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Martin Heidegger's principle of identity: On belonging and *Ereignis*

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This article discusses Martin Heidegger's interpretation of Parmenides given in his last public lecture "The Principle of Identity" in 1957. The aim of the piece is to illustrate just how original and significant Heidegger's reading of Parmenides and the principle of identity is, within the history of philosophy. Thus the article will examine the traditional metaphysical interpretation of Parmenides, and consider G. W. F. Hegel and William James' account of the principle of identity in light of this. It will then consider Heidegger's contribution, his return to and re-interpretation of Parmenides in his last lecture. Heidegger will, through the Parmenidean claim that "Thinking and Being are one", deconstruct the traditional metaphysical understanding of the principle of identity, and in its place offer a radically different conception of how our relationship, our "belonging together" with Being can be understood.

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"Mon Dieu! how the time passes!" Nothing could have been more commonplace than this remark; but its utterance coincided for me with a moment of vision. It's extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Perhaps it's just as well; and it may be that it is this very dullness that makes life to the incalculable majority so supportable and so welcome. Nevertheless, there can be but few of us who had never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much – everything – in a flash – before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence (Conrad 2012, 709).

Introduction

This paper will discuss one of the most ancient and persistent metaphysical problems, the principle of identity. It will do so with the context of the history of philosophy, examining how the problem has been construed in Parmenides, G. W. F. Hegel, William James and Martin Heidegger. Succinctly, the principle concerns the nature of a thing with itself – that every thing is the same as itself; that it is in unity with itself. The technical formulation of this principle is typically rendered as A = A, meaning that every A is identical with itself.[1] The principle is meant as a universal metaphysical law which describes how reality is and remains consistent, uniform and predictable. However, once this initial part of the principle is accepted, it leads to the second: if every being is identical with itself, then identity is a feature of all things that exist. This means that, though things appear distinct, all share the universal trait of identity and thus, necessarily, existence. Amidst the seemingly infinite number of objects, physical and imaginary, from the Many we can discern the One.

However, this leaves us with a persistent metaphysical paradox: is reality fundamentally One or Many? How is reality's simultaneousness sameness and difference possible? Throughout the history of philosophy this central problem of Western metaphysics has been grappled with in various ways.

1 Leibniz was the first to formulate it in this way; see Leibniz ([1686] 1989, 30). Another formulation is "There is an *x* such that *x* is identical to itself"; see Munitz (1974, 149).

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We will see, discussed in this paper, the Parmenidian claim that reality, in spite of its seeming multitude of difference, is fundamentally one. Conversely, for example, one finds in the work of Gilles Deleuze (1994) the claim for a new metaphysics, not founded on sameness, but fundamental difference. Modern analytic philosophy calls this the problem of the "nature of relations" and asks whether the shared properties different objects have necessarily implies that underlying this sharedness is an "all inclusive whole" to which these objects all belong (Honderich 2005, 799).[2]

The first part of this paper will discuss how the principle of identity is developed in some select thinkers, namely Parmenides, Hegel and James. The main reason for this selection is because these philosophers specifically approach the principle of identity through the language of the "One/Many" dichotomy. Their various approaches are also framed by uninterrogated metaphysical assumptions which Heidegger will show are deeply problematic. Thus drawing out this particular way of posing the problem is helpful in demonstrating what is revolutionary in Heidegger's conception of the principle, and how it contrasts and undermines previous conceptions of it. This discussion will form the second part of the paper. The essential claim will be that while Parmenides, Hegel and James all treat the problem of the One and the Many as *the* central problem of metaphysics, Heidegger's interpretation is so radical that the principle is rendered superfluous, another casualty of his destruction of metaphysics. In the wake of this destruction, what emerges is a conception of human existence which, to Heidegger's thinking, offers a more genuine understanding of what our human condition is, and what our "nearness" to, or "belonging together" with Being means. This is an understanding which overcomes the metaphysical strictures of the principle of identity itself. The term Heidegger uses to describe this "belonging together", as the second part of the paper will explore, is *Ereignis*.

