

Truth as Unconcealment in Heidegger's *Being and Time*

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Abstract

In his early masterpiece *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), Heidegger articulates a specific understanding of truth as *unconcealment* (German: *Unverborgenheit*). This notion differs greatly from the modern view of truth, based on the classical notion of *logos apophanticos*. Heidegger's understanding of truth as disclosure or unconcealment, or *alêtheia*, has been written about largely in terms of the complete range of Heidegger's work (Carman 2003; Cowell 2007; Dahlström 2007; Mulhall 1996; Wrathall 2011). However, I will specifically focus on the view Heidegger establishes in *Being and Time*. In my interpretation, Heidegger claims that truth is not separable from the entities in the world, including the one who uncovers the entities and also itself, *Dasein*. I also contend that attempts to incorporate traditional propositional truth and Heidegger's *alêtheia*, such as Wrathall (2011), will fail, especially in terms of the theoretical extraction of *Being and Time*'s pre-propositional theory of truth.

1. Introduction

In this article I will articulate the early notion of unconcealment (in German: *Unverborgenheit*) in Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) *Being and Time*. In his early masterpiece of philosophical literature, Heidegger points out two important results of the analysis of the phenomenon of truth: 1) that truth belongs primordially to *Dasein*¹ and 2) that *Dasein* is both in truth and untruth. He also shows in greater detail that the modern understanding of propositional truth is derivative from truth as uncovering. This early notion of unconcealment can be extracted and pursued independent of Heidegger's later philosophy and theory of truth.

¹ Applying Heidegger's own figures of speech to illustrate *Dasein*, it can be either described as individual and subjective way of being-in-the-world, which however does not reduce to qualities of the subject himself (but which cannot still be separated from the subject as running cannot be separated from the runner), or as supra-individual way of life, as in "German living" ("deutsche *Dasein*") or "cottage living" ("Hütte-*Dasein*").

My examination pursues as follows: 1) I will draw attention to the phenomenology and notion of truth Heidegger introduces in *Being and Time*, and therefore 2) I will explicate Heidegger's early notion of unconcealment, distancing the concept from later Heidegger's onto-historicity. I will also 3) assess Mark Wrathall's (2011) commentary of the early notion of unconcealment, in which he claims its connection to both propositional and pre-propositional truth. This analysis will result in a preliminary understanding whether the early notion of unconcealment could function independently outside Heidegger's later philosophical thinking: whether it works as a conceptual tool separate from Heidegger's complete project of unconcealment, and whether it could open pathways for independent development in a direction Heidegger may not have intended himself, but which might be philosophically intriguing.

2. Phenomenology, Unconcealment and *Being and Time*

In *Being and Time* Heidegger is trying to think the nature of phenomenology in an original manner. As Heidegger explains, the term 'phenomenology' is made up of two Greek terms '*phainomenon*' and '*logos*'. The Greek word *phainomenon* derives from the Greek verb 'to show oneself' (*phainesthai*). Thus for Heidegger, *phainomenon* means "that which shows itself in itself, the manifest" (das *Offenbare*, Heidegger 1962, 51; 28). Phenomenology has to do with self-manifestation. Things show themselves in many ways, depending on the modes of access we have to them. Indeed, sometimes things show themselves as what they are not, in cases of dissembling, seeming, illusion, and other such phenomena. Heidegger gives a careful analysis of these different senses of appearing and strongly emphasizes that dissemblance, mere appearance, semblance, and illusion are all secondary senses dependent on the primary meaning of 'phenomenon' as that which shows itself in itself. Heidegger wants to distinguish phenomenology as an account of the truth of a thing's appearance from all those accounts, including the Kantian account, whereby we only grasp the appearances of things and not their real being. For Heidegger, the appearance of a thing and the thing itself are interconnected, and moreover, are one and the same. In this sense, phenomenology is seeking after a meaning, which is in the entity's mode of appearing. But things do not appear themselves. *They are uncovered to someone*. Thus uncovering pre-requires not only what is being

