

# Heidegger on Unconcealment and Correctness

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*Truth* – together with *being* and *good* – is one of our most primitive concepts. It has also been, for that reason, one of the (more or less) perennial enigmas of philosophy.

Nietzsche, for example, brooded and puzzled over whether and how it was possible to care about truth for its own sake. Of what value is truth itself, he wondered, once we see through all the old myths that dressed it up as something supernatural, transcendent, magical, and redemptive. Thus in *Beyond Good and Evil* he writes,

These are beautiful, glittering, tinkling, festive words: honesty, love of truth, love of wisdom, self-sacrifice for knowledge, heroism of truthfulness – there is something in them that makes one swell with pride. But we hermits and marmots, we convinced ourselves long ago in all the secrecy of a hermit's conscience that even this dignified pageantry of words belongs to the old false finery, junk, and gold dust of unconscious human vanity, and that the terrible underlying primary text *homo natura* must also be recognized beneath such flattering colors and painted surfaces. To translate man back into nature ... Why would we choose it, this insane task? Or put otherwise: "Why knowledge at all?" – Everyone will ask us this. And we, pressed to such a degree, we who have already asked ourselves the same question a hundred times, we have found and find no better answer.<sup>1</sup>

Far from denying that truth has a value all its own, irreducible to any other value – power, justice, solidarity – Nietzsche evidently remained perplexed and anxious about his own commitment to truth precisely because of the tenaciousness of that commitment. But what makes such a commitment possible? Why should we care about

truth at all? Even after setting aside all the obfuscating rationalizations of the moral-metaphysical tradition, Nietzsche confesses, “we have found and find no better answer.”

Truth was also one of the central abiding concerns of Heidegger’s thinking, early and late. What distinguishes Heidegger’s reflections on truth from Nietzsche’s, though, is precisely his attempt to describe its foundational status relative to the myriad other goods we more casually refer to as “values.”<sup>2</sup> For Heidegger, by contrast, the Greek *alêtheia* “is a word for what man wants and seeks in the ground of his essence, a word thus for something fundamental and ultimate (*Erstes and Letztes*) ... what constitutes the ground and soil, the vault housing (*Wölbung*) human existence (*Dasein*)” (*GA* 34: 12).<sup>3</sup> In conceiving of truth as ontologically fundamental in this sense, not as a mere value, but as a condition of the intelligibility of a whole range of practical and theoretical attitudes, Heidegger’s account, unlike Nietzsche’s, remains rooted in the tradition of transcendental philosophy.

The *locus classicus* of Heidegger’s account of truth is §44, the final section of Division One of *Being and Time*. There he sets out to describe what he calls the “ontological foundations” of the traditional concept of truth as agreement or “correspondence” (*Übereinstimmung*).<sup>4</sup> The ontological foundation of that concept, he suggests, is something more basic, namely “uncovering” (*Entdecken*). Assertions can be true, that is, only if they are somehow involved in the uncovering of entities. Heidegger puts this, somewhat misleadingly, as a claim about what it *means* to say an assertion is true: “The

assertion *is true* means it uncovers the entity in itself. It asserts, it indicates, it 'lets' the entity 'be seen' (*apophansis*) in its uncoveredness. The *being-true (truth)* of an assertion must be understood as *being-uncovering*."<sup>5</sup>

How do assertions manage to uncover entities? By figuring into human practices that do so. Being-uncovering is a possibility for assertions, that is, only because it is a possibility for human beings. As Heidegger puts it, "Being-true as being-uncovering is ... ontologically possible only on the basis of being-in-the-world. This phenomenon, which we have identified as a fundamental state of Dasein, is the *foundation* of the primordial phenomenon of truth" (SZ 219).

"Being true as being-uncovering is a mode of Dasein's being. ... Uncovering is a mode of being of being-in-the-world" (SZ 220); "only with the *disclosedness (Erschlossenheit)* of Dasein is the *most primordial* phenomenon of truth attained" (SZ 220–1). Assertions uncover, then, only because human beings do. This makes sense, since, after all, *asserting* is something people do.

Finally, Heidegger suggests, tracing the traditional concept of truth as correspondence back to its ontological foundations in the being-uncovering of assertions and the disclosedness of Dasein, and so coming to see truth itself both *on the basis of* and *as* uncovering, reveals that the traditional concept misdescribes the phenomenon of truth, that truth is not, after all, any kind of correspondence between one entity and another: "Truth thus by no means has the structure of a correspondence between

cognition and object in the sense of a resemblance or alignment (*Angleichung*) of one entity (subject) with another (object)" (SZ 218–19).

