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Heidegger on Deep Time and Being-in-Itself: Introductory Thoughts on 'The Argument against Need'

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"The Argument against Need (for the Being-in-Itself of Entities)" (*Das Argument gegen den Brauch (für das Ansichsein des Seienden)*) presents one of Martin Heidegger's most acute and mature discussions of the problem of a mind-independent reality and the ontological status of facts about the early history of the Earth in particular. The text translated in this issue of the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* comes from an extensive manuscript with the title "The Legacy of the Being-Question" (*Das Vermächtnis der Seinsfrage*), which is held in Heidegger's literary estate at the German Literary Archive (DLA) in Marbach, Germany.[1] This manuscript was collated and at least in part written in the first half of the 1970s; it contains Heidegger's preliminary studies for a long introduction to his collected works, the *Gesamtausgabe*, addressing a number of different themes in retrospect. For reasons of health, Heidegger was unable to complete the introduction.

Selections from the "Legacy" manuscript have been published on several occasions before, most notably in the editor's introduction to the first volume of the *Gesamtausgabe* and in issues of the so-called *Jahresgabe*, an annual gift-booklet for members of the Martin-Heidegger-Gesellschaft. "The Argument against Need" was first edited for the *Jahresgabe* 2013/14. The editors Dietmar Koch and Michael Ruppert selected, transcribed, and annotated the text that we have published in English translation in this issue of BJHP, with kind permission from Arnulf Heidegger on behalf of the Heidegger estate and from the publishing house Vittorio Klostermann (Frankfurt am Main, Germany). The German original is

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[1] See the first note to the translation for more information. Martin Heidegger, "The Argument against Need (for the Being-in-Itself of Entities)", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* x, no. y (2021): $-$. doi: $$.

forthcoming in volume 91 of the *Gesamtausgabe*; an updated preprint version can be found in the online version of BJHP.[2] In their editorial comments to the *Jahresgabe* edition, Koch and Ruppert indicate that the texts they selected come from a slipcase entitled "Need" (*Brauch*), which contains part of the material for the planned introduction. (*Jahresgabe*, 75-76) Although Heidegger worked on that manuscript mainly in the last years of his life, the editors note that the texts they selected must have been completed before April 1970, when a stroke caused Heidegger's handwriting to change considerably. They further suggest that the texts may have been composed several years earlier, in the period of the so-called *Zollikon Seminars*, a series of classes Heidegger taught with the psychoanalyst and philosopher Medard Boss between 1959 and 1969.

This suggestion receives support from a protocol of the conversations between Heidegger and Boss that took place between April 24th and May 6th 1963 during their vacation together in Taormina, Sicily. (Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, 153–182, especially 181–182) Towards the end of the exchange documented by Boss, and in particular during their return flight to Zurich, Heidegger and Boss discussed the ontological status of the Earth before the existence of human beings. This is also the motivating question in the present text, suggesting that some of the material published here was written around the time of their exchange. Recently published notes appear to be a direct preparation for this conversation, indicating that Boss may have prompted Heidegger beforehand to comment on this issue. (GA89, 65–88; this volume includes a reprint of the conversation on pp. 637–668)

Indeed, already in the 1950s, Boss himself must have been interested in the ontology of facts from geological and evolutionary history, as suggested by a letter that is also contained in the archival slipcase and was published in the *Jahresgabe* alongside the texts by Heidegger. This letter, addressed to Boss, was written in 1955 by Rudolf Trümpy, a geologist

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[2] Martin Heidegger, "Das Argument gegen den Brauch (für das Ansichsein des Seienden)", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* x, no. y (2021): $-$. doi: $$.

at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETHZ) and translator of a popular science book on the history of the Earth. In response to a request by Boss, the letter contains recommendations for geological textbooks and scientific sources on the early history of the Earth and on the emergence of life. Trümpy closes the letter with the remark that "for us geologists there can be no doubt about the reality of a very long history of the Earth before humans. This reality may in the end exist only thanks to the retrospective activity of the human mind – but then one would be somewhat frightened by its likeness to God." (*Jahresgabe*, 41)[3]

