

Martin Heidegger  
Contributions to  
Philosophy  
(From Enowning)

Translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly



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Martin Heidegger

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**Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly**

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With this publication of *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Martin Heidegger's second major work, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, becomes available for the first time in English. Known in philosophical circles as *Beiträge*, this work had been awaited with great expectation long before its publication on the centennial of Heidegger's birth in 1989. *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* opens the third division of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, which is devoted to the publication of book-length manuscripts and treatises.

*Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* was written almost a decade after *Being and Time*. Like *Being and Time*, it is a treatise that was not originally presented as a university lecture course. But unlike *Being and Time*, it is the first treatise whose maturation and unfolding are not reflected in any of the lecture courses of the years 1919 to 1937. Even the university lecture text *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic"* though it was written at the same time as *Contributions*, involves some of the same language, and also deals with the question of truth, still does not reveal anything of the maturation and unfolding of *Contributions*. Thus, as far as the interrelation of Heidegger's treatises and university lecture texts is concerned, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* stands alone. Perhaps the "prolonged hesitation" spoken of in the epigram to *Contributions* reflects the inaccessibility to any form of publicness—and not only the publicness of the university lecture course setting. That is, perhaps the thinking that goes on in this work could not find a proper hearing anywhere—until now.

The singular importance of *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* consists in its being Heidegger's first fundamental work in which so-called "being-historical thinking" is enacted. In six "joinings"—not to be mistaken for "chapters"—called "Echo," "Playing-forth," "Leap," "Grounding," "The Ones to Come," and "The Last God," Heidegger enacts "being-historical thinking" as a thinking that is enowned by being in its historical unfolding. Whether we consider the echo of being, the way in which the first Greek beginning of thinking plays forth *into* the other beginning, the manner in which thinking leaps into the essential swaying of being, or how this thinking is engaged in the grounding of this swaying as the ones to come who receive the hints of the last god—in any case we witness the gradual, systematic, cohesive, and closely interrelated unfolding of a thinking that presents *Contributions* as a

work which—as no other work of Heidegger's—shows the active character of "being-historical thinking." If we fail to consider this active character and if we do not question the traditional pattern that structures a philosophical work (a presupposed thesis, its development and demonstration), we may be misled into assuming that *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* is a collection of "aphorisms" or that it presents Heidegger's "working notes." Both assumptions are wrong.

The appearance in the text of *Contributions* of a number of sentences that, seen from the outside, look like "notes" should not mislead us into believing that Heidegger is making certain notes to himself. The sentences in *Contributions* that look like "notes" are virtually all formal indicators of the paths to be taken or paths that have already been taken in the course of "being-historical thinking." When, for example, close to the end of *Contributions*, and after a focused discussion and analysis of the work of art, Heidegger lays out a series of questions and issues and addresses the views of the Berlin architect K.F. Schinkel—questions and issues that at first glance look like "notes"—he shows in a formal-indicative manner that each and every word used by Schinkel is open to a "being-historical" interpretation.

Moreover, Heidegger's own understanding of and relation to *Contributions* is such as to leave no doubt that he did not consider this work to be a collection of "aphorisms" or "notes." Indicating that "being and only being is and that a being is not,"<sup>22</sup> Heidegger makes clear that statements made on behalf of "being-historical thinking" are not to be confused with assertions as "a subsequent expression in the language of a re-presentation."<sup>23</sup> Rather, these statements emerge from and return to what shows and manifests itself, i.e., *uncovering* of being. Thus, Heidegger's own understanding of this work comes from the non-representational apophantic origin of "being-historical thinking." A characterization of *Contributions* as a collection of "aphorisms" or as "working notes" is only possible when we ignore what defines this work and structures it, namely being's self-showing and manifesting.

