

Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought

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In this essay I will try to sketch the main tenets of weak thought, *il pensiero debole*, and how it is related to dialectics and difference. This connection is not to be understood mainly or solely as an “overcoming” but, rather, it is to be defined primarily in terms of the Heideggerian notion of *Verwindung*, a term whose sense also must be understood within the horizon of a “weak” notion of what it means to think. We cannot in any case read the relationship between these three terms as if we were talking of a passage from one to the other. Weak thought has not entirely left dialectics and difference behind; rather, they constitute for it a past in the Heideggerian sense of *Gewesenes*, which has to do with the idea of sending [*invio*] and destiny.

With these premises, however, I am not saying that to take dialectics and difference as a point of departure requires I take a theoretical stance which would need to be radically justified, assuming that it could. In the present context, these two terms are “givens” of destiny understood as transmission: they are points of reference we encounter each and every time we engage in thinking, here and now. It is probably only “strong” thought, that of deductive cogency, which fears letting the initial move escape, the move after which everything falls into place. And yet the question of beginnings cannot be avoided even from the standpoint of a weak notion of thinking. Weak thought presupposes that, contrary to the heavily metaphysical framework beneath the problem of beginnings (starting from the first principles of Being), and contrary moreover to a historicist metaphysics (in Hegel’s sense, in which Being has no first principles but is rather a providential process: to think means to be up on the times), a third way may be possible. This third way would have an “empiricistic” nature without, however, presuming to begin with some experience which is either pure or else purified of

historical and cultural conditions. The experience with which we may begin and to which we must remain faithful is above all and largely that of the everyday, which is also and always historically qualified and culturally dense. There are no transcendental conditions of possibility for experience which might be attainable through some type of reduction or *epoché*, suspending our ties to historical-cultural, linguistic, and categorical horizons. The conditions of possibility for experience are always qualified, or, as Heidegger says, *Dasein* is a thrown project—thrown *time and time again*. The foundation, the setting out, the initial sending [*invio*] of our discourse cannot but be a hermeneutical foundation.¹

Even the logic which informs discourse (for it does have a logic, and its development is hardly arbitrary) is inscribed in situations made up of controlling procedures given time and again in the same *impure* mode we find in historical and cultural conditions of experience. Perhaps the model to keep in mind—which is in fact always-already at work in the movement of philosophy, even when we interpret this in different ways—is that of literary and art criticism: critical discourse and evaluation always arise from a set of canons constituted historically by art and taste.

Let us then suppose that when we engage in philosophy in this impure way here and now—in Italy today, which means in the context of present-day Italian philosophy, and in its relation to the prevailing trends of Euro-Continental philosophy—we encounter a pervasive but problematic concept: dialectics. And we are forced to take a stand on it. In other words, it may be useful as well as hermeneutically correct to refer to a work (for even here the choice is given in the things themselves, in the situation) which is emblematic of the presence of dialectics in contemporary thought, Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.² Here Sartre characterizes dialectics in terms of two main notions: totality and reappropriation. He retraces the dialectical paths already traveled by Hegel: truth is the whole, and the authentic formation of humanity consists in assuming the perspective of the whole.

To understand what it means to say that truth is the whole, we do not have to reconstruct Hegel as much as take a closer look at the critique of ideology prevalent in the thinking of our day. Contrary to what may seem to be the case, this critique consists less in an unmasking of the hidden (which would bring it closer to a certain notion of hermeneutics as the “school of suspicion”) than in an effort to reconstruct a non-partial point of view, one which would thus allow us to grasp totality as such. Ideology is not solely false thinking, expressing in an (unconsciously) masked form the truth that lies at the bottom. Ideology masks truth because it is partial thinking.

The reconstitution of totality means also its reappropriation. Only once the landscape is fully disclosed can we truly avail ourselves of it. What is

central in Sartre and in twentieth-century dialectics—which keeps in mind Marx and his critique of the idealistic traits of Hegel—is the awareness of the problematic relationship between totality and reappropriation. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is a critique in the Kantian sense of the term. It intends to clarify under what conditions is it concretely possible to constitute a non-ideological, total point of view. We know how Sartre solves the problem, even if not definitively: knowledge that is actually total-reappropriated realizes itself only in the consciousness of the “fused group,” the revolutionary group in action, in which theory and praxis are one and the perspective of the individual fully coincides with everyone else’s. But over and above this solution and the problems it nevertheless entails (as, for instance, the tendency to fall back into the alienation of the “practico-inert” once the “heat” of the revolutionary moments is over), what I find pertinent in Sartre’s analysis is the clarification once and for all of the mythological nature of all other solutions to the problem of dialectics. This applies especially to Lukács, who along with Marx attributed to the expropriated proletariat the capacity for a totalizing vision of the meaning of history, and who then in the footsteps of Lenin ensured the trustworthiness of this totalizing vision by identifying class consciousness with the avant-garde of the proletariat, that is, with the party and its bureaucracy.