The motivation for this discussion comes from Heidegger's last public lecture, "The Principle of Identity", delivered on the 500th anniversary of the University of Freiburg in 1957.[3] In the lecture Heidegger, taking his lead from Parmenides, radically reinterprets the principle of identity. Joan Stambaugh, who translated the text into English, states that Heidegger told her that he considered it to be the most important thing he had published since *Being and Time*, which appeared in 1927 (1969, 7). In spite of Heidegger's own high regard for this piece, many Heideggerians have not fully engaged with its importance. Those few that have, particularly Stambaugh (1969) and Joseph Kockelmans (1984) have done so meticulously, but with a tendency to analyse the lecture only within the framework of Heidegger's own thought.[4] The aim of this paper is, rather, to situate Heidegger's essay more fully within the history of philosophy, in order to not only explicate his understanding of the principle of identity, but also emphasise how original it is, when compared with the work of his philosophical peers. Thus the trajectory of this paper will move through the history of philosophy, considering Parmenides, Hegel and James's grappling with the principle of identity, and then Heidegger's.

Part One

One of the earliest engagements with the problem of the One and the Many is found in Parmenides of Elea's metaphysical poem, "On Nature". The poem, of which only fragments remain, tells of a chariot drawn from night into day, from non-Being into Being. The charioteer, Parmenides, encounters a goddess who offers him counsel and teaches him about the truth of what is. She proposes two competing, mutually exclusive claims: firstly "That *Being Is, and is not not-to-be*!" and secondly that "*There is no Being! There must not ever be!*" (Henn 2003, 25; original emphasis). She urges him to accept the first claim, stating that the second is held by mortals who have "strayed / Alone in ambiguity" (25). She promises that through contemplation and reason, Parmenides will gain knowledge of "presences steadfastly fixed, yet all / Removed from obviousness" (25). The

2 See also Williams (1989) and, for a recent discussion on this issue, Priest (2014).

3 This piece, "*Der Satz der Identität*" was translated into English by Joan Stambaugh in 1969, appearing in the slim volume *Identity and Difference* (1969), published originally in 1957 as *Identität und Differenz* (the lecture can also be found in *Gesamtausgabe* 11 and 79). A recent English translation of "The Principle of Identity" can be found in Heidegger's *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* (2012a).

4 Even texts such as Young's *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* (2002) and Braver's *Heidegger's Later Writings* (2009) are not particularly attentive to this lecture.

goddess characterises Being as the omni-temporal essence which founds and grounds the temporal, fleeting world of appearance. The poem can be interpreted as offering a proto-Platonism, arguing that finite human experience is underpinned by a "sourceless, ceaseless Being" which "subsists in one ubiquitous / Now – unitary and continuous" (26–27). The difference between Parmenides and Plato is that Parmenides holds to an absolute monism – reality is considered one without differentiation – whereas Plato understands Being as a genus universally common, manifest in each instance as an ideal form (Sheehan 2015, 47).[5] For Parmenides, mortals, through wisdom, can discern this truth of Being, in spite of the immediate experience of a world of appearance and its constant changing.

The traditional interpretation of Parmenides is that wisdom allows man "to see the macrocosm of the All within the microcosm of the mind" (Henn 2003, 38–39). Initial human experience finds these claims counterintuitive, for reality is perceived as ceaseless becoming, each instant obliterated and absorbed into the next. Human existence is itself marked by finitude, in the form of natality and death. Thus, the appearance of reality may lead mortals (as the goddess says) to "stray into ambiguity", and to convince themselves that our transitory existence is surrounded by an abyss of nothingness, a proliferation of endless unceasing difference. But for Parmenides this is false knowledge, opinion. The changing world, as perceived by the senses, is unreal (Guthrie 1969, 4). What is real is the "Being of all things" which is "unitary in form, eternal, and infinite; but this same Being is perceived by the senses in terms of individual beings" (Henn 2003, 36). We experience Being in the form of beings, things which are materially manifold, distinct, temporal, quantifiable, and finite. *But* these forms are universally shared by physical things. Thus, in spite of the many separate objects which surround us, the poem, as traditionally read, wants to teach us that "beings cannot claim the worldly essences that belong peculiarly and severally to them without there necessarily existing a transworldly, sourceless, and timeless Essence which gives of itself in the now" (Henn 2003, 36). This timeless essence, for Parmenides, is reality which is fundamentally "one and undivided, ungenerated and everlasting, homogeneous, motionless and not subject to growth or change" (Palmer 2009, 13). This typical metaphysical explanation of the nature of reality, which, as we will see, Heidegger will resist and undermine, falls into distinguishing between Being and becoming, a dualism which haunts the history of philosophy in various guises.

