

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF FORESTRY

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## **Abstract:**

*In an extended discussion, within the context of a "philosophy of forestry", of the relationships of the concepts of truth and of tree some fundamental aspects of occidental metaphysics are examined from a Heideggerian perspective. But the paper tries to go beyond Heidegger's thematization of metaphysics in the context of pre-Socratic philosophy by establishing Indo-European etymology as a more inclusive horizon. In this manner, the transition from anti-metaphysics to post-metaphysics is anticipated.*

## **Introduction**

The traditional view in the occidental world with respect to the relative priority of philosophy and the science of forestry is that the former came first and gave birth to the latter. The precedence of philosophy over forestry is not, moreover, a special case, for philosophy is the mother science. On this, the official (Aristotelian, to name names) view, all sciences are sciences just in case they are developed from first principles, and it is metaphysics, or first philosophy, that ultimately bestow these principles on the special sciences. Without philosophical grounding, the sciences could not define their basic terminology, establish their object domains, determine and justify their methodological procedures, and so on and so forth.

In short, the individual sciences get their philosophical underpinnings, their disciplinary matrixes, their paradigms, from

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philosophy. After all, natural science was until last century called natural philosophy, and natural philosophy was understood as a branch of philosophy. The most elevated academic title in the sciences is still the Ph.D., the doctorate of philosophy. The moral of the story is that forestry science must needs respect philosophy as its elder and better, namely, us, the philosophers.

Let us then determine if forestry science cannot be defended against the oneupsmanship of philosophy. What exactly might be said for forestry and against philosophy by a renegade philosopher? This antiphilosophical question must still be addressed in a philosophical manner, not only because we cannot entirely forsake philosophical task of refining our sense of just what philosophy is in the first place. Since none dare call it treason, let us call that which we propose to do “antiphilosophy”.

We shall turn the tables on philosophy. In order to do so, in order to counter the traditional pretension of philosophy to academic, intellectual, and even spiritual, superiority, we shall maintain a thesis that will appear at first highly implausible, even absurd, and yet is, on second thought and in truth, preeminently reasonable—nay—obvious.

Our thesis is the following: Philosophy is in reality the child of forestry science. Consider, in the reference to the title of this essay, that it is possible to speak of the philosophy of forestry in two senses. The first sense is the philosophy of forestry that lays the foundation for the science of forestry. This sense posits the primacy of philosophy over forestry, the standard philosophical doctrine. In the second sense, the phrase “of forestry” indicates the possession of something by forestry; and “philosophy of forestry” means “forestry’s philosophy”, that is, the philosophical tradition that was born of forestry, and is hence forestry’s child.

Our essay is concerned with the philosophy of forestry in this second sense. We shall begin by sketching two arguments for the priority of forestry over philosophy: the argument from evolution, and the argument from civilization.

### **The argument from evolution**

“Philosophy is forestry’s child.”

“Well, I’ll be a monkey’s uncle!” exclaims the incredulous philosopher.

“Not uncle, but cousin,” we respond, “and therein hangs a tale.”

At the risk of going out on a limb that only a more learned hand might negotiate, let us recall at this point several chapters in our mammalian evolution. When our distant, mammalian forebears first started to scamper up trees, they were something like today’s rodent or shrew. In time, environmental pressure and opportunistic adaptation combined to make them something like today’s squirrel, then something like a New World monkey, and in turn something like an Old World monkey.

Eventually, by coming to swing by their arm from branch to branch, they became something like a great ape; or rather, they became great apes, which is, for all the apologetics of paleontology, what we are today. Man is only separated from the chimpanzee and the gorilla by from a half dozen to a dozen million years (but who’s counting?) of evolutionary divergence, hardly enough time to have forgotten how to brachiate, and remains a species of man-ape, one who, if one might credit all that he reads in the newspapers, rather favors his nephew’s side of the family. “The higher the ape goes the more he shows his tail”.

It happens that our swinging forebears, upon finding themselves out on a limb from some climatic shift, fell into the nasty habit of foraging about the jungle floor for food, knuckling under, in a handy phrase, to the demands of terrestrial locomotion. “Hasty climbers”, the old saw goes, “have sudden falls”. In the long run, some marginals among this scroungy lot wandered off from the rest, turning heel on the three-tiered jungle and setting foot off on to the sprawling savannah.

