thus revealed as the capacity to appropriate one's thrownness, to take over the facticity of one's existence not as a burden to be escaped but as the very condition of possibility for any meaningful projection [11].

Resoluteness is the mode of disclosedness in which this appropriation is accomplished. In resoluteness, Dasein discloses itself to itself in its full existential constitution, as thrown projection, as being-towards-death, as being-in-the-world. This disclosedness is not a theoretical self-knowledge but a practical mode of being, a way of existing in which Dasein is transparent to itself in its fundamental possibilities. The resolute Dasein does not withdraw from the world into some inner sphere of authentic selfhood but is rather fully engaged in the world, taking up its concrete situation with a clarity and decisiveness that is impossible for the irresolute Dasein lost in the they. Resoluteness brings Dasein into the moment of vision, the authentic present in which possibilities are seized and actualized in the light of a lucid understanding of one's own finitude and thrownness. In this moment, past, present, and future are united in an ecstatic temporal unity that constitutes the original temporality of Dasein's existence. Freedom in resoluteness is therefore not an abstract capacity but a concrete mode of temporal existence, a way of being in which Dasein owns up to its past, seizes its present, and projects its future in a unified and authentic manner [12].

It is crucial to emphasize that resoluteness as the modality of authentic freedom does not entail any specific content or any particular set of choices. Heidegger is not offering a prescription for how one should live but an analysis of the existential structure of any authentic living whatsoever. The resolute Dasein may choose any possibilities that its historical situation opens up; what matters is not the content of the choices but the mode in which they are chosen. The resolute choice is one in which Dasein chooses itself, in which it takes over its own being as its own and projects itself upon its ownmost potentiality-for-being. This means that the resolute Dasein is not determined by the public interpretations of the they but relates to them freely, either appropriating them authentically or rejecting them in favor of other possibilities. This freedom from the they is not an isolation from community but a new mode of being-with-others, one in which Dasein can genuinely encounter others in their own freedom rather than relating to them through the anonymous norms of the they. The resolute Dasein can let others be themselves, can open up a space of genuine *Mits ein* in which authentic coexistence becomes possible. Freedom, in this sense, is not opposed to community but is the condition for any genuine community, any authentic being-with that respects the freedom and individuality of others.

2.3. Temporality as the Horizon of Existential Freedom

The full meaning of freedom in Heidegger's early thought cannot be adequately grasped without an understanding of its essential relation to temporality. Indeed, the analysis of resoluteness as the authentic mode of disclosedness leads directly to the question of time, for resoluteness is itself a mode of temporal existence that reveals the original temporality of Dasein's being. Heidegger's claim is radical and far-reaching: temporality is not merely a feature of human consciousness or a framework within which events occur but is the very meaning of the being of Dasein, the ontological condition that makes possible all the existential structures analyzed in the first division of *Being and Time*. Freedom, as the capacity to choose oneself and to project upon one's ownmost possibilities, is grounded in the ecstatic-horizontal constitution of temporality. Without an understanding of this temporal grounding, the conception of freedom developed in the analysis of resoluteness remains abstract and ungrounded, a mere phenomenological description without ontological foundation [13].

Heidegger distinguishes his conception of temporality from the vulgar understanding of time as a succession of now-points, an infinite, irreversible series of instants that flow from the future through the present into the past. This vulgar conception, which has dominated the philosophical tradition since Aristotle, treats time as a homogeneous medium within which entities occur, a framework that is indifferent to the content that fills it. Against this conception, Heidegger argues that original temporality is ecstatic, meaning that it is not a container or a series but a structure of self-transcendence in which

Dasein is always already beyond itself. The three ecstases of temporality—future, past, and present—are not three distinct moments that follow one another but three dimensions of Dasein's unified being that are always co-originally disclosed. Dasein is always ahead of itself in its projection upon possibilities, always already in a world in its thrownness, and always alongside beings in its making-present. This ecstatic unity constitutes the original phenomenon of time and provides the ontological ground for all the structures of Dasein's existence [14].