In §44 of *Being and Time*, then, Heidegger advances (at least) four distinct claims:

- (1) that the traditional concept of truth as correspondence *presupposes* the phenomenon of uncovering;
- (2) that the truth of an assertion just *is* its uncovering an entity "in itself" (*an ihm selbst*);
- (3) that the being-uncovering of assertions is possible only on the basis of Dasein's disclosedness or being-in-the-world;
- (4) that truth is *not* correspondence in the sense of a resemblance or alignment of one entity with another;

Many readers of *Being and Time* have thought it obvious that Heidegger rejects the notion of truth as correspondence altogether. But does he? He never says the notion meaningless or incoherent. The worst he says about it in *Being and Time* is that it's "very general and empty" (SZ 215), but of course even very general and empty notions can be coherent – abstract but benign, useless perhaps but harmless. At the beginning of his 1931–2 lectures, *The Essence of Truth*, he seems to go further by insisting that, although we ordinarily take it for granted as "self-evident," the notion of truth as correspondence is in fact "utterly obscure," "ambiguous," "unintelligible" (GA 34: 3, 4, 6).

Does that settle the matter? Well, not quite. When Heidegger says the received view of truth is "unintelligible," what he means is not that it's demonstrably incoherent, but rather that we have no understanding of it:

Something is “intelligible” to us if we understand (*verstehen*) it, i.e. can set ourselves before (*vor-stehen*) the thing, have its measure, survey and comprehend it in its basic structure. Is what we have just called “self-evident” (truth as correspondence and correctness ...) really *intelligible to us?* (GA 34: 2–3)

The answer is *no*. But again, this doesn’t prove anything; it merely shows that we don’t know what we’re talking about when we say truth is correspondence. Heidegger says the notion of truth as correspondence is “*unverständlich*,” but he also says in the same pages that it’s merely “*unverstanden*,” which can simply mean *misunderstood*. Could it be that all Heidegger wants to assert is that we do not yet have a proper understanding of the kind of correspondence that constitutes propositional truth? Could we come to understand it properly, and so embrace the traditional received notion, or at least a version of it?

Mark Wrathall has recently argued along these lines in what I think is the best brief discussion of Heidegger’s account of truth. In support of his reading Wrathall cites the following remarks from the beginning of *The Essence of Truth*. What makes an assertion true?

This, that in *what* it says, it corresponds to the things (*Sachen*) and states of affairs (*Sachverhalten*) *about which* it says something. The being-true of the assertion thus means such correspondence. What then *is* truth? Truth is *correspondence*. Such correspondence obtains because the assertion is directed to (*richtet sich nach*) that *about which* it says something. Truth is *correctness* (*Richtigkeit*). Truth is thus *correspondence, grounded in correctness, of the assertion with the thing*. (GA 34: 2)

So far, so good. But Wrathall quotes this passage as if it represents Heidegger's own considered view, whereas in fact Heidegger is here merely articulating what he takes to be our common preconception concerning truth, something we ordinarily take for granted as self-evident. He is not endorsing the concept of correspondence; indeed, as we have seen, he immediately goes on to say that that concept is obscure, ambiguous, and unintelligible. He is merely setting up the discussion, just as he does in *Being and Time* when he writes, "The analysis sets out from (*geht aus von*) the traditional concept of truth and attempts to lay bare its ontological foundations" (SZ 214). To "set out from" a received view is not to embrace it, but simply to take it as given, as received, in order to ask how it manages to be intelligible at all, *if* it does.

On Wrathall's reading, when Heidegger complains that the notion of correspondence is obscure, ambiguous, and unintelligible, all he is really denying is its *self-evidentness*, its *obviousness*. The idea of correspondence is not nonsense; it has merely been misunderstood. More precisely, it is, as Heidegger himself says, "ambiguous." Thus, in §44 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger asks us to consider the following paradigm case:

Someone with his back turned to the wall makes the true assertion, "The picture on the wall is hanging askew." This assertion proves itself (*weist sich*) when the speaker, turning around, perceives the picture on the wall hanging askew. What is the sense of the confirmation of the assertion? Is a kind of correspondence of "knowledge" or "what is known" with the thing on the wall established? Yes

and no, depending on how phenomenally appropriately we interpret the expression “what is known.” (SZ 217)

That reply (“yes and no”) seems to support Wrathall’s claim that the notion of correspondence is merely ambiguous and misunderstood rather than incoherent. The idea of correspondence is by itself unproblematic, that is, given a proper understanding of *what we know* when we know something. If “what is known” – by which Heidegger means not the object, but the *content* both of the assertion and of the perception or belief that “confirms” it as true – is supposed to be a kind of mental representation (*Vorstellung*), then *no*, the truth of the assertion is not any kind of correspondence between the representation and the object. What alternative notion of content would allow us to say *yes* to the idea of correspondence? Wrathall writes,

