

Heidegger on Sameness and Difference

DAVID A. WHITE
DePaul University

The capacity to recognize how things are the same as and different from one another is essential in order to stabilize the flux of experience. And the abstract articulation of this correlative notion is equally essential to the structure of an ontology. This requirement holds even for the grandly speculative vision of Martin Heidegger. In fact, the notion of sameness is especially crucial to the ontology of Heidegger's middle and later periods. Its importance as applied within a concrete setting may be exemplified by the following claim: "Metalanguage and Sputnik, metalinguistics and rocket technology are the same."¹ At first glance, such a claim may perhaps be dismissed as just another virulent specimen of the Heideggerian penchant for abusing language. What does Sputnik have to do with metalanguage? And are those who study metalinguistics and those who study rocket technology in actuality studying the same discipline? The predication of "the same" could not possibly be meaningful in this context. But to reject so abruptly Heidegger's usage of sameness presupposes that (a) we know what he means by sameness and that (b) we also know that whatever he means by sameness is either false or so beset by difficulties as to be unworkable. The following study attempts to develop the first presupposition (Part I) and to assess the second presupposition (Part II).

I

What does Heidegger mean by sameness (*das Selbe*)? He provides an answer to this question in appropriately abstract language, but language which is generally clear and coherent, at least if one looks carefully at what has been said on the matter. That answer must, however, be pieced together from a variety of sources. And before we attempt to present a connected and unified version of the answer, it is important to acquire additional firsthand experience in

the extensive application of the terms to be studied. Here is a series of texts containing references to sameness or to derivatives of sameness:

1. Therefore, in a good conversation, what is said and what is heard are the same.²

2. That which is said in poetizing and that which is said in thinking are never identical; but at times they are the same³

3. The subject–object relation and Newtonian physics . . . are and remain metaphysically the same⁴

4. We do not maintain that Nietzsche teaches what is identical to Descartes, but . . . that he thinks the *same* in its historically essential completion.⁵

5. We must also learn first to read a book like Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in the same rigorous way as a treatise of Aristotle; in the same way be it noted, not in the identical way.⁶

6. Thus, both of them, the dwarf and Zarathustra, say the same thing.⁷

7. The will to power and the eternal return of the same say the *same thing* and think the *very same* fundamental character of beings as a whole.⁸

8. It would be a delicate and genuinely difficult task for contemporary thought as representation to show in what respect the characterization of Being (*Sein*) as objectivity and as will say the same.⁹

9. Thus, the essential determination of thinking in Plato is not identical to that in Leibniz, but it is the same.¹⁰

10. *Aletheia* . . . and *logos* are the same.¹¹

11. The *energeia*, which Aristotle thinks as the basic character of presence, of *eon*, the *idea*, which Plato thinks as the basic character of presence, the *logos*, which Heraclitus thinks as the basic character of presence, the *moira*, which Parmenides thinks as the basic character of presence, the *chreon*, which Anaximander thinks in that which is present in presence—all name that which is the same.¹²

12. Thinking and Being belong in the same.¹³

Although far from exhaustive, this series of texts is sufficiently diverse for present purposes. We note how sameness has been predicated of language as spoken and heard, of language as poetry and thought, of epistemology and physics, of metalanguage and rocket technology (the introductory example), and of numerous apparently unrelated moments in the history of philosophy, from the presocratics to Nietzsche. Is there any pattern to this diversity? If

there is a pattern, its ordering principle has probably been expressed in the final utterance, that thinking and Being belong "in the same." Thus, to understand sameness in this most fundamental sense is to understand the relation between thinking and Being, which in turn presupposes insight into the authentic nature of Being as such. If understanding on this global scale can be secured, then it should be possible to discern the less universal but equally essential instances of sameness when that notion is applied to individual beings and to individual linguistic events. *

Briefly stated, the notion of sameness is usually applicable in two different philosophical contexts. The first context is ontological, i.e., when two beings are determined to be the same as one another (at least in one respect); the second context is primarily linguistic, i.e., when we say that two propositions have the same meaning or the same referent. In the texts cited above, sameness is applied to the meanings of individual words (10, 11), to the meanings of different parts of the teaching of a single philosopher (6, 7), to the meaning of the teachings of different philosophers (4, 9), to types of language differentiated in various ways (1, 2), and to an entity in conjunction with a linguistic activity (the Sputnik–metalanguage text). Therefore, by applying sheer numerical preponderance as a standard, the texts seem to indicate that sameness should be understood in a linguistic rather than in an ontological context.