Sartre pursued to the limit what one might call the problem of how each and every one of us could become the Hegelian absolute spirit. As a result he could not but fall into a trap. Yet in Sartre’s critical setback one can find a positive contribution to thought, namely, evidence of the link between the ideal of total-reappropriated knowledge and the structures of domination which it was set to overthrow. The return of the practico-inert after the heat of the revolution means simply that totalizing-reappropriated knowledge cannot subsist except as a new form of property (even, and above all, in the linguistic sense of the word: mastery of what is proper [one’s own] against metaphor . . .). This is not solely the transcription of our century’s historical experience with revolutions. If anything, it is proof [*verifica*] (and not a consequence) of the weakness and internal groundlessness of the ideal of reappropriation, something demonstrable on a theoretical level.

Let me consider another great example of dialectical thought, that of Walter Benjamin, as expounded in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.³ Alluding explicitly to Nietzsche’s second *Untimely Meditation*, Benjamin takes a critical look at the idea of historical time as a homogenous process—an image that underlies not only a faith in progress but also the anticipation of the “necessary” event, the revolution. The idea that there exists a progressive unfolding of time, and even that such a thing as history is at all possible, belongs to a culture of masters. As a linear unity history is actually only

the history of those who rose to the top as victors. It is constituted at the cost of excluding, first in practice and then in recollection, an array of possibilities, values, and images. More than the desire to assure a better destiny for those to come, it is disdain for such "liquidation" that really moves the revolutionary decision, according to Benjamin. This decision aims at vindicating or restoring the word to that which the linear history of the victors has excluded and consigned to oblivion. From such a perspective revolution would redeem *all* of the past. Indeed, this is precisely what would constitute its "right," its superiority over the culture of the masters.

To this, however, Benjamin counterfoists a "constructive" concern. Historical materialism cannot "squander its energy on a meretricious 'once upon a time' in the brothel of historicism" (Thesis 16). Not all of the past can or should be redeemed. Redemption [*riscatto*] can occur only by means of a constructive vision different from that of bourgeois historicism: "the Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of the Antichrist" (Thesis 6). From this perspective the right of revolution is no longer based on its capacity to redeem everything that has been excluded. It is now the right of a new power that imposes itself through other acts of exclusion.

The difficulty of interpreters in agreeing on the sense of this short piece by Benjamin may well reflect problems concerning dialectics as a whole. More pointedly, we might say that the problems present in all twentieth-century dialectics of a materialistic cast are reflected in the very *micrological pathos* pervading Benjamin's *Theses*. The angel in Klee's painting that Benjamin speaks of in Thesis 9 feels enormous compassion [*pietà*] for the ruins that history has accumulated at its feet. It is a compassion for all that could have been and yet never was, or for what is no more, for all that produced no real *Wirkungen*, or historical effects. This follows not from the fact that these relics seem "precious" in view of some ideal construction, but from the fact that they are traces of something that has lived. It is on account of this basic right of the living that one must declare, along with Adorno, that the whole is false.

Benjamin's micrological pathos, which can be perceived in many of Adorno's pages, is the most significant and urgent mode in which the crisis of dialectics comes across today (though one should not forget that Kierkegaard had already founded his own anti-Hegelianism on a revindication of the individual). The importance and suggestiveness of thinkers like Benjamin, Adorno, and Bloch consists less in their having rethought dialectics in such a way as to incorporate the critical exigencies of micrology, than in their having reassessed such exigencies even to the detriment of dialectics, even to the detriment of the coherence and unity of their own thinking. They are not dialectical thinkers. They are thinkers of the dissolution of dialectics.

