

Chapter 6

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Why Heidegger?

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Martin Heidegger does not make it easy to understand him. Because he is a phenomenologist who believes that phenomena show themselves as grounded in what is hidden, Heidegger shoves readers into a hall of mirrors that makes it hard to remember where you entered and sometimes why. Under the cover of recovering the power of words, he endows existing words with unexpected meanings, creates new words, and in general writes terribly.¹ He was also by most accounts a dreadful man, and no matter how one contextualizes it after the fact, he was a member of the Nazi party who at best lacked the personal integrity to renounce that decision even decades afterwards.

So, why would anyone study Martin Heidegger? More exactly, why would Joseph P. Fell? And not just study him. His 1979 book, *Heidegger and Sartre*, exhibits the depth of Fell's mastery of both writers as well as of the history of western philosophy, in all its major languages.

The expected answer might be that Fell was taken by Heidegger's ontological question: What is Being? Heidegger's is a question that the vast majority of contemporary philosophers think is empty at best and cultishly mystical at worst. But I am not convinced that this is indeed the question that drew him to Heidegger. Based on Fell's reading of Heidegger's own pathway of thought, it seems that Fell was attracted to Heidegger because of that philosopher's starting point—a phenomenological approach

that begins with the most ordinary of experiences: the hammering of a nail, the falling of snow. In these experiences are the clues that show Western philosophy a way off the rails that lead to nihilism.²

Fell's interpretation of Heidegger—more like a wrestling match—brings to this simple beginning the powerful philosophical question of grounds: What grounds this beginning? How does and can this beginning ground philosophical thought? Can we and do we ever leave this beginning behind? Such questions lead Fell to an ever-deepening inquiry into the ontological question. But it all begins with the beginning. We will focus on three of Fell's works: the 1965 book *Emotion in the Thought of Sartre*;³ his 1970 lecture, "What is Philosophy?";⁴ and his 1979 magnum opus, *Heidegger and Sartre: An Essay on Being and Place*.⁵

I should acknowledge from the outset two biases and one danger. First, I am not a neutral reader of Fell's writing. In the many classes I took with him from 1968 to 1972 at Bucknell University, he modeled a joy of thought and a sweetness of disposition that I'd learn is not always typical of professors of philosophy. It was because of Fell that I went to philosophy graduate school in 1973 and wrote my dissertation on Heidegger. I will always be grateful to Fell. Second, it is more than likely that I find so much truth and value in Fell's reading of Heidegger because my initial encounters with Heidegger's thought were guided by Fell. Sometimes a hermeneutic circle is indistinguishable from a closed loop.

The danger is that in my attempt to understand what led Fell to Heidegger's thinking I may simply be projecting what led me, under my beloved teacher's guidance, to embrace Heidegger. Since I cannot escape my own point of view, all I can do is alert

you to this. Consider yourself alerted.

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Emotion in the Thought of Sartre

Fell's first book was written when Jean-Paul Sartre loomed large as a philosopher and as a public intellectual. Sartre was controversial, provocative, and offered a deep critique of philosophy and politics.

Fell's *Emotion in the Thought of Sartre* takes a narrowly defined territory as its domain, but he uses Sartre's theory of emotions as a crowbar to pry up more substantial issues—issues that not accidentally bear directly on the questions that Heidegger had already posed. For Fell wrote his Sartre book with Heidegger already in mind. On page 2 of the introduction, he notes that thirteen years before Sartre's first work on emotions, Heidegger was setting the context for the inquiry by claiming that psychological explanations are not enough, and emotion should not be “studied in abstraction from concrete situations.”⁶ By page 3, Fell has introduced the Cartesian challenge to explain the unity of experience given the duality of mind and body. Fell uses the confined question of Sartre's ideas about emotion to explore a deep problem space.