But this conclusion is surely premature. The predication of sameness with respect to an entity such as Sputnik shows that Heidegger does not reserve the notion of sameness strictly for the context of language. In fact, the final instance of sameness cited (12) must imply that Heidegger intends the notion of sameness to be understood at a level which transcends what, for Heidegger, is the purely metaphysical distinction between beings as such and language about beings. To affirm that "thinking and Being belong in the same" can only mean that the structure of Being and the structure of thinking about Being—including the linguistic expression of such thought—must share properties that are defined by the nature of sameness (a nature as yet unspecified). As a result, the fundamental character of sameness may be distorted if some currently viable theory of meaning is imported for purposes of eliciting comparisons between this theory and Heidegger's apparently unique version of sameness. For a theory of meaning must be derived from a theory of language, and a theory of language is ultimately derived from explicit conceptions or implicit presuppositions concerning the relation between language and

Being. If the nature of Being which grounds this theory of meaning differs from Heidegger's grasp of Being, then it will be inappropriate to evaluate Heidegger's notion of sameness by comparing it to a theory of meaning which, in its ontological foundation, is incompatible with the nature of Being insofar as Being belongs to sameness.

My procedure in determining the ontological structure of sameness and difference has been to follow the leads provided by various seminal texts, hopefully without undue metaphysical bias. I then attempt to reproduce this structure in outline form, to the extent that an outline is possible on that fundamental level where Being, thought, and sameness are mutually constituted.

It is not accidental that the majority of the texts cited concern relations of sameness which occur within the history of philosophy. In fact, the connection between sameness and the history of philosophy leads into the structural core of sameness and difference. For Heidegger, "the essential thinkers continually say that which is the same (*das Selbe*). But that which is the same does not mean: identity."¹⁴ For our purposes, we need not discuss the unspecified criterion by which Heidegger separates essential from non-essential thinkers. The relevant point here is the distinction between that sameness which has continually concerned these thinkers, whoever they may be, and the fact that such sameness is other than identity. The elucidation of the distinction between identity and sameness will point the way toward establishing the full structure of Heidegger's notion of sameness and difference.

In many ordinary language contexts, sameness and identity are synonymous. "A is the same as B" normally does not mean anything distinct from "A is identical to B." But, for ontological reasons, Heidegger sharply distinguishes between the unity of which identity is predicated and the unity of which sameness is predicated. The unity of identity "is the indifferent likeness of the empty, endlessly repeatable identity: A as A, B as B."¹⁵ But the unity of sameness is in no way such a "faded emptiness."¹⁶ What then is sameness? Sameness is "the belonging together of what is distinct" as derived from "the gathering by means of difference."¹⁷ Since, for Heidegger, sameness can be predicated only "when it is thought with respect to difference,"¹⁸ sameness must be defined in relation to difference. Therefore, Heidegger contends that sameness first breaks open "the indifferent likeness of that which belongs together" and at the same time "holds it in the most distant unlikeness . . ."¹⁹ This "holding together in holding apart from one

another (*Zusammenhalten im Auseinanderhalten*) is a characteristic which we name sameness²⁰

The historical origin of sameness in this sense of the belonging together of distinct properties is "in the enigmatic word *to auto*, the same,"²¹ as found in, e.g., Parmenides' dictum that thinking and Being belong in the same. Locating the historical origin of sameness is essential for two reasons: first, because "the distinction concerning beings and Being turns out to be that sameness from which all metaphysics springs"²² Thus, any metaphysician, ancient or modern, necessarily expresses the nature of Being and the relation between Being and beings as sameness of some sort. And second, because the distinction between Being and beings "is that sameness, which concerns the Greeks and us in different ways. . . ."²³ Thus, the expression of sameness is somehow historically conditioned; Heidegger assures us that the way in which the Greeks construed Being and beings is different from the way in which modernity has represented Being and beings. Furthermore, regardless of the greatness of an individual thinker, and whenever in history that thinker happened to exist, the sameness of Being and beings "is so essential and rich that a single great thinker never exhausts it"²⁴ If final answers to ontological problems defined by this particular fundamental notion are available, these answers do not reside in the works of any one of philosophy's greatest minds.