An assertion or proposition is true when it corresponds with a state of affairs. ... But this correspondence or agreement, Heidegger argues, cannot be understood on a representational model of language. He argues instead that correspondence exists when our orientation to the world allows what is to show itself in a particular way, and thus it can be understood as a bringing out of concealment.<sup>6</sup>

On Wrathall’s account, then, truth is correspondence, but correspondence just turns out to be whatever relation we have to things when we uncover them by means of perception or assertion. This leaves no room for the traditional image of correspondence as an agreement or fit between two similar or matching entities – say, two halves of a torn paper or a lock and a key. Indeed, it seems to leave no room for any notion of

correspondence, except one defined trivially in terms of uncovering. What remains, on this account, still deserving of the name “correspondence”? Did Heidegger merely want to preserve the word, not the image itself?

Wrathall’s interpretation, it seems to me, is wrong, but only because, unlike most, it manages to be half right. He is right to insist that Heidegger neither doubts nor denies that the truth of perceptions, beliefs, and assertions consists in their *correctness*. He is wrong, I think, in assuming that for Heidegger correctness is the same as *correspondence*. Heidegger often lumps the two together, but not always. When he does distinguish them, moreover, it becomes clear that correctness is the more primordial phenomenon, both historically and conceptually. Disentangling them, I shall argue, promises to bring into sharper focus not only Heidegger’s philosophical commitments concerning truth, but also the critical stance he takes up against the metaphysical tradition.

Heidegger advances two distinct claims, I believe, though he often runs them together. They were the first two of the four I distinguished above, namely:

- (1) that the traditional *concept* of truth as correspondence presupposes the phenomenon of uncovering;
- (2) that the truth of an assertion just *is* its uncovering an entity “in itself” (*an ihm selbst*).

What (2) says, more precisely, is that the *correctness* of an assertion consists in its uncovering an entity in itself. What (1) says is that the *concept* of correspondence, the image of two adjacent things either resembling each other or fitting together like the



pieces of a puzzle, is made possible by the being-uncovering of assertions and the disclosedness of Dasein. Uncovering “explains” the concept of correspondence not by justifying or validating it, then, but by showing how it was ever possible for us to have such a concept. Whereas uncovering *constitutes* correctness, it merely *motivates the idea of* correspondence. And of course we can have the one without the other. Indeed, how could we do otherwise? How could we do without the concept of correctness? And how does the image of agreement or correspondence shed any further light on that concept?

Granted, Heidegger often seems simply to equate correctness and correspondence (e.g. GA 45: 16). You might have noticed that in the passage from *The Essence of Truth I* quoted, Heidegger asks, “Is what we have just called ‘self-evident’ (truth as correspondence *and correctness* ...) really intelligible to us?” (GA 34: 3; emphasis modified). That seems to suggest that correctness is no more intelligible to us than correspondence; that what goes for one, goes for the other.

You also might have noticed, however, that in the next passage I quoted, from the previous page, Heidegger says, “Truth is thus correspondence, *grounded in correctness*, of the assertion with the thing” (GA 34: 2; emphasis modified). Moreover, the entire remainder of the lecture course is devoted to a scrupulously detailed examination of Plato’s *Republic* and *Theaetetus*, texts in which, Heidegger supposes, the word *alêtheia* itself ceased to mean unconcealment and came to mean correctness (*orthotês*). Heidegger was wrong about that putative semantic shift in the Greek language, but he was

probably right that theoretical correctness as such first became metaphysically paradigmatic and unconditionally important in Plato, in contrast to the Homeric and Presocratic tradition. “Ever since,” Heidegger writes, “there is a striving for ‘truth’ in the sense of the correctness of the gaze and its orientation. Ever since, in all fundamental orientations toward entities, what becomes decisive is achieving a correct view of the ideas.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Heidegger says here and elsewhere, only in Aristotle do we find the first version of what would become the standard account of truth as correspondence (*homoiôsis*), or, as Heidegger puts it, a kind of resemblance or alignment (*Angleichung*) (SZ 214) between experience and, as Aristotle says, “those things of which our experiences are the images (*homoiômata*).”<sup>8</sup>

What Heidegger describes in the lectures, then, is not the origin of the correspondence theory of truth, but the far more significant dawning of the idea that the essence of truth is not unconcealment but correctness. Again, Heidegger was wrong that the word *alêtheia* itself acquired a new meaning in Plato, a meaning he thinks it didn’t have for the Presocratics. He was arguably right, however, that Platonic philosophy represents a radical shift in our understanding of the essence of truth. For Plato, as for the subsequent tradition, including our own current scientific-technological culture, truth is correctness, nothing more or less. What is correctness?