It would appear, moreover, that this journey of a thousand millennia began with a single faux pas, for we have been out of our tree with longing for the green world of youth ever since. Yet whether or not we are nostalgic for the tall trees, it remains to determine to what extent

our sylvan extraction defines our current identity. Any such determination must be anthropocentric, that is to say, (crypto)mythological in character: On the grounds that the greater portion of the last one hundred million years of our formative history has been invested in a perfecting our marvelous powers of perception and motility by working monkey shins and playing the ape in the top of the tree, and that the canopied forest that bore our kind through its primate gestation and nurtured us through our pongid infancy is the Great Mother in her most rapturously viridescent guise; one could say that we are in truth stray children of the jungle, the last bloom of its climax phase.

This then is the argument from evolution for the priority of forestry over philosophy: Philosophical thinking is the child of forestry just because our simian ancestors were foresters, and hence that our physiological and psychological constitution is determined in and by the practice of forestry. In Marxian (not to say Marxist) terms, the material basis, consisting of the means and relations of production, determine the ideological superstructure, whose core, in the context of occidental civilization, is philosophy.

Here it is relevant to cite the role of metaphors based on vision and manipulation in philosophy. It was in negotiating the forest floor that we became upright and fully bipedal; thus we have philosophical stances, attitudes, positions, postures, approaches, and so forth. It was seeing in three dimensions how not to fall from the branch that determined our special vision of the world; thus we have in philosophy perspectives, points of view, insights, illuminations, enlightenments, and so on.

### **The argument from civilization**

Much later than the descent of man's ancestors from the trees, at the time of the agricultural revolution, the linguistic forebears of the one half of mankind that speaks Indo-European tongues came out of the Anatolian highlands into Greece and the Balkans, developing as they came, with scant show of filial piety, the technique of slashing and burning the woods and brush to open fields for their corn and pastures for their

herds. On the grounds that the distinctive and predominant mode of European thinking is the twenty-four hundred year old tradition of philosophy, and that philosophy has been almost exclusively written in western Indo-European languages, the neolithic peoples who invaded the European mixed oak forest seven or eight millennia ago might be recognized as the spiritual granddaddies of the European intellectual heritage.

Transforming their sylvan environs into gardens, not only by exercising stewardship over clearing and spring, grove and wood, footpath and water-passage, cliff-face and cave, but also by clearing the field and pasture and tilling the soil and tending the kine, the new Europeans were to build a civilization in which the style of thinking that calls itself philosophy might germinate and disseminate itself.

The argument from civilization for the priority of forestry over philosophy is simply that philosophy is the child of forestry just because our Indo-European ancestors were foresters, and hence that our linguistic and sociological constitution is determined in and by the practice of forestry. Once again, the material basis of forestry determines the ideological superstructure of philosophy.

In the argument from civilization, there is more significant detail concerning how forestry determines in intrinsic character of philosophy. Let us just give illustrative examples of this determination touching on several constituent elements of the philosophical tradition: the problematics or questions of philosophy, the lexical items of philosophy, or philosophemes, and the role of the philosopher.

### **Tree and being**

Philosophy then is indebted to a recollection of our forester forebears. The most famous question of philosophy, for example, is that of Bishop Berkeley, when, in defense of the doctrine of phenomenalism, he asked whether, if a tree falls in a forest and nobody hears it, there is a sound.

Yet instead of analyze various and sundry such examples, let us examine one example in depth. The main topic area of philosophy is metaphysics, and the main branch of metaphysics is ontology, the science

of being. Thus it is relevant to our thesis what Martin Heidegger, the greatest philosopher of the century, says in the third chapter of *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (trans. Karl Manheim; New Haven: Yale UP 1959), entitled “The Question of the Essence of Methaphysics”.

Heidegger suggests that if we want to “get away from the empty schema of this word ‘being’, ... we have ... all sorts of things at our disposal ... the immediately tangible things ... that are constantly at hand, tools, vehicles, etc ... If these essents strike us as too commonplace, not refined and soulful enough for ‘metaphysics’, we can restrict ourselves to the nature around us, the land, the sea, the mountains, rivers, woods, and to the particulars there in, the trees, birds, insects, grasses, and stones” (p.76).

He considers this approach to being, however, only to reject it, and does so by adducing the problems attaching to an elucidation of the universal concept “tree” (*Baum*) in terms of individual trees as illustrative of the problems inherent in determining the ‘universal concept’ “being” (*Sein*) through examination of particulars.