The previous two paragraphs present a textual basis for determining the structure of Heidegger's notion of sameness and difference. We may initiate a description of this structure by continuing to trace the distinction between identity and sameness. For Heidegger, the most important difference between the two concepts is that identity remains abstract while sameness becomes concrete. Heidegger does not deny the logical soundness of the identity "A is A," but he does claim that the unity of A with itself is "empty" and "faded" when the being which A represents is construed as identical to itself in such a way that nothing in that being becomes differentiated in any manner whatsoever. Heidegger intends to correct this abstraction by introducing a notion of sameness which is structured so that it can manifest more concretely the ontological composition of those beings to which it is applicable. Whereas identity is a purely logical concept indifferently predicated of any and every being and type of being, sameness is an ontological notion which applies only to certain types of being and in ways which elucidate the hidden structure of those beings.

The following outline isolates and describes the principal properties of sameness and difference as derived from the set of texts cited above. An outline of this sort should facilitate understanding the full complexity of the notion stipulated by Heidegger's various references to that notion.

a. Sameness always refers to beings which are both wholes and taken as wholes (unlike identity, which can be predicated of part of a whole—e.g., an identical hue of greyness in two grey pitchers).

b. Sameness cannot be predicated of a whole which is simple, however simplicity may be defined (i.e., Platonically, atomistically, etc.) but only of a whole which is complex, i.e., having distinct parts or properties.

c. If the various parts or properties of a whole "belong together," then presumably sameness applies only to those beings which have a certain order conferred by nature or by human artifice, as opposed to a random collection of entities which may be said to belong together only, e.g., in the sense of simple spatial proximity.

d. Unlike identity, which can be predicated of a being with respect to itself, sameness always refers to two distinct beings.

e. These two beings must be both equal to and different from one another. The sense in which they are equal is not yet clear, and more will be said on this aspect of sameness in Part II. The sense in which they are different depends on the difference in properties between the two beings. In general, therefore, two beings which are the same are both like and unlike one another. (Sameness defined in this sense runs counter to the term's typical meaning in most ordinary language contexts, for as a rule we do not normally think about difference when we say that two beings are the same. In instances of this sort, however, ordinary language is naive, for if two beings are in fact the same in all respects, then they are not two beings but one being, misleadingly reduplicated in language as two distinct beings. When we want to say that two beings are the same without worrying about the sense in which they are different from one another, then according to Heidegger's terminological recommendations we may call them identical i.e., by that "empty" relation which binds two beings together without further specification.)

f. Once the properties which determine the difference factor necessary for sameness are gathered together and specified, these properties must be "held apart" from one another in "the most distant unlikeness." I suggest that the superlative degree in this stipulation implies that, for Heidegger, there are gradations or levels

of unlikeness; thus, if two beings can be more or less unlike one another with respect to a given property or properties, then sameness is correctly applied only when this unlikeness is maximally displayed. (Recall the stipulative character of Heidegger's claim; ordinary usages of "the same" may not reflect the sense just described.)

g. In addition to its predication with respect to particular beings, sameness can also be predicated of Being in relation to beings. (We may ask here whether it is possible for sameness to function in the relation between Being and beings in a manner equivalent to sameness when predicated of particular beings. The point will be discussed in Part II.)

h. Unlike identity, which is a purely formal concept and therefore is non-temporal and non-historical, sameness—as noted above—is historically conditioned, at least when it is applied to the relation between Being and beings. The Greek notion of sameness and our notion of sameness are different because the nature of history—presumably an essential aspect of the relation between Being and beings—somehow necessitates this kind of differentiation.

i. If the sameness in the relation between Being and beings has never been exhausted by a single great thinker, then we may wonder whether that sameness has not been exhausted even by the sum total of great thinkers, however many that may be and whoever they may be. If this hypothesis is in fact the case, then it may follow that sameness in this fundamental ontological context is in principle impossible to state completely. The profundity of the relation between Being and beings always outstrips any attempt to express the full scope of that relation.

II

It is evident, both from the number and the stipulative content of these properties, that sameness and difference constitutes one of the most important structural notions in Heidegger's ontology. However that ontology will eventually be substantiated, the coordination of its respective elements will depend in large measure on the capacity of this correlative notion to provide stability and coherence to those elements. Therefore, the notion as defined in this complex sense must be evaluated with special rigor. For if sameness and difference as such are not free from conceptual problems or are unclear in some respects, then the ontological substance which

Heidegger will mold by means of sameness and difference cannot avoid becoming disfigured, perhaps beyond recognition, by the imposition of an apparently neutral bit of "formal" terminology.

