

Martin Heidegger
COUNTRY PATH
CONVERSATIONS

TRANSLATED BY **Bret W. Davis**

STUDIES IN
CONTINENTAL
THOUGHT



Country Path Conversations

Studies in Continental Thought

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Martin Heidegger

**Country Path
Conversations**

Translated by
Bret W. Davis

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CONTENTS

Translator's Foreword	vii
1. Αγχιβασίη: A Triadic Conversation on a Country Path between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Guide	1
2. The Teacher Meets the Tower Warden at the Door to the Tower Stairway	105
3. Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and an Older Man	132
Editor's Afterword	161
Glossaries	165

Translator's Foreword

The present volume is based on a set of manuscripts which Heidegger wrote in 1944–1945, but which he did not publish during his lifetime apart from an excerpt from the first conversation (discussed below). Heidegger did make plans, however, for this trilogy of “conversations” to be published in his collected works—or rather, as his motto for the collection has it, in his “ways, not works” (*Wege, nicht Werke*)—and these intentions were fulfilled when *Feldweg-Gespräche (1944/45)* was first published, posthumously, as volume 77 of the Heidegger *Gesamtausgabe*.¹ *Country Path Conversations* is a translation of that volume.

Many of the basic contours of Heidegger's later thought were first sketched out in the voluminous collections of private meditations that make up *Contributions to Philosophy* and its sequel volumes, which were composed during the years leading up to *Country Path Conversations*, that is, between 1936 and 1944.² These important texts are presently receiving the close scholarly attention they deserve. Yet because of the exceedingly *monological* character of those meditations, they are often notoriously difficult to decipher. To be sure, the unfamiliarity and difficulty of their thoughts must be understood at least in part as essential to the originary and enigmatic character of the matter itself. Heidegger indeed

1. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995; 2nd edition, 2005. For details on the manuscript remains and the editorial process behind volume 77 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter abbreviated as *GA*, followed by volume number), see the editor's afterword at the back of this volume.

2. *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis) (1936–38)* (*GA* 65); *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). A new translation of *Contributions*, by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, is in preparation for Indiana University Press. Also see *Besinnung (1938/39)* (*GA* 66), translated as *Mindfulness* by Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (London: Continuum, 2006); *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* (*GA* 67); *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (*GA* 69); *Über den Anfang (1941)* (*GA* 70); and the forthcoming volumes *Das Ereignis (1941/42)* (*GA* 71) and *Die Stege des Anfangs (1944)* (*GA* 72).

never writes for “public consumption,” and in *Contributions* he even goes so far as to claim: “Making itself intelligible is suicide for philosophy.”³ Common sense is all too quick to condemn as unintelligible what it cannot immediately understand on its own terms, and all too quick to neutralize and trivialize what it can. Nevertheless, while in those private manuscripts Heidegger also writes to be someday read and understood, at least by “the few and the rare,” even the most careful reading of many of the esoteric meditations in those volumes can sometimes leave one with the sense of having eavesdropped on a solitary thinker’s struggle to make sense of his own emerging and evolving thoughts, rather than having been addressed by a writer endeavoring to invite others onto his path of thinking.

By contrast, *Country Path Conversations* was written precisely at a point when Heidegger had rounded the bend of the major turns in his thought-path, and it can be read as a fresh attempt to more openly convey—or rather, to more *dialogically* or *conversationally* unfold—the way of thinking he had found.⁴ Heidegger in fact prefers the word *Gespräch* (conversation) to *Dialog* (dialogue), apparently because, while the latter might be (mis)understood as a subsequent speaking that takes place between two subjects about something predetermined, the former can be understood as an originary gathering (*Ge-*) of language (*Sprache*) which first determines who is speaking and what is spoken about (see pp. 36–37).⁵ Insofar as it is especially through conversation that “what is spoken of may of itself bring itself to language for us and thus bring itself near” (p. 47), the literary form of *Country Path Conversations* would be vital to the furthering of Heidegger’s path of thinking, and not simply a heuristic device used to communicate thoughts which had already been worked out privately.

In any case, while no less profound in content than his volumes of solitary meditations from the previous decade, and while at times as deeply enigmatic (indeed, abiding with what is essentially enigmatic is

3. *GA* 65, p. 435; *Contributions*, p. 307.

