I would like to show how both papers can be heard addressing the same question. To say this, however, is to say also that each paper takes up this same in its own unique way and thus comes to articulate a distinctly different reservation, even if tentatively and cautiously, with regard to Heidegger’s thinking in Contributions. Both papers present strong and decisive interpretations that draw out important connections between Contributions and Being and Time. They show how this later work grows out of, and yet entails a thorough transformation of, the earlier project. In each case, Heidegger’s word and thought is opened up by being submitted to a kind of repetition and translation; in each case, this is carried out by thematizing and pursuing a certain delimited question that is established in advance and that guides the inquiry. On the one hand, there is the “ethical” concern with the theme of the decision over beýng’s historicality; on the other hand, there is the question of da-sein as the being that both transcendentally enables and yet possibly limits Heidegger’s thinking and saying of being. Each paper insistently follows its own strategic line of interpretation, and precisely this insistence is what sets these papers apart from each other, although in a kind of related opposition, or counter-valence to each other. (I hope to make this opposition more explicit.) But, for this reason, it also becomes possible to bring the two papers productively into dialogue, to allow them to bear upon each other in their difference. And perhaps this difference then also offers a promising way to gain access to the very matter at issue here in Heidegger’s thinking in Contributions.

I begin my response by considering the conclusion of Heidegger’s 1936 lectures on Schelling’s Treatise On the Essence of Human Freedom. These lectures were given shortly before Heidegger began to work on
Contributions to Philosophy. Heidegger’s discussion here provides an excellent place to begin to open up the question that I see running through and connecting both of the papers.

At the very end of the Schelling lecture, Heidegger raises the concern over what he calls the “anthropomorphic” character of Schelling’s thinking. At issue is the way in which Schelling—even as he attempts to address questions that concern the absolute, creation, nature and being—proceeds always through a reliance upon an analogy with human life. The apparently anthropomorphic character of Schelling’s thinking is brought up usually as a way to justify a dismissive attitude toward it, says Heidegger, since, in the end, such thinking is thought thereby to be wholly unproductive toward the attainment of “objective” knowledge.

Heidegger insists that the most appropriate response to this kind of objection is first of all to concede its most basic assertion, namely, that everything does indeed come down to how it may be measured in relation to the human. Yet what is immediately exposed in this way, contends Heidegger, is simply that all reservations and objections against anthropomorphism implicitly rely upon an assumed knowledge concerning humankind, that the question that concerns the human as such has already been decided. What is most insidious here pertains, then, not only to anthropomorphism but also to all possible objections against it: it is not simply that the ἀνθρώπος is taken as the measure, but rather that, even when such a measure must be rejected, the rejection already understands this measure itself to be something self-evident and clear. Thus, without regard to whether anthropomorphism is to be affirmed or denied, what is most insidious here is that a closer determination of the human is already thought to be a superfluous endeavor (cf. GA, 65, §43).

Heidegger thus states that if the inquiry is to proceed beyond this point, if it is to move to a different level, this requires first taking up a decisive question: the question that concerns how and why this measure becomes necessary at all. But this question, then, is only a beginning, according to Heidegger, as it in turn releases a manifold of further questions. Without rehearsing the complete series of questions unleashed by Heidegger in this passage, it is worth noting that this questioning culminates with a strange and paradoxical characterization of the human: the human is that being that, the more originally it is itself, is precisely not only itself and first of all not itself. The way in which the human becomes proper must happen according to this apparently