Rightness or correctness (*Richtigkeit*) is arguably the most basic concept of truth explicit in ordinary understanding, and probably always has been. Knowledge has a

“direction” (*Richtung*); it is “directed” (*gerichtet*) straight at its object. “True” in this sense means *right*, which, like the German *recht*, originally meant, according to the *OED*, “Straight; not bent, curved, or crooked in any way”; “Direct, going straight towards its destination.” In Old English “wrong” occurred only as a noun meaning an injustice, but in Middle English the adjective meant “Having a crooked or curved course, form, or direction; twisted or bent in shape or contour; wry”; “Marked by deviation; deflected”; “Mis-shapen; deformed.” Hence the verb “to true,” which means “to place, adjust, or shape accurately; to give the precise required form or position to; to make accurately or perfectly straight, level, round, smooth, sharp, etc. as required.”

This understanding of truth as rightness over against wrongness, straight and direct as opposed to crooked and deviant, is plainly not the same as the concept of agreement or correspondence. It is also evidently a much more ancient notion. As Paul Friedländer observed, *pace* Heidegger, Homer already understood truth as correctness and always used *alêtheiê* and *alêthês* in connection with “verbs of assertion,” the object of which was not the unhidden, as Heidegger would have it, but – if such terms were negative at all, which Friedländer doubts – something more like “that which is not-crooked,” in contrast to “everything that disturbs, distorts, slants.”<sup>9</sup> In any case, Heidegger is right that Plato makes the image of direction or rectitude explicit and canonical in the theory of forms. Thus, in the allegory of the cave Socrates says, of the prisoner released from his bonds and now no longer captivated by the shadows but looking into the light, “that

now – because he is a bit closer to what is, and is turned toward things that *are* more – he sees more correctly (*orthotera*).”<sup>10</sup> In the same spirit, Socrates says in the *Theaetetus* that in false judgment, “like a bad archer, one shoots wide of the mark and misses.”<sup>11</sup>

The priority of rectitude to correspondence becomes clear, too, when we consider how naturally at home the former is in the expression of normative as well as factual truths. For while it remains a fruitless conundrum what in the world normative truths could be said to correspond to, we seem to have no trouble at all understanding wrongness as a kind of deviation, crookedness, or deformity.

The historical claim Heidegger is entitled to, then, is not that the meaning of the word *alêtheia* changed in the fourth or fifth century B.C.E., but that the ideal of theoretical correctness acquired centrality and prestige, a new intellectual and cultural authority it evidently lacked in the pre-Classical period. What interests Heidegger is not the history of the correspondence theory of truth – which is, after all, a pretty dismal affair – but a far more momentous event, namely the emergence of the scientific-theoretical understanding of truth as correctness.

Of correctness, moreover, Heidegger says two things: that it *is* a kind of uncovering, and that it is possible only *on the basis of* other, more primordial forms of unconcealment, ultimately on Dasein’s disclosedness. These were the middle two of the four claims I distinguished earlier:

- (2) that the truth of an assertion just *is* its uncovering an entity “in itself” (*an ihm selbst*);
- (3) that the being-uncovering of assertions is possible only on the basis of Dasein’s disclosedness or being-in-the-world.

What does it mean to say that correctness is itself a kind of uncovering? Does that claim constitute a substantive theory of truth?

No. To see why, it is important to see Heidegger’s account in its proper context, namely *phenomenology*. The immediate and decisive predecessor to Heidegger’s discussion is Husserl’s phenomenological description of truth as correspondence in Chapter 5 of the Sixth Logical Investigation, “The Ideal of Adequation: Self-Evidence and Truth.” There Husserl describes an experience of the coincidence or “convergence” (*Deckung*) of intending acts with “fulfilling” intuitions, paradigmatically perception. “The fulfilling function of perception,” he argues, indicates an “ideal of ultimate fulfillment” of intentions in intuitive “self-evidence” (*Evidenz*), which constitutes complete “adequation to the ‘thing itself’ (*die ‘Sache selbst’*).” He writes,

when a representational intention has attained final fulfillment through this ideally complete perception, then the genuine *adaequatio rei et intellectus* has been established: *the objectivity is really “present” or “given” exactly as it is intended*; no partial intention is further implied that lacks fulfillment.

“Self-evidence itself is,” he continues, “the act of the most complete synthesis of convergence.”<sup>12</sup> Husserl’s theory, then, is an analysis of “adequation” or correspondence

as the convergence or coincidence of the contents of signifying and fulfilling acts. Truth is the ideal point of complete coincidence of intentions and intuitions. Heidegger's example of turning around to see that the picture on the wall is indeed askew, just as one said it was, is thus in effect a concrete illustration of the gist of Husserl's theory.