4. These “imaginary conversations” can also be contrasted with the significant interpretive works from this period, such as the lecture courses and essays on Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, Hölderlin, Schelling, Hegel, and Nietzsche. While such texts present Heidegger’s dialogical confrontation with other thinkers and their thoughts, the freer format of *Country Path Conversations* allows him to develop and convey his thought both dialogically and yet in his own terms. While acknowledging the manner in which these terms are often critically retrieved from the tradition, the characters in *Conversations* are less bound to elucidation and interpretation, and freer to unfold their own path of thought.

5. All references to *Country Path Conversations*, whether given parenthetically in this foreword or in translator’s notes, indicate page numbers in the present volume. The corresponding pagination of *GA* 77 can be found in the header of the text.

one of the volume's recurring themes: see for instance, pp. 19–21, 51–53, 78, 89, 138, and 141), *Country Path Conversations* is considerably more approachable and engaging; its dialogical or “conversational” character invites the reader to accompany Heidegger along his path of thinking. And with respect to this format—as *erdachte Gespräche*, imaginary or “thought-up” conversations—*Country Path Conversations* holds an almost unique place in Heidegger's writings.⁶

The first and longest conversation is exemplary in this regard. It takes place between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Guide, and it is precisely the interplay between these three distinct characters that moves their “triadic conversation” along.⁷ While by the end of the conversation the three voices do frequently appear to be speaking in tandem and finishing one another's thoughts, this is far less the case in the beginning. In particular, the distance and disagreement between the Scientist and the Guide is marked in the earlier parts of the conversation. The Guide (*der Weise*) is clearly pointing (*weisen*) the way to proceed down the path,⁸ while the Scientist⁹ often finds it rather difficult to follow these indications insofar as this demands thinking beyond the hori-

6. The only comparable text is “A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), which was composed by Heidegger loosely on the basis of his conversations with Tezuka Tomio and other Japanese thinkers.

7. The title “A Triadic Conversation . . .” translates “Ein Gespräch selbstdritt . . .” The rare and obsolete expression *selbstdritt* combines the notion of “self” (implying “selfsame”) with that of “three,” indicating a relation of three-in-one. Indeed, the title could have been translated as “A Triune Conversation . . .” were it not for the almost exclusively Christian connotations of “triune,” which would be misleading here. (It should be noted, however, that to my knowledge the only use of a variation of *selbstdritt* is in the case of paintings of “Anna Selbdritt,” which portray St. Anne, the Virgin Mary, and the Infant Jesus.) Were it not for distracting contemporary connotations, the title could also have been translated as “A Threesome Conversation . . .,” especially given the etymological kinship between “some” and “same.”

8. “Guide” translates here *der Weise*. Although this term would normally be translated as “wise man” or “sage,” Heidegger makes clear that he means someone who is able to indicate (*weisen*) the way, rather than someone who possesses wisdom (*Weisheit*) (see p. 54). The word “guide” is in fact etymologically related to “wise” as well as to *weisen*: “the ancestor of guide was Germanic *wit*-‘know,’ the source of English wise, wit, and witness. . . . It eventually became Old French *guider*, and was borrowed by English. The semantic progression from ‘knowing’ to ‘showing’ is also displayed in the related German *weisen*, ‘show, direct, indicate’” (John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* [New York: Arcade, 1990], p. 267).

9. “Scientist” translates here *der Forscher*, which more literally means “researcher.” In German *Forschung* generally connotes “scientific research,” and, even though we need to bear in mind that *Wissenschaft* has a somewhat wider semantic range than “science” (insofar as it includes the *Geisteswissenschaften* or hu-

zon of established modern concepts. The Scientist's frank obstinacy and at times impatient eagerness for clarity contrast with—and complement—the Guide's radical yet guarded suggestions; and both are mediated by the contributions of the learned Scholar, who seeks to cautiously follow up on the Guide's indications by relating them back to the history of philosophy. All three characters thus play indispensable roles in the conversational movement of the text. The Guide suggestively indicates the way, the Scholar provides erudite footing and cautions patience, and the Scientist repeatedly demands clarity and sometimes stubbornly drags his feet. But it is often precisely because the Scientist asserts familiar modern and "scientific" platitudes, and insists on clear explanations for unfamiliar (radically new as well as old and forgotten) ways of thinking, that we find ourselves drawn into and kept involved in the conversation. Indeed, let us confess that the Scientist often provocatively raises precisely the objections, or pointedly asks just the questions, that many of us—Heidegger scholars as well as first-time readers—at times find ourselves wanting a response to!