uncovered, but also another being this being is uncovered to, i.e. human being. In such case, the proper model for seeking meaning is interpretation. Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics: phenomenology of human being is necessarily a hermeneutic enterprise. “Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has in its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task” (Heidegger 1962, 31). Before the questions of Being can be answered, one needs to ask who or what is questioning the questions of Being in the first place. This leads to the analytic of Dasein. “Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it” (ibid., 32). How things appear or are covered up must be explicitly studied as an ontic question of the Dasein. The things present themselves to us, but as noted before, this presentation itself happens in a manner which is self-concealing. When a thing is made present to us, we note the thing itself and not the way it is being presented. Presentation and being itself are therefore interlinked in a translucent way.

Unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*) is a term that first entered Heidegger’s philosophy as a translation for the ancient Greek word *alêtheia*. The more standard translation of the word is “truth” (*Wahrheit*), but Heidegger elected to go with a literal translation: *a-lêtheia* means literally “not-concealed” (Wrathall 2011, 1). Unconcealment is an event: it happens with human beings through what Heidegger calls “the creative projection of essence and the law of essence” (Heidegger 2001). The idea of unconcealment rejects the idea that there are uniquely right answers to questions, promoting therefore a type of epistemological relativism. Heidegger thinks that we encounter entities as beings that are only in virtue of the world within which they can be disclosed and encountered. “Being-true (‘truth’) means Being-uncovering” (Heidegger 1962, 262). Unconcealment is thus a privative notion: it removes concealment. This shows the primordial sense of unconcealment. “What makes this very uncovering possible must necessarily be called ‘true’ in a still more primordial sense. *The most primordial phenomenon of truth is first shown by the existential-ontological foundations of uncovering*” (ibid., 263). Unconcealment is not the property

of merely an object being uncovered. As mentioned before, it is an event that happens to someone: to a human being, a Being-there (Dasein). “Being-true as being uncovering, is a way of Being for Dasein” (ibid., 263). Dasein, a worldly human being, is constituted by its way of being in the world. This means that for Heidegger unconcealment is not only part of the world but also the human condition itself. “Uncovering is a way of Being-in-the-world. Circumspective concern, or even that concern in which we tarry and look at something, uncovers entities within-the-world. These entities become that which has been uncovered. They are ‘true’ in a second sense. What is primarily ‘true’ – that is, uncovering - is Dasein” (ibid., 263). Truth as unconcealment has therefore two senses: something as being uncovered and the uncovering itself. “‘Truth’ in the second sense does not mean Being-uncovering (uncovering), but Being-uncovered (uncoveredness)” (ibid., 263). Unconcealment is therefore Dasein’s state of being, but again, at the same time the event of unconcealment is a translucent part of the world in which Dasein uncovers things. This shows how Heidegger wishes to dismiss a subject-object duality: it is impossible to talk of truth as unconcealment merely as uncovering things or just as an aspect of human being. Unconcealment is a worldly thing, so to speak, and human being is a necessary constitutive part of that world, and vice versa. Therefore it is not strange at all that, when talking of unconcealment (or uncovering) in *Being and Time*, Heidegger spends a significant length of his time on Dasein:

To Dasein’s state of Being, disclosedness in general essentially belongs. It embraces the whole of that structure-of-Being, which has become explicit through the phenomenon of care. To care belongs not only Being-in-the-world but also Being alongside entities within-the-world. The uncoveredness of such entities is equiprimordial with the Being of Dasein and its disclosedness (ibid., 264).

In chapter 5 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger interprets the disclosure of Dasein in terms of state-of-mind (*thrownness*), understanding (*projection*), and *fallenness*. The analyses of thrownness, projection and fallenness mean that as an entity that uncovers (as an entity “in truth”), Dasein reveals itself as factual – limited by what actually is; as existential projection – open to its own possibilities; and as fallen – closed off to these possibilities by its they-involvement (Gelven 1989, 132). This last characteristic is especially important, for it introduces the concept of untruth. Dasein