Although made only in passing, this remark leads to the philosophical core of the question considered by Heidegger: how is it possible to know about events from a time before the emergence of knowers? how to adequately describe the ontological status of facts from what is sometimes called deep time, facts about the early history of the Earth, about the emergence of human species, or about the emergence of life? This problem is prominent in recent debates in metaphysics as well, as geological findings are among Quentin Meillassoux's examples of what he calls "ancestral facts", i.e., facts about matters that predate the evolution of cognizing humans (Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 1–27), and such facts are similarly used by Paul Boghossian as counter-examples to a constructivist account of scientific knowledge. (Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*) The text published here shows that Heidegger, too, considered such facts an important test case for ontology. Heidegger's central effort is to show that the approach of fundamental ontology, as laid out in *Being and Time* in particular, or at least Heidegger's later approach of so-called 'being-historical thinking'

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[3] "Für uns Geologen kann es keinen Zweifel an der Realität einer sehr langen vor-menschlichen Erdgeschichte geben. Diese Realität mag letzten Endes nur dank der rückblickenden Tätigkeit des menschlichen Geistes existieren – aber da wird einem doch vor seiner Gottähnlichkeit etwas bange". The titles Trümpy recommends to Boss are: Gagnebin, *Histoire de la terre et des êtres vivants*, translated into German by Rudolf Trümpy as *Geschichte der Erde*; Peyer, *Geschichte der Tierwelt*; Schindewolf, *Der Zeitfaktor in Geologie und Palaeontologie*; Holmes, *The Age of the Earth*; Brinkmann, *Abriss der Geologie* (in an English abridged version as *Geologic Evolution of Europe*); and Dunbar, *Historical Geology*.

(*seinsgeschichtliches Denken*), are not susceptible to a specific challenge derived from facts about geological or evolutionary history.

This challenge to Heidegger's philosophy even gives the text its title, which comes from a provisional title page also contained in the archival slipcase. Heidegger understood this draft as an attempt to answer the "argument against need" or, as the second clause in the title reads, to respond to the argument "for the Being-in-itself of Entities." (*Jahresgabe*, 40) The title page further adds that the text is merely a "draft" (*Entwurf*), indicating that it should have received further elaboration before publication in the context of the planned introduction. In Heidegger's response to the 'argument against need', much hinges on how one understands the idea that the human being is 'needed' in ontology, i.e., the idea of some form of dependence of facts on cognizing subjects.

This is a question both for the interpreter and for the translator: the German term we translate as 'need' here is *Brauch*, and Heidegger's use of it as a philosophical notion is unusual. The standard meaning given in the *Oxford German Dictionary* is simply 'custom', recording *so ist es der Brauch*, *so will es der Brauch* ('that's the custom') and *nach altem Brauch* ('in accordance with an old custom') among the examples for its use. The more extensive and historically informed *Deutsches Wörterbuch* notes two distinct meanings, however, with the Latin equivalents *mos* ('custom') and *usus*, *utilitas* ('use', 'utility'). The latter meaning is associated in modern German with the variation *Gebrauch*, although according to examples provided by the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, *Brauch* was current in the sense of 'use' in the writings of Luther, which were formative for much of the subsequent history of the German language. For the most part, Heidegger does not seem to deploy the word in this archaic sense, but rather as a nominalization of the root verb *brauchen* ('to need', 'to require'); we have accordingly rendered the noun as 'need' or, when Heidegger emphasizes the definite article, 'the need'. Given how Heidegger uses this term, however, it

should be taken more as a marker for a problem than a standardized, defined concept. Characteristic of Heidegger's approach to the 'argument against need' is that he does not discuss the alternative of whether or not human beings are 'needed' in ontology but contrasts different ways in which such 'need' may be understood. The correct response to the 'argument against need' is not its refutation but a modification of how one should understand the idea that ontological facts 'need' the human being in order to exist.