By way of example, we substitute for the universal concept “being” the universal concept “tree”. If we wish now to say and define what the essence of tree is, we turn away from the universal concept to the particular species. This method is so self-evident that we almost hesitate to mention it. Yet the matter is not as simple as that. How are we going to find our famous particulars, the individual tree *as such*, *as* trees; how shall we be able even to look *for* trees, unless the representation of what a tree is shines before us? Even though it may be true that in order to determine the essence “tree” in every respect, we must pass through the particular, it remains at least equally true that the elucidation of essence and richness of essence is contingent on the radicalness with which we represent and know the universal essence “tree”, which in this case means the essence “plant”, which in turn means the essence “living things” and “life”. Unless we are guided by a developed knowledge of tree-ness, which is manifestly determined from out of itself and its essential ground, we can look over thousands and thousands of trees in vain — we shall not see the tree for the trees. (p. 80).

As a first impression, here we see Plato's point (called Meno's paradox) that if one does not know what he is looking for — in this case, the treeness of the trees — he might look at any number of trees without finding it. In order to reap the food for thought the passage bears, it is needful to shake it root and branch and see how things fall out. For as the proverb goes, "The apple never falls far from the tree".

"The tree which we cannot see for the trees" might be either of two things, or rather both at once. First, it can be the generic tree that cannot be seen because we are lost in the forest of the thousands and thousands of particular trees without a developed knowledge of tree-ness. It is said that when one is lost in a forest one can go around and around in circles without realizing it. In the case at hand, one wanders from tree to tree looking for the tree-ness of the tree but without anything to go on, one remains bewildered.

Second, the tree in question may be taken figuratively, as is the word "forest" in the colloquial saying, "You cannot see the wood for the trees". In English, this figure of speech, which means that one is too close to one's subject matter to get a perspective on it, dates from at least the sixteenth century, when John Heywood (*Proverbs*, Pt. I, Ch. 11) wrote these words. This saying has been particularly hackneyed since the late nineteenth century; it means just that it is difficult to pick out the essentials from the surrounding mass of details, that the main issues are not readily apparent.

Since the same idiom runs in German as in English, *er sieht den Wald vor (lauter) Bäumen nicht*; it seems that Heidegger's "we cannot see the tree for the trees" is a play on words that exploits the two constructions of "tree", already examined—namely, "tree" in the generic sense, or tree-ness, and "tree" in the figurative sense, or the issue in question—as well as the two or three corresponding senses of "trees" — namely, "trees" either as particular, real trees (such as the ones growing in Heidegger's Black Forest) or as specific kinds of trees (the oak and the ash, the beech and birch), and trees as the welter of confusion that obscures the issue in question. In addition, there is the literal sense of the statement that "we cannot see the tree for the trees" in which both "tree" and "trees" refer to the same thing as "trees" as particular, real trees.

There are, accordingly, four or five levels of reference established by the passage in question: first, the individual trees, or kinds of trees, that one might examine in order to determine their common essence; second, this essence, the being of the tree; third, the tree as a stand-in or placeholder for anything; and fourth, the essence of anything, the being of beings.

In Heidegger's statement that "we cannot see the tree for the trees", three distinctions—the general and the particular, the universal and the abstract, and the literal and the figurative—are dovetailed together by means of two implied identifications. On the one hand, the trees that block our view of a forest are one and the same real, living trees that we might examine with the mistaken notion that they might reveal the general concept "tree". On the other, the tree-ness, or essence, of the tree is at one and the same time the matter for thought in a deeper sense.

### **The Indo-European poet**

The etymology of the word "text" shows it to come from a term of home economics (this term, by the way, is a pleonasm, because *economos* already means "home"). It derives from the Middle English *teste*, from the Old French *texte*, from the Medieval Latin *textus*, (Scriptural) text, from Latin, literary composition, "woven thing", from the past participle of *texere*, to join, weave, plait (akin to Hittite *takks-*, *taks-*, to join, build); whence also "context", "pretext", "textile", "test" (shell, cupel, trial), "tete-a-tete", (by way of the French for a type of gauze) "tissue", and so on. A textbook is not merely a literary composition to be assigned in school, but also one that by laying out the principles of a subject in an orderly manner merits consideration as part of an educational canon; and that this honorific connotation is recalled from a time when the word "text" refers to something drawn from divinely inspired scripture.