What I propose here by such broad “emblematic” references to Sartre and Benjamin is a relatively simple scheme. Having assimilated the Marxist overthrow of idealism, twentieth-century dialectical thought presents itself as a philosophy of totality and reappropriation, for it redeems as materialism what the culture of the masters has excluded. Yet that “cursed part” excluded by the masters refuses to be reabsorbed in a totality so easily. Those who are excluded feel that the very notion of totality is a “lordly” notion, one belonging to the masters. With this materialistic overturning of Hegelian dialectics there arises a permanent tendency which we might call “dissolutive.” It finds expression in Adorno’s negative dialectics, in Benjamin’s blending of materialism and theology, and in Bloch’s utopianism.

The thought of difference inserts itself in this tendency toward dissolution, and the questions it reflects and elicits. (By the words “inserts itself” I want to suggest an itinerary of thought which, without negating its own characteristics, allows itself to be guided by the “thing itself,” encountering the thematics of difference precisely in this micrological-dissolutive tendency of dialectics.) We are not dealing here with a casual insertion. Numerous threads even on the level of actual history tie Marxist critics like Benjamin, Adorno, Bloch, and the young Lukács, not to mention Sartre, to the existentialism from which the thinking of difference arises. In its most radical form, difference is expressed by Heidegger.

The thesis submitted therefore must be completed as follows: in the development of twentieth-century dialectical thought a tendency arises toward dissolution which the dialectical scheme can no longer control. Visible in Benjamin’s micrology, in the “negativity” of Adorno and in Bloch’s utopianism, the significance of this tendency consists in its revealing how the dialectical approach to the problem of alienation and reappropriation is still deeply complicitous with the alienation it intends to combat. The idea of totality and reappropriation, the very pillars of dialectical thought, remain metaphysical notions yet to be critiqued. Nietzsche helped bring this awareness to light by analyzing metaphysical subjectivity in terms of mastery and by announcing that God is dead. The sense of this assertion is that the strong frameworks of metaphysics (*archai*, *Gründe*, primary evidences, and ultimate destinies) are only forms of self-assurance for epochs in which technology and social organization failed to render us capable of living in a more open horizon (as is the case in our day and age), in a horizon less “magically” guaranteed. The ruling concepts of metaphysics . . . turn out to be means of discipline and reassurance that are no longer necessary in the context of our present-day organization capability of technology.

Yet even the discovery of the superfluousness of metaphysics (in Marcuse’s words, of additional repression) risks resolving itself into a new

metaphysics—humanistic, naturalistic, or vitalistic—going no further than substituting “true” being in place of the one that has been shown to be false. The risk run by dialectical thinking, whether utopic or negative, can be avoided only if one relates Heidegger’s radical recovery of the question of Being to the critique of metaphysics as an ideology committed to insecurity and the domination that stems from it.

On the surface, and ultimately much more than on the surface, the problem that Heidegger discusses in *Being and Time* is analogous to the one raised by the critique of ideology: we can no longer take the notion of *entity* [*ente*] as self-evident, since its being self-evident is already the result of a series of “positions,” occurrences, or—as Heidegger calls them—historical-cultural “destined” disclosures that, prior to the objective-self-evidence of “entity,” constitute the meaning of Being. It seems then that for Heidegger as well as for the critics of ideology, the question is one of reappropriating the conditions of possibility for what underlies and determines the “objective” and the “self-evident” as such. Yet in working out this problem Heidegger early on is led to discover something else: not a Kantian (or even Husserlian) transcendental structure, nor a dialectical totality in the Hegelian-Marxist vein which would determine the meaning of entities, but rather the untenability [*insostenibilità*] of what metaphysics has always ascribed to Being, namely, its stability in presence, its eternity, its “thingness” or *ousia*. The stability of Being in presence is precisely what from *Being and Time* on Heidegger exposes as a “confusion,” as a “forgetfulness,” because it derives from the act of modeling Being [*l’essere*] on beings [*enti*], as if Being were merely the most general characteristic of that which is given in presence.

The issue of the difference between Being and beings, called the ontological difference, ultimately leads much further than even Heidegger expected. This difference entails first of all that Being *is not*: entities or beings [*enti*] are what can be said to be. Being, on the other hand, befalls, or occurs [*accade*]. We truly distinguish Being from beings only when we conceive of it as historical-cultural happening, as the instituting and transforming of those horizons in which entities time and again become accessible to man, and man to himself. To be sure, immediate sense data are not *ontos on*; nor, by the same token, is the transcendental, as the neo-Kantian philosophy of Heidegger’s day believed. The analysis of *Dasein*, of its thrownness as well as of its continually resituated and qualified nature, leads Heidegger to radically temporalize the *a priori*. All we can say about being at this point is that it consists in trans-mission, in forwarding [*invio*]: *Über-lieferung* and *Ge-schick*. The world plays itself out in horizons constructed by a series of echoes, linguistic resonances, and messages coming from the past and from others (oth-

ers alongside us as well as other cultures). The *a priori* that makes possible our experience of the world is *Ge-schick*, destiny-forwarding, or *Überlieferung*, transmission. True Being never is, but sets itself on the path and sends itself [*si mette in strada e si manda*], it trans-mits itself.