Thus, read in this way, Parmenides generates one of the great, enduring philosophical questions: is reality One or Many? Is there, in spite of the manifold essences which we experience and which melt away in time, a singular Essence, an enduring, eternal, unified fabric of reality? Our immediate obstacle to perceiving this essence is that we already find ourselves inhabiting a veil of appearance which separates us from the infinite. We succumb to the illusionary and false belief that worldly, temporal experience is the only reality, and are both consumed and absorbed with controlling and ordering it. However, through following the Way of Truth in the poem, the mortal mind can recognise the "eternal Essence of all that is" (Henn 2003, 23).

We see this concern carried through in Hegel's *The Science of Logic* ([1812] 2010) where we encounter a discussion of the One and the Many within the broader claims of German Idealism. These claims are, essentially, that reality is not only understood and shaped by the mind, but rather *is* mind, and thus fundamentally rational and logical in nature. We see here an echo of the Parmenidean claim repeating itself, that reason will allow us to discern ultimate reality. However, an important distinction between Parmenides and Hegel is their understanding of what ultimate reality looks like. Both hold to monism, but for Parmenides, Being is a unified, timeless essence, unchanging and singular. For Hegel, Being is the unfolding of "spirit", dynamic, self-conscious life moving through time teleologically, guided by the logic of dialectics, but underpinned by fundamental unity (Burbidge 1999, 93). Hegel makes this distinction explicit stating that the ancient proposition that "*the many is one*" is a truth which can only be fully expressed as a "becoming", through repulsion and attraction, not, as we see it characterised in Parmenides, as "Being", and "inert unity" ([1812] 2010, 140).

5 The problematics of this difference form part of the Platonic dialogue, *Parmenides*. Parmenides appears as the main character in discussion with a young Socrates. The discussion centres round the question of the existence of forms in their plurality and unity. Essentially, Parmenides questions and problematises Socrates' theory of forms and their relation to physical, perceptible reality, forcing Socrates to re-evaluate his theory; see Plato (1997).

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Hegel is concerned with making the rational fabric of Being more intuitable through an account of the science of logic itself, by uncovering the essential structures of thought which are already always presupposed by the act of thinking ([1812] 2010, 23). The logical patterns of thought, its rules and laws, are not plainly given, but require transcendent reflection. Discerning the science of thought is one and the same as discerning the framework of reality. While Parmenides requires the help of the goddess, Hegel is able to achieve this by means of the unfailing rigorousness of his dialectic method, and its seemingly irrefutable logical pattern, grounded in rationality. Reason moves through concepts, drawing out their differences, while maintaining the integrity of their relation, creating a complex, comprehensive design which is fundamentally a unity. These are thought processes which shape the conceptions we have of the world (Burbidge 1999, 92). Thus Hegel's approach to accounting for the One and the Many is inscribed in metaphysical reality. While James will approach the issue in a different way, the same metaphysical biases will persist, and it is these assumptions which Heidegger will argue are deeply misleading. He will return us to, and then go beyond his version of Parmenides, a "pre-metaphysical thinker" (Stambaugh 1969, 8).

In book one of *The Science of Logic*, Hegel discusses the One and the Many, beginning with the ontological structure of reality which he approaches through three determinations: quality, quantity and measure ([1812] 2010, 56). He situates the seeming distinction between the One and the Many as one aspect of the quality of Being. This distinction develops through three successive stages. The first is "The One in Its Own Self", the second "The One and the Void", and the third "Many Ones". Initially the one is given in its "simple immediacy" and "*posited in-itselfness*" (133; original emphasis). In this simple immediacy it is self-referring, and all possible differences vanish into the one. Thus, in the one is *nothing* for no other relationship is possible. As Winfield writes, there "can be nothing in the one but the void, because otherwise relation to [an] other would re-enter and cancel the self-relation" (2012, 117). The void is the negative self-reference of the one, the "not-one". For Hegel the "void is thus the *quality* of the one in its immediacy" ([1812] 2010, 133; original emphasis).