How to define the target of the 'argument against need' is thus already to anticipate a response, and Heidegger's text may be best understood as a series of attempts to formulate the argument in such a way as to show that it represents no objection to his thought. In the archival material, there is a further indication as to which version of the 'argument' Heidegger is defending his work against. The major body of text translated in this issue (section I) is a longer, continuous text, labeled (though not in Heidegger's hand) a "Complete Elaboration" (*Vollständige Ausarbeitung*), and the *Jahresgabe*-edition includes some additional preparatory notes, which we also translate (section II). These notes include a type-written page (section II.1), which in all likelihood was composed by Boss and outlines a seven-step argument with the conclusion that "mountains, for example, cannot have been there before the arrival of the human being." (AAN, $/$) Although the key term in this argument is slightly different in the German (*bedürfen* instead of *brauchen*), central to this argument is the idea that the ontological category of "being-in-itself" (*An-sich-sein*) "requires the human being [*bedarf des Menschenwesens*]". (AAN, $/$) This suggests that this note presents the version of the argument that originally prompted Heidegger's discussion. What it purports to show is that to assert ontological independence is to silently suppose its contrary. That is to say, it supposes some form of the idea that the assertion of ontological categories, including that of 'independence' (*Unabhängikeit*), presupposes in turn some cognitive involvement, i.e. some idea of 'need'. When Heidegger writes the question "How so?" (*Wie?*) next to the decisive

steps in what in all likelihood is Boss's version of the 'argument against need', Heidegger's response is not to reject the idea of 'need' altogether but to demand further explanation.

Given the sustained effort devoted to this problem, it appears Heidegger took this argument as a serious challenge and thought that clarifying the meaning of 'need' was an important task for ontology; what is required in particular in order to succeed at this task is for the notion to be free from contradiction. Thus in notes for the conversation with Boss in 1963, Heidegger remarks that raising the question as to the existence of the Earth without the human being purports to identify a "contradiction between proposition and doctrine" (*Widerspruch zwischen Satz und Lehre*), i.e. a conflict between the 'doctrine' that being can be determined in relation to the human being and the assertions of ontological independence such as "The earth *is* without the human being" or "The earth is already (at a time) when the human being did not yet exist". Rather than accepting this dilemma, Heidegger points to a third option: "Or perhaps: *no* contradiction – harmony – between proposition and doctrine". Because Heidegger asserts "*that the interpretation of being and Dasein is wrong* when I say that the Earth *was* – before the human being existed" – the overall goal of both the notes for the conversation with Boss and the "Complete Elaboration" is to give a positive account of the sense that assertions of ontological independence have rather than accepting that they are impossible in Heideggerian ontology, in which case the 'argument against need' would be an argument against his philosophy. In the texts published here, Heidegger presents a similar form of this contradiction at the beginning of the "Complete Elaboration". He also develops his response in directions that are defined by often implicit references to contexts which are worth commenting on. One such direction is to inquire into the notion of *temporal* sequence implied

in the idea that the earth was there *before* Homo sapiens. In his notes for the conversation with Boss, Heidegger poses the question explicitly: "*What does 'was' mean?*" (GA89, 82)[4]