Sartre needs to consider emotion as part of his “phenomenological program” of reestablishing a “kind of experiential immediacy allegedly surrendered by post-Cartesian philosophy,” writes Fell.⁷ And Sartre's project begins well, he suggests. Sartre takes from Heidegger the idea that emotion is a way we are in the world, not merely an epiphenomenon.⁸ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger pursues the question of Being by inquiring into what it means to be a person in a world. Being-in-the-world always entails having a mood, notes Heidegger, even if that mood is the common one of everything being pretty much ok. If one examines moods not as a psychologist but as a

phenomenologist, one sees (says Heidegger) that a mood shows itself in how the world appears to us. A mood discloses the world. “The most fundamental insight which Sartre derives from Heidegger is that any adequate theory of the nature of human experience is uniquely determined by man’s comprehension of the ‘world’ in which he finds himself,” writes Fell.⁹

But after that first step, Sartre goes wrong, according to Fell’s careful and sympathetic reading. For example, Sartre’s insistence on the freedom of consciousness leads him to construe the bodily side of emotions as the consequence of consciousness. He insists that one faints in the face of danger in the magical belief that if one loses awareness of the threat, it will go away. Against this, Fell poses the simplest and most ordinary of events: “Suppose I have just seen a huge roach and that I happen to loathe roaches.”¹⁰ Fell’s emotion, manifested as mild trembling and feeling “slightly lightheaded,” inspires him to non-magically swat the roach. In Fell’s attention to the most ordinary of events and feelings, we can see some of what may have attracted him to Heidegger’s phenomenology, a philosophical approach that has us turn to the world rather than explore ideas from purely the point of view of what our theory requires.

Fell traces Sartre’s implausible ideas about emotions being a type of self-deception to his theories about radical freedom—“Nothing but consciousness can be the source of consciousness.”¹¹ This insistence that “all types of emotions are intentional acts ...” is “responsible ... for all the difficulties we have encountered in Sartre’s theory.” Fell suggests that we “boldly reject this thesis.”¹²

Sartre’s insistence that consciousness is its own ground is a response to the issue that has dogged Western tradition ever since René Descartes cloistered himself in a room

in front of a warm fire. From such a perch, the mind can wander seemingly free of the physical, and the noisy world of everyday experience seems to be nothing but a distraction. Striving to preserve the mental from the contingent, conditioned physical, Sartre discounted the physicality of emotions, calling them “very trivial disturbances.” But, the “line dividing mind from body” that Sartre draws “is too neatly drawn, too Cartesian,” concludes Fell.¹³ Against this, Fell points to the simple phenomenological fact that, despite Sartre, we don’t experience emotion purely as a way in which something shows itself to us—as hateful, or lovable—but also as a set of bodily sensations, whether it is a trembling hand before you swat the roach or a racing heart when your love is required. Far from feeling that he must explain away the bodily side of emotion, Fell suggests that emotion “can be regarded as a kind of *incarnation*, a reunification of consciousness and body.”¹⁴ Emotion thus discloses and enacts a truth that belies the Cartesian separation, rather than being a “deception and an escape,” as Sartre would have us believe.¹⁵

One can see in his critique of Sartre’s approach three interests that may have led Fell to Heidegger:

1. We know that Cartesian dualism is wrong, because we overcome it with every swat of a roach; so we must explain how it went wrong and provide a non-dualistic explanation.
2. Our understanding that we’ve overcome dualism comes from a valorizing of everyday, pre-philosophical experience.
3. Phenomenological investigation also shows that all of our experience and understanding—including philosophical and scientific knowledge—occurs within a

historical-cultural-linguistic situation. We did not create that situation. Rather, we found ourselves in it. That situation is not an obstacle to understanding but is understanding's condition.

From this comes the question that Fell poses to Heidegger: Is there a ground that explains how it is that we find ourselves in such a world? Does this ground let us talk about more than what happens to have been our own experience, or are we doomed to be stuck within a relativistic hermeneutics?

I believe such questions and inclinations brought Fell to Martin Heidegger.

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What Is Philosophy?

When in 1970, Fell delivered the Class of 1956 lecture at Bucknell University, a talk intended for a broad audience, he takes the questions we just listed as primary themes of philosophy itself.¹⁶ He begins by seating himself next to Descartes's fire, defining philosophy as "*the activity of holding oneself reflectively in a free space.*"¹⁷ He presumably begins there because he wants to acknowledge the common perception of philosophers "as being 'out of it.'"¹⁸ But this leads to the question of the bounds of this free space, for not all daydreamers are philosophers.

