What right have I on this day of remembrance to speak to or at least before you?* I was—like many others—a pupil of Heidegger's. And I have never made a secret of the fact that he is, which is to say remains, my teacher.

In confessing this, I by no means wish to imply that Heidegger for his part saw in me one of his pupils. That is—to put it mildly—rather unlikely. Be that as it may. At any rate he had in me a listener, and one who learned not only, as many others did, several or many things from him, but rather everything. Which everything? Answered in his words: “The destiny of the topic of thinking” (Die Bestimmung der Sache des Denkens).

Determined by this, Heidegger taught thinking. One might contend that thinking is imparted to everybody in various ways, what is more: has already been imparted to them. What did this teacher still have to teach then? Apparently the thought of the thinker, as formerly the knowledge of the philosopher, is to be understood with distinction and in fact with that which ultimately is initiated by the insight that we do not think; in view of his times Heidegger adds: not yet. Hence his question: what is called thinking?

The philosophy of our history had no reason to question in this way. It was, of course, familiar with the manifold modes of thoughtlessness,
yet they were always surpassed by the thoughtfulness practiced by philosophy. It is only the sense-explication (Besinnung) of our world—more precisely: the modern sense-explication of human being (Menschenwesen)—as it has been severed from its history that is impelled to raise that question. Why? Due to the experience of a privation in just this being—first concerning its power, then its will, finally its knowledge. Heidegger noted such privation in the fundamental technical trait of thinking. For him it was testimony of the mission (Geschick) in consequence of which thinking has continuously been denied its proper topic.

I

Let us turn at once to this topic and recall how Heidegger introduced it—namely, as "that which incites contest." It recalls the contest in which a decision about human being is due—that is to say: about Da-sein (being-there), which is threatened by the indifference regarding its being-away (Weg-sein).

Human being, as it is to be distinguished from the former nature of man (Wesen des Menschen), i.e., from the animal rationale, is to be understood first of all in (1) linguistic significance—open to the poetic word and, along with it, severed from speech interpreted instrumentally.

Such speech already calls to mind the other, the (2) historical version of human being—recalls the closure of being-mortal, the denaturing of the animal rationale, and the latter's place in the nature of technicity. This exerts exclusive force against Da-sein and thus against the man of the other future.

The contest over human being is settled only where it emerges in (3) mundane concretion. To be decided here is: being-in-the-world, but in which world? With its distinction, does the world permit one to experience, before anything else, the favor of anxiety or of the nihilating (Nichten) in human being—that is to say: the sinking of mere being?

In view of the undecided future of human being, it becomes clear: Heidegger's topic has to be more originarily that of thinking. How must it, for its part, be structured in order to determine its topic?

Prior to this topic thinking is firstly of (1) an historical character and precisely on account of this is simultaneously a commemoration and a forethought—focused on the future of what has been, thus on the distinction of the latter's beginning.

Devoted to the other beginning, thinking then becomes cognizant of its (2) mundane character, which is to say: of its transcendence of the autocracy even of questioning and into the piety of listening and