Although Heidegger does not reference his earlier work directly in sketching an account of time in the texts published here, he reiterates an important move from that period when describing a regress from the chronological sequence of events, from what he calls 'world time' (*Weltzeit*) in *Being and Time*, to a more basic form. As Heidegger remarks in one passage of the "Complete Elaboration", time thus understood is "already given previously — previously, not only within the backward chronological order of the old, older, and oldest entities-in-themselves, but '*previously*' as before this chronological order as such". (AAN, $/$) Such a genuinely ontological understanding of time is 'previous' (*zuvor*) with respect to time as a sequence of events; it is prior in the order of explanation. In contrast to *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger does not attempt to explain this deeper temporal structure with respect to the inherent temporality of Dasein, because this might be taken as but another attempt to describe the dependence of temporal categories on the human being, thereby failing to address the challenge presented to his thought. Instead, Heidegger ties in notions typical of his later works: the explication of time as the relation of the 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) and the 'event' (*Ereignis*) explored in "Time and Being" (1962), for example, as well as the idea of an 'earliness' (*Frühe*), which is associated in "Anaximander's Verdict" (1946) both with the earliest instances of philosophy in the writings of the Pre-Socratics and with the intellectual situation after the writings of Nietzsche. The term 'earliness' is also prominent in Heidegger's interpretation of Georg Trakl in "Language in the Poem" (1952). The implication of these references seems to be that recognizing geological or evolutionary facts as ontologically independent, although it rules out a certain reading of *Being and Time*, does not affect the idea that the connection of past and authentic futurity provides the proper understanding of

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[4] "Die Erde *ist* ohne den Menschen". "Die Erde ist schon (zu einer Zeit), als der Mensch noch nicht existierte". "Oder aber: *kein* Widerspruch – Einklang – zwischen Satz und Lehre". "*Die Interpretation von Sein und Dasein ist irrig*, wo ich sage: die Erde *war* – bevor der Mensch existierte. / *Was heißt 'war'*?"

ourselves as temporal entities: "The turning-in of the human being into the event is the turning-back into his essential provenance, in which humans have always already been, without as yet having expressly inhabited it". (AAN, $/$) With regard to the philosophy of time, the alternative to an understanding of time as a sequence of events is thus not a regress to basic facts about the temporal constitution of one group of entities, namely human beings, which for Heidegger would be to misconstrue *Being and Time*; the alternative is to recognize that a peculiar interdependence between past and future can serve as a normative measure for how we should 'inhabit' the present, an idea arguably anticipated by *Being and Time* in the treatment of 'having-been-ness' (*Gewesenheit*) and 'futurality' (*Zukünftigkeit*).

Heidegger's earlier discussion of time, however, is merely one of the contexts in which Heidegger in the text presented here works towards a genuine understanding of 'need'. Heidegger's own preparatory notes (section II.2) in particular contain important ideas from his thought which are easily missed as they have not, for whatever reason, been included in the more elaborate text. Particularly remarkable is a reference, contained in a note titled "Independence" (*Unabhängigkeit*), to the Nicene Creed. According to this early Christian creed, although God created everything, it is contrary to church doctrine to say that there was a time before God or that God himself is an entity created in time. When Heidegger asks what "invoking" the Nicene Creed could contribute to the understanding of ontological independence, the answer seems to be that on this model, independence must always be granted by the creator to his creation. Responding to the question, "How is such independence *given*?", by referring to a "he" who gives, is to assert the independence of an entity on the condition of a deeper dependence expressed by the thought that the entity is created. (AAN, $/$) The point Heidegger then makes concerns the dilemma identified with regard to the argument: judging entities to be 'created as independent' yields an incoherent understanding of ontological independence. Such analogy with creation may seem peculiar because the entity whose existence is supposedly required to assert the independence of entities is not the

human being but 'he', the creator. But recall Trümpy's remark that "one would be somewhat frightened by its likeness to God" if, as on a constructivist account, the "reality" of geological or evolutionary facts "may in the end exist only thanks to the retrospective activity of the human mind". Trümpy here makes explicit the same thought that emerges in Heidegger's genealogy of the notion of ontological independence: the need to assert the ontological independence of entities may be motivated by the implicit acceptance of a deeper dependence. To be sure, the direct target of Heidegger's critique is views such as creationism or constructivism: when creation by God or construction by the human mind serve as the most basic conceptual scheme, every assertion of an entity's independence implies a deeper dependence. But the point may generalize to any view that attempts to derive metaphysical insights from conditions of assertability or knowability. One such view is Kant's, because Heidegger finds the same structure in Kant's assertion of empirical realism and transcendental idealism. Another is the scientism Heidegger associates with modern physics. (AAN, $/$)