is in the truth, as things uncover themselves to it and it uncovers thus itself as well. But at the same time, there is another aspect at play, as untruth: “To Dasein’s state of Being belongs falling ... *Because Dasein is essentially falling, its state of being is such that it is in ‘untruth’*” (ibid., 264). Fallenness means that Dasein is lost in its ‘world’, everything that has been disclosed and uncovered are in a mode which is disguised by ‘idle talk’ (*Gerede*). Things being “closed off and covered up belongs to Dasein’s *facticity*” (ibid., 265). Heidegger’s recognition that original existential discoveries and disclosure can get covered up in the tradition of discourse led him to realise that descriptive phenomenology has to be aware of the nature of tradition and history (Carman 2003, 204). Tradition, as Husserl also knew, involves a constant process of sedimentation whereby original discoveries become absorbed into the general consensus (Mulhall 1996, 91). Understanding operates largely in terms of this common consensus, the kind of public knowledge, which is expressed by Heidegger’s concepts of ‘publicity’ (*Öffentlichkeit*) and the inauthentic kind of awareness of ‘*das Man*’. But, for Heidegger, it is simply not the case that one can live in the truth all the time, that one can bask in the light of disclosure. Our ordinary life constantly draws us back down into forms of complacency and everydayness. This is a structural feature of Dasein; its everydayness is characterised by ‘falling’ (*Verfallen*, Heidegger 1962, 219; 175). Heidegger stresses that falling is not meant to have any negative connotation but it simply expresses the manner in which human beings live, to borrow a phrase from Arendt, in the midst of the world. Humans become absorbed and lost in the anonymous public self. Thus, Heidegger notes, that the “existential-ontological interpretation of the phenomenon of truth is (1) that truth, in the most primordial sense, is Dasein’s disclosedness, to which the uncoveredness of entities within-the-world belongs; and (2) that Dasein is equiprimordially both in the truth and in untruth” (ibid., 265).

Heidegger also insists in showing the insights of this understanding of truth against the more traditional one. Heidegger turns to the second Greek term in phenomenology: ‘*logos*’. The Greek word *logos* normally means ‘word’, ‘concept’, ‘thought’, but Heidegger translates it as ‘discourse’ (*Rede*). Heidegger also goes back to its etymology which means ‘to bind together’, ‘to gather up’ into a unity or synthesis, and ‘to let something be seen’ (Heidegger 1962, 56; 32). Discourse brings

the matter out into the open, lets it be seen, makes it manifest, although it is always driven by human needs and human interests. This, for Heidegger, is also a central notion involved in the concept of truth. Traditionally, truth has been understood in terms of conformity between our judgments and the facts in the world. But as noted before, Heidegger claims this traditional understanding of truth is derivative from a more fundamental understanding of truth as self-manifestation, revelation, disclosure (Heidegger 1962; Carman 2003). As Heidegger interprets the Greek term for truth, *aletheia*, as having the etymological sense of ‘dis-closing’, ‘un-covering’, ‘dis-covering’, ‘revealing’, that is: “making manifest that which in some sense lies hidden” (Heidegger 1927, 56–57; 33), the primordial meaning of *logos* is “letting an entity be seen from itself” (ibid., 196; 154). Heidegger notes that anything involved in speech or assertion can get ‘passed along’ to others, owing to the very nature of discourse in such a manner that the original power of revelation of the utterance gets covered up or distorted and congeals into an everyday sense which loses its urgency and its power to stimulate. That which is put forward in the assertion is something which can be passed along for ‘further retelling’. What has been pointed out may become veiled again in this further retelling, although even the kind of knowing which arises in such hearsay always has the entity itself in view and does not ‘give assent’ to some ‘valid meaning’ which has been passed along. Even hearsay is a Being-in-the-world, and a Being towards what is heard. (ibid., 197–198; 155). Heidegger wishes to show “(1) that truth, understood as agreement, originates from disclosedness by way of definitive modification; (2) that the kind of Being which belongs to disclosedness itself is such that its derivative modification first comes into view and leads the way for the theoretical explication of the structure of truth” (ibid., 266). Thus, truth in its primordial sense is pre-propositional, but it leads the way for propositional contents of truth.