The future has a certain primacy within this ecstatic unity, for Dasein exists primarily in terms of its possibilities, in its being-towards its ownmost potentiality-for-being. This futural character of existence is most clearly revealed in Being-towards-death, where Dasein is confronted with its ownmost possibility as a possibility that is not to be outstripped. In authentic Being-towards-death, Dasein runs forward into its death, not as an actual event that will occur at some future now but as the constant possibility of impossibility that individuates and temporalizes Dasein's existence. This running forward is the primordial phenomenon of the future, the ecstatic horizon within which all authentic possibilities must be projected. Freedom, as the capacity to project upon one's ownmost possibilities, is thus essentially futural. It is not a freedom that exists in a present now and occasionally projects into a future that is not yet actual; rather, freedom is the very mode in which Dasein exists futurally, the way in which it is its possibilities as possibilities. The authentic future is not a distant point that will eventually become present but the horizon of possibility that first enables Dasein to return to its thrownness and to make-present the beings it encounters.

This futural projection, however, is always a projection upon a thrown ground. Dasein does not project its possibilities *ex nihilo* but always from out of its facticity, from the concrete historical situation into which it has been thrown. This thrownness is the existential meaning of the past, the having-been that Dasein always already is. In authentic existence, Dasein does not flee from its thrownness or attempt to escape it but takes it over as the ground of its projection. This taking-over is what Heidegger calls repetition, the mode in which the authentic future returns to the having-been and appropriates it as its own. Freedom, therefore, is not a liberation from one's past but an appropriation of it, a taking over of the heritage that one always already is. The past is not a dead weight that determines the present mechanically but a field of possibilities that can be taken up and repeated in the light of futural projection. This repetition is the mode in which Dasein exists historically, in which it chooses its hero and appropriates the possibilities that have been transmitted to it by its tradition. Freedom and historicity are thus essentially intertwined, for freedom is the capacity to exist historically, to take over one's heritage and to project it into the future in a way that is one's own [15].

The present, finally, is the ecstasis in which Dasein encounters beings within-the-world. In inauthentic existence, the present has a primacy that leads Dasein to lose itself in its absorption with the beings it encounters, forgetting its own futural projection and its thrown ground. In authentic existence, by contrast, the present is held within the unity of the ecstases, arising from the future's return to the past. This authentic present is what Heidegger calls the moment of vision, the instant in which Dasein is fully present to its situation in the light of its ownmost possibilities. In the moment of vision, Dasein does not flee from its situation but encounters it with clarity and decisiveness, seizing the possibilities that the situation offers in a way that is transparent to its own finitude. Freedom is actualized in the moment of vision, not as a choice among options but as the existential mode in which Dasein is fully present to its world in the light of its authentic self-understanding. This temporal grounding of freedom reveals that freedom is not a property that Dasein sometimes exercises and sometimes does not but is rather the very mode of Dasein's temporal existence. Dasein is free not because it possesses a faculty of choice but because it exists temporally, because its being is constituted by the ecstatic unity of future, having-been, and present. To exist as Dasein is to be free, for existence itself is the temporal transcendence that first opens the space of possibility within which anything like choice, decision, or responsibility can appear. This is the deepest insight of Heidegger's early thinking on freedom and the foundation upon which all his subsequent reflections on this theme will be built [16].

3. The Turn and the Ontologization of Freedom in Heidegger's Middle Period

This chapter examines the profound transformation in Heidegger's conception of freedom that occurs during the transitional period of the late 1920s and early 1930s, a movement often designated as the

turn. Whereas the early analysis of Being and Time approached freedom primarily through the existential structures of Dasein's authentic self-choice, the middle period witnesses a decisive shift toward thinking freedom as the condition for the disclosure of Being itself. This ontologization of freedom is articulated through a series of interconnected investigations: the rethinking of truth as unconcealment, the identification of freedom as the essence of truth, and the grounding of transcendence in freedom. Through a close reading of pivotal texts including "On the Essence of Ground," "On the Essence of Truth," and the lecture courses on Kant and on human freedom, this chapter demonstrates how Heidegger progressively liberates the question of freedom from its confinement within philosophical anthropology and repositions it as the very event of world-disclosure that first enables beings to appear as beings.