Heidegger expresses this idea in a contrast that is easily overlooked, namely, the contrast between *Ansichseiendes* and *Ansichsein*, entities-in-themselves and being-in-itself. Heidegger uses the first expression to refer to that domain of entities whose ontological independence is asserted. What such assertion should express but fails to capture is the 'in-itself' as a specific trait or mode of being, the independence of entities prior to any system of ontological categories. Despite the close semantic connection, locating entities in the domain of *Ansichseiendes* is one thought too many with regard to entity independence, the experience of their *Ansichsein*. Heidegger draws on this contrast when he discusses the example Boss introduced, a particularly fitting choice for a flight from Sicily to Zurich: "In order to exhibit such entities [namely, entities-in-themselves], is it necessary to make the cumbersome appeal to the results of modern natural science regarding the various ages of the Earth and the human? … to exhibit entities that are independent from the human, it is enough simply to point to the Alps, for example, which tower up into the sky and in no way require {*bedarf*}

the human and his machinations to do *that*". (AAN, $/$) Certain other terms in this text, such as *Anwesen*, also play on the implicit directionality in the preposition *an-*, the sense of approaching or nearing, to indicate what Heidegger seems to understand as the typical trait for the manifestation of the 'in-itself'. The alternative to the contradiction involved in asserting ontological independence, which Heidegger finds in the very notion of entities-in-themselves, seems to be a form of unprejudiced openness to the manifestation of entities 'approaching' or 'nearing' the subject of experience.

Another related set of terms is Heidegger's use of the Latinate *Objektivität* and the German *Gegenständlichkeit* in a discussion of Kant. Here both forms are not opposed to one another but rather are taken to express two instances of the said contradiction, both failing to accommodate genuine being-in-itself. Because Kant's transcendental idealism implies "the turnedness of entities towards subjectivity", the assertion of objectivity (*Objektivität*) fails to capture the genuine 'in-itself': "Objectivity is not synonymous with the being-in-itself of entities-in-themselves". Even more literal in the original German, the same worry emerges with regard to *Gegenständlichkeit*, or in Heidegger's preferred form, with regard to *Gegenständigkeit*: the "character of standing-over-against {*das Gegenständige*} of entities" is not identical to the genuine in-itself because it identifies "only that region of experience of entities-in-themselves, whereby the latter turns *toward* scientific representation". Heidegger goes on to conclude that the very notion of objectivity falls victim to the constructivist worry. The semantics of *Objektivität* and, even more clearly, *Gegenständigkeit* contain an indication that, although they assert independence at the empirical level, on the transcendental level they constitute a problematic form of 'need'. To the extent that they invoke Kant, even more recent theories "make plain the dependence of the determination of objects and of the arguments drawn from this on the human". (AAN, $) The line of reasoning much resembles one of the prominent treatments of Kant in Heidegger's later writings, namely, in the first "Country Path

Conversation" (1945), where the semantics of *gegen-* and *begegnen* are discussed, as is the proximity of Kant's transcendental idealism and the metaphysics of modern science.

Heidegger does not single out a specific scientific methodology or set of scientific theories in the "Complete Elaboration" to be representative of the modern sciences. In another preparatory note, however, he associates what he calls "the retrogressive question concerning an entity-in-itself" with "*modern* physics" and Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in particular. (AAN, $/$) The point here is the same as in the contexts just discussed: being-in-itself is construed in a 'retrogressive' (*rückläufig*) way rather than experienced more genuinely. Although the reference to contemporary science and physics in particular is not discussed in detail either in the "Complete Elaboration" or in the preparatory material, it is worth noting that the three seminars Heidegger co-taught with Boss in 1964 after their airplane conversation all begin with a discussion of modern science. The class notes are not very detailed, but Heidegger's discussion seems to lead to the contrast laid out in the "Complete Elaboration", for he opposes immediately accessing what he calls "the nearest" (*das Nächstliegende*) to the access to reality provided by the construction of scientific models. (GA89, 89-178, esp. pp. 167-173) This line of reasoning leads Heidegger to the perhaps surprising conclusion that genuine access to entities must not presuppose any ontological categories at all. Working with a conceptual scheme that is 'retrogressively' construed rather distorts the genuine manifestation of what there is. Given the earlier discussion of the 'in-itself', invoking a form of ontological pluralism that grants independence to a domain of entities 'in-themselves' will not help to correct this mistake. Heidegger associates such a notion of 'entities-in-themselves', as an ontological region, with 'the sciences' (*Wissenschaften*), concluding that, in view of his discussion, "science will not be able to avoid the concession that entities-in-themselves are being*less*" (*sein*los). Because science presupposes a *specific* ontology, "being remains unconsidered", its experience barred by ontological prejudice. (AAN, $/$)