A significant excerpt from *Country Path Conversations* is already familiar to readers of the later Heidegger. In 1959, in a small volume entitled *Gelassenheit*, an abbreviated and slightly modified version of the climactic sections of the first conversation—approximately one-fourth of the entire conversation¹⁰—appeared under the title "Toward an Emplacing Discussion [*Erörterung*] of Releasement [*Gelassenheit*]: From a Country Path Conversation about Thinking."¹¹ An English translation of this text was published in 1966 as "Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking."¹² Although I have benefited from consulting this work, I have retranslated all the corresponding sections along with—and in light of—the original longer version of the conversation. In a few places where Heidegger modified these sections for the 1959 publication, I have inserted notes to alert the reader to what was altered.

Despite the fact that this excerpt from the first conversation was removed from its original context, it has nevertheless proven to be one of the most widely read and influential texts by the later Heidegger. One reason for this prominence is its explanation of a key term in Heideg-

manities, as well as the natural sciences), *Forscher* is often best translated as "scientist," as in the present case where it refers to a physicist.

10. Although in her afterword to the present volume, the German editor refers to this excerpt as "roughly the last third," there are significant sections in the last third of the conversation that were not included in the 1959 publication.

11. "Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit: Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken," in *Gelassenheit*, 10th edition (Pfullingen: Neske, 1992), pp. 29–71 (reprinted in *GA* 13).

12. In *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 58–90.

ger's later thought, *Gelassenheit*. I have followed the established consensus in translating this term as "releasement." However, it should be kept in mind that the traditional and still commonly used German word conveys a sense of "calm composure," especially and originally that which accompanies an existential or religious experience of letting-go, being-let, and letting-be.

The word *Gelassenheit*—as the nominal form of the perfect participle of *lassen*, "to let"—has a long history in German thought. It was coined by Meister Eckhart in the thirteenth century and subsequently used by a number of other mystics, theologians, and philosophers.¹³ In the context of Christianity, *Gelassenheit* is generally thought to entail both a releasement-from—a renunciation or abandonment (*Ablassen*) of—self-will, and a releasement-to—a deferral or leaving matters and one's own motivations up to (*Überlassen*)—the will of God. Heidegger certainly draws on this tradition. And yet, while he acknowledges that "many good things can be learned" from Eckhart, Heidegger explicitly seeks to distance his thought from any deferential obedience to a divine will. This traditional understanding of *Gelassenheit*, it is said, is "thought of still within the domain of the will." Heidegger does not want to simply reverse positions within this domain, namely from active assertion (willful projection) to passive deference (will-less reception). Rather, insofar as releasement as "non-willing" (*Nicht-Wollen*) would "not belong to the domain of the will" as such, he is attempting to twist free of this very dichotomy, and indeed to think "outside the [very] distinction between activity and passivity" (p. 70).

This attempt proves, however, to be extremely difficult. To begin with, this difficulty is due to the fact that "non-willing" can all too easily be (mis)understood to indicate a variety of comportments *within* the domain of the will, such as a willful refusal to will or a mere lack of strength to will. Each of these senses is shown to be a "variation" (*Abwandlung*) of, rather than a genuine alternative to, willing (see pp. 48ff.). Authentic non-willing must be thought of as radically beyond the domain of will, rather than as a mere shift of position or simplistic reversal within it. And yet, it is the very radicality of this difference that gives rise to the enigmatic character of the *transition* from willing to non-willing; after all, at least the instigation of such a transition would seem to require a "willing of non-willing." Much attention in the conversation is accordingly given to the Guide's intentionally paradoxical remark, "I will non-willing" (see pp. 33, 37-42, 68-69, and 92-93). In any case, the conversation-partners cannot simply and without further ado renounce the will and embrace the

13. See *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 2006), vol. 3, pp. 220-224. On *Gelassenheit* in Meister Eckhart's thought, see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), chap. 5.

alternative of non-willing, but must "slow down their pace" and meditate on the enigmatic transition out of the domain of the will and into the open-region of non-willing.