3.1. Truth as Aletheia and the Critique of the Correspondence Theory

The transformation of Heidegger's conception of freedom in his middle period is inextricably linked to his radical rethinking of the nature of truth, a rethinking that constitutes one of the most original and influential contributions of his entire philosophical project. Heidegger's point of departure is a critical engagement with the traditional understanding of truth that has dominated Western philosophy since its inception, namely, the conception of truth as the correspondence or adequation of intellect and thing. This understanding, which finds its classical formulation in Aristotle and its medieval codification in Thomas Aquinas, conceives truth as a relation of agreement between a proposition or judgment and the state of affairs to which it refers. A statement is true when it corresponds to reality, when it says of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not. Heidegger does not simply reject this conception as false; rather, he argues that it is derivative and ontologically ungrounded, that it presupposes a more primordial phenomenon of truth that remains unthought within the metaphysical tradition. The correspondence theory, for all its apparent self-evidence, leaves unexamined the conditions that must obtain for such a relation of agreement to be possible in the first place [17]. How can a proposition, which is a linguistic or mental entity, correspond to a thing, which is an entity of an entirely different order? What is the space or medium within which such a correspondence can be established and measured? These questions point toward a more fundamental dimension of truth that precedes and enables any particular truth of correspondence.

Heidegger finds the resources for this more primordial conception of truth in the ancient Greek experience of truth as aletheia, a term that he interprets as unconcealment or disclosedness. The etymological analysis of aletheia, with its alpha-privative indicating a negation of lethe or concealment, suggests that truth is not primarily a property of propositions but an event of revelation, a happening in which beings emerge from hiddenness into openness. This understanding of truth as unconcealment is not a theoretical construction but a recovery of the pre-philosophical experience that guided the thinking of the early Greek thinkers before the subsequent 硬化 into the correspondence theory. For the pre-Platonic Greeks, Heidegger argues, truth was experienced as the lighting within which beings could appear, as the open region that first grants to beings the possibility of being encountered and understood. This open region is not itself a being but the condition for the manifestness of beings, the clearing within which any particular being can show itself as what it is. The correspondence theory of truth is thus possible only because there is already a disclosedness of beings, a prior manifestness that enables the subsequent measurement of propositions against things. The truth of propositions is a mode of the truth of beings, which is itself grounded in the more original truth of Being as the event of unconcealment [18].

This reorientation of the question of truth has profound implications for the understanding of human existence. If truth is primarily unconcealment, then the human being is not merely a subject that formulates true propositions about an objective world but is rather the site or placeholder of this unconcealment. Dasein is the being that exists in the truth, that is always already disclosed to itself and to beings in its being-in-the-world. This disclosedness is not an occasional achievement but the very constitution of Dasein's existence. Dasein is its disclosedness, which means that it exists as the clearing within which beings can appear. This is what Heidegger means when he says that Dasein is in the truth. The traditional conception of truth as correspondence is not thereby abolished but is shown to be founded upon this more primordial disclosedness. A proposition can correspond to a thing only because the thing has already been uncovered, because it has been let appear in the open region of intelligibility. The truth

of assertion is a derivative mode of the truth of uncoveredness, which is itself a mode of the truth of Being as the event of unconcealment. This hierarchical structure of truth leads directly to the question of freedom, for if Dasein is the site of unconcealment, then the manner in which Dasein comports itself toward beings and toward Being will determine the character of the disclosedness within which beings appear [19].