I propose to evaluate Heidegger's notion of sameness and difference by sketching a series of five problems internally related to one another. These five problems have been derived from the properties enumerated and described in Part I, and may be taken as one pathway toward assessing critically the ontological structure of sameness and difference. That there may be other and more illuminating pathways should go without saying.

1. If two beings are the same, then at least one property is different with respect to the conjunction of these two beings, a difference which is maximized if sameness has been accurately predicated. But is this difference one of degree or of kind? If A and B are the same, is A different from B because A has a property B lacks altogether or because A and B share an identical property but manifest that property in different degrees? As far as I have been able to determine, Heidegger never directly speaks to this question. And his silence in this request is especially significant in view of the fact that potentially serious repercussions will ensue regardless which alternative should prove most applicable.

If the difference Heidegger intends is one of kind, then any two distinct beings, regardless of their respective constitution, will satisfy this condition. For example, Sputnik is made of various kinds of metal, i.e., a type of being completely distinct from everything proper to the definition of a metalanguage. Surely this instance of sameness must be construed as a difference in kind. But if, in general, no restrictions are placed on the types of properties that will constitute a difference of this sort, then designating the relation (e.g., between Sputnik and metalanguage) as difference in the technical sense required by sameness dilutes the force of the relation to the point where it can mean little more than sheer and simple otherness. This notion of difference can be predicated of *any* two beings, regardless of the extent to which they are like or unlike one another.

But such an ontologically bland notion of difference can make no difference, so to speak, as far as the substance of an ontology is concerned. So far, we have been treating Heidegger's beings as approximately equivalent to "bare particulars." But of course this mode of reference is only an abstraction, and it would admit of more concrete rendering once Heidegger's substantiation of the nature of beings was in full view. Presumably the difference factor of

sameness is intended to gather together differences between two beings in such a way that their mutual unlikeness does not remain sheer otherness but somehow helps to illuminate both their likeness to one another as beings and their mutual relation to Being as such. However, if the difference essential to sameness means simply a non-restricted difference in kind, then this ontologically heuristic function cannot be fulfilled.

If, again, the difference is one of kind, then there is a second and perhaps even more serious problem: How can a given example of difference be held apart in the "most distant unlikeness"? If properties are different in *kind*, is it even possible to speak of a *degree* (e.g., "most distant") of unlikeness between them? Is the difference between metal and the sound of spoken language more or less unlike the difference between metal and a grammatical explanation of the sound of spoken language? One is strongly tempted to answer that this question cannot even be asked, because the nature of the difference in this case precludes the common ground which is essential before degrees of likeness or unlikeness can be specified. Therefore, if Heidegger intends to preserve the degree-aspect of difference, then it is not clear how difference can be defined as one of kind; if in fact the difference is one of kind, then it is not clear how Heidegger can preserve the degree-aspect of difference.

But perhaps the difference Heidegger intends is one of degree. The presence of a textual reference to unlikeness in the superlative degree supports this alternative. If this alternative does prove to be applicable, then, the second problem just mentioned is obviated, since properties can admit degrees of difference if these properties are of the same kind. But if we return to the Sputnik-metalanguage example, then yet another serious problem arises. As noted above, the comparison of two properties different in degree presupposes that these properties are the same in kind. But what is the "kind" that grounds, e.g., Sputnik and metalanguage? One could perhaps appeal to the fact that both are products of human activity. But this ground is surely too inclusive. Although both activities are of human origin, producing Sputnik and producing a metalanguage are so heterogeneous—both in their respective processes and in the products of those processes—that it is not sufficient simply to note their common origin.

To circumvent this objection, we may narrow the scope of the ground from human activity as such to human activity as derived from a technological attitude toward nature. This shift is adequate up to a point, for it results in showing how different aspects of

Sputnik and metalanguage can be related in sameness to one another. The sense in which Sputnik is technological is obvious; and a metalanguage is also technological as a purely formal construct based on a natural phenomenon and designed to illustrate at least part of the "real" underlying structure of that phenomenon. But is this shift in ground sufficient to justify the predication of sameness based on kinds? Many differences between Sputnik and metalanguage remain, even after both are located on a common ground situated within technological boundaries. And if any one of these differences is sufficiently diverse to disrupt this common ground, then it would follow that the difference in properties could not be established as one of degree.