Hegel goes on to develop the relationship between the one and the void which is characterised initially as "repulsion" (135). This is because they exist in negation to each other (Carlson 2007, 117). However, this process of negation and repulsion brings forth a multiplicity of ones, thus creating the quality of many.[6] Nonetheless what underlies this plurality of ones is that "they are all *the same*" (Hegel [1812] 2010, 139; original emphasis). This means that, while the generation of a plurality of ones occurs because of repulsion, what underpins this plurality, the many ones as one, is attraction. Thus Hegel contends that this multiplicity exists fundamentally as a unified whole, one affirmative unity (139).[7] While this discussion of the One/Many dichotomy in Hegel is brief, it suffices to illustrates how he thinks about the problem of the One and the Many within the strictures of metaphysics, using logic and dialectics as a way to solve it, and arguing fundamentally for a dynamic monism.

The last person to consider in the first part of this discussion is an early American contemporary of Heidegger's, William James, who also reflects explicitly on the One and the Many within the development of his pragmatic method. James writes that after "long brooding over it" he considers it to be the "most central of all philosophic problems" ([1907] 1987, 542). For James, the value of the issue, like any metaphysical issue, can be determined by adhering to this pragmatic method, which aims to trace the practical consequences of holding one belief instead of another. If no practical difference results, then the "dispute is idle" (506). He follows Charles Peirce, who essentially argues that our beliefs are really rules for action, i.e. what would the outcome be if the beliefs we hold were enacted? (506). Thus James asks the question: if the world is one, then what of it? What facts will be different in consequence? *How* is the world one? And what is the practical value of this oneness for us? (543).

The discussion he offers is an overview of why reality could be considered one unity, as opposed to many irreconcilable pluralities. James offers a number of arguments, some with merit, but

6 How this takes place is very detailed and complex, beyond the scope of this paper. See Hegel ([1812] 2010, 135–137) for the argument and Carlson (2007, 117–120) additional explanation.

7 See also Carlson (2007, 121–124).

remains, from a pragmatic position, unconvinced that absolute monism holds unequivocally. He begins by stating that the "world is at least one subject of discourse", meaning, simply, that if the "manynesses" of reality were utterly irreconcilable, then our minds could not express the whole of them at once. Words we use, such as "world", "universe" or "cosmos", which intend to convey the wholeness of reality, would be impossible and incomprehensible to think or articulate, because the experience of such a complex plurality would prevent the intuition of such an idea of wholeness ([1907] 1987, 544).

Another argument he offers for the unity of reality is the continuity of the universe, the way different parts of it all "*hang together*" (544–545; original emphasis). Space and time are the underlying fabric of this continuity, and all movement follows the order that these two structures allow. Within this framework exist the innumerable relationships and connections created by human efforts to unify the world in definite systematic ways. We can consider the world economy or the internet as contemporary examples of this global entanglement, the whole system greater than the sum of its parts.

James also raises a claim for the world's causal unity and the possibility of a single causal origin, and another for what he calls "generic unity", the notion that things exist in kinds and that logic works by "predicating of the single instance what is true of all its kind" (546). If the world consisted of singular, unique entities, each unlike the next, our logic would be useless. This position of generic unity implies the possibility of one "*summon genus*" which all things, without exception, could be subsumed into (547). The difficulty and ambiguity surrounding a "*summon genus*" is very much at the forefront of Heidegger's *Being and Time* when he begins his exposition of the question of the meaning of Being ([1927] 1996, 2). The last argument James entertains is that of "*the one Knower*", an omniscient Being who is all-enveloping. For a pragmatist, who is interested in the consequences of belief, if there were certain proof of this Absolute Being the consequences would be far-reaching. Certainly a great deal of history has been structured according to this belief.