Yet Heidegger is far from rejecting scientific truth claims altogether, for the "Complete Elaboration" ends with the call for a "reflective dialogue" (*besinnliches Gespräch*) between philosophy and science. (AAN, $/$) Heidegger takes it to be a double condition for a meaningful dialogue to even begin that both sides recognize their mutual entanglement. In order for such dialogue to succeed, the idea that the "scientific mode of representation" (*wissenschaftliche Vorstellungsweise*) is the only format of meaning and truth relevant for a complete description of entities must be relinquished. (AAN, $/$) But Heidegger also holds that such dialogue requires of philosophy to accept "that the sciences make use of philosophical thinking everywhere". (AAN, $/$) Whether this requirement is compatible with Heidegger's catchphrase that "science does not think" (GA8, 9; Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 8) is a question for his interpreters. But it should not be lost on the reader that there is another interested party in this dialogue more readily recognized in the German original: Heidegger implicitly refers to a central idea from his discussion of Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry when he defines these requirements as what is necessary for a *Hörenkönnen aufeinander*, for the "ability to hear one another" (AAN, $/$), a slight variation on a phrase Heidegger commented on frequently in his writings on Hölderlin.[5] It comes from Hölderlin's hymn "Friedensfeier" ("Celebration of Peace"), penned in response to the 1801 Treaty of Lunéville. The fact that Heidegger refers to this poem may not only indicate in what mood the dialogue between philosophy and science should take place. Hölderlin in the same verse contrasts the "dialogue" (*Gespräch*) between human beings with poetic "song" (*Gesang*) and anticipates the transformation of human speech into the revelation of Nature in poetic language. Although the citation is indirect, the reference indicates that even with regard

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[5] "Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander" ("Since we are a dialogue and hear from one another"). GA4, 38-40, GA12, 171-172, 255, GA39, 68-72, 218; GA89, 860.

to difficult questions of metaphysics and ontology, Heidegger may still think that the transformative linguistic power of poetry has its part to play.[6]

ABBREVIATION KEY

AAN   Heidegger, Martin. "The Argument against Need (for the Being-in-Itself of Entities)". *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* x, no. y (2021): $-$. doi: $$. Page Numbers after the slash refer to the German original published online with the translation: "Das Argument gegen den Brauch (für das Ansichsein des Seienden)". *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* x, no. y (2021): $-$. doi: $$.

GA 4   Heidegger, Martin. *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1981.

GA 8   Heidegger, Martin. *Was heißt Denken?* Edited by Paola-Ludovika Coriando. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002.

GA 12   Heidegger, Martin. *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985.

GA 39   Heidegger, Martin. *Hölderlins Hymne* "*Germanien*" *und* "*Der Rhein*." Edited by Susanne Ziegler. 3rd ed. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1999.

GA 89   Heidegger, Martin. *Zollikoner Seminare*. Edited by Peter Trawny. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2018.

Jahresgabe   Heidegger, Martin. *Das Argument gegen den Brauch (für das Ansichsein des Seienden). Jahresgabe der Martin Heidegger-Gesellschaft 2013/14.* Stuttgart. © Dr. Hermann Heidegger.

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