The critique of the correspondence theory also entails a rethinking of the relation between truth and untruth. Within the metaphysical tradition, untruth is understood simply as the negation or absence of truth, as error or falsehood that can in principle be eliminated through correct method and rigorous thinking. For Heidegger, however, untruth is not merely the absence of truth but belongs to the essence of truth itself. The unconcealment of beings is always simultaneously a concealment, for in letting certain beings appear in certain aspects, the open region necessarily conceals other beings and other aspects. More fundamentally, the unconcealment of beings is accompanied by a concealment of Being as such. The very lighting within which beings appear withdraws from attention, remaining unthematized and unthought. This self-concealing of the open region is not a deficiency that could be overcome but belongs to the very structure of unconcealment. Truth as *aletheia* is therefore a struggle against concealment, a wresting of beings from hiddenness that always remains exposed to the possibility of renewed concealment. This insight will prove crucial for understanding Heidegger's later conception of freedom, for it implies that freedom cannot be understood as a simple mastery over beings or as a transparent self-presence but must instead be conceived as a mode of comportment that acknowledges and accepts the essential concealment at the heart of unconcealment. The free relation to beings is one that lets them be while respecting the mystery of their ground, that dwells in the truth while remaining open to the untruth that co-constitutes it [20].

3.2. The Essence of Truth as Freedom

The decisive step in Heidegger's ontologization of freedom occurs in the 1930 lecture "On the Essence of Truth," where he advances the provocative and seemingly paradoxical thesis that the essence of truth is freedom. This formulation is easily misunderstood, and Heidegger takes great care to distinguish his meaning from any subjectivistic or voluntaristic interpretation. The thesis does not mean that truth is arbitrary, that what counts as true depends on the whim or decision of the individual subject. Nor does it mean that freedom is a property or capacity that human beings possess and that they can exercise in relation to truth. Rather, the claim is that freedom is the condition for the possibility of truth, that the event of unconcealment within which beings can appear as what they are is itself a happening of freedom. Freedom, in this context, is not a human faculty but an ontological event, the opening of the open region that first enables any relation to beings, whether theoretical, practical, or aesthetic. Heidegger expresses this by saying that freedom is the letting-be of beings, the releasement that allows beings to manifest themselves in their being without coercion or distortion [21].

This conception of freedom as letting-be must be carefully distinguished from any notion of passivity or indifference. To let beings be is not to abandon them to their own devices or to adopt an attitude of quietism toward the world. It is rather to engage with beings in a manner that respects their own mode of being, that allows them to show themselves as they are rather than forcing them into categories and frameworks that are alien to them. This letting-be is an active and disciplined mode of comportment that requires a constant vigilance against the human tendency to impose its own schemas upon reality. It is the stance of the thinker, the artist, and the genuine scientist who are capable of receiving beings in their unconcealment rather than merely projecting their own representations upon them. Heidegger finds the paradigm for this letting-be in the Greek experience of *physis*, the self-emerging arising within which beings come to presence and endure. The Greeks, he argues, did not dominate nature through technological imposition but rather let it be present in its own compelling splendor. This letting-be is the essence of human freedom, the mode of existence in which Dasein corresponds to the unconcealment of beings rather than seeking to master them [22].

The identification of freedom as the essence of truth also entails a radical rethinking of the relation between human existence and Being. If freedom is the letting-be of beings, then human freedom is not a possession that Dasein owns but a response to the address of Being. Dasein is free not because it possesses a faculty of choice but because it *ek-sists*, because it stands out into the open region of Being and thereby participates in the event of unconcealment. This *ek-sistence* is not a property but a way of

being, the mode in which Dasein is the there, the place of disclosedness. Freedom, therefore, is not something that Dasein has but something that Dasein is, or rather, something that happens through Dasein as the site of unconcealment. This is what Heidegger means when he says that freedom is the essence of truth: the open region within which beings can appear is opened and maintained by the ek-sistent comportment of Dasein, which lets beings be in their being. This does not mean that Dasein creates truth or that truth depends on Dasein in any subjectivistic sense; rather, it means that truth as unconcealment requires a site, a clearing, a there within which it can happen, and that Dasein is this site. The happening of truth and the existence of Dasein are thus co-original, two aspects of the same event of disclosedness [23].