Related to Latin *texere* is *tegere*, to cover, which is akin to Old English *thaec*, a roof, whence "thatch", and which yields "tegula", "tile", "toga", "togs", "detect", "protect", and so on. The Indo-European base of both is *\*teks-*, to carpenter, or to fabricate, especially with an ax, particularly the wicker or wattle fabric for the mud-covered walls and



roof of a house. The root metaphor is evidently the process of erecting the frame of a daub-and-wattle hut by the cutting and trimming with an ax of, and the weaving and binding together of, twigs, reeds and/or branches.

The suffixed form *\*teks-on*, weaver, maker of wattle for house walls, builder, yields Sanscrit *taksan* and Greek *tekton*, carpenter, builder (whence our “tectonic” and “architect”), as well as a Sanscrit verb meaning to form, construct, carpenter. The suffixed form *teks-na*, handicraft, manual skill, manual art, yields the Greek *techne*, art, craft, skill (whence “technics”, “technical”, “technology”, and so on). The suffixed form *\*teks-la*, moreover, yields Latin *tela*, web, weaving, net, warp of a fabric, also weaver’s beam (to which thee warp threads are tied) (whence “tela”, “tiller” and “toil”); from which *\*sub-tela*, “the thread passing under (sub-) the warp”, the finest thread, whence *subtilis*, thin, fine, precise, subtle (“subtle”). As the folk saying goes, “The devil is subtle, yet weaves a coarse web”.

Through comparison of dialectically distinct literary traditions, it is possible to reconstruct various Indo-European poetic expressions. One of these is the phrase for the Indo-European poet himself, *\*wekwom teks-*, “weaver (or carpenter) of words”. Evidently, the making of tropes, such as the kenning, was seen on the model of a housewife weaving fabric for a garment to clothe the family, or on that of a husband (from *\*bheu-*) weaving wattle for the family hut. Just as woodsman and weaver cover and shelter us from elemental forces, the poet—the root meaning of “poet” is “piler of stones (for fortress walls)”, reflecting a more sophisticated means of production than *wekwom teks*—weaves his words to project tribe or village against evils that hide in darkness, thickets and the night. In fabricating his text, the verbal technician projects a place of shelter for the tribe and nation, a context for the conduct of collective life, and in the case of settled peoples, a mythopoetic framework for civilization.

The antitype of the philosopher is the *wekwom teks*.

If we want to form a clear image of the *wekwom teks*, we must think of the Celtic bards, and of the class of Celtic sacerdotess, the druids,

for the bards were druids. Celtic paganism is called Druidism after these sacerdotess, the druids, literally “oaktree-seers”. The druid (from Indo-European \**deru-*, see below) venerated oaks, in groves of which they practised rites involving human sacrifice. Like the Greeks with their tree nymphs—the dryads and hamadryads, such as Dryopes (all three names from \**deru-*)—the Celts venerated goddesses of the oak groves—such as Druantia (from \**deru-*)—and had oracles in oak groves.

The druids had both magico-religious and juridico-political attributions, according to the reports of Pliny and the *Commentaries* of Julius Ceasar. Together with the brahmans, they represent, according to the Dumezilian school of Indo-European studies, survivals of the first function of the Indo-European class structure, that associated with priestly and regal affairs, namely, the sacerdotess-king. The name of the Indo-European priest, of which the druid is a main exemplar, is \**bhlagmen-*, which is conserved in peripheral areas—in the Latin *flamen*, priest (of a particular deity), and Sanscrit *brahman-*, priest, and *brahman-*, prayer, whence “brama”, magical or divine knowledge, “brahman”, “brahmin”.

### **Tree and being redux**

Heidegger’s witticism about not seeing the tree for the trees shows him to be a weaver of words: his account of \**bheu-* is meant to shelter the world from an elemental threat of some kind. Why else would he fail to develop the example of the treeness of the tree any further than he does? For surely the witticism about not seeing the tree for the trees, however well-carpentered it is, warrants a much more extended treatment than Heidegger affords it.

Consider, as a pointer to the matter for thought, the English idiomatic expression, “the treeness of the tree”, which means the essential qualities that compose a tree, in the absence of which the tree would cease to be a tree, and hence the absolute essentials of anything. The phrase is evidently modeled on Sterne’s ‘Correggiocity of Corregio’ (*Tristram Shandy*, III xii).

Sterne’s phrase being a parody of the philosophical parlance of his and former times. The phrase, “the treeness of the tree”, in the

extended sense of the absolute essentials of anything is roughly equivalent to what Heidegger calls “the being of a being” in *Being and Time*, and “beingness” and “presence” in later writings.