Heidegger insists that difference is essential to the structure of sameness. Furthermore, he stipulates that difference must be understood according to certain complex specifications. But it does not seem unfair to conclude at this point that Heidegger must clarify whether the properties in question are different by degree, by kind, or according to some as yet unstated principle of diversification.

2. If sameness is to be employed as a technical term without complete loss of its ordinary language meaning and if the sense of identity which the term possesses in this context must nonetheless manifest an ontological connotation, then the nature of whatever is "in" two beings which justifies the predication of sameness must be stated as clearly as possible. Now if Heidegger's ontology is substantiated in such a way that beings are subject to generic or type distinctions, then sameness could refer to that which is common to beings that share a given genus or type. But two reasons militate against adopting this interpretive gambit. First (as far as I know), the notion of sameness has never been discussed by Heidegger in any genus or type context; second, and more importantly, Heidegger was never disposed to describe *any* aspect of the ontological character of beings in terms of generic distinctions, which he would have to do in order to ground different ontological senses of sameness. Therefore, this potentially attractive gambit cannot be introduced, given Heidegger's fundamental approach to the relation between beings and Being.

On the assumption that Heidegger would deny the relevance of such generic distinctions, the only apparent alternative is to base the element of identity in sameness on the simple fact that particular beings determined as the same are "in" being. However, it would then appear to follow that in this respect every being is necessarily the same as any other being. But if all beings are the same as one

another simply by virtue of possessing being, then the ascription of sameness carries no real significance. Sameness of such a universally undifferentiated scope is equivalent to the non-restricted difference of kind discussed above—neither can serve the ontologically heuristic function that both are seemingly intended to perform. If the identity aspect of sameness cannot be specified, then the predication of sameness becomes a simple conjunction of entities for purposes of drawing comparisons between some or all of the properties of those entities.

3. Heidegger maintains that thinking and Being “belong in the same” and that the distinction between Being and beings is “that sameness from which all metaphysics springs.” We have already seen sameness predicated of particular beings and individual linguistic expressions. But if “belonging” can be taken as establishing a relation between Being and sameness, and if sameness in this relation can be properly predicated of Being as such, then it appears to be the case that there is no significant difference between sameness as predicated of the relation between Being and beings and sameness as predicated of two particular beings. If this inference does not result from a radical misrepresentation of Heidegger’s thought in this regard, then two questions should be asked: (a) In what sense can sameness be predicated of the relation between Being and beings? (b) Can the meaning of sameness in this relation be equivalent to the meaning of sameness when predicated of particular beings?

(a) For Heidegger, a qualitative difference exists between Being and the sum total of beings. Therefore, regardless of how this difference is ultimately defined, it is at least certain that the difference factor essential to sameness has been fulfilled. The problem will be to identify that which is common to both Being and beings insofar as sameness can be predicated of this identity. Now as traditionally defined, sameness is a symmetrical relation: If A is the same as B, then B is the same as A. But this symmetry pertains to the predication of sameness to particular beings. Notice, however, the implications which fall to the nature of Being if sameness is symmetrical in the Being-beings relation just as it is symmetrical in the relation between particular beings. In the relation between Being and beings, the number and type of beings are never stipulated. Presumably the absence of this stipulation is not significant—Being and beings will belong in sameness regardless of whether some or all beings are involved in this relation. But if we assume that sameness is symmetrical in all respects, then paradoxes result from

predicating sameness of Being and beings. And these paradoxes arise independently of the number or type of beings stipulated.

Consider: If beings are different from one another, then according to the definition of sameness all such differences must be gathered into Being and held apart from one another *within* Being in such a way that Being can be discerned as distinct from beings. The structure of sameness requires that Being be viewed from that perspective which allows Being to become differentiated according to whatever properties are found in those beings which comprise the other terminus of the sameness relation. But there must be something present to Being over and above the set of differences held apart within Being. For if this something is not present, then Being becomes identical to beings. And the "most distant unlikeness" between Being and beings cannot be recognized as such if Being is simply identical to the various differences proper to beings. But in light of the symmetry of the sameness relation, this something must be present to beings as well as to Being, regardless of the precise specification of that something. For if Being possesses something that is not possessed by beings, then this essential asymmetry means that sameness cannot be predicated of both Being and beings. But how can sameness be predicated of Being as such if the difference aspect of sameness requires that one *part* of Being can constitute this predication, i.e., that part which allows the maximization of the difference between Being and whatever beings have been included in the predication of sameness?