Fell in this talk acknowledges that the inescapability of our being situated creatures—creatures whose understanding of their world depends on their particular history, language, and desires—creates a problem for the quest for knowledge. The path he proposes requires acknowledging and embracing our *situatedness*.

Language is a key determinant of the meaning we encounter already etched into the place in which we find ourselves.¹⁹ But what language articulates is not merely linguistic. Language is not simply naming, pointing, and making things clear. It is central

to this lecture that much is hidden from us:

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We are mortals who live in a small region of light surrounded before and aft by darkness. We are given the divine gift of light, language, which illuminates Things for us as intelligible and knowable and which opens up fertile sources for our use. ...Suddenly someone without saying anything points to a *thing*: a flower. It grows in the light, but its roots are hidden in the dark and fertile earth. It comes out of the dark earth into the light and is present there only briefly before it returns to its source, but long enough to be named and cared for and appreciated as beauty by man.²⁰

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This hiddenness, which nevertheless shows itself to us as hidden, helps to ground us, and our world. It is not pure light, pure meaning, or pure intentionality. “‘To be’ conveys the notion that beyond and behind what we take to be the simple fact of the mere thing there is *more*, there are possibilities.”²¹ And beyond possibilities, there is “the *source*, which is the common context of all our reflection and discourse.”²² The audience for this remarkably accessible yet profound lecture should have come out of with it a fact, a resolve, and a question:

Fact: There is a ground to our everyday experience that makes the flower’s moment in the light intelligible to us, and that ground is present to us as hidden.

Resolve: We cannot escape our being thrown into our historical situation. We should therefore embrace it resolutely.

Question: What is the ground of our philosophical examination of these deep truths? Are we stuck only with our culturally-relative beliefs? If so, philosophy founders,

for the only difference between truth and falsehood would be that truths are the things people like us happen to believe.

Fell therefore spends the next couple of decades, if not more, trying to understand not just what is the ground of our experience, but what is the ground of our most careful, respectful, and loving *thinking* about that experience. That is to say, Fell's ontological quest is thoroughly grounded in his phenomenological beginning.

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Heidegger and Ground

“For a philosopher, everything hangs on where one begins,” says Fell mid-way through *Heidegger and Sartre*.²³ *Heidegger and Sartre* is a fearless and relentless inquiry into the ground of situated philosophy, that is, of a philosophy that begins from an examination of how the world shows itself to us as creatures who can only find it intelligible within that world's historical and linguistic constraints. This is a quest for grounds given the presumption that we have no access to grounds that fully escape our situation and our situatedness.

But “presumption” is the wrong word, for Fell does not simply assume our situatedness. Throughout the course of the book, he shows how the idea of an absolute, non-situated ground has seized our philosophical tradition, how it has developed over time, and how our metaphysics has finally reached the point where its implicit nihilism—its insistence on an absolute that we now agree cannot be reached—can no longer be avoided.

This leaves Fell, and us, with a simple and ancient fact: Beneath and before all arguments about the things of the world in their scientific and theological and philosophical meanings, the world is always already a place in which every thing we

encounter presents itself to us *as* something. Even if the thing dissembles itself, it is still present to us *as* that dissimulation. Even, say, a mysterious mechanical widget found in our yard without any further context shows itself to us *as* a mysterious mechanical widget—and thus *as* something made by humans, *as* made for some purpose, *as* a part or a whole, *as* something that someone once cared about and now perhaps misses or does not, etc. Fell’s interest in *Heidegger and Sartre* is to hold on to this truthful origin while asking about its ground. Fell’s answer is a phrase of Aristotle’s to which he returns over and over: for there to be a world of this sort, there must be a “precedent community of nature.” At the end of *Heidegger and Sartre*, Fell writes:

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This Aristotelian notion has proven to be crucial for my interpretation of the nature and truth of the phenomenon. It expresses the principle that beings cannot be successfully interrelated unless they already have something in common.²⁴

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Why begin here? First, we know from experience that beginning from a “broken totality” leads to the dead ends reached by Western metaphysical philosophy. The second reason is at least as powerful, and, I suspect, more originary in Fell’s thinking: our every experience demonstrates the precedence of that community. This means that his valuing of everyday experience grounds Fell’s pursuit of the question of Being in a phenomenology that he never leaves behind.