Heidegger's concern with the cohesive character of *Contributions* is clearly manifest in the close attention that he paid to the process of the typing of the manuscript, in his checking the typed copy against the handwritten original, and, equally importantly, in the meticulous cross-references throughout the *Contributions*.<sup>24</sup> When carefully followed through, these cross-references show the path that thinking has traversed or is about to traverse. Cross-references are given in order to facilitate the engagement of thinking in what is formally indicated: they are not there for demonstrating what a preceding stage of discussion has already established.

As translators of this work, we had to face the necessity of reflecting its singularity. We also had to be constantly aware of its unusual syntax.



remaining always fully aware of the source from which this translation receives guidance and directive.

In our attempt to let the singularity of *Contributions* be reflected in its English translation, we tried to keep in mind that "being-historical thinking" is not a thinking about being. For being is not an **object** and cannot be treated as a delimitable and **objectifiable** topic. For us as translators this meant that we could not use an objectifying approach to the language and word structure of this work. Throughout *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* in the course of a "preview," six "joinings," and a concluding section entitled "Be-ing" – Heidegger takes a new approach to the question of being by enacting a thinking that is "enowned by being." The singularity of this work comes through in translation when translation mirrors "being-historical thinking" as a thinking that is "enowned by being." It has been one of our goals to let this happen throughout the translation.

It is the enactment of this thinking that molds the unusual syntax of *Contributions*. Translating this work into English, we faced the necessity of coming to terms with this syntax, since we realized that it is only by understanding and interpreting this syntax that the singularity of this work can come through in translation. We were thus called upon to characterize and appraise this syntax.

A careful reading of the *Contributions* shows that its unusual syntax is neither extraneous to the work nor an **insurmountable** obstacle. Thus the unusual syntax cannot be set aside as having no impact on translation. The unusual character of this syntax shows itself in two ways: in the incompleteness of some sentences and in an occasional ambiguity with respect to German grammar. We found that both must be accounted for in our translation. We came to terms with the unusual syntax of the work by making minor additions to the text (they appear within square brackets []). These additions are meant to enhance the readability of the text. What we have added to the text within square brackets is in each case either an interpretation of a certain punctuation mark or derived from the immediate context. This device leaves the reader free either to use or to ignore the additions. The reader who opts for the latter needs only to overlook what stands between the square brackets.

We decided to implement this device in spite of the fact that Heidegger opted for leaving the syntax of the *Contributions* intact. Indeed, the enactment of a new approach to the question of being, which is what *Contributions* is all about, does not depend on a detailed unfolding of its syntax. In a note written at the same time as *Contributions*, Heidegger points out:

In its new approach this *Contributions to Philosophy* should render manifest the range of the question of being. A detailed unfolding here is not necessary,

because this all too easily narrows down the actual horizon and misses the thrust of questioning.<sup>4</sup>

He was clearly aware of both the incompleteness and the grammatical ambiguity of some passages as they determine the present shape of the *Contributions*. And yet he saw an improvement on this score as unnecessary and perhaps not useful because, in his own mind, a more detailed unfolding of the syntax of this work would distract thinking from the thrust of questioning.

Seen in this light, our few parenthetical remarks are meant to enhance readability as well as to acknowledge that here and there the English needs (can make use of) additions that are less necessary or useful in the German. Sometimes the *context* relieves and releases the text in German in ways that do *not* occur in English. Given these deliberations, it should be pointed out that our parenthetical additions do not pretend to be equal to Heidegger's own "detailed unfolding" — had it occurred — first, because we do not know how he would have actually carried out such an unfolding, and second, because our additions to the text are only indications showing how we as translators understood and interpreted the text. Thus our parenthetical additions are intended only to enhance the readability of the translation and to present the full scope of our interpretation — an interpretation that is inherent in *any* translation.