Thus, if Heidegger intends to maintain that Being is in some difficult and undefined sense "greater than" beings, then it becomes virtually impossible to see how he can also maintain that both Being and beings belong in sameness. The only identity aspect of sameness possible in this case is that derived from whatever is common to *part* of Being and *all* beings. But sameness must be predicable of Being *as such* and as a whole in order to justify the claim that Being and beings belong together in the symmetry of sameness. Therefore, it does not seem possible to derive sameness in this way. If, on the other hand, he continues to maintain that sameness can be predicated of Being and beings, then it is difficult to see how Being can be anything other than a mere synonym for the sum total of beings. In this case, the requisite sameness is generated from the fact that everything in existence possesses Being insofar as each thing is a being. However, it also follows that Being as such loses all significance as a unique and distinctive ontological component, since the meaning of Being will be reduced to the meaning of

whatever beings are at hand. And this conclusion, if sound, undermines Heidegger's lifelong labor to establish the question of the meaning of Being—not the meaning of this or that individual being or even of beings taken collectively—as the primary locus of authentic philosophical thought. This question cannot assume this exalted status because it cannot even be asked. And it cannot be asked because Being is nothing more than a name for beings—whether one, some, or all.

The predication of sameness to Being engenders yet another related problem. This problem concerns the presence of difference within Being as such. If the differences which distinguish beings from one another become an essential part of the structure of Being, then Being as such is differentiated according to those distinguishing properties. Now if it is possible to isolate Being from its relation to beings and to analyze Being from the perspective of this differentiation, then one must ask about the nature of the ontological difference between a property of Being (as specified in the above manner) and a particular being. What distinguishes the relation between that property and Being from the relation between a particular being and Being? A property of Being cannot be the same as a particular being—how then can one account for the ontological difference between the two?

(b) If the predication of sameness is univocal with respect to the relation between Being and beings as well as the relation between particular beings as such, then whatever is "in" two particular beings which are the same is identical to whatever is "in" Being and beings when they belong to sameness. But surely whatever is predicated as the same in two particular beings cannot be identical to whatever is in Being that justifies the predication of sameness between Being and beings (assuming that such predication is somehow possible). For this identity would imply that particular beings are no longer recognizably particular but become in fact indistinguishable from Being as such, at least with respect to the predication of sameness. It would follow either that Being as such is reduced to the level of particular beings or that particular beings are elevated to the level of Being as such. But in either case, the difference between Being and beings cannot be preserved. This problem is obviated if sameness could be predicated of Being and beings in such a way that the common element in this relation is different from the common element in the predication of sameness with respect to particular beings. But, of course, this obviation would then imply that the notion of sameness cannot be univocally

predicated of all ontological regions. Therefore, if it is the case that the notion of sameness must be analogically predicated of different ontological regions, then Heidegger is either incorrect or, at best, misleading when he attributes sameness to Being and beings as well as to particular beings without stating that the notion cannot be understood univocally in these two distinct ontological settings.

4. If sameness is historically conditioned, then it is possible that the structure of sameness for the Greeks will be different in some essential respect from the structure of sameness for modernity. And Heidegger has asserted that this difference is in fact present in modernity. Generally speaking, at any given moment in the history of philosophical thought, the specification of sameness and difference in the relation between Being and beings is subject to alteration. But if, in this most fundamental ontological context, the content of what is predicated as the same can shift with history, does the notion of sameness retain its elementary and foundational significance? For if the content of sameness is somehow dependent upon its occurrence within an historical epoch, then whatever is "in" two beings which are determined as the same in one epoch may be incompatible with, perhaps even contradictory to, whatever is "in" two beings which are determined as the same in another epoch. And the same trans-epochal consequences would also apply to predicating sameness of Being and beings.

Heidegger's notion of sameness is clearly marked by a form of historicism. We must therefore assume that this historicism is essential to the structure of sameness. Two alternatives then appear open. The first alternative is to reject sameness as such because the historicist part of its structure renders the notion into a state of virtual self-destruction. But of course, this rejection is based on the truth of the premise that the historicism in question is, in fact and as such, self-destructive. And one would accept this premise only if one was disposed to believe that sameness as an ontological notion must be essentially non-historical, in a manner similar to the logical formality of the concept of identity. But if Being as such is necessarily defined by the appropriate form of historicism, then it follows that a non-historical formulation of sameness would distort the authentic character of Being. Therefore, the problem of whether or not a historical definition of sameness is intrinsically self-destructive can be decided only if the nature of Being is known with some degree of certainty. As such, the problem is resolvable only on the most basic ontological level.