But if this is a theory, what *kind* of theory is it, and what is it a theory *of*? Is it a version of the correspondence theory? Husserl's aim is to do justice to the intuition driving that theory, cash it out in experiential terms, and so render it phenomenologically respectable. But the account also bears a resemblance to Peirce's conception of truth as the ideal endpoint of inquiry, an ideal one can never claim to have arrived at once and for all, but a kind of asymptotic limit. Finally, one might reasonably insist that Husserl's account is really a version of the coherence theory, since "adequation" turns out to be an internal relation among the contents of intentional acts, not an external link between consciousness and reality itself. The fact is, virtually all theories of truth, even those intended as alternatives to the correspondence theory, try to do justice to the intuitive appeal of the idea of correspondence. Even the redundancy theory (which merely says, "*p* is true, if and only if *p*") purports to preserve all that is worth preserving in the idea of correspondence. This is why a deflationist like Paul Horwich can agree "that truths correspond to reality," while denying "that such correspondence is what truth essentially is."<sup>13</sup> Correspondence, on this view, reduces to something harmless, but trivial.

Is Husserl's theory a substantive theory of truth? Not exactly. It is, after all, part of a phenomenology of conscious experience. It is therefore doomed as a theory of truth for the same reason pragmatist and coherence theories are doomed. Why? Because, at the end of the day, everything they say about what constitutes truth is consistent in principle with the belief or proposition in question in fact being false. Such theories are plausible only to the extent that they adopt the same modesty that Horwich professes in his minimalist account, which does not purport to be a theory of some mysterious property called "truth," but merely describes and analyzes our use of the truth predicate. No more than that, Horwich insists, is either possible or necessary.<sup>14</sup> So too, it seems to me, Husserl's theory can only be an account of the kind of experience that *motivates* our calling a perception or a belief true. If Husserl intended it as more than that – well, add that to a long list of unfulfilled intentions.

Heidegger's account of truth, it seems to me, is descriptive, hence nontheoretical, in the same way. The account is meant not to explain what makes assertions true, but to describe the experiences and practices that *warrant* our calling them true, even if we turn out to be wrong. Indeed, Heidegger's account is even more obviously modest than Husserl's, since he says nothing about approximation to an ideal limit of perfect convergence and self-evidence, but says simply, "The assertion *is true* means it uncovers the entity in itself. It asserts, it indicates, it 'lets' the entity 'be seen' (*apophansis*) in its uncoveredness. The *being-true (truth)* of an assertion must be understood as *being-*

*uncovering*" (SZ 218). Surely he cannot have meant that every assertion that uncovers a state of affairs is *eo ipso* true. And yet this is what Wrathall's reading seems to imply. He writes, "An assertion most genuinely succeeds if it brings a state of affairs into unconcealment for thought."<sup>15</sup> Is uncovering therefore a sufficient condition for truth? If so, then an assertion's falsity implies that it doesn't uncover after all, however much it may *seem* to.

This consequence raises the specter of Ernst Tugendhat's classic objection to Heidegger's account of truth as unconcealment, namely, that it fails to distinguish truth from falsity.<sup>16</sup> Granted, it is hard not to regard other people's false beliefs as, so to speak, obstacles standing between them and the world, as somehow blocking their view of the way things really are. But surely there is also a sense in which false beliefs and assertions uncover things, that is, make them manifest, bring them to light – albeit as *other than* they are. Indeed, Heidegger himself says as much in *Being and Time* when he describes the obfuscating effect of falling (*Verfallen*) and *das Man*: "Entities are not completely hidden, but precisely uncovered, but at the same time obscured (*verstellt*); they show themselves – but in the mode of semblance (*Schein*)" (SZ 222). So, semblance or "seeming" (*Scheinen*), which Heidegger earlier defines as "what is (*Seiendes*) showing itself as what it is *not* in itself" (SZ 28), is a mode of uncovering, a kind of truth. Indeed, "Appearance and semblance are themselves founded, in different ways, in the



phenomenon" (SZ 31), that is, "that which shows itself in itself" (*das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende*) (SZ 28).

Similarly, in *The Essence of Truth* Heidegger insists not only that the prisoners in the cave regard the shadows of the puppets on the wall as "the true" – or as Heidegger has it, "the unconcealed" (*to alêthes*) (GA 34: 24) – but that Plato himself does. What Socrates actually says is that "what the prisoners would take for the true (*to alêthes*) is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts" (515c, translation modified). On Heidegger's reading, the prisoners are wrong to believe that "the true is nothing other than the shadows," but they are not wrong to regard the shadows themselves as (part of) "the true" (*to alêthes*) For if *alêthês* means unconcealed, then the shadows are indeed *alêtheis* – though of course, as we readers know, not to the same degree or clarity as objects outside the cave. This reading of the text may be dubious, but it is crucial to Heidegger's argument. On his account, what the prisoners see is *to alêthes*, since it is unconcealed to them. Indeed, for Heidegger's Plato,

from childhood on, man is already and in his nature set before the unconcealed. ... Even in this strange situation in the cave, man is ... directed to what is *before* him: *to alêthes*. It belongs to being human – and this is in the allegory already from the beginning – to stand in the unconcealed, or as we say, in the true, in truth. Being human means, however unusual the situation may be, not only but among other things, comporting oneself to the unconcealed. (GA 34: 25)