This beginning is itself the ground of the appearance of dualism. Indeed, one of Fell’s most trenchant critiques of Sartre in *Heidegger and Sartre* is that for Sartre “... social community is *to be achieved* ... rather than community being a parent, structural,

or definitional trait of human being, as in *Being and Time*. ”²⁵ If that community has to be achieved, it is too late. Writes Fell:

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The fundamental force of Heidegger’s incessantly repeated expression “always already” (*immer schon*) is as a constant reminder that the union of essence and existence, of idea and entity that philosophy seeks to construct out of subjective and objective factors is already there in the most ordinary human experience.²⁶

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For Fell, then, the question of ground leads from phenomenology to ontology. Nothing could be more Heideggerian.

There would be no need for that move if the precedent community were the solution, the end of the story. But, the community has been disrupted by a Western metaphysical history intent on achieving a commonality that has already been “achieved.” That metaphysical history is a “forgetting” of being, but it is crucial to Fell’s notion of ground that even seen clearly, the precedent community hides itself from us. Hiddenness is crucial to *Heidegger and Sartre*.

Or, should we say “hiddennesses”? There are at least three types of hiddenness that Fell discusses.

First, there is the way in which the world, in its precedent community, is manifested as something into which we are “thrown.” We did not choose our world, and yet it forms and shapes our understanding, a fact understood at least since Xenophanes said if horses could draw, the gods would look like horses. If you were born at a different

time, a different place, or spoke a different language, the world would show itself quite differently to you. But that fact itself is hidden by the seeming obviousness of the world into which we are thrown.

Second, there is the way in which the things that show themselves to us we recognize are not exhausted by that showing. Every surface has an inside that is closed to us until we crack it or penetrate it; Fell repeatedly reminds us of the violence of this act, of disclosure, for our taking something one way hides the other ways it might be. For another, our every action in the world shows that we understand that the things that show themselves to us exist apart from our awareness of them. That hiddenness is an essential part of their disclosure to us.

Third, there is the way that the very ground of phenomena is itself hidden to us. Why is there showing rather than darkness? Or more exactly, as we shall learn, since “All presence is conditioned by an absence,”²⁷ how does this absence – a darkness – make presence possible?

These hiddennesses, and perhaps the third most of all, leads Fell to what he poses as the central question of *Heidegger and Sartre*: What “must the ground of the phenomenon be if the phenomenon is to be a disclosure of Being?”²⁸ Over the course of *Heidegger and Sartre*, Fell identifies a resoluteness in Heidegger’s questioning. Fell is too humble to recognize that in *Heidegger and Sartre* he exhibits an equal determination and fearlessness. In chapter after chapter, he asks for the ground of a philosophy that begins from the uncovering of the precedent community of nature. This inquiry leads him into Heidegger’s darkest waters—post-“Turn” works that make *Being and Time* look easy—for it seems to ground its assertions in an apodeictic phenomenology to which we

assent because it accords with an examination of our everyday experience.²⁹ Fell instead shows that Heidegger's post-"Turn" thought is a quest for the ground of the phenomenological clearing—the precedent community—that *Being and Time* exposed. Fell's reading makes it seem as if this must have been Heidegger's lodestar. The book thereby makes clear the deep necessity—the *logos*—of what to those who mock Heidegger looks like a career of self-indulgent word mysticism. And it does leave one wishing that Heidegger wrote as clearly as Fell.

I cannot here summarize the long argument of *Heidegger and Sartre* but here are some of the markers along the path Fell blazes as he chases Heidegger's thought to ground.