The difference between Being and beings also accounts for the particular characteristic of being's "deferment" (and its problematic "sameness," if one thinks of *Identity and Difference*). Into this deferment is woven also the relationship between being and language, a relationship which becomes crucial for Heidegger from the thirties onward. The preoccupation with this relationship, which admittedly Heidegger engages in more radically than others, binds him to other philosophical positions of the twentieth century (which, as we know, Apel speaks of in terms of a "semiotic transformation of Kantianism").⁴ What is more radical about Heidegger is the fact that his discovery of the linguistic character of being's occurrence carries over into his concept of Being itself. Being now ends up stripped of the strong traits attributed to it by metaphysics. Being that can occur does not have the same traits as metaphysical Being with the simple addition of "eventuality." It offers itself to thought in a radically different way.

In what light, from the perspective of difference [*il pensiero della differenza*], do the difficulties and dissolutive tendencies of dialectics appear now? Difference can be conceived as the heir to and radicalization of the dissolutive tendencies of dialectics. I am not trying here to dispose of the problem of dialectics by "a theological assumption in the service of historical materialism," as Benjamin had it, by displacing, as it were, the reconciliation and reformation of totality into a utopic future (as Bloch and Adorno in their different ways had it). My aim is rather to develop fully Sartre's (perhaps merely casual) suggestion that the meaning of history (or even of Being) will be every person's patrimony once it has *dissolved* into them. Reappropriation is not possible without liberating Being from the idea of stable presence, of *ousia*. But what would be entailed by such a reappropriation that no longer deals with Being as stability? The enfeeblement of (the notion of) Being, the explicit occurrence of its temporal essence (which is also and especially ephemerality, birth and death, faded trans-mission, antiquarian accumulation) has serious repercussions for the way we conceive of thinking and of the *Das-ein* that is its "subject." Weak thought aims at articulating such repercussions and thereby preparing a new ontology.

Such a new ontology is to be constructed by developing the discourse of difference, as well as by recalling dialectics. The relation between dialectics and difference is not one-way: the illusions of dialectics are not simply abandoned in favor of difference. It is likely that *Verwindung*, the declination of

difference into weak thought, can be thought only by engaging the heritage of dialectics. This might be explained by taking literally Sartre's suggestion in *Question de méthode*: "the moment must come when history will have but a single meaning and will dissolve itself into the concrete men who make it together."⁵ Sartre does not especially stress the "dissolutive" aspect of the idea nor, however, does he exclude it. In fact, following the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, his thinking may be said to substantiate the interpretation I am setting forth here, especially for its ethical implications. It may also be that Marcuse's aestheticization of dialectics has the same dissolutive nature, one in which reappropriation might finally occur without the slave becoming the master and inheriting thus the metaphysical tradition with its armamentarium of strong categories.

The dialectical heritage through which difference is declined (*verwindet sich*) into weak thought is condensed in the notion of *Verwindung*, and with good reason, for *Verwindung*, as we know, is the term Heidegger adopts⁶ in place of *Überwindung*, the overcoming or sublimation proper to dialectics. *Verwindung* (declination/distortion) and recovery ([*rimettersi*] recovery from, entrust oneself to, start up in the sense of sending on) mark the attitude which characterize post-metaphysical thought in relation to the tradition handed down by metaphysics. (PD, 21; herein 46). More than that, in the Heideggerian concept and "practice" of *Verwindung* we find a concentration of the dialectical (and thus metaphysical) heritage that still lives on in the thinking of difference. Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics seems to involve a dialectical overcoming, yet it is different precisely insofar as it is a *Verwindung*: but as such it still develops something which is proper to dialectics. This relation of overcoming and distortion is already exemplified in Nietzsche's announcement that God is dead, which is *not* a metaphysical utterance on the nonexistence of God. The statement is intended as the true realization [*presa d'atto*] of an "event," since the death of God means mainly the end of the stable structure of Being, hence also the end of the possibility of stating God's existence or nonexistence. What is this announcement then? Is it not a historicist (as opposed to metaphysical) thesis which charges the death of God with value, cogency, "logical" necessity, along the lines of "what is real is rational"? Can one declare nihilism to be the truth one must acknowledge?

