On Truth/Untruth in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty

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In his essay On the Essence of Truth, Heidegger enters into the difficult thought of the essential community or belonging together of truth/untruth, through which the errancy man experiences may be understood. Heidegger's study of art in The Origin of the Work of Art develops this thought further in that it situates truth in the strife between "earth" and "world" which the work of art instigates and which responds to the interplay of lighting and concealment within Being itself. By setting up a world, the work of art brings near the gratuitous giving and enigmatic self-refusal of the earth, the darkness of which can show itself only in tension with a world. The freedom of this giving and withholding makes possible Dasein's freedom which is intertwined with the essential nature of truth. To think the essence of truth is also to think the truth of essence (Wesen, Sein) from the perspective of freedom, and in a critical dialogue with the philosophical tradition.

Merleau-Ponty, in his fragmentary last work, The Visible and the Invisible, sustains a similar dialogue with modern and contemporary philosophy concerning the understanding of essences and the nature of truth. The context is, as it is for Heidegger, the necessary search on the part of philosophy for an understanding of its own project of interrogation. Merleau-Ponty seeks to divest the understanding of essences of "positivity" and to restore to it the ambiguity and latency which he considers to be the mark of Being itself and therefore of all truth. Merleau-Ponty charges that phenomenology, in seeking an intuition of essences (Wesensschau), has denied the situated character of the questioner and the ambiguity or, we might say, the interrogative character of that which is
questioned, Being. This twofold negation amounts to a concealed nihilism, an alienation of truth from Being.6

It is apparent that Merleau-Ponty's concerns and guiding insights rejoin, in some ways, those of Heidegger; yet they do so obliquely and without an effort to engage in explicit dialogue.7 If we are to carry on the task which Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger have undertaken, the task of thinking the conflictual nature of truth, it remains for us to instigate between them the conflict which Heidegger calls "the loving strife of the thing itself," disagreement among essential thinkers.8

The present paper endeavors to give an initial impetus to this strife so that, in work to come, it may gain magnitude and import. We will begin by following the paths of Heidegger's thinking and by allowing difficulties that may arise to delineate themselves.

I

For Heidegger, truth and untruth belong to one another because they spring from the two strands of a common source. These two strands, inextricably intertwined, are the ontological difference and the existence of Dasein. Untruth itself has a twofold character: it comprises the concealment (Verbergung) involved in all un-concealment, as well as semblance, disguise, or dissembling (Verstellung).9 The restless movement of errancy presupposes both forms of untruth. We will first consider untruth as concealment or enigma and its relationship to the ontological difference.

Heidegger regards concealment as the form of untruth most proper to the essence of truth, and as "older" than all disclosure (On the Essence of Truth, p. 19). It is a fundamental trait of Being,10 in that Being is understood as the counterplay of lighting and concealment or as the refusal of a ground. Since the clearing itself sustains in its granting (gewähren) a refusal, the enigma is preserved (bewahrt) in all truth (Wahrheit).11 The Being of beings cannot become manifest as any being or as the totality of beings,12 but only in difference or negation:

... the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know.13

Since Heidegger equates truth with disclosedness (Offenbarkeit), concealment is untruth, an untruth which is essential to truth.

Ernst Tugenchat, in his illuminating study of Husserl's and Heidegger's understanding of truth,14 points out that, with Heidegger's focus on concealment, the temporality and negation (finitude) by which Heidegger