This crucial yet enigmatic transition from willing to non-willing is not just a central topic of the first text in *Country Path Conversations*. As I have sought to demonstrate in detail elsewhere, the meditations on *Gelassenheit* in terms of non-willing in this text play a pivotal role in a turn in Heidegger's thought-path itself, a turn which involves a transition from an ambiguous and often ambivalent philosophy of will to a radical and explicit critique of the (domain of) will, together with an endeavor to think non-willing(ly).¹⁴ *Country Path Conversations* was written precisely as Heidegger was rounding the bend of this "second turn" in his thought-path. After this time, the will is seen as nothing less than the aberrant meaning of being—its revealing in extreme self-concealment, its withdrawal to the point of abandonment—in the modern epochs of the history of being, which culminate in Nietzsche's philosophy of the "will to power"¹⁵ and finally in the contemporary epoch of the technological "will to will."¹⁶

While the first conversation treats a number of central topics of the later Heidegger's thought, including the question of technology, the transition from willing to non-willing could be said to reflect one of its two main themes. These two themes are, on the one hand, an explication of the open-region (*die Gegnet*), in other words, what Heidegger later calls a "topology of being";¹⁷ and, on the other hand, a critique of

14. See my *Heidegger and the Will*. For an introduction to this topic, see my "Will and *Gelassenheit*," in Bret W. Davis, ed., *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen, 2010).

15. See in particular the second volume of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, 5th edition (Pfullingen: Neske, 1989), most of which was written in the five years leading up to *Country Path Conversations*. The English translations of these lectures and essays are contained in volumes three and four of Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1987, 1982).

16. In an essay completed around this same time (1946), Heidegger writes: "The basic form of appearance in which the will to will arranges and calculates itself in the unhistorical element of the world of completed metaphysics can be stringently called 'technology.'" Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 7th edition (Pfullingen: Neske, 1994), p. 76; "Overcoming Metaphysics," in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 93.

17. "[The] thinking after *Being and Time* replaced the expression 'meaning of being' with 'truth of being.' And, in order to exclude its being understood as correctness, 'truth of being' was explained by 'location of being' [*Ortschaft*]—truth as locality [*Örtlichkeit*] of being. This already presupposes, however, an understanding of the place-being of place. Hence the expression *topology of be-ing* [Topologie des Seyns]" (*GA* 15, p. 335; *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François

the will—especially the willfulness of “transcendental-horizonal representation”—along with a search for a way of releasement from its grip and into an authentic, non-willing manner of thoughtfully dwelling within the open-region of being. Together, these two themes reflect Heidegger’s abiding twofold concern with being and its relation to human being. While he concludes elsewhere that “the deepest meaning of being is *letting* [Lassen],”¹⁸ he proposes here that the most proper comportment of human being within the open-region of being is releasement (*Gelassenheit*). In *Gelassenheit*, human being properly corresponds to the *Seinlassen* of being itself.

This twofold concern with being and its relation to human being is in one way or another the fundamental question at issue throughout all three conversations. The guiding question of the first conversation, however, is the nature of “cognition” (*Erkennen*). Modern and scientific thinking is characterized as a willful representation, an objectification that transcends—climbs over—things to determine a transcendental horizon which delimits the forms through which things can only appear as objects to subjects (see pp. 55–56, 63, and 65). Heidegger traces this modern transcendental “thinking as willing” back to *τέχνη* (*technē*) as one of the Greek forms of knowledge, and forward to the “mathematical projection of nature” in the natural sciences, especially physics (see pp. 7ff.). It is even suggested that, in a sense, “physics is applied technology,” and that “the thinking of physics and technology, which sets forth nature as object, shows itself as a human attack on nature” (p. 11). However, when nature is objectified, it is said to reveal a “mysterious defense against the attack of technology” which threatens to annihilate the essence of the human (pp. 11, 13). Hence the urgency and the stakes of the conversation’s reflection on the essence of cognition and thinking.

This critique of willful representation (*Vorstellen*)—together with the other components of the essence of technology, production (*Herstellen*), ordering (*Bestellen*), and so on (see pp. 7, 117), which Heidegger later names together as the *Ge-stell*¹⁹—gives way to a search for an alternative, non-willing thinking. Whereas willful representation projects transcendental subject-centered “horizons” of intelli-

Raffoul [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003], p. 41). In fact, from quite early on Heidegger thought of the event of the truth of being as taking place in, or rather as, a clearing (*Lichtung*), in the metaphorical sense of a place in a forest where trees have been cleared so as to open up a space for meaningful habitation.

18. *GA* 15, p. 363; *Four Seminars*, p. 59.