What is the source from which we drew guidance and directive for carrying out this translation? To respond to this question, we must characterize the act of translating the text of the *Contributions* as an act of disclosing the orienting power of "being-historical words" as this power shapes the cohesive, systematic, and closely interrelated "joinings" of being as enowning. However, this is a power that undermines mere lexicography — the one-to-one correspondence of the German words to their English counterparts. The cohesive, systematic, and closely interrelated "joinings" of Heidegger's "being-historical thinking" — which comes "alive" only in enactment — presents the translation process with the possibility of rethinking, revising, and eventually combining English words in a new way.<sup>5</sup>

Thus the source from which this translation received directive and guidance was not primarily the lexicographical settlement of the relation between Heidegger's German and the English words. It was rather the cohesive, systematic, and closely interrelated "joinings" of "being-historical thinking" that guided this translation toward disclosing the orienting power inherent in the key words of *Contributions*. We see clearly how such a disclosing occurs when we discuss our specific choices for rendering into English the key philosophical words and phrases of the *Contributions*. This discussion forms the core of the Trans-

lators' Foreword. (The reader who reads this work for the first time will do well to return to this Foreword in order to bear in mind the reasons that support our renditions of the key words of *Contributions*.)

In preparing this translation and in consulting with scholars in the field, we—as they—have discovered that this text, even in the original, is not readily accessible to its readers. This is true even for those readers who are well read in Heidegger. If this is the case for those reading the *Contributions* in its original German, it is all the more true for anyone who wants to appreciate the text in English. Given the groundbreaking character of *Contributions*, reading this work demands an exceptional scrutiny and precision. Individual words and punctuation marks often carry an even greater weight than normal—even in “normal” Heidegger. Often words and punctuation marks must be read within the context that is both prospective and retrospective. A case in point is the rendition of *Seinsentwurf* as *projecting being open*, where the danger of imputing this “projecting” to a “subject” is avoided by reading “projecting-open as thrown” within “projecting being open.”

Thus we advise readers of this English text that it requires some getting used to, just as does the German text itself. This is a groundbreaking work of thinking, one that opens pathways to the thinking of being that (a) have never been opened before and (b) require a profoundly renewed way of listening to and active engagement with the text. This is true regardless of one's philosophical persuasion and regardless of which current “movement” in philosophy one adheres to.

In what follows we shall do three things. First, we shall discuss families of words that gather around one central German word—families that are recognizable in their phenomenological kinship. Second, we shall address the special case of the large number of words in *Contributions* that carry the prefix *er-*. Third, we shall clarify certain technical aspects of the translation.

## 1. The Group of Words That Gather Around One Single Word

### I. *Ereignis* and Related Words

We considered the possibility of leaving the word *Ereignis* untranslated, since we were aware of Heidegger's own view, corroborated by our understanding of *Contributions*, that *Ereignis* is “as little translatable as the guiding-Greek word λόγος and the Chinese Tao . . . and is . . . a *singulare tantum*.”<sup>9</sup> And yet we opted for translating *Ereignis* rather than leaving it untranslated, for three reasons: (1) Leaving the word *Ereignis* untranslated in the text requires an explanation, which involves an interpretation of this word, which in turn constitutes translating it. That is, leaving *Ereignis* “untranslated” is itself a translation. Thus translating

this word becomes unavoidable. (2) Leaving the word *Ereignis* untranslated would make it practically impossible to translate the family of words that are closely related to *Ereignis*, such as *Ereignung*, *Eignung*, *Zueignung*, *Übereignung*, *Eigentum*, *ereignen*, *zueignen*, *übereignen*, *eignen*. (3) Actually translating this word does not resolve the problem of the untranslatability of *Ereignis*. Thus, what is called for is an English rendition of *Ereignis* that approximates the richness of the German word *without pretending to replace it*. (Heidegger shows that such approximation is possible, e.g., with his own rendition of the Greek λόγος.) In the case of *Ereignis*, feasibility of an approximation is foreshadowed by the way in which the *er-* in *Ereignis* has the function of stressing and putting forth the movement of *eignen* in *-eignis*.

We found a good approximation to *Ereignis* in the word *enowning*. Above all it is the prefix *en-* in this word that opens the possibility for approximating *Ereignis*, insofar as this prefix conveys the sense of "enabling," "bringing into condition of," or "welling up of." Thus, in conjunction with *owning*, this prefix is capable of getting across a sense of an "owning" that is not an "owning of something." We can think this owning as an un-possessive owning, because the prefix *en-* has this unique capability. In this sense *enowning* does not have an appropriatable content.