What matters to Heidegger's account of unconcealment, then – even here, where what is at issue is apparently true and false belief, correct and incorrect opinion – is the phenomenological standpoint of the prisoners themselves, not what we readers know about the objective wrongness or their view of things. Indeed, Heidegger worries that calling what the prisoners see “shadows” already misdescribes what is unconcealed to them in its unconcealment:

The prisoners indeed *see* the shadows, but not *as* shadows of something. When we say the shadows are for them the unconcealed, that is ambiguous, and we have already at bottom said *too much*. We, who already survey the entire situation, refer to what they have before them as shadows. ... it lies in the essence of their existence that precisely *this* unconcealed, which they have before them, *suffices* – so much so, that they don't even know *that* it suffices. They are given over to that which *immediately* confronts them. (GA 34: 26)

This suggests that the position of the prisoners is so impoverished, so “immediate,” that they do not even apprehend what is unconcealed *as* unconcealed. This is not to say that the shadows are *not* unconcealed to them, but that the contrast between concealment and unconcealment is itself concealed from them, so that unconcealment as such remains concealed from them.<sup>17</sup>

In any case, for Heidegger, unconcealment is as definitive of false beliefs and appearances as it is of the true and right manifestations of things as they are, of what shows itself “in itself.” Hence Tugendhat's charge that Heidegger's theory of truth fails,

since it fails to distinguish the true from the false. Tugendhat is not wrong about this, and indeed Heidegger himself eventually conceded the point.<sup>18</sup> The objection misses the mark, however, precisely because it assumes that Heidegger's account is meant to be a theory of truth, that is, a theory of correctness. Wrathall sees that this is mistaken and insists that, in Heidegger, "unconcealment is not to be taken as a (re)definition of propositional truth." But again, he goes on to say that for Heidegger, "An assertion most genuinely succeeds if it brings a state of affairs into unconcealment for thought."<sup>19</sup> That sounds an awful lot like an analysis of correctness, and moreover it seems to imply that failed assertions (which I assume means *false* assertions) fail by failing to bring things into unconcealment. But that is evidently not Heidegger's view.

It might be tempting to suppose that both true and false assertions uncover, but to different degrees – false assertions less, true assertions more. In this spirit, one might think, in *The Essence of Truth* Heidegger distinguishes between obscurity and opacity. Darkness can fail to make things visible, he says, precisely because what it is *is* insufficient light. A brick wall, by contrast, blocks vision, but since it is not the sort of thing that can make visible, neither can it be said to fail to do so. As Heidegger says, "Only that which is capable of affording can deny" (GA 34: 56). So, just by being in the business of uncovering, perhaps even false beliefs do at least a little bit of what true beliefs do more of, namely uncover entities.

But there are two reasons this cannot be right: one textual, the other systematic. The textual reason is Heidegger's fascinating – and, I think, compelling – suggestion that false belief uncovers not less but *differently* than true belief. Immediately following the remark I just quoted, he says, “The dark denies visibility because it can also afford vision: in the dark we see the stars” (GA 34: 56). Indeed, it is precisely the darkness of the cave that allows the prisoners to see the shadows on the wall; too much light would wash them out, just as daylight washes out the stars. What exactly do darkness and light stand for in this metaphor, which Heidegger here extends well beyond Plato's original text? It is hard to say exactly, but they cannot simply be synonymous with concealment and unconcealment, since the point is precisely that daylight conceals the stars while the dark of night uncovers them. I am not suggesting that light and darkness in this passage symbolize true and false belief, and nothing else. Nevertheless, false belief is *like* darkness inasmuch as it obstructs and denies the clearest, most correct view of things. And yet, like the darkness of the cave, it also brings things into unconcealment – not less than true belief, but in its own way.