Heidegger's *Verwindung* is the most radical effort to think Being in terms of a "taking account of" [*presa d'atto*] which is at once a "taking leave of," for it neither conceives Being as a stable structure nor registers and accepts it as the logical outcome of a process. *Verwindung* is the mode in which thought thinks the truth of Being as *Über-lieferung* and *Ge-schick*. In this respect it is synonymous with *An-denken*, the other more current term

with which the later Heidegger designates postmetaphysical thought. This is thought which recalls Being: it never renders Being present but always recalls it as already “gone.” (We must “let go of Being as foundation,” Heidegger says in *On Time and Being*.⁷)

One has access to Being not through presence but only through recollection, for Being cannot be defined as that which is but only as that which is passed on [*si tramanda*]. Being is sending and “destining.” This also means, however, that postmetaphysical thinking cannot avoid working with metaphysical concepts, declining and distorting them, entrusting itself [*rimettendosi*] back to and away from them, transmitting them as its own heritage. Heidegger’s work after the turn in the thirties is a colossal attempt to rethink, retrieve, and decline the metaphysical tradition. Since we do not have pre-categorical or trans-categorical access to Being, which would belie and deprive of authority the objectifying categories of metaphysics, we cannot but take these categories as “appropriate,” at least to the extent that we possess no others. But this must be done without any nostalgia for other categories which might be more adequate to Being as it is, since Being is not at all. *Verwindung* frees these metaphysical categories from precisely what made them metaphysical: the presumption of gaining access to an *ontos on*. Once this presumption is dispelled these categories become “valid” as monuments, as a heritage evoking the *pietas* due to the traces of what has lived. *Pietas* may be another term which along with *An-denken* and *Verwindung* could characterize the weak thought of postmetaphysics.

Pietas suggests primarily mortality, finitude, and passing away. What might it mean to think Being under the aegis of mortality and passing away?⁸ The “program” of a weak ontology holds that such a change in the way of thinking about the fundamental traits (even simply descriptively, or typical) of Being will have important consequences, and of which thought has only begun to become aware of. These are the derangements that substantiate the announcement of the death of God, and which according to Nietzsche are fated to play a major role in the coming centuries of our history. *Thus the transcendental, or that which makes any experience of the world possible, is nothing less than transience [caducità]*. That which constitutes the objectness of objects is not their standing across from us in resistant stability (*gegen-stand*) but their be-falling, that is, their consisting thanks solely to an openness constituted by the anticipatory resolve upon death, as expressed in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*. Be-falling, or *Ereignis* (in the multiple senses Heidegger accords the term), is what allows the metaphysical characteristics of Being to exist, perverting them through the exposition of their constitutive mortality and transience. To recall Being means to recall

such transitoriness [*caducità*]. Thinking the truth does not mean “grounding,” as even Kantian metaphysics maintains. It means rather revealing the waning and mortality which are properly what make up Being, thus effecting a breaking-through or *de-grounding* [*sfondamento*].

Weak thought accepts and develops the heritage of dialectics, conjoining it to difference. This can be seen at two levels: at the level of content, in its rethinking and degrounding the main traits of metaphysical being, and at the level of form, insofar as the thought of *Verwindung* entails no legitimation through an appeal to a structure of being, and no support from a logical principle of history, but rather only “a realization” or a “taking account of” [*presa d'atto*] (which is yet in some guise historicist).⁹

If this is so, it would appear that the sort of thought which thinks Being in these terms is enfeebled by yet another weakness: the absence of an authentic project of its own, the purely parasitical rethinking of what has already been with a strong edifying and aestheticizing slant. It wants to relive the past as past with the sole purpose of savoring the antiquarian. Indeed, much deconstructive work of recent times can be charged with such an accusation, an accusation which seems all the more convincing the more one assumes that the task of thinking is something *else*, namely, construction, particularly of historically and politically useful structures (a very dubious idea, especially where philosophy is concerned).