We found that none of the existing English translations of Heidegger's word *Ereignis* is capable of showing the movement that runs through the *en* and the *own*, as *enowning*. *Enowning* approximates the movement of *er-* that runs through *eignen* and the *eignis* in *Ereignis*. Part of this movement is a "going all the way into and through" *without possessing*. We consider it a significant confirmation of the appropriateness of the word *enowning* that this word provides a unique possibility for bringing into English what Heidegger does, at important junctures of *Contributions*, when he hyphenates *Ereignis*. By sometimes hyphenating this word, he draws special attention to *er-* as an enabling power and as naming the always ongoing movement "in" and "through" without coming to rest in a "property" or "possession." We found that the *en-* of "enowning" is capable of doing this.

The existing options in English for translating *Ereignis*, i.e., "event," "appropriation" (sometimes as "event of appropriation"), and "befitting" are totally mute when it comes to the movement that runs through *Ereignis*. None begins with the prefix *en-*, with its specific indication of "enabling" and "thorough moving unto." None approximates the *er-eignen* and *eignis* the way *en-, own, and owning* do. It is also clear that none of these words is capable of showing this movement by way of hyphenation. Let us take a closer look at each option.

The first word, *event*, does not even remotely approximate *Ereignis*, because "event" immediately evokes the metaphysical notions of the

unprecedented and the precedent that are totally alien to *Ereignis*. Moreover, as born out by sections 238–242 of the *Contributions*, “event” cannot live up to the demands put on it by *Ereignis* because “event” emerges from within “time-space” and as such is *itself* endowed by *Ereignis*. This means that “event” must be understood from within *Ereignis* and cannot function as its approximation.

After carefully examining “appropriation,” we came to the conclusion that this word also does not approximate *Ereignis*, for at least three reasons: First, “appropriation” is more static than the German *Ereignis* in Heidegger. This English word conveys a sense of stability that is foreign to the vibrancy of *Ereignis*. Second, and more important, “appropriation” brings to mind the act of seizing something without negotiating, which would misconstrue *Ereignis* as an active agent, as one highly bent on ruling and dominating. “Appropriation” proved not to be a viable option because it strengthens the misconception of *Ereignis* as agency of seizing, ruling, and hegemony. Third, “appropriation” lacks a prefix that is necessary in order to reflect the hyphenation of *Er-ignis*. We found that this prefix puts extra demands upon translation, since at highly crucial junctures of *Contributions* the German prefix “Er” in *Er-ignis*—when hyphenated by Heidegger—functions with the autonomy of a full word. To have opted for “appropriation”—disregarding other reservations—would have amounted to depriving the English translation of reflecting what goes on in *Contributions* with the aid of the prefix “Er.”

Finally, we rejected “befitting” as an option because this term runs the risk of misinterpreting *Ereignis* as something self-subsisting that is destined to fit another self-subsisting thing. In other words, “befitting” would dichotomize *Ereignis*. Moreover, the prefix “be” in “befitting” conveys the sense of a “completion” rather than an enabling process.

These reservations about “event,” “appropriation,” and “befitting” were strengthened by the realization that none of these three terms presents translation with the possibility of reflecting the phenomenological kinship—so central to an understanding of the *Contributions*—that exists on the one hand between *Ereignis* and *Ereignung*, *Eignung*, *Zueignung*, *Übereignung*, and on the other hand between *Ereignis* and *ereignen*, *eignen*, *zueignen*, and *übereignen*. We found that this phenomenological kinship must at all costs be reflected in the English translation in order for this translation to belong to the domain of phenomenological thinking. The three terms—*event*, *appropriation*, and *befitting*—have the added disadvantage that none is equipped with a prefix to indicate that, with *Ereignis*, an enabling power comes to the fore that extends itself into words like *Ereignung*, *Eignung*, *Zueignung*, *Übereignung*, *Eigentum*, *eignen*, *ereignen*, *zueignen*, *übereignen*—all words surrounding *Ereignis*.