Fell appropriately begins with *Being and Time*, asking how it sees the grounding of what Heidegger calls the Dasein-world relationship.³⁰ Fell points to Heidegger's later characterization of this precedent community as "'Place — that is, the locale of the truth of Being.'" ³¹ Fell considers this place in terms of time, as per Heidegger, and what this means for freedom. If we are radically free to invent ourselves, our possibilities, and the "as-ness" of things, then this Place would seem to have either no ground or whatever ground we choose to give it, which is to say the same thing twice. Heidegger resolves this in part by accepting the inescapability of our having always already been *thrown* into an "ekstatic" notion of time according to which beings are present in terms of our future projects. "Being is always the Being of particular beings," Fell writes. "This Being is their disclosure in ... a particular time and a particular world."³²

This approach keeps Heidegger's project from floating into the groundlessness of mere possibility, and it preserves the primacy of the "original unity of thought and

Being” which “was the primary goal of phenomenology in its struggle against a dualistic broken totality,”³³ but it does not explain what grounds that unity, that precedent community, that Place. If our situation is conditioned by its history, what conditions that history? Nothing? That way nihilism lies. Do we resolutely embrace our tradition simply because it is our ground, and we are unthinkable without it? As Fell points out, “this effective assumption of tradition commits him in the Germany of 1933 to a position that appears to confirm the nihilistic danger of his position...,”³⁴ which he suggests, admittedly “without evidence” might have been “the proximate cause of his *Kehre*,” or turn.

But, Fell isn’t fundamentally interested in proximate causes. He cares about grounds. “As long as meaning is ‘thrown over’ beings that are inherently meaningless,” the original community is not grounded, or even accurately described phenomenologically. Heidegger’s way forward, says Fell, is to inquire into the prior articulation of the Place that gives it its particular, historical character. “This suggests that language is the way in which the meaningful structure of the world comes to expression.”³⁵ Language, of course, for Heidegger is not a system of symbols attached to meanings. Such a conception would leave Heidegger open to the Sartrean idea that the utterly meaningless world that anxiety reveals is to be taken as the fundamental truth. Rather, beings are linguistic in their Being: they are present to us in the prior articulation that is language.³⁶

But this raises its own issues, as Fell points out: “must one still not account for brute nature insofar as it does not fall within the phenomenal experience of man?”³⁷ Heidegger looks back to the ancient Greeks, that is, to before the sundering accomplished

by metaphysics, and “finds the experience of ‘nature’ as *physis*.”³⁸ “‘Mortal’ man is aware of this dark source as the limit and boundary of his understanding, out of which he himself comes and back into which he returns.”³⁹ This is the dark, hidden realm that keeps beings from being grounded solely in our intentions.

Yet, this dark realm isn’t simply withdrawn from our intelligibility: “At the same time, in emerging from darkness into the ‘light’ (*Licht*) of the clearing (*Lichtung*), phenomena come into an articulated or meaningful ‘presence.’”⁴⁰ This play between dark and light is crucial to Heidegger’s ground, argues Fell. Traditional metaphysics wants the ground itself to be intelligible. *Physis* provides a ground that is beyond our intelligibility, but that shows itself (is intelligible) as such.⁴¹

But *physis* itself needs a ground. “The ground of *physis* that lets the phenomenon be what it is *by* remaining hidden Heidegger calls ‘earth.’”⁴² “‘Ground’ is no longer simply Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. It is now to be construed more literally, as the solid and supportive earth, the fundamentum of world.”⁴³ It is what we know will outlast us and what shrugs off our interpretations of what is here. It thus grounds the things of the world in their apartness from our interpretations of them.

Heidegger first pairs earth with the world, and describes their relationship as a kind of strife. As Fell writes: “In the notion of strife between world and earth there remains a residue of the man-thing polarity” that flags a lack of precedent community.⁴⁴ This leads Heidegger to “concentrate anew on the relation between unity and multiplicity, identify and difference, in their relation to *language*, in such a way that the stress falls increasingly on ‘oneness’ and ‘simplicity.’”⁴⁵

This is only possible because the earth is not a mere brute force without any

disclosure. Rather, it shows itself in the world *as* something that will outlast the world's intelligibility. The earth is thus *present* in the world in its recalcitrance in the face of our attempt to bring it into intelligibility. And thereby the world loses "its abstractness ... precisely when it is seen as the precedent and lasting articulation of the earth."⁴⁶ Fell expresses this with the lovely phrase the "worlded earth": "For the rest of his life, Heidegger's goal is to remember the character of the place-worlded earth", which is "the common place where every being is 'as' it is."⁴⁷ This takes an act of memory because, as Fell puts it in a 1985 essay, "Heidegger's Mortals and Gods": "this place has dissimulated itself through the history of metaphysics; the epochs of metaphysics are differing modes of forgetting of the place."⁴⁸

It "is the *Kehre*'s rapprochement between language and earth that at last guarantees" the precedent community of nature on which the success of the phenomenological program depends."⁴⁹ So writes Fell more or less at the midpoint of *Heidegger and Sartre*. He is not done inquiring into the ground.