What all of this suggests is that there may be something about the relationship of “tree” and “being” that recommends the phrase “the treeness of the tree” as a manner of speaking of “the being of a being” as well as the universal concept “tree” as a substitute for the universal concept “being”. This something is that “tree” and “being” have a family resemblance.

Now when Wittgenstein says that language-games have family resemblances, he means to say only that they are more or less like each other. Maurice Mandelbaum criticizes this notion by pointing out that when we say of two people that they have a family resemblance, we do not mean to say merely that they look alike but that moreover the fact of their common physiognomy has its explanation in a common biological origin.

The resemblance of Heidegger’s “tree” and “being” is of this stronger kind.

According to philology, German *Baum*, tree, like English “bush” may come through Germanic *\*baumaz* (and *\*bagmaz*), tree, “the growing thing”, from the same Indo-European root as “being”—namely, *\*bheu*, to be, to grow.

There are three circumstances that precipitated this coincidence. First, growing is so much a part of being that there is an Indo-European radical base that means both being and growing. Or rather, since growing is an eminent mode of being, the word for the first can also be that for the second. Second, this root was one of three that merged into the irregular paradigm of the Indo-European verb “to be”. Third, being the tallest, largest, firmest, and most long-lived of growing things, the tree was taken in the Germanic dialect as the eminent mode of growing things.

What these observations suggest is that the tree may serve not only as an eminent mode of living beings but also of beings as such. The deeper logic of Heidegger’s example is, therefore, that while the concept “tree” might not after all serve as an example for the being of beings, it might the metonymical function of evoking being.

In a footnote somewhere, Paul de Man speculates that we might with profit conceive of a schematism, in Kant's sense, in which the rules embodied are not the concepts of the understanding but rather literary tropes. The metonymy of tree for being is a deep aspect of such a schematism, an aesthetic ideal close to the philosophical soub.

### Triangulation

Let us see where this path leads by examining the common ground between three simple ideas, two of which (being and truth) are quite abstract and one of which (tree) is fairly concrete.

The first of these is the constellation "Is/Be/Was". The most basic roots of the Indo-European irregular verb meaning to be are *\*es-*, to be, *\*er*, *\*bheu-*, to be, exist, grow, and *\*wes-*, to delay, dwell, stay the night.

The second is "Tree/Bush (*Baum*)/Wood". The original Indo-European root for tree is *\*widhu-*, found in "wood" as well as "gael" and "goidelic". Another root for tree appearing in Germanic is Indo-European *\*bheu-* (for which, see above), appearing in German *Baum* and English "bush", "ambush", and so on. Finally, there is Indo-European *\*deru-*, which originally has the abstract sense to be firm, solid, steadfast, but which assumes the specialized senses "tree", "wood", and forms derivatives referring to objects made of wood.

Third and last, there is "Truth/Sooth/Verity". The original Indo-European root meaning "true", *\*weros-* (stem *\*wero-*), appears in English through both the Germanic *\*wera-* (whence "warlock" and "varangian") and Latin *verus* (whence "veracious", "verism", "verity", "very", "aver", "verdict", "veridical", "verify", "verisimilar", "veronica"). Another word for true, now archaic, is "sooth" deriving from Indo-European *\*es-*. "True" itself derives from Indo-European *\*deru-*, to be firm, solid, steadfast. In Germanic, this root produces not only the specialized sense of tree, as "firm thing", but also "true", as "firm (like a tree)".

We seen then that the roots *\*bheu-*, *\*es-*, *\*deru-* exhibit a triangulation of meanings among them, as follows: *\*bheu-* comes to mean

both being and tree; \**es*- both being and truth; and \**deru*- both tree and truth. It is hard to say how common this sort of triangulation of sense is, or to judge its significance, but it might be taken as a pointer toward a fuller experience of being. For we sense that at the back of it all, there is something else, something we do not quite comprehend, something that we are not exactly kept out of, but to which we have not the key.

At least, the reasons for the affinities among these roots are more or less evident. First of all, growing is one main way of being, the way of the most important category of beings, living ones, exhibit; hence the twofold sense of \**bheu*- as growing and being. Trees are, after all, the largest, tallest, and oldest of all living things, and for all that, perhaps the most noble. They are steadfast in the face of events; only lightening or flood or a fortnight with a bronze ax might fell the greatest of them.