The second alternative allows for the possibility that such

historicism is not intrinsically self-destructive. In this case, the content of sameness will vary with historical epochs. The potential incompatibility between the determination of sameness in one epoch in comparison with the determination of sameness in another epoch will never arise, given that such trans-historical comparisons are based on a fundamental misconception of Being. If the meaning of Being as such cannot be said to straddle historical epochs, then sameness as predicable of Being must be similarly structured. Sameness cannot yield the certainty generated by the application of the logical notion of identity; the only certainty available on this ontological level is that found *within* whatever historical epoch the content of sameness has been articulated. To expect a degree of certainty that transcends the limits of a historical epoch is to expect what is possible only on the basis of a metaphysical dimension which, for Heidegger, must remain inappropriate to Being as such.

If this second alternative is adopted, then there is the additional problem of restructuring sameness so that all its stipulated properties are defined in the proper historicist context. Heidegger does not introduce the factor of history as essential to sameness in the majority of references to its structure. For example, the careful delineations of the relation between like and unlike properties with respect to difference would not, by itself, lead one to expect that these properties were historically conditioned. But this element and all other elements of sameness are so conditioned. Although presumably that aspect of the abstract structure of sameness by virtue of which different properties are held apart from one another will not vary from epoch to epoch, that which is held apart will become subject of epochal variation. And it is the epochal content of sameness that will manifest the nature of Being and beings insofar as they belong to sameness.

5. Heidegger has maintained that the sameness of Being and beings is "inexhaustible." Perhaps the most potentially damaging repercussion of this claim is the threat of skepticism, with the possible cessation of the philosophical enterprise. For if we know *a priori*, so to speak, that the ontological ground of sameness is inexhaustible, we can hardly avoid wondering how to react to this fact. Should the thinker simply stop short because the project of thinking sameness can never be completed or should the thinker carry on in the face of this fact because of the intrinsic grandeur traditionally associated with this project? Adopting the first alternative is perhaps a subtle form of indolence, but in the long run it may be the most prudent course; pursuing the second alternative

indicates intellectual diligence, but in the end it may also be simply quixotic.

Now there are grounds to substantiate an attitude of skepticism only if sameness is inexhaustible for certain reasons. Is the relation between Being and beings inexhaustible because of the historicism proper to sameness, i.e., because the articulation of the nature of Being in relation to beings depends on its position within a historical epoch, or is it inexhaustible by virtue of a complexity which is present in sameness over and above the historical transformation to which the relation between Being and beings is subject?

As far as I am aware, Heidegger has never addressed this problem. The problem is important, however, and must eventually be discussed. If the reason for the inexhaustibility of sameness is that sameness necessarily remains historicist in its forms, then skepticism is unwarranted. Since the efforts of any thinker are bound by the limits of his or her historical epoch, it would be ontologically impossible for that thinker to attempt to say anything more about sameness with respect to Being and beings than what can be said from within that epoch. The thinker knows that Being is inexhaustible because the manifestations of Being are epochally plural and the existence of the individual thinker is epochally singular. But that knowledge need not hinder the attempt to say whatever it is possible to say about the sameness of Being and beings from within the epoch in which the thinker exists. In fact, such knowledge may well excite the thinker's efforts all the more, given that sameness is epochal and that in *this* epoch *this* thinker has glimmerings of what can be said about Being and beings. For if what can be said in this regard is in fact not said, then the consequences of this silence may be something less than beneficial, both for the thinker as an individual and for the world as a whole.

If, on the other hand, the reason for the inexhaustibility of sameness is non-historicist in origin, i.e., having to do with an element in the structure of sameness other than its historicity, then skepticism is perhaps a more fitting reaction. In this case, it would not matter how perceptive or energetic the individual thinker may be, or how many historical epochs will transpire—Being remains inexhaustible for a reason which is, perhaps necessarily, impossible to determine and equally impossible to alter. And because this inexhaustibility is of non-historicist origin, it would be present to each and every historical epoch, thus affecting the efforts of every thinker within that epoch to express the nature of sameness appropriate for that epoch. But even in this eventuality, skepticism

is not the thinker's only recourse. For if the sameness of Being and beings is complex, then it would be premature to assume that all aspects of this complexity were equally inexhaustible. And if some aspects of sameness *are* open to expression, then the thinker shirks his duty if the attempt is not made to articulate these aspects. This possibility must at least be entertained, if not actively explored, before any thinker slips into the safe but sterile haven of skepticism.