Assertion and its structure ... are founded upon interpretation and its structure ... and also upon understanding - upon Dasein’s disclosedness. Truth, however, is regarded as a distinctive character of assertion as so derived. Thus the roots of the truth of assertion reach back to the disclosedness of the understanding. But over and above these indications of how the truth of assertion has originated, the phenomenon of *agreement* must not be exhibited *explicitly* in its derivative character (ibid., 266).

Dasein expresses itself as being towards things, entities. However, “Dasein need not bring itself face to face with entities themselves in an ‘original’ experience; but it nevertheless remains in a Being-towards these entities” (ibid., 266). Here Heidegger relies on his two basic neologisms: *present-at-hand* (*vorhanden*), a propositional attitude like that of a scientist or theorist, of merely looking at or observing something, and *ready-to-hand* (*zuhanden*), involvement in the world in an involved way to achieve something. Why are they important for the notion of truth? “That which has been expressed as such”, propositional expression,

takes over Being-towards those entities which have been uncovered in the assertion. If however these entities are to be appropriated explicitly with regards to their uncoveredness, this amounts to saying that the assertion is to be demonstrated as one that uncovers. But the assertion expressed is something ready-to-hand, and indeed in such a way that as something by which uncoveredness is preserved, it has in itself a relation to the entities uncovered. Now to demonstrate that it is something which uncovers ... means to demonstrate how the assertion by which the uncoveredness is preserved is related *to* these entities. The assertion is something ready-to-hand. The entities to which it is related as something that uncovers, are either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within-the world. The relation itself presents itself thus, as one that is present-at-hand (ibid., 267).

Therefore, making assertions about entities in the world makes the relationship between these entities but also the uncoveredness of these entities present-at-hand as well. We begin to question (in a scientific way) how it is these entities are (in a relationship among themselves) and how they have become present for the purposes of our assertion. “*When the assertion has been expressed, the uncoveredness of the entity moves into the kind of Being of that which is ready-to-hand within-the-world. But now to the extent that in this uncoveredness, as an uncoveredness of something, a relationship to something present-at-hand persists, the uncoveredness (truth) becomes, for its part, a relationship between things which are present-at-hand (intellectus and res) – a relationship that is present-at-hand itself*” (ibid., 267). Interestingly we can infer from this that we cannot know truth in an assertive way. When we make propositional assertions about uncoveredness, this

uncoveredness evades us. As mentioned before, uncoveredness is a translucent occurrence to those who attempt to take it under observation. “*The primordial phenomenon of truth has been covered up by Dasein’s very understanding of Being – that understanding which is proximally the one that prevails, and which even today has not been surmounted explicitly and in principle*” (ibid., 268). Heidegger concludes in the understanding that propositional truth is built upon and based on a more primordial truth of unconcealment, which itself cannot be explicated as a propositional assertion. Heidegger therefore proposes to broaden the concept of truth as *logos*, which is the way of comporting oneself to cover things up, to include the primordial uncoveredness, in the sense of *aletheia*.

3. Wrathall on the Propositional and Pre-Propositional Truth in *Being and Time*

I will focus next on Mark Wrathall’s (2011) analysis of propositional and pre-propositional truth in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Wrathall’s treatment, *Heidegger and Unconcealment - Truth, Language and History* (2011) is relevant to my analysis here, because he not only makes a fresh analysis of unconcealment in the whole breadth of Heidegger’s work, but mainly focuses on the concept in early Heidegger’s onto-phenomenology. Regarding my own treatment, what is interesting here is Wrathall’s take on the propositional and pre-propositional aspects of unconcealment. Wrathall also points out some of the possible basic misunderstandings of the issue. One is to think that Heidegger defines propositional truth as unconcealment. According to Wrathall, because the analysis of unconcealment is an analysis of the ground of propositional truth, it should be clear that unconcealment is not to be taken as a (re)definition of propositional truth: “to translate this word [*alêtheia*] as ‘truth’, and, above all, to define this expression conceptually in theoretical ways, is to cover up the meaning of what the Greeks made ‘self-evidently’ basic for the terminological use of *alêtheia* as a pre-philosophical way of understanding it” (Heidegger 1962, 219).