Western history is a history of the forgetting of Being that has divided the "that it is" from the "what it is" of beings, attributing reality to the pure "that," devoid of meaning and place. But, says Fell, Heidegger claims to have found the "primal gathering principle"⁵⁰ that is the "original understanding of place, clearing, abode, home, whole, or totality, 'worlded' earth, ground—all of which mean fundamentally the same."⁵¹ This Place is not to be taken lightly, Fell urges. Indeed, he says that the one common meaning within all of Heidegger's "*manifold* uses" of the word "Being" is "precisely his later meditation on the 'single', 'simple', and 'remaining' place, the common place where every being is 'as' it is."⁵²

Fell reads Heidegger's turn to The Fourfold as motivated by a desire to move past the polar relationships that characterized Dasein and world in *Being and Time* and then the earth-world pair. The world is not one end of a polar relationship; but it is that in which we find ourselves. Such a configuration starts from the distinction of the two elements and thus cannot ground the precedent community. Further, such pairs do not ground the particularity of the beings we find in our world. If the Being of beings stops with an explanation of their presence in the open, then what they are present "as" becomes external to their Being; nihilism therein lurks.

But with the Fourfold, Heidegger gets at the nature of what is without having to resort to subjects throwing meaning over objects. The open is not just open. Anything that shows itself in this Place reveals itself as something understood in relation to human purposes, in light of what is beyond us as mortals, within an open horizon, on an earth that enables us but ultimately is not of us. These elements—a very rough approximation of the Fourfold—are not grounds in the causal or logical sense. They are, Heidegger says, a round dance.

Fine. But we are left with the fundamental question: We exist in a place that precedes us and that always already is differentiated into beings that show themselves "as" a this or a that such and such. This is a place of difference: things are different from one another, as are each of the members of the Fourfold. How can it be a precedent community, a unity at all? Part of the answer for Fell has to do with the presence of what is hidden. A tree is more than our word for it, Fell acknowledges, but the tree before us only becomes "'a tree' and 'an oak'" because of our originary naming.⁵³ The tree as what-is-more-than-our-word is a hidden and grounding presence.

But how can this be so? How can the Place be differentiated by language and still be unity? Fell pushes further, raising the salient objection: languages are conventional. “Is the ‘precedent community of nature’ merely a conventional community?” he resolutely asks.⁵⁴ If so, Heidegger is ultimately nihilistic. “This is a critical question.”⁵⁵ Fell writes, acknowledging that “any ground which can enter human experience will be one in which thought itself already participates and thus will in an important sense be ‘relative.’”⁵⁶ The particularities of any situation may be conventional—the distinction between trees and bushes is not etched in Being’s stone tablets—but, says Fell, convention is only possible in a place in which meanings emerge, rooted in the darkness that is more than their meaning to us. This place enables meanings and simultaneously ensures that meanings are always imperfect, incomplete, and conditioned by language and history.

This thought leads to another question about ground: Can language ever speak past or beyond its conventional particularities? Yes, replies Fell. For Heidegger there is a type of language that uses the conventions of language to gesture toward the hiddenness that enables convention: *poesis*.

But how can there be such a place at all? A place that precedes and enables our dividing it up into words? A place of the identity of all within it that yet is only present in the differences we experience? A place in which what is shown depends upon what is hidden—and shows that fact as well? A place that both presents itself and withdraws itself? A place that is given and gives? A gift? Or, perhaps, a gifting? This place is, in Heidegger’s terms, an event, something that happens—*Ereignis*: “This Place and Event are the conditions of the possibility of any experience and knowledge of beings as what

they are.”⁵⁷ *Ereignis* is a ground that cannot be penetrated any further. It is what enables beings and enables ground. So, why should we believe in it? Is this not just more Heideggerian word mysticism?