This understanding of freedom has profound implications for the question of human agency and responsibility. If freedom is letting-be, then the free act is not primarily the act of choice among alternatives but the act of releasement, the act that opens a space within which beings can manifest themselves and within which genuine decisions can be made. This does not eliminate the need for choice but rather grounds it in a more fundamental openness. The free Dasein is not the one that chooses arbitrarily but the one that has first let beings be, that has opened itself to the claims that beings make upon it, and that then chooses in response to those claims. This is the structure of what Heidegger calls resoluteness in *Being and Time*, but it is now understood in a more explicitly ontological register. Resoluteness is the mode of disclosedness in which Dasein lets itself be called forth by its situation, in which it opens itself to the possibilities that are genuinely available rather than imposing its own preconceptions upon the world. Freedom, in this sense, is a form of obedience, a hearkening to the voice of Being that speaks through the beings we encounter. This paradoxical unity of freedom and obedience, of letting-be and responding, is one of the deepest and most difficult themes in Heidegger's thinking, and it will become even more prominent in his later meditations on *Gelassenheit* [24].

3.3. Transcendence and the Grounding of Freedom in Being

The ontologization of freedom in Heidegger's middle period reaches its fullest articulation in the 1929 essay "On the Essence of Ground" and in the lecture course of the same year on Kant's philosophy. In these texts, Heidegger approaches the question of freedom through the phenomenon of transcendence, which he understands as the fundamental constitution of Dasein's being. Transcendence does not mean, as it does in the metaphysical tradition, a passing beyond the sensible world to a supersensible realm, nor does it mean the relation of a subject to an object that stands over against it. Transcendence means rather that Dasein is always already beyond beings, that it exists in the understanding of Being that first enables it to encounter beings as beings. Dasein transcends beings toward Being, and this transcendence is the condition for the possibility of any relation to beings whatsoever. Without this prior openness to Being, Dasein would be enclosed within a world of merely present entities without any understanding of what they are or that they are. Transcendence is thus the event of world-disclosure, the happening in which a world is opened within which beings can appear and within which Dasein can find its bearings [25].

The crucial move in Heidegger's argument is the identification of this transcendence with freedom. Freedom is not a capacity that Dasein exercises within the world but the very event of world-disclosure that first makes a world possible. In transcending toward Being, Dasein opens the space of possibilities within which it can project itself and within which beings can be encountered. This opening is freedom, the letting-be of a world that grants to Dasein its possibilities and to beings their manifestness. Heidegger expresses this by saying that freedom is the origin of the ground, that the grounding of a world in transcendence is a happening of freedom. The ground is not something that is simply given but something that is projected, that is opened up by Dasein's ek-sistent comportment [26]. This does not mean that Dasein creates the ground *ex nihilo* but that it takes over its thrownness and projects it into possibilities, that it appropriates its heritage in a way that opens a future. Freedom, in this sense, is the capacity to ground, to be the ground of one's own being by taking over one's thrownness and projecting it upon possibilities. This is what Heidegger in *Being and Time* called being-the-ground of a nullity, the structure of Dasein as thrown projection that is at once ground and grounded, free and factual [27].

The lecture course on Kant provides Heidegger with an opportunity to develop this conception of freedom through a critical engagement with the Kantian understanding of transcendental freedom. Kant had distinguished between practical freedom, which is the capacity of the will to act independently of determination by sensible impulses, and transcendental freedom, which is the capacity to initiate a state

spontaneously, without being determined by antecedent causes. For Kant, transcendental freedom is a problematic concept, one that cannot be proven theoretically but must be postulated as the condition for the possibility of morality. Heidegger reads Kant against the grain, arguing that the true significance of transcendental freedom lies not in its role as a postulate of practical reason but in its function as the condition for the possibility of transcendence itself. Freedom, in this interpretation, is not primarily a property of the will but the ground of ontological difference, the event that enables Dasein to transcend beings toward Being and thereby to encounter beings as such. The Kantian analysis of the transcendental unity of apperception, of the synthesis of imagination, and of the schematism are all, for Heidegger, covert ways of thinking the transcendence of Dasein, which is itself grounded in freedom [28].