Truth too is a steadfast thing, not uprooted by every gust of wind. The kinship of “tree” and “truth” derives from the circumstance that truth is firm like a tree. A true thing is a real, actual, existing one, and not some figment of fantasy, such that Indo-European \**es*-, to be, might not only produce “is” through Germanic \**santhaz*, whence “sooth”, truth, and Sanskrit *sat*, *sant*, existing, true, virtuous.

Thus the tree, one might say, is paradigmatic of being and truth not only because of its power to grow and endure, but also because of its actual size and strength.

The affinity of truth (*verum*, in the sense of being available for theory) and being (*ens*) has been well noted in the philosophical tradition. Along with good (*bonum*, in the sense of being plentiful), one (*unum*), thing (*res*), something (*aliquid*), and sometimes beauty (*pulcher*, in the sense of being available to perception), they are said to be transcendentals—ways in which all entities are alike, or concepts controvertably assignable to any entity. Furthermore, that something exists, is real and hence is true is, by the lights of occidental man, a logical progression of sense.

What is not so well noted is that the tree shares firmness with truth and growth or vitality with being. If, as we have indicated, it is its solidity and vitality that likens the tree to being and truth, could it not be

that the being, or the truth, of the tree is “growing firmness”, or “firm growth”? In that case we have elucidated the universal concept “tree” in a manner different than the traditional one, to which Heidegger alludes in saying that “tree” is a species of “life” or “living thing”.

And why is *An Introduction to Metaphysics* so concerned to obscure this sort of appropriation of the treeness of the tree if it is not that it might point beyond the higher sort of anthropocentrism found in the thought of Dasein (the essence of human being)? For if man might be viewed as a mode of the firm growth which is the treeness of the tree, he could not be seen as the measure of things, made or otherwise, and one cannot leap to the presumption of jumping into the circle of interpretation, in the manner projected by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, by way of man’s essence.

### **Tree and Truth**

The word “being”, which names the topic of ontology, comes from an Indo-European roots meaning to grow. English “be” comes from Middle English *be (e)n*. Old English *beon*, to come to be, from Germanic *\*biju-* from extended forms *\*bhwi(y)o-*, *\*bhwi-*, of Indo-European root *\*bheu-*, to be, exist, grow; and “been” comes, through Middle English *be(o)n*. Old English *beon*, from the same Germanic root.

As the largest growing thing, the tree is a natural model for being, as it has come to serve in philosophy. The Romans, for example, adopt the philosophical concept of matter by means of the form of literary loan called a calque. A calque is a form of semantic borrowing in which a word is given a special extended meaning by analogy with that of a word having the same basic meaning in another language. As a calque, Latin *materies*, which meant originally growing wood, timber, acquires the philosophical sense “matter” by analogy with Greek *hule*, forest, timber, hence stuff, matter. In this way the stuff of the tree comes to serve as stuff as such, not just for the Greeks but for all philosophy.

Indeed, the tree was, for Germanic peoples, both scene and symbol for all sorts of agreements: the trust of the cohort, the truce with

their enemies, the troth that binds two communities (by the exchange of hostages), the tryst between lovers in the bower, the truth exacted from witnesses at a trial. The transgressor knows that the betrayed will, by right, bind him to the tree before which he swore his broken oath. This is originally a characteristic of men and only derivatively of their utterances: true words are those spoken by a true man—that is, one stout-hearted, firm and steadfast like the tree.

The Germanic root for “true” is applied to persons before it is used in reference to statements and other kinds of things, truth means steadfast, sound, firm (like a tree). “Trust”, “truce”, “tryst”, “troth” derive from the same root, and the fact that all of these agreements or compacts involve trees owes itself to the circumstance that the Germanic peoples originally sworn out of doors under towering crossroads trees or before the sky kings of sacred groves. The ritual acts of swearing an oath of testimony, wedding a couple or conducting a tree marriage, arranging or keeping a tryst in a bower, and burying the hatchet in the arbor all derive their significance from the promise and hope that the one who commits himself will be as strong and straight as the oak or the ash, the birch or the beech, in whose presence the ritual is enacted.