It depends what the job you think truth should be doing. If you are looking for propositions that can be checked against reality, you are unlikely to have gotten very far with Heidegger in the first place. From the beginning he challenges the propositional correspondence idea of truth, showing that it is only possible because of that precedent community of nature. Heidegger’s truth, writes Fell, is “*fundamentally* valid” because it is “grounded *with an awareness* in that prior disclosure that inevitably grounds and orients even philosophies that seek ... to establish a transcendental or absolute present ground....”⁵⁸ That is why at the end of his long book, Fell leads us not to a set of true propositions but to an urging to *remember*: “... Heidegger’s goal is to remember the character of the place-worlded earth,”⁵⁹ “the common place where every being is ‘as’ it is.”⁶⁰ And again: “The quest for the ground of beings both completes and limits itself in the remembering of the Event of the thing in language as the precedent and mutually qualifying union....”⁶¹

Remembering “The Place and its Event” when they are the ground of value itself requires more than sitting in front of the fire thinking good and true thoughts.⁶² At the end, Fell goes back to Heidegger’s own beginning in *Being and Time* where he points out that only because we are creatures that care can we become philosophers who know. “Intentionality becomes care, and care becomes love,” Fell writes. The last sentence of the book brings us back to the simple grounding of all that preceded it: a willingness to value and listen quietly to how the things of our world show themselves. “In the end,” he

writes, it is a matter of recognizing and honoring one's prior commitments, commonplace though they be."⁶³

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Why Heidegger

So, why Heidegger? What about Martin Heidegger's thought so caught Joseph Fell's attention that he spent several decades reading, thinking, teaching, and writing about it? About Heidegger, Fell says: "*His thought, then, is fundamentally the expression of his circumstances.*"⁶⁴ That is to say, it is a consequence of our being thrown, situated creatures. Yet, Heidegger's "clues have not been invented"; he is being guided by genuine features of this situation and history; his "thinking is claimed in the same way as any thinker's thought."⁶⁵

What in Heidegger's thought so claimed Fell?

We can't know with certainty. Even to hazard a hypothesis is an act of arrogance, of violence. Nevertheless...

... I am perhaps overly impressed by my old teacher's humility, for I see evidence of it in all that I read by him. It is expressed not by a lot of throat clearings and a persistent insertion of phrases such as "in my opinion" and "if I may suggest." Fell knows the history of philosophy as well as anyone, and speaks with a calm and justified confidence. Rather, his humility manifests itself as a teacher who genuinely cared for his students enough to challenge them with the hardest thoughts.

There is a profound humility as well in his thinking. We are all undoubtedly familiar with professional philosophers who earn their coin by being the smartest person in the room, scorching all competitors. It is a withering type of philosophy that applies the highest heat to every idea and every proposal to see which, if any, do not melt away.

The result is a handful of propositions that have withstood the flames, at least until the next fiery philosopher tests them.

Fell is not of that type. My guess is that Heidegger ensnared him by walking away from the armory of weapons that had been brought to bear on the old metaphysical questions, especially Descartes's dualism. "Well," says Heidegger, "Let's just see where we are." Unlike the methodologies of philosophy and science, and even unlike Husserl's phenomenology, this is an approach that first asks us to relax. Whether we are in front of a roaring fire, on a fine walk through the Schwarzwald, or drumming our fingers nervously as we try to write our philosophy assignment, we find ourselves, suggests Heidegger, in quite a remarkably difficult and wonderful spot.

What can we say about this place into which have been thrown? Things are present to us. They are present to us each as a this or a that. We understand entities in terms of what we are up to, which means entities are present to us in terms of how they play into our future projects. They generally are so handy that we don't even think about them explicitly, until they break, of course. And, look, there are other people! We care about them. We care about ourselves. In fact, we just care. If we didn't care, nothing about our experience of the world would make sense. We may have been thrown into this place, but it's a gift.