At the root of this weakness of thought with regard to that which exists—and according to which to think means only an enjoyable taking in of the spiritual forms that were handed down—there would seem to be an obfuscation of the very idea of truth. In fact the link between weak thought and hermeneutics makes such a suspicion credible, for if Being is not but is instead handed down [*si tramanda*], to think being would be only to rethink what has been said and thought thus far. Such a rethinking, which, unlike scientific calculation and technological organization, is the authentic thinking, cannot occur according to a logic of verification and of rigorous demonstration, but only by means of that old, eminently aesthetic instrument called intuition.

Intuition, however, is not an invention of weak thought. Intuition is strictly bound to the metaphysical concept of evidence, of bringing an inner illumination into the open, of gathering first principles. Indeed, the ultimate object of *nous*, of intellectual intuition, is nothing less than first principles. To what strange cult of intuition, then, could such a thinking belong which, in the wake of Heidegger, thinks Being as never giving itself in presence but only as the object of recollection? To respond to this question, we must reread Heidegger's essay on “The Essence of Truth” in the light of “feeble” expectations.

Of the two meanings of truth that Heidegger singles out—(1) as propositional conformity to things and (2) as freedom, that is, as the opening of horizons within which any conformity becomes possible—it is certainly the second one that interests us here. Yet this meaning should not be understood in the metaphysical sense of some access to an originary which would devalue the verification of single truths conforming to evidence. As recent readings of Heidegger are beginning to show, it is likely that the elucidation of these two meanings of truth may finally show the single verified or confirmed “trues” to stand essentially as the results of operational procedures. Far from discounting them in the name of a more originary access to Being, we must finally recognize these procedures as the only available pathways toward the experience of truth.

The freedom that Heidegger identifies as the essence of truth may also, and perhaps exclusively, be freedom in the most ordinary sense: the freedom we live and act as members of a society. The call to freedom, then, would double as pure and simple de-stitution of the “realistic” assumptions of the correspondence criterion of truth. That is to say, it would be a different way of formulating Wittgenstein’s idea of the language-game: Truth as correspondence (verified according to the rules of each game) would be placed in the open horizon of dialogue between individuals, groups, and epochs. But this horizon of truth within which demonstrable and forged propositions become possible is itself opened up by *Über-lieferung* and *Ge-schick*. Yet respect for those processes by which truth is consolidated in the various languages of reason (and for truth itself as procedure) cannot be established in the name of some ontological foundation of these languages, nor in the name of the possibility of linking such procedures to a fundamental normative structure (as in Apel’s “semiotic Kantianism”). The respect follows only by virtue of a *pietas* for what has been handed down to us as our heritage. The rules of the various language-games can be imposed neither in the name of the utility of these games (even if this utility consists merely in assuring the good of orderly cohabitation or of organized social labor defending us from the hostility of Nature), nor in the name of their grounding in some meta-rules of a transcendental sort (even if they involve only the “natural function” of reason). The rules of the games can follow only from that irreducible respect for monuments that speak to us at once of passing away and of duration within trans-mission. Moreover, this feeling is not an indivisible “one.” As the beautiful that individuals, groups, societies, and epochs recognize as such, seeing themselves within it (and thereby constituting themselves as groups), is different time and again; in just this way, the *pietates* are historically variable, and the possibility for them to include other contents and traditions (a possibility in which truth consists) is contained in the fact that they are

the result of concrete, persuasive operations. Hermeneutics, which with Heidegger becomes synonymous with philosophy itself, deals precisely with this.

To summarize, then, how a weak ontology conceives of truth, we could begin by saying: first, the true is not the object of a *noetic* prehension of evidence but rather the result of a process of verification that produces such truth through certain procedures always already given time and again (the project of the world that constitutes us as *Dasein*). In other words, the true does not have a metaphysical or logical nature but a rhetorical one. Second, verification and hypothesis occur in a controlling horizon, in the openness that *On the Essence of Truth* speaks about as the space of freedom both of interpersonal relations and of the relations between cultures and generations. In this space no one ever starts from scratch but always from a faith, a belonging-to or a bond. The *rhetorical* (or should we say, hermeneutical) horizon of truth is constituted in this free but “impure” way, analogously to the common sense that Kant speaks about in the *Critique of Judgment*. Bonds, respect, and belonging-to are the substance of *pietas*. Along with the rhetoric-logic of “weak” truth, *pietas* also delineates the basis for a possible ethics, in which the supreme values—those which are good in themselves and not because they are means to an end—are symbolical formations, monuments, traces of the living (everything that gives itself to and stimulates interpretation); hence an ethics of “deeds” [*beni*, also: of “goods”] rather than of “imperatives.” Third, truth is the product of interpretation not because through its process one attains a direct grasp of truth (for example, where interpretation is taken as deciphering, unmasking, and so on), but because it is only in the process of interpretation, in the Aristotelian sense of *hermeneia*, expression, *formulation*, that truth is constituted. Fourth, in this “rhetorical” conception of truth being experiences the fullness of its decline (as Heidegger understands it when he says that the Western world is the land of the crepuscle of being), fully living its weakness. As in the Heideggerian hermeneutic ontology, being becomes only *Über-lieferung*, trans-mission, dissolving even into procedures, into “rhetoric.”