Which brings me to the systematic reason it cannot be right to say simply that false beliefs or assertions uncover less than true ones do. Recall that Heidegger worries that to call the shadows in the cave “shadows” is to misdescribe the position of the prisoners, who do not, indeed *cannot*, see them *as* mere shadows. They *are* mere shadows, but they do not show themselves to the prisoners as such. Similarly, although it is obvious to us,

and to the prisoner who escapes, that those in the cave can see less and less well than those in daylight, it is wrong to say that they *merely* see less and less well. Rather, they see something different, and they see differently. This is not to relativize the two points of view. Cave vision is inferior to vision in daylight, even if that fact only becomes obvious in daylight. The point is rather that cave vision as such, like false belief and assertion, in spite of its objective inferiority, affords those who have it genuine access to the world. Cave vision is kind of vision, after all, and as such presents itself to its owners not as degraded or inferior, but as transparent and revealing. Again, this is why in *Being and Time* Heidegger defines mere “seeming” (*Scheinen*) as “what is (*Seiendes*) showing itself as what it is *not* in itself” (SZ 28). Someone who *has* a false belief, or is committed to a false assertion, that is, understands and experiences the world *through* it, by means of it, in its light. This is consistent with those of us who know better recognizing how the attitude or utterance fails to uncover things as they really are – that is, as *we* know them to be, thanks to *our* beliefs, which we cannot regard as false, so long as they remain ours.

Simply put, mere degree or intensity of uncovering cannot serve as a criterion of correctness for the simple reason that uncovering is a phenomenological notion and correctness is not. Uncovering is something in principle manifest from the first-person point of view. The being-uncovering of my attitudes or utterances cannot be held hostage to a third-person standpoint unavailable to me, as the rightness of my actions and the correctness of my assertions can be. My actions can always turn out to have been

wrong, and my assertions false, regardless of how they struck me when I performed them; rightness as such has no phenomenological criteria. As Wittgenstein say, "An inner experience cannot show me that I *know* something."<sup>20</sup> He could have dropped the word "inner" and said simply that no experience at all, no *phenomenon*, can show me that I know something, for truth is not a function of the way things show up for me, but whether the way they show up for me is the way they *are*. Attitudes and utterances, by contrast, cannot wholly fail to uncover entities while seeming to do so from the first-person perspective, for again, *having* beliefs and being *committed* to assertions are precisely ways of encountering entities. They are, as Heidegger says, modes of being-in-the-world.

Which brings me, finally, to my main point. The problem facing Heidegger's account is this. How can the correctness of an assertion *consist in* its being-uncovering, given that both correct and incorrect assertions uncover? What is the relation between uncovering and correctness? On the one hand, uncovering cannot be a *sufficient* condition for correctness, since both correct and incorrect assertions uncover, though in different ways. On the other hand, to say that uncovering is merely a *necessary* condition for correctness tells us nothing about what specifically distinguishes the true from the false, that is, the correct from the incorrect.

The solution to the problem, I think, is to say that the being-uncovering of assertions is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for their actual correctness, but rather a

necessary (but insufficient) condition for our *regarding* them as correct. What kind of condition? In a word, *commitment*. Our regarding assertions as true is possible only on the basis of *making* them, that is, committing ourselves to them in linguistic practice. In the analogous case of belief, commitment just means *having* the belief: you must have a belief in order to regard it as true, though you need not regard it as true in order to have it.<sup>21</sup>

The acute reader will have surmised I have been referring throughout to belief and assertion indifferently in order to sidestep the vexed question of how the two are related. In *Being and Time* Heidegger gives pride of place to assertion and hardly mentions belief, since he thinks cognition is grounded in the pragmatic context of being-in-the-world. Belief looks more conducive to my argument, however, since one apparently cannot regard a belief as true without actually *having* it, though one can regard a proposition as true without actually *asserting* it. For present purposes, though, I think the difference makes no difference. Put in more pragmatic terms, my claim is that, as a matter of general principle, the collective practice of *regarding* assertions as true is possible only on the basis of a collective practice of *making* assertions. In both cognitive and pragmatic domains, that is, *deeming* or *holding true* is parasitic on the more fundamental phenomenon of *commitment*, whether in belief or in speech.

Identifying the disclosive function of belief and assertion with our *commitment* to them – that is, our *making* the assertion, our *having* the belief – solves the problem of the

relation between uncovering and correctness. For it allows us to say both that false beliefs do indeed uncover entities, namely for those who *have* them, and that the being-uncovering of a belief is bound up with its being true as opposed to false, since we can *regard* beliefs as true only because we can *have* them. Indeed, as G. E. Moore observed, it is impossible to have a belief one considers false, for to regard it as false is precisely no longer to *have* it. Consequently, although we can regard false beliefs as uncovering entities *to others*, inasmuch as they have those beliefs, we cannot regard them as revealing the world *to us*. To say that uncovering is a condition of correctness, then, is to say neither that only true beliefs uncover entities nor that both true and false beliefs do so indifferently, but that *having* beliefs is a condition for regarding beliefs as true. It would be getting the phenomena backwards to suppose that we have beliefs *because* we regard them as true, as if the *commitment* to the belief were the consequence of a prior judgment concerning its truth.