Another misunderstanding Wrathall points out deals with the relation of unconcealment with *the clearing* (*Lichtung*). In his later works Heidegger eventually comes to think of truth of being

especially as truth as the clearing: there is a clearing within which an understanding of being or essence can prevail while incompatible possibilities of being are concealed or held back. This clearing is to be understood as the most fundamental form of unconcealment. Unconcealment as clearing does not name a thing, or a property or characteristic of things, or “a kind of action we perform on things, or even the being of things” (Wrathall 2011, 14). Instead, it names a domain or structure that allows there to be things with properties and characteristics, or modes of being. It is a domain, or a space of possibilities.

However, as Wrathall points out, Heidegger does not mention unconcealment of being nor connected unconcealment with clearing before 1928. In *Being and Time* the word unconcealment only appears to be introduced as equal with uncoveredness (*Entdecktheit*) (Heidegger 1962, 219). This is noteworthy in Heidegger’s early work. In *Being and Time*, unconcealment is not to be considered separate from propositional truth either. Heidegger argues that truth “has by no means the structure of a correspondence between knowing and the object in the sense of a likening of one entity (the subject) to another (the object)” (ibid., 218-219). Heidegger suggests that correspondence is a characteristic of our orientation to the world, in particular of our “assertive being toward what is asserted” (ibid., 218). Wrathall argues that Heidegger believes that a phenomenological description of cases where we confirm the truth of an assertion shows us that this is in fact how we ordinarily understand the truth of the assertion (Wrathall 2011, 19). “To say that an assertion ‘is true’ signifies that it uncovers what is as it is in itself. It asserts, it points out, it ‘lets’ what is ‘be seen’ (*apophansis*) in its uncoveredness. The being-true (truth) of the assertion must be understood as being-uncovering” (Heidegger 1962, 218).

Heidegger believes that propositional truth is a kind of bringing out of concealment. Wrathall articulates that concealment reigns in “*a nonassertoric dealing with the world in the sense that, in such pre-predicative comportments, the world is experienced in a way that lacks determinacy, that is, propositional articulation*” (Wrathall 2011, 19, emphasis mine). This means that the world is not available for thought, for the discovery of inferential and justificatory relationships between

propositional states and worldly states of affairs. Heidegger believes that in our everyday dealings with things, we experience the world precisely in such propositional concealment. In our pre-predicative experience of the world things are understood as the things they are in terms of our practical modes of coping with them. Such practically constituted things are implicated in a complex variety of involvements with other objects, practices, purposes, and goals, and are understood immediately as reaching out into a variety of involvements. In assertion, by contrast, our experience undergoes an explicit restriction of our view, and we dim down the whole richly articulated situation in front of us to focus on some particular feature of the situation (Heidegger 1962, 155).

The dimming down or leveling off that occurs when we suspend our everyday dealings with things is what first makes it possible to give something a conceptual character by uncovering the kind of determinate content that allows one to form conceptual connections, draw inferences and justify one occurrent intentional state on the basis of another. The pre-predicative is a non-conceptual way of comporting ourselves toward the things in the world around us. Rather than a conceptual or a logical articulation, the pre-predicative manifestness of things is articulated along the lines of our practical comportment. In such an articulation, “things show up as what they are but in the whole complexity of their involvements” (Wrathall 2011, 20). This, as we have seen, makes propositional truth on Heidegger’s view a privative concept. Wrathall is correct again to my understanding: *propositional truth is defined relative to the richer, more primordial givenness of the world, which is lost in propositional articulation*. “Propositional truth is consequently a specific form of a broader kind of unconcealment where what is at issue is the availability of entities for comportment in general” (ibid., 20). The uncoveredness of entities makes entities available for *comportment* (*Verhalten*). Comportment is a broad term that means every instance in which we experience something and everything we do. The specific form of concealment that is removed by the uncoveredness of entities consists in entities not being available as that toward which or with which we can comport. Wrathall points out, that every uncoveredness of the world occurs together with a concealing of entities. I have not explicated this important characteristic to the fullest in my treatment so far. For Heidegger, the default state of entities in the world is being covered over.