19. See “The Question Concerning Technology,” in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, rev. and exp. edition, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1993).

bility, a non-willing thinking would entail opening up to the "open-region" (*Gegnet*) which surrounds all our horizons and lets them be in the first place. In other words, the horizon is revealed to be only the side facing us of this surrounding openness, a provisional anthropocentric delimitation of the open-region. Rather than insist that things be impossibly set forth into unbounded unconcealment, non-willing thinking would let itself engage (*Sich einlassen*) in the play of revealing/concealing that allows things to show themselves within delimited and yet—or rather, and *therefore*—meaningful horizons.²⁰ The open-region does not replace so much as enplace or enfold our horizons of intelligibility. But now these horizons are recognized for what they are: always finite delimitations of the open-region of being. The epochal events of these temporally and spatially finite determinations make up the history of the open-region (see p. 91). The open-region is thus not just a topological, but also a temporal name for being. Indeed, Heidegger speaks of the open-region not only as an "expanse" (*Weite*), but also as an "abiding-while" (*Weile*) or, putting this temporal-topological pair together, as an "abiding expanse" (*verweilende Weite*) (p. 74).

Much of the first conversation is concerned with how to rethink the relations between open-region and human, open-region and thing, and thing and human. The conversation attempts to think these relations in terms of a "selfsameness" (*Selbigkeit*) that essentially includes difference, as well as a nearness and farness that mutually imply one another. We might call to mind here Heidegger's later rethinking of "identity" as a belonging-together, especially the belonging-together of *Dasein* and *Sein* or of thinking and being,²¹ as well as such claims as "the essence of nearness appears to lie in bringing near that which is near, in that it holds it at a distance."²² The first country path conversation concludes with an interpretation of a one-word fragment from Heraclitus, Ἀγχιβασίη (*Anchibasiē*), which suggests that proper knowing is neither a matter of maintaining an objective and disengaged distance, nor of

20. The Greek word *horizon* derives from *horizein*, meaning "to bound or limit," and from *horos*, meaning "boundary." Yet it should be borne in mind that for Heidegger a "limit" is also what enables something to come to presence in a definite manner. He writes: "The boundary or limit [*Grenze*] in the Greek sense [of *peras*] does not block off; rather, being itself brought forth, it first brings to appearance what presences. The limit sets free into the unconcealed" (*GA 5: 71; Basic Writings*, p. 208, trans. modified).

21. See Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1957); *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

22. Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 6th edition (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), p. 24; *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), p. 42.

abolishing distance with a technological attack that attempts to remove all that nature holds in reserve, but rather a "going-into-nearness" (*Indie-Nähe-gehen*), an approaching that cultivates a relation of respectful intimacy (pp. 101–102).

This going-into-nearness is at the same time a special kind of "waiting," another key term of *Country Path Conversations* with which Heidegger characterizes the non-willing essence of authentic thinking, and which he identifies with "releasement" and "surmising" (*Vermuten*) (see pp. 75–76, 78–81, 97–98, 140–143, and 146–153). All three conversations explain this authentic kind of waiting (*Warten*) in terms of an attentive and engaged openness to an arrival of something unexpected, in contrast to an awaiting (*Erwarten*) that would first actively project what it then expects to passively receive. A genuine non-willing waiting would be neither a merely passive reception of a fate nor an aggressively active projection of a plan, but rather an attentive and responsive "present-waiting-toward" (*Gegen-wart*) which allows what is far to come near, to be near in its farness and far in its nearness (pp. 146–150).

The intimate interplay between nearness and farness is also a concern of the second conversation, where the Tower Warden (*Türmer*) not only tells us, "He who lives in the height of a tower feels the trembling of the world sooner and in further-reaching oscillations," but also says that it is necessary to "catch sight of the tower from a distance" (pp. 105, 109). How to understand the figures of the Tower Warden and the tower is one of the topics this text invites us to ponder. Perhaps Heidegger had in mind watchtowers on fortress hilltops, like the one in Zähringen near his home on the outskirts of Freiburg (see the photograph on the back jacket of this book)—or like the one in Staufen, a small town near Freiburg where Faust is said to have spent his last days. Indeed, having made reference to Goethe in the first conversation (see p. 22), in this second conversation Heidegger might even have had in mind the following lines spoken by a tower warden who appears near the end of *Faust* in a scene called "Deep Night" (part 2, act 5, scene 4):

LYNCEUS DER TÜRMER (*auf der
Schloßwarte singend*):

Zum Sehen geboren,
Zum Schauen bestellt,
Dem Turme geschworen,
Gefällt mir die Welt.
Ich blick in die Ferne,
Ich seh in der Näh
Den Mond und die Sterne,