The penalty for swearing oaths falsely or betraying trusts is to return to the stand or grove where the oath is sworn, there to be hung, garroted, crucified, lacerated, beheaded or demaned. Trial by torture is instituted as late as Charles the Great, who had accused and accuser stand with their arms crossed like the Tree of Christ until one or other could no longer endure the posture and relented. In each case, the truth of a man is that he is true to his word, spoken or understood, offered or exacted. Being true to one’s word does not, however, mean merely that one’s oaths and statements are honest rather than deceitful, that one’s professions of intentions or of faith are sincere, or in general that what one says is the truth to the best of one’s knowledge of the past, the present and the future. Keeping one’s word means to have the perseverance and skill to discharge one’s obligations in the face of adversity. It means as much to stay out of temptation’s way as to resist temptation: not to flee in battle nor to let the muscles loosen in fear, not

to abscond with a partner's share nor to develop the need for greed, not to covet thy neighbor's wife nor to let the eyes rove.

In a derivative sense, the truth is not a matter of the relationship of a man to his words, but a property, usually conceived as relational, of those words themselves, and the question of the meaning of truth concerns the nature of that property. Here the words stand on their own, whether or not the speaker takes them back in the end.

To repeat, "tree", "truth", "trust", "tryst", "troth" and "truce", derive from the Indo-European radical *\*deru-*, to be firm, solid, steadfast, and hence with specialized senses "wood", "tree", and with derivatives referring to objects made of wood. The original sense of "firm, solid", is attested in Latin, Greek, Sanscrit and Celtic; it produces the senses of tree, (from "firm [thing]"), and hence of wood and its derivatives, and as well as oak (as "*the tree*"), and also of true (as perhaps "firm like a tree").

When a warm spell let the priests penetrate the Germans forests, Christ was "the Truth" and the Cross "the Tree", in commemoration of Wodin hanging on Yggdrasil (literally, "ugly-horse"), the world-tree of Norse mythology, that, with its roots and branches, binds together heaven, earth and hell. It is an ash and evergreen, and at its root lies a fountain of wonderful virtues. An eagle, a squirrel, and four stags sit in the tree, which drops honey. The tree is one of life and knowledge, and of time and space.

### **Mythopoetic affirmation**

Heidegger asserts that the Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, derives from *letho* (*lanthano*) and the alpha-privative, with the sense of "unconcealment". Heidegger bases his account of the essence of truth as disclosure on the etymology of the Greek word for truth. He claims that after Plato and Aristotle *aletheia* assumes the sense of the adequation of thing and idea, but that before them it means what it literally says—namely, unhiddenness, disclosure. Later Heidegger retracts his historiography of this topic *aletheia* while retaining his account of the essence of truth as the disclosure and concealment of being.



In addition to Heidegger's views on the ontologico-poetic powers of the Greek people in their heyday, one reason that Heidegger is drawn to the Greek language in order to explicate truth is that the etymology of the common Indo-European word for truth—\**weros*, seen in Latin *veritas* and German *Wahrheit*—reveals nothing about the character of truth, because it retains the same basic sense through its long history. For the purposes of interpreting truth it is more suggestive to examine terms that have come to replace this base in its primary significance.

That firmness is the basic meaning of "truth" is also attested to by the senses of the word. Since in English, as in most Indo-European languages, the substantive "truth" is derived from the adjectival form "true", it is appropriate to examine the senses of "true" together with those of "truth".

We speak of the truth of things in the world as well of that of intentional entities such as signs and judgments that are not so much of the world as about it. In each case the thing is called true because answers to our conception of the thing that might properly bear the name in question. For both statements and things, truth consists in firmness. The true person or thing is firm in that it stands straight and steadfast according to its conceptual measures; the true statement is firm or steadfast in that it stands straight and steadfast according to the tests of truth.

The interpretation of truth as the adequation of things and ideas addresses not only the character of the truth of words and phrases, of beliefs, propositions, sentences and statements, and of systems of concepts, propositions and belief, but also that of the truth of persons, of things done, of things made, and of mere things. Representatively, Thomas Aquinas holds that it is not to our conceptions that true things are adequate, but that like our conceptions, things are true insofar as they correspond to ideas in the mind of God. Since it is hard to imagine how brute entities might have intrinsically intelligible essences unless some Intellect created them through its conceptual activity, his God is necessary for the positing of an immutable order of nature populated with entities the fixed essences of which would exemplify true names and concepts. God is the ground in which the true stands firmly and steadfastly.

Whence does the notion of naming truth “the firm” derive? A Heideggerian view might be that this sense development derives from the metaphysical interpretation of Being as constant presence. *Veritas*, as one of the transcendentals along with *esse*, would be contravertible with it. If being is constant presence, truth must have its own form of constancy, and “firmness” would be a good designation for it. Yet the Germantic interpretation of truth as the firm occurs before the epoch of metaphysical thinking, which might indicate that what Heidegger interprets as the specifically metaphysical sense of being and truth is older than his hellenophilia lets him admit.