Truth understood as uncoveredness is stealing unconcealing from where there are things to be concealed. “The factual uncoveredness of anything is, as it were, always a robbery” (Heidegger 1962, 294). This default state applies also to the Dasein as well, and is an important aspect of Dasein’s mode of being. Dasein’s default state of being in the world is having the truth of its being being covered. Dasein is in the state of fallenness. “The understanding, dispositions, and skills that Dasein has in the first instant are the banalized understandings, dispositions, and skills of the one (*das Man*)” (Wrathall 2011, 24). Unconcealment can occur authentically, without a set of predispositions. Entities are initially manifest but nevertheless concealed in what they most authentically are. Authenticity by contrast, consists in Dasein learning to “uncover the world in its own way ... this uncovering of the ‘world’ [is] ... always accomplished as a clearing away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way” (Heidegger 1962, 129).

Wrathall’s treatment of the role of propositional truth in unconcealment seems like a piece of solid philosophy. The passages from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* support his analysis and thus ultimately my analysis of his treatment. However, regardless of the meritorious take on propositional truth as unconcealment, it is hard to find the relevance for going to the extent Wrathall goes to express the significance or structure of propositional truth as a secondary level of a more primordial notion of unconcealment, so to speak. One must bear in mind, that Heidegger does not raise the question of assertive aspect of truth to any greater extent in the Chapter 5 of *Being and Time*. Assertive truth plays a role in his philosophy, though. However, although the point that is raised here is meaningful to a degree, it is a secondary question to the more fundamental notion of uncoveredness as a state of Being for Dasein. Also, assertive, propositional understanding of truth as logos is what Heidegger criticizes in many passages throughout *Being and Time*. In fact, it is the main function of the first part of the book to argue against modern understanding of subjectivity and truth. What seems then more important in Heidegger’s early notion of truth is Dasein’s uncoveredness and Being-in-truth. It is undeniable in the end that unconcealment is as much part of Dasein itself as the world Dasein is in. This gives a more primordial sense to truth than any layered

structures, where assertive acts are at the top. Unconcealment represents a certain fundamental involvement upon which the tension between this readiness and assertive observation rests.

4. Conclusion

I have discussed here the important and challenging characteristic of Heidegger's theory of truth, namely *unconcealment*, or as Heidegger names it in *Being and Time*, *uncovering*. He claims that truth in the first and real sense refers not to objects but to Dasein. If we define truth as uncovering, it must obviously be a characteristic of Dasein itself. Only in the sense of being uncovered can one say that 'objects' are true. 'True' and 'false' are characteristics of human activity in terms of one's hiding behind masks and deceptions. It is indeed Dasein that most properly uncovers and discloses, and it is in fact Dasein itself that is being disclosed. For the most part, Dasein does not expose itself; it remains hidden. As hidden it is in untruth; this is due to its *fallenness*. Heidegger points out that the very etymology of the Greek *alêtheia* shows that truth is a kind of violation or robbery of what is normally the case. Truth is snatched from the usual mode of untruth in the they-self. The whole structure of the existential analytic is proceeding from an everyday and inauthentic existence in which the grounds of authenticity can be spotted.

In his early masterpiece *Being and Time*, Heidegger articulates this specific understanding of unconcealment, which is developed further in his later work. A great deal of scholarly work address this later philosophy (Carman 2003; Cowell 2007; Dahlström 2007; Mulhall 1996; Wrathall 2011). However, I have specifically focused on the notion that Heidegger establishes in *Being and Time*, namely a view of uncoveredness of the entities and Dasein itself, which has a pre-propositional grounding. What has come forth in this treatment is that truth is not separable from the entities in the world, including the one who uncovers the entities and also oneself, Dasein. This view challenges traditional understanding of truth and knowledge, but may not necessarily be alien to everyday practical attitudes.

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