This interpretation of Kant leads Heidegger to a radical reconception of the relation between freedom and necessity. The metaphysical tradition had typically opposed freedom and necessity, understanding freedom as the absence of external determination and necessity as the presence of determining causes. For Heidegger, however, freedom and necessity are not opposed but intertwined. Freedom, as transcendence, opens the space within which beings can manifest themselves in their being, and this manifestation includes their causal connections and necessary relations. Freedom does not suspend or abolish causality but rather grounds it by opening the world within which causality can appear as a mode of being. Moreover, freedom itself is not arbitrary but is bound by the possibilities that are opened in transcendence. Dasein is free only in and through its appropriation of its thrownness, only in and through its response to the address of Being that comes to it from its historical situation. This is what Heidegger means by the finitude of freedom: freedom is not an infinite capacity for self-determination but a finite response to a finite situation, a taking over of possibilities that are given and not chosen. The later Heidegger will radicalize this insight by thinking freedom as a response to the sending of Being, as a mode of comportment that corresponds to the historical destiny in which Dasein finds itself. This thinking of freedom as response, as correspondence, as releasement, will become the central theme of his later philosophy and the point of departure for his meditation on technology and *Gelassenheit* [29]. The analysis of transcendence and freedom in the middle period thus prepares the way for the later thinking of *Ereignis* and the history of Being. If freedom is transcendence, and transcendence is the opening of a world, then the question inevitably arises: what opens this opening? What grants transcendence itself? This question leads Heidegger beyond the existential analytic of Dasein to a thinking of Being as the event of appropriation, as the giving that first enables any world to be worlded. In this later thinking, human freedom will be rethought as the mode of comportment that corresponds to this event, that lets Being be as event, that dwells in the appropriation without seeking to master or control it. This is the path that leads from the freedom of resoluteness to the freedom of releasement, from the freedom that chooses itself to the freedom that lets be, from the freedom of Dasein to the freedom of Being. It is a path that remains faithful to the fundamental insight of the middle period: that freedom is not a property of the subject but the event of disclosedness itself, the happening of truth in which beings can appear and within which human existence can find its authentic possibility [30].

4. Freedom in Heidegger's Later Thought: *Gelassenheit* and the Event of Appropriation

The trajectory of Heidegger's thinking on freedom reaches its most radical and enigmatic formulation in his later philosophy, where the very language of existential analysis and fundamental ontology gives way to a meditative thinking of the history of Being. In this final phase, freedom is no longer conceived primarily as a mode of Dasein's existence or even as the essence of truth, but is instead thought from out of the event of appropriation, the *es gibt* of Being that grants to each historical epoch its fundamental configuration of intelligibility. This shift entails a profound transformation in the understanding of human freedom, for if Being itself is understood as the sending that grants and withholds presence, then human freedom cannot consist in self-assertion or autonomous self-determination but must rather be conceived as a mode of correspondence, a responding to the address that comes from Being itself. The later Heidegger thus thinks freedom as releasement, a term that designates a comportment beyond the distinction between activity and passivity, beyond the will to power that characterizes the metaphysical tradition from Plato to Nietzsche. Releasement is the stance of meditative thinking that lets beings be, that opens itself to the mystery of Being without seeking to master or control it, that dwells in nearness to Being while respecting its essential self-concealment. This conception of freedom is developed most