It is this same dynamic at work in *Ereignis* that guides our translation of *von* as "from": from Enowning. Rather than merely referring to enowning as a topic ("on" or "of" enowning), the *von* here is to be understood as indicative of a thinking that is enowned by being, being as enowning. Thus: from Enowning.

Having decided for *enowning* as the translation of *Ereignis*, we found that the way was opened for translating *Ereignung* with *enownment*, *Flüchtling* with *owning*, *Eigentum* with *ownhood*, *Zueignung* with *owning-to*, and *Übereignung* with *owning-over-to*.

## 2. *Sein* and Related Words

Near the end of *Contributions* Heidegger remarks that, by writing *Seyn* instead of *Sein*, he wants to "indicate that [*Sein*] here is no longer thought metaphysically."<sup>7</sup> Thus he elucidates the specific way in which these words, *Sein* and *Seyn*, with their frequent appearance throughout *Contributions*, are to be understood. But how do we reflect this understanding in translation?

Heidegger uses the eighteenth-century orthography of *Sein*, i.e., *Seyn*, in order to indicate that, when he writes *Sein*, he means the way *Sein* is grasped metaphysically and, when he writes *Seyn*, he means the way *Sein* is no longer grasped metaphysically. In both cases, then, he is dealing with one and the same *Sein* and not, as it were, with *Sein* differentiated from *Seyn*. He intends no opposition. Accordingly, to use two different words for translating *Sein* and *Seyn*—e.g., "being" and "been"—would increase the danger of carrying too far a simple orthographic device.<sup>8</sup> It suggests too much of a "division." Thus we realized (a) that translating *Seyn* with a new English word is misleading, in indicating too great a delineation, and (b) that, if available, an orthographic device is enough for drawing attention to *Seyn*.

Considering the fact that both *Sein* and *Seyn* are pronounced in exactly the same way and that the difference between these words is noticeable only in writing, we decided to use the English word "being" for translating *Sein* and to hyphenate the same word as "be-ing" for translating *Seyn*. In this way we have two English words, *being* and *be-ing*, that, like *Sein* and *Seyn*, are pronounced in the same way but written differently. Thus we are able to avoid using a "new" word for *Seyn*—like *been*—which could be misunderstood as standing in opposition to "being." For, distinguishing *Seyn* from *Sein* is not the same as creating an opposition between them. (It should be noted, however, that, as F. W. von Herrmann writes in the Editor's Epilogue, "The alternating spellings "*Seyn*" and "*Sein*" ["be-ing" and "being"] were left unchanged, even where the matter at hand is "*Seyn*" ["be-ing"] and not "*Sein*" ["being"] and where Heidegger here and there, apparently during the writing, did not consistently maintain the different spelling."<sup>9</sup> We have

made the same decision and consistently translated "Seyn" with "being" and "Sein" with "being.")

Regarding words that are related to being and being, we found that they fall into two groups: (1) the group in which being and being are directly present, (2) the group of words derived from being and being.

From the first group we must discuss our choices for rendering *die Geschichte des Seins*, *Seinsgeschichte*, and *seinsgeschichtlich*. Focusing on the "being" component in these words and deciding to translate *Geschichte* with "history," we rendered these words as "history of being," "being-history," and "being-historical." But how to reflect in translation the important difference between *Geschichte* and *Historie*?

Our translation needs to reflect the difference between *Geschichte* as what is enowned by being and *Historie* as the discipline of historiography. This differentiation is of paramount importance for understanding *Contributions* because, as Heidegger points out near the end of this work, "enowning" is the "origin of history."<sup>10</sup> "History" here is quite different from history as a discipline or as historiography. The happenings that constitute *Geschichte* are quite different from the events that make up *history*. The German word *Geschichte*, more so than the English word *history*, implies: unfolding, issuance, and proffering. Given this difference and considering the sheer impossibility of using two different words in English, one for *Geschichte* and one for *Historie*, we decided to use the same word *history* for both but to demarcate *Historie* by using two parenthetical devices. Whenever the context makes it clear that *Historie* is meant, the reader will find the word *history* followed in brackets either by the word *Historie* or the words "as a discipline."