The point that underlies all these various arguments supporting monism is that, while they can be entertained in an abstract and intellectual way, none offers the kind of certainty and proof which should cause us to act upon them. While many live as if some of these monist claims are true, for a pragmatist that does not mean that the claims necessarily are. "Truth" James writes "*happens* to an idea", through this a process verifies itself ([1907] 1987, 574; original emphasis). Thus the criterion is whether the theories make a "practical difference" and they do not. The pragmatist must

> equally abjure absolute monism and absolute pluralism. The world is one just so far as its parts hang together by any definite connection. It is many just so far as any definite connection fails to obtain. And finally it is growing more and more unified by those systems of connection at least which human energy keeps framing as time goes on (554).

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Part Two

What is important to note is that James, like Hegel and the traditional reading of Parmenides we have encountered, falls into the same metaphysical framework which dictates how this problem of identity is depicted, as one which tries to negotiate between describing reality as either One or Many – and it is this very structure Heidegger will attack. As is often typical of his later philosophy, he draws us back to the ancient Greeks in order to do this. One reason for this return is that Heidegger thought the ancient Greek artists and thinkers were "gifted with a sense of the excess of meaningful presence" and were able to convey something of this presence through their work (Sheehan 2015, 252). By returning and re-interpreting their work one can potentially discern something of this presence, which the history of philosophy has neglected, overlooked or appropriated as metaphysics. The text in discussion here, "The Principle of Identity", focusses on a radical re-interpretation of Parmenides, which, as mentioned earlier, Heidegger considered to be the most important text he had published since *Being and Time*.

Why is this text so important? Essentially it offers a succinct drawing together of the major themes of Heidegger's thinking, centred on his destruction of metaphysics. The principle of the identity is discussed which draws us back to the spirit of Parmenides, and reveals that our

traditional metaphysical understanding of the One and the Many, identity and difference is in fact a *perspective* on Being rather than a principle characterising Being. Heidegger argues that our traditional metaphysical interpretation of these issues leads to a way of thinking about reality which obscures the meaning of Being itself, which falls into oblivion. He suggests that when we think about something, the act of thinking itself changes the nature of the thing thought about ([1957] 1969, 23). This is the case with our metaphysical preconception of how we understand Being. The history of philosophy thinks about Being as a problem or paradox in terms of the One and the Many, or identity. But this changes the nature of the thing thought about in such a way that the problem of identity *becomes* the way that Being is defined and understood. In this sense, Heidegger's return to the pre-Socratic Parmenides both reverses traditional metaphysics and revitalises an ancient way of thinking. This, in turn, provides a bridge to a new way of thinking about Being, one which entails the transcending of or "twisting free" from [*Verwindung*] metaphysics, and so the end of philosophy (Heidegger [1961] 1973, 37, 66, 101; Heidegger [1955] 1998, 313).

The discussion to follow will provide a strong example of this process of "destruction" of the history of philosophy, in order to remove the "pile of distortions" which metaphysics has constructed, which cover up the "primordial essence of Being" according to Heidegger ([1961] 1973, 14). While he considered the ancient Greek experience of Being to be more "potent" than ours, even Parmenides and Heraclitus, who both intuited the "all-enabling openness" of the ground of Being, failed themselves to "inquire into *what* accounts for that openness" (Sheehan 2015, 78; emphasis added). Thus the question concerning the meaning of Being is precisely *this* question for Heidegger, which even the pre-Socratics failed to fully articulate. With this in mind, let us consider the lecture "The Principle of Identity".

The lecture begins by questioning what Heidegger terms "the highest principle of thought": A = A ([1957] 1969, 23). The problem with this traditional formulation of the principle of identity is that it expresses a relationship of equality, not a relationship of identity. It does not define A as the same as itself, but rather states that the depiction of the A on the left side of the equation is equivalent or equal to the A on the right side. This formation, A = A, in fact *conceals* what the very principle is attempting to say, that "every A is itself the same with itself" (25). What the principle is meant to tell us is how every being is; "it itself is the same with itself. The principle of identity speaks of the Being of beings" (26).