This place imposes limits on us, for sure, besides the big one that our time is short. But those limits—always seeing from a point of view, through a language, etc.—are also the conditions for our understanding anything. We need to embrace that finitude not as a contraction of our vision but as an integral part of what it means to see at all. Fell's response to this humble beginning is twofold.⁶⁶

First, he embraces it. He writes:

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Hatred of finite conditions (of limited possibility) is the one true Evil because it devalues the Place wherein man does and must live. Love of finite conditions is the affirmation of the one true Good because it cares for and sustains the Place wherein man does and must live.⁶⁷

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His second response is that of a philosopher who wants to know if this starting point and method are worthy. This he does by asking about what grounds them. But, remaining true to his starting point, he does not ask for grounds that reach all the way down to the absolute. He is not looking to verify propositions through a reproducible methodology. Most important, he is not looking for a ground that stands outside of the precedent community, because his starting point says all that we can encounter is within the open space of the encounterable, including the darkneses that are present as the limits of what is present.

Fell is explicit about the challenges this creates for the project of finding ground. He leads us through these challenges without flinching. His conclusion is bound to the type of ground an inquiry into the open Place of beings can provide. He thus doesn't list the true statements he has justified. Rather, he urges us to embrace our situation as limited creatures in a world that only shows itself because it holds so much back from us. He asks us to be true to ourselves. At the end of both "What is Philosophy?" and *Heidegger and Sartre*, he invokes love and wonder:

Love because our small clearing is lit by our caring, and without caring we will live in a darkness that we call light.

Wonder because we abide in a world that overwhelms us, that our thought cannot fully grasp, that is both of us and so very much different from us, that it is a gift that lets us be and even lets us be who we are.

Although most of the world would not associate love and wonder with the forbidding and arrogant Martin Heidegger, we know for sure that that is what Joseph Fell finds in him because he has told us so. The path there, however, required the open-minded tenacity so distinctive of this great teacher and scholar.

If, moreover, you have had the privilege and deep delight of knowing Prof. Fell as a person, you can also see that it is no accident that he found love and wonder at the heart of our everyday experience and in the deepest depths of Heidegger's pursuit of the question of Being, for they are at his heart—his ground—as well.

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¹ Martin Heidegger (1947), “Letter on Humanism,” *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1978), 193.

² See Peter S. Fosl and Gary Steiner’s essays in this volume for other interpretations of Fell and nihilism.

³ Joseph P. Fell, *Emotion in the Thought of Sartre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

⁴ Delivered in 1970 as the “Class of 1956” invited lecture. Unpublished. With Fell’s permission I have posted a PDF of his typescript at <http://www.hyperorg.com/misc/philscans/what-is-philosophy-JP-Fell.pdf>.

⁵ Joseph P. Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre: An Essay on Being and Place* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

⁶ Fell, *Emotion*, 2–3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹² *Ibid.*, 196.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁶ Fell, “What is Philosophy?” Chapter 1 of this volume.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24. A human being "is a source of possibilities because he can inhabit the free-space, the space of alternatives, the space given him by language...."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 30.

²³ Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre*, 26.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 400.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 331, emphasis in original.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁹ *Die Kehre*—"the turn"—refers to a much-debated change in Heidegger's approach, language, and possibly beliefs in the 1930s after the 1927 publication of *Being and Time*. Most Heidegger scholars argue that the Turn represented an attempt by Heidegger to deepen his pursuit of the ontological question, not an abandonment of it.

³⁰ Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to refer to what others might call "consciousness" or even "human beings" because the words we have used for ourselves have taken on metaphysical meanings. By using this unexpected phrase—which means literally "being there"—Heidegger intends to help us see ourselves and our way of Being freshly.

³¹ Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre*, 47, quoting Heidegger in "Wegmarken." See Moorman and Malpas's essays in this volume for more on Fell and "place."

³² *Ibid.*, 63.

³³ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁴ HS 197.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 207-209.

⁴⁸ Fell “Heidegger’s Mortals and Gods” *Research in Phenomenology* 15 (1985):

29.

⁴⁹ HS 201.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 209, emphasis in the original.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 231. [As Aristotle describes substances in *Metaphysics Z* (1033b20 ff.), each is a “this-such” (*tode tionde*)—an individual and part of a category, type, or kind. We name things individually, and we assign them to kinds. The individual exceeds the mere type (this tree is more than tree generally), and the type is more than the individual example of it (tree is more than this entity) –PSF].

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 423.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 378, emphasis in the original.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁶⁶ For more on Fell and finitude, see Katie Terazakis’s chapter in this volume.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.