Belonging to the second group are words such as *das Seiende*, *das Seiendste*, *seiender*, and *seiend*. Whereas *das Seiende* appears quite frequently in the text, other variants of this word appear infrequently. An unsurpassable philosophical precision in translation—if such were ever achievable—would demand that we uniformly render *das Seiende* with "a being." However, realizing that such precision is not achievable in translation, we exercised two options. For those cases where the philosophical meaning would be otherwise totally compromised, we opted for translating *das Seiende* with "a being." In all other cases we translate *das Seiende* with "beings" in order to maintain a uniform level of readability. But the reader should bear in mind that throughout this translation "beings" is used as a word whose point of reference is "a being's restoration in the other beginning," which is to say that our choice of "beings" is not to be taken as a generalization of all "beings."

When Heidegger uses *das Seiendste*, *seiender*, and *seiend* in *Contributions*, he does not assume a chain of beings and its inherent hierarchy. Although these words bring to mind the Platonic  $\delta\upsilon\tau\alpha\varsigma\ \delta\upsilon$  and the Thomistic *maxime ens*, what is to be disclosed by them is called in the

*Contributions* "restoration of beings." Thus our renditions of these words with "most being" and "more being" are to be taken not in the sense of a series of superlatives but as indicating restoration of beings.

### 3. *Wesen* and Related Words

One might perhaps say that the words *Wesen* and *Wesung* are the most crucial words for translating *Contributions*. Therefore, when translating *Wesen* and *Wesung* into English, it is of paramount importance to convey the richness, complexity, and subtlety that these words have in German. No other word in the entirety of *Contributions* offers as varied a possibility for the translator as the word *Wesen*. Whether *Wesen* refers to something specific—e.g., language, history, truth—or appears in the context of the first Greek beginning or exercises its disclosive power in conjunction with being and be-ing, each time *Wesen* comes through with a demand for a different way of being translated. The varied possibilities for translating this word range from a rather simple rendition of it as "essence," when the context is that of the first Greek beginning, to a more difficult rendition when this word says something directly and specifically about being and be-ing and thus borders on untranslatability. In short, as a central being-historical word, *Wesen* in *Contributions* defies a uniform English rendition.

When *Wesen* appears in the context of the first beginning, which, among other things, is distinguished by the questions τί ἔστιν (what a being is) and ὅτι ἔστιν (that a being is) and by a discussion of ἕξις, οὐσία, κοινόν, etc., we consistently translate *Wesen* as "essence." We do so because, in the context of the first beginning, Heidegger uses the word *Wesen* as the German rendition of *essentia*, in English: *essence*. But it should be pointed out that this is more than simply using a traditional and available word. For Heidegger's returning to *Wesen* as the German rendition of *essentia* cannot be understood as simply picking up a German word that happens to be available to him as he thinks *essentia*. The return to *Wesen* as *essentia/essence* occurs in the context of a being-historical decision which shapes the entirety of *Contributions*. This is the decision for opening up and disclosing that unprecedented and monumental unfolding in the thinking of being that is the first beginning. Thus, *Wesen* is always situated within a broader context, one that the word *essence* cannot convey.

Thus, sometimes the word *Wesen* simply means "essentia" or "essence." As a "being-historical word," however, it also discloses a profound and comprehensive occurrence that is the first beginning and in which the word *Wesen* is not simply a rendition of *essentia* (essence). In order to convey that occurrence, Heidegger now uses the same word *Wesen* but with a significant twist. This "twist" is of paramount importance for the translation of *Contributions*. He uses *Wesen* as a word derived from the



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