Truth in the several Indo-European words for it always has something of the holy about it, and the words for it might also have been more than once the names of a goddess. It was always an Indo-European practice of treating the names of abstract entities as divinities. Such practice is perhaps the ultimate origin of those linguistic fetishes called “concepts”.

Mythopoesis often casts these gods for roles in sacred stories. Such a contextualization establishes the possibility of a subsequent demythologization, for a purification of the god. Thus did Zoroaster create his relatively austere faith out of the religion of the Medes, and so too the Ionian philosophers demythologized the gods of Homer.

The myth of truth appears to be Zoroastrian in origin and goes something as follows. There is a God of Light and Goodness (*Ahura Mazda*, or *Ormazd*), who rules over a kingdom of the Truth (*Asha*), and a God of Darkness and Evil (*Ahura Mainyu*, or *Ahriman*), who reigns over the Kingdom of the Lie (*Druj*), who are engaged in a struggle that constitutes the course of human and cosmic history. Human beings are free to choose either the rule of the Wise Lord and the Truth or the Evil Lord and the Lie; the God of Truth and Light gives his followers (*ashavan*) immortality. At the end of Time, the Kingdom of Truth would reign supreme in the world. In the *Gathas*, Zoroaster attacks greedy, false priests, the Karpans. The true priests or Magi are, like the philosophers, Lovers of Truth.

This story was disseminated to both the Hebrews and the Greeks in the sixth through the fourth centuries B.C. In fact, the whole dynamic

and linear concept of time and history derives from Zoroastrianism and its Indo-Iranian (Aryan) antecedents, because only with truth as a measure of progress in time did the historical temporality of Judaism, Christianity and Islam emerge from cyclical temporality of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

### **Conclusion**

Why should philosophy dwell on words and metaphors drawn from the forest? We would give the following explanation. The role of the philosopher in ancient Greece was developed from the archtypical role of the Indo-European sacerdote-king. Just as this earlier figure was the master of forest lore, the latter figure borrowed the ancestral wisdom, tree metaphors and tree rites.

As philosophical culture spread out from Greece, other Indo-European peoples translated the role and discourse and rituals connected with philosophy on the basis of what they already possessed of this sort, which was again the Indo-European role of sacerdote-king, his forest talk, his tree rites. Thus the forestry aspect of the philosophical tradition was reinforced by its transfer to new peoples.

Philosophy is the task of comprehending the whole of things and the what and how of them. In comprehending the whole, philosophy must comprehend itself as part of the whole. Nietzsche, and Heidegger after him sought to comprehend the central part of philosophy, metaphysics, by placing it in the more inclusive context of pre-metaphysical philosophy, that is to say, by taking metaphysics as a theme for interpretation in the more inclusive context of pre-Socratic philosophy. We have been suggesting here that it is possible to radicalize this approach by placing philosophy, or philosophical thinking, in the context of prephilosophical thinking, namely, in the epoch of being that preceded the pre-Socratics, in the thought of the Indo-Europeans as they came off the Eurasian steppelands into the European mixed-oak forest—in short, by placing it in the context of the older and more elemental science of forestry.

The Indo-Europeans felled and burnt the forest. By dint of slash-and-burn agricultural techniques, and of bronze, and eventually iron, implements, they reduced the European mixed-oak forest already in pre-historic times. Is his elevation of the clearing (*Lichtung*) to an image of man's ownmost nature not just one more of several survivals in Heidegger of the Indo-European mode of thinking? Does the image celebrate a technical and violent mode of life?

A forest clearing is not a meadow or glade that has come about from natural causes such as fire or soil erosion. It is a man-made opening of the forest's density. It might be a field for the tillage of cereal, a garden for vegetables, a pasture for kine, a site for a homestead.

Might we not better penetrate the thicket and looking back on the clearing, from the outside as it were? And were there not already and always heathen eyes in the darkling thicket to look the giant Indo-European horsemen over—elves in the Western oaklands, trolls in the copper Mountains, fairies in the Northern pines? Is the final twist in the path of thinking not to think the unthought and the unthinkable of the Indo-European heritage by taking a further step back into the nurturing *\*bheu*—in short, a retreat to the coign of vantage of the old peoples of the forest, who were there to see the axman cometh and from whose standpoint farming and metaphysics and the whole project of clearing must appear the felling, uprooting and kindling of true being itself?