LYNCEUS THE TOWER WARDEN (*singing
on the watchtower of the castle*):

To see I was born,
To look is my call,
To the tower sworn,
I delight in all.
I glance out far,
And see what is near,
The moon and the stars,

Den Wald und das Reh.	The wood and the deer.
...	...
Nicht allein mich zu ergetzen, Bin ich hier so hoch gestellt; Welch ein greuliches Entsetzen Droht mir aus der finstern Welt!	But not for my joy alone I am placed at such a height; What a hideous threat has grown Under me out of the night!
...	...
Sollt ihr Augen dies erkennen! Muß ich so weitsichtig sein! Das Kapellchen bricht zusammen	Eyes, must you behold this sight! Must you see so very far! Now the falling branches crash
Von der Äste Sturz und Last. Schlängelnd sind mit spitzen Flammen	Through the chapel, it falls down As the flames, like serpents, dash
Schon die Gipfel angefaßt. Bis zur Wurzel glühn die hohlen Stämme, purpurrot im Glühn.— (<i>Lange Pause, Gesang.</i>)	To embrace the lindens' crown. To their roots the hollow trees Have turned crimson. (<i>Long pause. Song.</i>)
Was sich sonst dem Blick empfohlen, Mit Jahrhunderten ist hin.	What for many centuries Pleased all eyes—now is gone.
FAUST: Von oben Welch ein singend Wimmern?	FAUST [<i>responds</i>]: From up there, what a whining squeal?
Das Wort ist hier, der Ton zu spat. Mein Türmer jammert; mich im Innern	It is too late to speak or plead. My warden wails; at heart I feel
Verdrießt die ungeduldge Tat. Doch sei der Lindenwuchs vernichtet	Annoyed at this impatient deed. The lindens are part of the past,
Zu halbverkohlter Stämme Graun, Ein Luginsland ist bald errichtet, Um ins Unendliche zu schau. Da seh ich auch die neue Wohnung,	Charred trunks are of no benefit— Yet a good lookout is built fast To gaze into the infinite. The new estate I also see
Die jenes alte Paar umschließt, Das im Gefühl großmütiger Schonung	Where the old couple has been sent: Glad of my generosity
Der späten Tage froh genießt.	They'll spend their last years there, content. ²³

23. *Goethe's Faust*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 446–451.

Of course, Heidegger's Tower Warden cannot be simply identified with Goethe's, but perhaps this passage from *Faust* can at least help us interpret the setting of, and that elusive character in, Heidegger's second conversation. Perhaps philosophers dwell in their "ivory towers" not only to wonder at the world, but also to serve as watchmen on the lookout for the looming dangers and promising new dawns on the horizons of their epoch of the history of being. The figure of the tower in the second conversation would thus not just be an ivory tower of useless speculation; or rather, given that speculation is defended in the first conversation (see pp. 5-6), as is the usefulness of the useless (or the necessity of the unnecessary) in the third conversation (see pp. 143, 152-153, 155-156), the philosophy that takes place in such a tower would be a matter of what Heidegger calls elsewhere the "immediately useless, though sovereign, knowledge of the essence of things."²⁴ The seemingly lofty speculations of these conversations could be understood as immediately useless *though urgent* warnings to modern, Faustian humanity of a spreading devastation that goes unnoticed by those who cannot see it, see the spreading forest fire, on account of their immersion in the business and busyness of life among the trees, that is, on account of their "factual sense of reality which they claim lets the human first stand with both feet squarely on the ground" (p. 153). For Heidegger, who began his career by wedding a return to the concreteness of factual life with a retrieval of the seemingly most abstract question of being, it would be necessary to both dwell in the tower and, so to speak, to walk through the woods. Along with the way up and the way down, the overview from the tower and the underview from the path on the ground need to be interwoven in the selfsame task of thinking.