To say that uncovering is grounded in Dasein's disclosedness or being-in-the-world, then, is to indicate the primacy of the *first person* as an ontological structure making intelligible the very idea that perceptions, beliefs, and assertions reveal the world at all, to anyone. Beliefs and assertions uncover entities, that is, only because human beings disclose worlds. Beliefs uncover entities to us in virtue of our *having* them, just as assertions uncover entities in virtue of our *making* them. Having beliefs and making



assertions are modes of being-in-the-world that allow such actions and attitudes to draw things out into the light, even in the cave of ignorance and error.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §230 (my translation); *Kritische Studienausgabe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., C. Colli and M. Montinari, eds. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), vol. 5, 169–70.
- <sup>2</sup> Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” *Holzwege*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1980), 100; “The Age of the World Picture,” *Off the Beaten Track*, J. Young and K. Haynes, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 77.
- <sup>3</sup> Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*. *Gesamtausgabe* 34, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Freiburg lectures, winter 1931–32 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1997), 12. Hereafter GA 34.
- <sup>4</sup> *Übereinstimmung* is usually translated as “agreement.” But since “correspondence” is the standard English equivalent in philosophical discourse, I will use it instead.
- <sup>5</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1927; 15<sup>th</sup> ed. 1979), 218. Hereafter SZ.
- <sup>6</sup> Wrathall, “Unconcealment.” *A Companion to Heidegger*, H. Dreyfus and M. Wrathall, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 338.
- <sup>7</sup> Heidegger, “Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit,” *Wegmarken*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978), 232; “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” *Pathmarks*, W. McNeill, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 179.
- <sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, E. M. Edghill, trans.; *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, R. McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 1941), 16a6.
- <sup>9</sup> Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*. H. Meyerhoff, trans. (New York: Harper, Bollingen, 1958), 223. Friedländer willingly adds “or conceals” because his point is that *alêtheia* was not semantically secondary to or parasitic on concealment. My point is just the evident archaic emphasis on truth as direction or rectitude. I am not suggesting that the image of straightness was primary or exclusive; in Greek, apparently, as in English, ethical and legal notions of honesty and reliability were at least as fundamental. Of course, such ethical concepts are themselves also deeply bound up with images of straightness and direction.
- <sup>10</sup> Plato, *Republic*, C. D. C. Reeve, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 515d.
- <sup>11</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*. J. McDowell, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 194a.
- <sup>12</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1900–1; 6<sup>th</sup> ed. 1980), II/2 (§37), 116, 119, 118, 122.. *Logical Investigations*. 2 vols. J. N. Findlay, trans. (London: Routledge, 1970; 2001).
- <sup>13</sup> Horwich, *Truth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford, 1998), 116. Thus, seemingly tautological formulations in Plato and Aristotle, construed by some as statements of the correspondence theory, can also be read, not implausibly, as anticipations of the redundancy theory. See Plato, *Cratylus* 385b2 and *Sophist* 263b; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1011b25.

- <sup>14</sup> Of course, Horwich's minimalism is theoretically ambitious in its own way, since, in helping itself to propositions, it takes their contents for granted and so stands in need of a theory of meaning. See therefore Horwich, *Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford, 1998).
- <sup>15</sup> Wrathall, "Unconcealment," 345.
- <sup>16</sup> Tugendhat, *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967), 329 *et passim*; "Heidegger's Idea of Truth," *Critical Heidegger*, C. Macann, ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 233 *et passim*.
- <sup>17</sup> These remarks echo what Heidegger says elsewhere about the "world poverty" of animals. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt-Endlichkeit-Einsamkeit. Gesamtausgabe* 29/30. Freiburg lectures, winter 1929–30 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983); *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. W. McNeill and N. Walker, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
- <sup>18</sup> In the 1964 essay, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," Heidegger writes, "In any case, one thing is clear: the question of *alêtheia*, of unconcealment as such, is not the question of truth. For this reason, it was inadequate and hence misleading to call *alêtheia* in the sense of lighting or clearing (*Lichtung*) 'truth.' ... The natural concept of truth does not mean unconcealment, not even in the philosophy of the Greeks." *Zur Sache des Denkens*, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Niemayer, 2000), 77; cf. *Time and Being*, J. Stambaugh, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 70.
- <sup>19</sup> Wrathall, "Unconcealment," 340–1. Wrathall (rightly) criticizes Tugendhat's approach in "Heidegger and Truth as Correspondence," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 7 (1999): 69.
- <sup>20</sup> Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §569.
- <sup>21</sup> Here I am denying what Donald Davidson calls, with tentative approval, "a redundancy theory of belief," namely, "that to believe that *p* is not to be distinguished from the belief that *p* is true." "Thought and Talk," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 170. Davidson invokes the theory to support his thesis that "a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another" (157). It seems to me, conversely, that the fact that animals and prelinguistic children do indeed have beliefs of some kind, however rudimentary, renders the theory untenable. One man's *modus ponens*, as they say.