III

The analysis of sameness and difference presented in Part I culminated in a list of nine properties. These properties illustrated the breadth and also the complexity of the notion. The commentary in Part II set these properties in relief by sketching some problems that emerge if the notion of sameness and difference is taken as an integrated whole. However, in their present format, these problems can perhaps be appreciated only as a source of abstract exercise, for they are drawn from an ontological world inhabited solely by the terminology and concepts introduced by Heidegger to define the structure of sameness and difference.

However, this relatively abstract world of sameness and difference is, in fact, coterminous with the concrete world of Being and time as presented in, e.g., Heidegger's late work *Zeit und Sein*. We find this passage on the second to last page of that austere and highly condensed essay: "What remains to be said? Only this: Appropriation appropriates. By this, we say the same of the same toward the same" (*vom Selben her auf das Selbe zu das Selbe*).²⁵ In the course of this work, Heidegger discusses the nature of appropriation (*Ereignis*) in some detail, but nowhere in the work have I been able to locate any explicit indication either of the importance or the complexity proper to the notion of sameness. Lacking an awareness of this notion, even the most sympathetic reader might experience philosophical vertigo when confronted with this peculiar trio of seemingly equivalent terms. Hopefully, a study of the complex structure of sameness and difference would allow Heidegger's audience to withstand the onset of this not entirely unexpected reaction, and to integrate that complex structure with the equally complicated structure of appropriation.

Two related points should be made in conclusion. The first point is that the notion of sameness and difference is intimately connected to the substance of Heidegger's middle and late ontological ventures, especially his attempts to think Being as the temporality of

presence (*Anwesen*) and as appropriation. Any effort to understand and to reconstruct the Heideggerian doctrine of Being as time will necessarily be fragmented unless an interpretation of sameness becomes an essential component of that doctrine. The second point is a corollary of the first. Even if the purely temporal aspects of the doctrine of Being as presence assume an integral and coherent ontological whole, that whole must also be evaluated in conjunction with the notion of sameness and difference as a constituent part of the structure of that whole.

The problems raised in Part II should, I suggest, be taken into account in any such evaluation. However, in terms of Heidegger's overall philosophical project, these problems must be resolved not in the narrow domain of sameness and difference as an isolated and abstract phenomenon, but in the far richer world of Being as the temporality of presence. An analysis of sameness and difference in the abstract, isolated from all forms of ontological substantiation, will have served its purpose if students of Heidegger's perhaps more immediately alluring doctrines will also concern themselves with a notion which is as pervasive as it is pedestrian. The notion of sameness and difference has been generally overlooked in secondary work on Heidegger, but it was never overlooked by Heidegger himself. The extent to which Heidegger's later ontology is coherent and incisive will depend in no small measure on the extent to which the formal structure of sameness and difference can be understood in conjunction with the substance of that ontology.

NOTES

1. Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1959), p. 160. All translations from the original German are my own.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Holderlins Dichtung*, 4th ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1971), p. 124.
3. Martin Heidegger, *Was Heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1961), pp. 8–9.
4. Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1954), p. 63.
5. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche II* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1961), p. 149, italics in text.
6. *Was Heisst Denken?*, p. 68.
7. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1961), p. 307.
8. *Nietzsche I*, p. 481, italics in text.
9. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1957), p. 115. I follow the convention of much recent Heideggerian scholarship by capitalizing all references to *Sein*, i.e., Being. All references to particular beings are in lower case.

10. *Was Heisst Denken?*, p. 103.
11. *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 220.
12. Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), p. 342.
13. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 90. This bilingual edition has been used because the translation contains an emendation to the original German text. The translator notes both the original text and the emendation on p. 38.
14. Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), p. 193.
15. *Der Satz vom Grund*, p. 152.
16. *Identity and Difference*, p. 87.
17. *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 193.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Der Satz vom Grund*, p. 152.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 249.
22. *Nietzsche II*, p. 208.
23. *Holzwege*, p. 310.
24. *Nietzsche I*, p. 46.
25. Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1969), p. 24.