To help recover the essence of humanity, and to save it from this devastation, the second conversation further develops the temporal-topological understanding of the relation between being and human being. What Heidegger elsewhere calls the existence of Dasein is referred to in this conversation as *Aufenthalt* (sojourn), a word which can be understood in the dual sense of a temporal-spatial abiding, a staying somewhere for a while, and a temporal-spatial abode, the time during which and the place in which one stays. While Dasein's existence is thought as *Aufenthalt*, being (*Sein*) is topologically thought here as the *Enthalt*. This peculiar neologism is clearly related to the verb *enthalten*, presumably both in its sense of "to contain" (to hold within oneself) and also in the sense of *sich enthalten*, "to withhold oneself." (This ambiguity is enhanced by the fact that the prefix *ent-* can signify either an intensification or a removal.) We can surmise that both senses are intended by

24. GA 45, p. 3; *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 5.

Heidegger here. I have attempted to reiterate this intentional ambiguity in my translation of *der Enthalt* as “the with-hold,” in light of the fact that the “with-” too can be understood both in the sense of a withholding or withdrawing (*Entziehen*), and in the sense of a holding within or nearby (*bei*) oneself. The apparent paradox of this ambiguity is perhaps resolved if we consider that—as in the case of the open-region, which *both surrounds and exceeds* our limited horizons—one never has in full view that in which one is contained. The whole both contains (holds within itself) and withdraws (withholds itself) from the part.

To be sure, human being is for Heidegger not just one among other parts of an encompassing being; the human is that being which is called on to take part in the appropriating event of being. Being requires (*braucht*) human Da-sein (being-there) as the locale for its presencing, for its arrival into truth as unconcealment (see pp. 95–96). Da-sein—as being-in-the-world in the sense of an indwelling (*Inständigkeit*) or staying (*Sichaufhalten*) within the shelter of the clearing of being—is thought of in the second conversation as “sojourn-in-the-with-hold” (*Auf-ent-Halt*) (see pp. 118ff.). This sojourning in the with-hold, that is, in the abiding expanse which both holds within and withholds, is not simply described as a transhistorical given to be recognized, but rather spoken of as a historical task to be taken up. Human beings must find their way (back) into this essential abode of their most proper way of being: “we must continually turn back to where we truly already are” (pp. 115, 117).

In Heidegger's being-historical thinking, the question of “where we are” must be understood both ontologically and historically. *Country Path Conversations* was written at a crucial moment, not only in the development of Heidegger's own thought, but also in world history. All three conversations were composed on the eve of the end of the Second World War. The third closes with the date 8 May 1945, and the following remark: “On the day the world celebrated its victory, without yet recognizing that already for centuries it has been defeated by its own rebellious uprising” (p. 157). The conversations attempt to explain why, in the realm of the essential, the end of the war “changes nothing,” why Germany was not alone—even if in well-known respects exemplary—in the global insurgence of the technological civilization of the Occident. Here too, Heidegger maintains that an ontology of the essential events of history (*Geschichte*), or being-historical thinking (*seinsgeschichtliches Denken*), cannot be conflated with historiography (*Historie*) as a reckoning of ontic occurrences.

One of the reasons for the timeliness of a translation of *Country Path Conversations* certainly has to do with the hardly resolved (and perhaps never fully resolvable) “Heidegger affair,” that is, with the controversy surrounding his official involvement with the Nazi regime in 1933–

1934 and the political implications of his thought before and after this time. Although various external perspectives may still be called for in the critical debate surrounding Heidegger's political thought, as a growing number of *Gesamtausgabe* volumes become available, it is also time to return to Heidegger's own texts in order to hear what he has to say with regard to the relation of his thought to world-historical events. The three texts included in *Country Path Conversations*, especially the third, will be central to this endeavor. Although the characters in the conversations rarely speak directly of political events (their focus is meant to be on larger and deeper historical movements), the context is unambiguous. It is no coincidence, for example, that the third conversation takes place in a prisoner of war camp in Russia. Heidegger's own two sons were at the time missing in action on the Russian front. And Heidegger's exasperation with the malicious errancy of Nazism bursts to the surface in such lines from this conversation as the following: "And what is not all wounded and torn apart in us?—us, for whom a blinded leading-astray of our own people is too deplorable to permit wasting a complaint on, despite the devastation that covers our native soil and its helplessly perplexed humans" (p. 133).