Heidegger then elaborates on the accepted understanding of the principle of identity, reiterating how this formulation is generally understood. What is said is that every thing is itself the same as itself. Every object identifies with itself; this is a constant, consistent and predictable law of reality which we see stated explicitly as far back as Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1991, book 7, §6), though we find the first actual formulation of this principle, in the way Heidegger depicts it, in the work of Leibniz ([1686] 1989, 30). To every being belongs identity, the unity of the thing with itself. Thus, all beings share Being; all beings are grounded by their being in Being. Though we are surrounded by a plethora of different objects, physical and imaginary, we can discern one principle which unites them. Thus, the law of identity, the "highest principle of thought", directs us to the meaning of Being itself, and the primordial relationship between beings and Being. When Heidegger writes this in "The Principle of Identity", he is echoing the claim made in *Being and Time* that "Being is always the being of a being" ([1927] 1996, 7). From the Many can always be discerned the One. The law of identity is that the unity of a thing with itself is also its unity with Being. So far, Heidegger restates the traditional metaphysical reading of Parmenides' monism.

However, at this point he begins refuting and confounding this traditional argument. He takes this principle to be deeply misconstrued because it creates a profound ambiguity which runs through all metaphysics. The claim of "unity", which implies a thing's oneness with itself, also necessary implies its oneness with Being, thus creating two different "onenesses", *in spite* of the claim of unity. Unity, as it appears in these metaphysical discussions of identity or the One and the Many, is actually, paradoxically, a relationship grounded in difference ([1961] 1973, 33).

To overcome this fundamental ambiguity Heidegger returns us to a line in Parmenides' poem, reverberating down through 2 500 years of philosophy: "Thinking and Being are one and the same" (Heidegger [1957] 1969, 27; Henn 2003, 25). For Heidegger, Parmenides means to convey not only

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that Being is truth, but that this truth is fundamentally thought itself. Being does not merely shape thinking such that human reason is able to contemplate it, meaning that through our experience of the Many we can discern the One. This is the kind of interpretation Henn and other commentators on Parmenides' poem develop. Rather, Being and thought *are* the same fabric of reality. Significantly for Heidegger, this sameness is *not* the same as identity, which, as indicated earlier, is paradoxically grounded in difference. Rather, as I will shortly more fully explain, it is a "belonging together" of man and Being, a relation which Heidegger calls a "unification into a unity" that is meant to transcend the principle of identity as we have encountered it ([1957] 1969, 25).

To reinforce this point we find, for example, one commentator writing that Parmenides cannot literally mean that thinking and Being are identical – whereas, for Heidegger, this is *exactly* what Parmenides means, but only when we re-conceptualise the notion of identity as sameness (Waterfield 2000, 51). The gift of Being is not that we can discern it as something external, outside temporal reality, *but* that it already exists for us as thought itself; it is, in an axiomatic sense, us. This claim is meant to go beyond and overcome any uninterrogated metaphysical framework which shapes our understanding of reality, frameworks apparent in the thinkers already discussed. These preconceptions are deliberately what Heidegger works to overcome through his re-appropriation of Parmenides' claim, writing that

> identity speaks from the Being of beings. However, where the Being of beings appears, most early and most authentically in thought – with Parmenides – there speaks τὸ αὐτό, [thisness/sameness] that which is identical, in a way that is almost too powerful ([1957] 1969, 27).

He claims an originary status for Parmenides' formulation that thinking and Being are the same for it is the most *authentic* thought, the most authentic thought Western philosophy has thought. The originary power of τὸ αὐτό is profoundly disruptive, for it cuts across the history of philosophy leaving a trail of hollowed-out metaphysics.

In the course of this piece we have encountered various discussions which have examined the relationship between Being and beings, between the One and the Many. Henn draws out the distinction between eternal and fleeting reality. Socrates, in the *Parmenides*, is perplexed by this distinction. Hegel attempts to sublate it dialectically. James remains sceptical that adherence to either the One or the Many is ultimately convincing. In all these examples, the principle of identity is discussed *as a feature* which *belongs to* our intrinsic understanding of Being. To think about Being and its relationship to beings is "naturally" to think about the problem within the language of a metaphysical dualism. But Heidegger claims that this is *not* actually what Parmenides is saying. Rather, the claim that thinking and Being are the same

> says something else – it says that Being, together with thinking, belongs in the Same. Being is determined by an identity as a characteristic of that identity. Later on, however, identity as it is thought of in metaphysics is represented as a characteristic of Being. Thus we must not try to determine the identity that Parmenides speaks of in terms of this metaphysically represented identity ([1957] 1969, 28).