There is no doubt that once the characteristics of being and truth are rethought in weak terms, philosophical thinking, or the thinking of being, can no longer vindicate the sovereignty that metaphysics attributed to it—mainly through ideological deception—in the sphere of politics and social praxis. In fact, weak thought has no reasons left to vindicate the supremacy of metaphysics over praxis. Does this indicate yet another weakness—that of accepting existence “as it is” and hence one’s critical incapacity both in theory and in practice? In other words, does speaking about the weakness of thought mean theorizing a diminished projectual capacity in thinking itself? Let us not try to hide the fact that this is a problem, even if what it implies

is not so much that we have to restructure the relation between thought and the world as that we have to rethink the question of the meaning of being. By rethinking such meaning in postmetaphysical terms, with whatever consequences it may have for our conceptual grammars, we may find a new “disposition” for the relation between philosophy and society, one of which we now know little. As for the constructive task [*progettualità*] of thought, which seems to have lost much of its former emphasis in the postmodern experience, a philosophy of *Verwindung* in no way renounces it. An *An-denkend* rethinking of metaphysics and of its world, thus also of the corresponding structures of domination and social discipline, is a project that can justify commitment. Even the deconstruction that originates with Derrida is not at all a pure and simple form of aesthetic savoring as it sometimes appears to be (and occasionally is).

A weak ontology that conceives of being as trans-mission and monument evidently tends to privilege the *canon* over the exception, the patrimony over prophetic illumination. But the inherited patrimony is not a coherent unity. It is actually a closely netted interplay of interferences. If the possibility of the “new,” and thus also (to speak with Kuhn) of changing “paradigms,” cannot come from a mythic encounter with the “other”—with the precategorical or Nature or things as they are—this possibility does nevertheless come into play insofar as *Ge-schick* does not merely hand down *Wirkungen* (or effects which unraveled and are now present as constitutive of our worldly project), but also specific traces, elements that have not become world: the ruins accumulated by the history of victors at the feet of Klee’s angel. Compassion [*pietà*] for these ruins is the only real fuel of revolution—not some project legitimized in the name of a natural right or an inevitable course of history.

To identify the new with the other, as for instance with another culture—whether that of another civilization or of a different language-game, or that of a virtual world contained in those traces of our tradition which never became dominant—does not mean experiencing the difference of Being as occurring somewhere else, in an originary ground and thence yet again as an entity. It means seeing the difference of Being as interference,¹⁰ as a whisper [*sotto voce*], as *Gering*.¹¹ It means accompanying being along on its twilight journey and preparing for a postmetaphysical world.

Notes

1. For this idea of hermeneutical foundations see the essay “Verso un’ontologia del declino,” included in my book *Al di là del soggetto* [*Beyond the Subject*] (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981).

2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960). English translation by A. Sheridan-Smith, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1. (London: Verso, 2004 [1976]).

3. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited by H. Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 253–264.

4. I am referring to Apel's 1973 book *Community and Communication*. On Apel see also the essay "Esiti dell'ermeneutica [consequences of hermeneutics]," included in my *Al di là del soggetto*.

5. *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, vol. 1: 57.

6. Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* [1954], Italian translation by G. Vattimo (Milan: Mursia, 1976), 45.

7. See Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), 5–6. English translation by J. Stambaugh, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 6.

8. These two sentences did not appear in the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* version of this essay published in 1985. *Trans*.

9. This short paragraph also was missing from the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* version. *Trans*.

10. See my essay "Difference and Interference: On the Reduction of Hermeneutics to Anthropology," *Res* 4 (1982): 85–91.

11. Again from *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Italian translation, 121–122.