Nevertheless, as we have seen, *Country Path Conversations* also offers much more than fuel to the fire of all sides in the controversy surrounding Heidegger's politics. All three of the conversations in this volume are exceptionally rich in philosophical content. They introduce or significantly illuminate a number of central ideas of the later Heidegger's thought, many of which do not find comparably extensive treatment elsewhere. Alongside the topics discussed above—including the problem of the will and the possibility of non-willing, the temporal-topological understanding of being as an abiding open-region that surrounds the temporally delimited horizons of human thought, the sense in which "physics is applied technology," the technological devastation of nature, the possible annihilation of the essence of the human, and "the necessity of the unnecessary"—other key topics addressed in the three conversations include: listening and answering rather than making statements and questioning (pp. 14–16, 47, 66, 78, 106–107, 146–148), a thing in contrast to an object (pp. 81–91, 127–128), the two oldest occidental definitions of the human as the thinking being and the mortal (pp. 143–146), the as yet unrecognized essence of the German people as "those who wait" by means of poetizing and thinking, an essence which has been covered over and distorted by a tyrannical pseudo-essence of impatient and willful "nationalism" (pp. 151–155), and the problem of evil (pp. 133–135, 139, 157–158).

The last of these topics deserves special comment since it receives sparse treatment elsewhere in Heidegger's writings. In the third con-

versation it is suggested not only that “the will itself is what is evil” (p. 134), but even that “evil would dwell in the essence of being” (p. 139). Thus, even though Heidegger suggests that the deepest meaning of being is a letting beings be, and that the most proper human response to this letting is a released involvement in this letting-be, he not only acknowledges here that humans are prone to fall into a malicious willfulness, but also intrepidly suggests that the potential for evil haunts the very essence—or essential occurrence—of being itself. And so, even though the third conversation speaks of the salutary experience of a healing (*das Heilende*) in the midst of the devastation, Heidegger would not be proffering here a theodicy—or an ontodicy—that would seek to justify, much less have us close our eyes to, the horrific and malefic possibilities and actualities of being-historical existence. The existentially decisive question then becomes this: How are we, as the self-restraining-comporters (p. 119) who are required by being (pp. 95–96), called upon to participate in “the strife of being itself”²⁵ so as to aid in letting beings—including other human beings—freely be, rather than so as to blindly assist in unleashing them into the machinations of technological devastation?

It goes without saying that Heidegger is extremely difficult to translate. *Country Path Conversations* presents the translator with a number of peculiar difficulties, starting with the fact that its language is at once that of a conversation (albeit a rather formal one) and yet also always terminologically precise, often poetically thoughtful, sometimes highly unusual, and on more than one occasion frankly enigmatic. I have commented above on the *relatively* accessible nature of their conversational format (in comparison to the more “esoteric” volumes such as *Contributions to Philosophy*). But these conversations by no means consist of small talk on strolls through a park. As “country path conversations,” they veer off the pavement of our accustomed ways of speaking and at times venture into a thicket; their ponderous yet radical manner of speaking frequently transgresses the limits of our familiar horizons and goes several strides beyond our established “clearings” of intelligibility.

I have spared no effort in attempting to make the English *as* clear and accessible as Heidegger's German, but have generally not tried to make my translation any *more* smooth or transparent than its original. Where the German is intentionally ambiguous, dense, or out of the ordinary, so too, I felt, should be the English. Indeed, the occasionally awkward or cryptic manner of speaking is perhaps not only due to the

25. See *GA 9*, p. 359; *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 272.

fact that Heidegger (or one of his characters) is struggling to articulate an unfamiliar thought; it could also be seen as a signal that we are being asked to slow down the usual pace of our reading and thinking. The conversation partners are attempting to patiently follow the path of their meditations as it unfolds—and we are being asked to attentively join them in this endeavor.

Some of the highlights of the content of *Country Path Conversations* have been introduced above, in the process of explaining several crucial terms and their translations. Rather than comment here, out of context, on numerous other difficulties encountered and decisions made in the translation of particular words and phrases, I have inserted translator's notes at points where an explanation seemed necessary or potentially helpful. At other times I have merely inserted the German in square brackets to alert the reader to the word or phrase that is being translated. This was done especially when it was not possible to reproduce a set of cognate German words or phrases, and when Heidegger employs an unusual term or a usual term in an unusual manner. In the back of the book, the reader will find English-German and German-English glossaries that include many important terms and their translations.

I would like to express my appreciation for all the support and encouragement I have received while working on this translation. Let me begin by thanking John Sallis of Boston College and Dee Mortensen of Indiana University Press for their support of this project from the beginning, and for their patience till the end. While most of the work was carried out during a semester and two summers spent in Freiburg in 2007–2008, it was begun several years prior to that. I would like to thank the Center for Humanities at Loyola University Maryland for sponsoring a sabbatical leave, as well as the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) for a Visiting Faculty Scholarship to work on this project at the University of Freiburg in the fall of 2007.

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Country Path Conversations

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