To say that Being and thinking are the Same is not to represent the "together" of man and Being "as a coordination and to establish and explain this coordination" (Heidegger [1957] 1969, 30). *Rather*, it is to say that "Man *is* essentially this relationship of responding to Being, and [s]he is only this…Man and Being are appropriated to each other. They belong to each other" (31–32; original emphasis). We "stubbornly misunderstand this prevailing *belonging* together of man and Being as long as we represent everything only in categories and mediations" (32; original emphasis).

It is difficult to fully articulate this *belonging together* that Heidegger describes, for human experience is characterised by difference and separateness – hence the reason we have puzzled over the question of the One and the Many for as long as we have asked it. Another metaphor which may be helpful in expressing this relationship is a house (an image upon which Heidegger often draws). Heidegger writes about a house as something that is "gathered" together from all the aspects of its production. While the house appears "at rest", this "rest" is a result of the movements which produced it; rest "preserves the completion of what is moved" ([1961] 1973, 5). In this

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sense the house is an "emergent presencing" of what is concealed, the completed boundary point of the meeting of the raw materials of the earth, human intellect, labour, and the need for shelter. Thus the house is a thing "at rest as work" (5).[8] The *belonging together* is both the actual and possible, the thing at rest, working. Furthermore, a boundary, as Heidegger says elsewhere, is not where something stops, but where something "*begins its presencing*" ([1954] 1975, 152; original emphasis). We build, to use a central idea in his later work, for the sake of dwelling (148); the completion of a house is not where its purpose ends, but rather where it truly begins.

Human existence can also be characterised in some of these ways. We are also a "site" which gathers together possibilities, some which are realised, others which fall away to nothingness. Our possibilities extend far beyond the houses we build, to include concepts and languages, actions and practices, cultures and life-worlds. Thus we are both the encapsulation and furthering of Being, the horizon point or boundary which, as we travel towards it, always reveals more of itself as it recedes ever away. We are not merely thing-like, in the way a house is, but have the capability to produce, or rather, "unconceal" things themselves, giving them a life of their own – a life reflected in and through ours. "Belonging together" is the inextricable and tangible relationship we are with the world. It is a relationship irreducible to metaphysical "categories and mediations" and grasping this relationship dispels any claims to some supra-noumenon. We are not merely the pinhole in the camera through which the real projects itself, but are ourselves both the camera and the real. Our existence encompasses both the actual and the possible, as a radiating presencing which is not limited to that which is present, but is interwoven out of and in temporality, out of the created past and the uncreated future. Just as the house's foundation gives it structure and permanence in order that it may fulfil its role as a dwelling place, so too is our being grounded by our historicity, but opened out through thrownness and care, our orientation to be in the world. Thus our "belonging together" is not derived from or predicated on something else separate from us. It is not, at its most primordial, a relationship between a unified, sourceless supra-reality and its proliferations in difference in this world. Rather it is "the *this*" – which, once grasped, reveals why such distinctions of reality as the One and the Many are essentially meaningless ([1961] 1973, 7).

This brings us to *Ereignis*, the most significant idea in Heidegger's work, which attempts to describe this "belonging together". There are different ways to explain what this term is trying to describe, and none of the varied translations into English are extremely successful without accompanying contorted explanations. Most commonly, *Ereignis* is rendered as "event" or "event of appropriation". The concept appears in his earliest lectures, delivered in 1919 (in embryonic form), and then in various manifestations through to his last lecture, under discussion, "The Principle of Identity" ([1957] 1969).[9] After *Being and Time* ([1927] 1996), *Ereignis* became definitively integrated into his middle and later thought, the central term in his *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* (written between 1936 and 1938) and *The Event* (written between 1941 and 1942) for example.[10] What *Ereignis* means becomes more developed as Heidegger's thought unfolds, though arguably there are three distinctive, but related ways the term can be understood. Firstly, *Ereignis* stands for our always already ineluctable state of existence: we are a site of openness (an "eventing") through which the world comes to be. Secondly, *Ereignis* can be interpreted similarly to Karl Jaspers's "limit-situation", as an event of some significance, either personal or communal, which creates a self-reflexive insight, allowing the individual to gain an existential transparency on their life-choices and resulting worldhood (Blattner 1994; Ruin 1998). Lastly, *Ereignis* can be construed as a world-historical event, enabling a kind of ontological paradigm shift in human experience itself: a heralding, revealing the nature of our current framework of reality, and offering and drawing us into another.