explicitly in the discourse on *Gelassenheit*, where Heidegger engages in a dialogue with Meister Eckhart and the mystical tradition to articulate a mode of thinking that is no longer governed by the will [31]. Releasement is freedom from the will to will, the letting-go that releases itself into the openness of Being and thereby becomes capable of receiving beings in their unconcealment without violence or imposition. This is not a passive quietism but a rigorous and disciplined mode of comportment that requires a constant vigilance against the temptation to reduce everything to calculable order. The relevance of this thinking for our contemporary situation becomes apparent in Heidegger's analysis of modern technology as enframing, the mode of revealing that challenges forth nature as a standing-reserve to be ordered and exploited. Within the horizon of enframing, freedom is reduced to the efficient manipulation of resources, and human beings themselves become transformed into human resources, mere functions within a totalizing system of calculative control [32]. Against this reduction, Heidegger's later thinking proposes a free relation to technology, a relation that neither simply rejects technology nor remains blindly enslaved to it but that sees through its essence and thereby opens the possibility of a more originary dwelling upon the earth. This free relation is releasement toward things, the openness to the mystery that lets us affirm the necessity of technological objects while remaining attuned to a deeper dimension of Being that technology conceals. Freedom, in this final thinking, is thus the capacity to exist in the truth of Being, to correspond to its sending, to dwell in nearness to the mystery that withdraws even as it grants. It is a freedom that is at once humble and exalted, finite and open to the infinite, a freedom that finds its fulfillment not in mastery but in releasement, not in will but in gratitude, not in self-assertion but in thanksgiving for the gift of Being itself [33].

5. Conclusion

The journey through Martin Heidegger's thinking on freedom reveals a philosophical trajectory of extraordinary depth and complexity, one that systematically dismantles the traditional understanding of freedom as a property of the will or a capacity for choice and replaces it with a series of increasingly radical conceptions that ultimately situate freedom within the very event of Being itself. The early Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, approaches freedom through the existential analytic of *Dasein*, conceiving it as the authentic appropriation of one's ownmost potentiality-for-being in the face of finitude. Here freedom is revealed in resoluteness, the mode of disclosedness in which *Dasein* chooses to choose itself, taking over its thrownness and projecting itself upon its possibilities in lucid awareness of its Being-towards-death.

This freedom is essentially temporal and historical, grounded in the ecstatic unity of *Dasein*'s existence and actualized in the moment of vision where past, present, and future are gathered into an authentic stance toward the world. The middle period deepens this analysis by rethinking freedom in ontological terms, identifying it as the essence of truth and the ground of transcendence. Freedom is now conceived as letting-be, the *ek-sistent* comportment that opens the clearing within which beings can appear as they are. This is not a human faculty but the event of disclosedness itself, the happening of unconcealment that first enables any relation to beings and any understanding of Being. Freedom and truth are thus shown to be co-original, two aspects of the same primordial event that constitutes the very possibility of world-disclosure. The later Heidegger radicalizes this insight still further by thinking freedom from out of the history of Being and the event of appropriation. Here freedom is conceived as releasement, a mode of correspondence to the address of Being that stands beyond the will and beyond the framework of metaphysical subjectivity.

In the age of technology, where enframing reduces all beings to calculable order and transforms even human beings into standing-reserve, authentic freedom consists in the capacity to maintain a free relation to technology, to affirm its necessity while remaining open to the mystery of Being that it conceals. This freedom is releasement toward things, the meditative thinking that lets beings be and dwells in nearness to the self-concealing ground. Across all three phases of his thinking, Heidegger remains faithful to a single fundamental insight: that freedom is not a possession of the human subject but the very event of openness within which human existence first becomes possible. This insight carries profound implications for how we understand ourselves and our relation to the world. It challenges the modern project of technological mastery that threatens to reduce both nature and humanity to mere resources for exploitation, and it opens the possibility of a more originary mode of dwelling, one that respects the mystery of Being and lets beings be in their own proper essence. The path of Heidegger's thinking on

freedom is therefore not merely of historical interest but speaks directly to the most pressing questions of our contemporary situation: what it means to be human, how we should relate to the natural world, and what form of life might be possible beyond the nihilism of technological enframing. It is a path that demands rigorous thinking and patient meditation, but one that offers the promise of a deeper understanding of freedom than the philosophical tradition has hitherto been able to provide.

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