Although all three meanings could be drawn into a discussion of identity, my focus here will be the first meaning. In his re-interpretation of Parmenides' claim that thinking and Being are the same, Heidegger draws our attention to the always "eventing" nature of existence. *Ereignis* understood

8 T.S. Eliot captures this sense of a "living" dynamic stillness in *Four Quartets* where he describes houses as things that "live and die"; the house, to appropriate another of his lines, moves "perpetually in its stillness"; see Eliot (1963, 180–182).

9 For the earliest mention of the term, see Heidegger (2002, 58).

10 See Heidegger (2002; 2012b and 2013).

here, to give it a recent more technical formulation, is the "ever-operative yet intrinsically hidden thrown-openness that is the appropriated clearing" (Sheehan 2015, xix). It is this "clearing" that we ourselves are, as temporal, dynamic, thinking beings who create meaning by revealing and bringing forth the world. But we are also appropriated by and belong together with the meaning we disclose. Thus *Ereignis* "shines forth, as something to which the subject of knowledge also *belongs*" (Ruin 2007, 366; original emphasis). It is a "universal structure" which articulates the source of intelligibility itself, how it is that meaning and worlding are possible (Polt 2007, 389). This is how the claim that thinking and Being are the same is possible, but it requires a re-imagining of what we are and how we understand reality, which goes beyond the "isms" of traditional metaphysics.

Ereignis attempts to articulate the "*this*" of our existence, that human beings are able to *be* in a way which allows them to both disclose and marvel at Being and its possibilities, which they themselves are. Heidegger writes that the "relation [between humankind and Being] is not a bond stretched between the clearing and man…The relation *is* the clearing itself, and man's essence *is* that same relation" (quoted in Sheehan 2015, 240; original emphasis). Through the term he wants us to "see" and experience this "owning in which man and Being are delivered over to each other" (Heidegger [1957] 1969, 36). In doing so, we achieve our "active natures by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed" us (37). *Ereignis* can thus also be characterised as a moment of epiphany which allows an opening out of metaphysics, and a return to the nearness, the "*belonging* together" of humankind and Being which the ancient Greeks (in Heidegger's opinion) sensed more deeply than any other culture (39). Thus *Ereignis* gives us the world and ourselves: it describes the appropriation of self through our disclosure of the world, and also accounts for the event that makes this possible (which we always already are). "Belonging together" gives us both the world and ourselves; we are shaped by it and it is shaped by us, as the house is designed for the inhabitants, but their existence then takes place within its rooms, seeing the view through its windows. Our fundamental openness and reciprocity to Being make this appropriation possible.

Given this understanding of *Ereignis*, the history of metaphysics, for Heidegger, has been a falling into representational thinking, missing the insight that our very ability to think metaphysically about Being exists because we are *already always* the same as Being in this fundamental openness and sameness. It is the way we think about the "problem" of Being and beings, in the language of the One and Many, that creates this distanciation from "something" so "near" to us that we only notice it once we have abstracted it and speculated on it. Thus, to understand this relationship of sameness in the way Heidegger thinks Parmenides perceives it, the way in which Heidegger himself wants us to return to, is to render superfluous the principle of identity framed as the question of the One and the Many, something which we leave behind with the ending of philosophy, understood within this metaphysical framework. This is why Heidegger describes Parmenides' idea as "authentic", and as "too powerful", for it tells us that Being *belongs* to us, is the Same with us. We stand both within *and* outside the language of metaphysics – we intuit the "something else" about ourselves and our relationship with Being which is "too powerful" for the language of metaphysics to convey, where its fails to speak. For Heidegger, our nearness to Being renders it initially invisible and unnoticed such that all too easily it falls into oblivion. His singular contribution is not only the recognition of this closeness, but the locating of his most significant idea, *Ereignis*, within it. By following the path Heidegger has made for us back to Parmenides, and offering this re-encounter with that mysterious, compelling claim that "Thought and Being are the Same", we may experience, in the words from Conrad "moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much – everything…".[11]

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