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— David Eagleman, PhD, neuroscientist at Stanford University,
New York Times bestselling author

SPEAKING BEING

WERNER ERHARD, MARTIN HEIDEGGER,
AND A NEW POSSIBILITY OF BEING HUMAN

BRUCE HYDE AND DREW KOPP

AFTERWORD BY MICHAEL E. ZIMMERMAN

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To the students in my Communication Studies classes at St. Cloud State University, who for the past twenty-five years have been my partners in the play and mystery of ontological inquiry; and to my wife Susan Saetre, my constant guardian angel.

BRUCE

To my friend and writing partner, Bruce Hyde (1941-2015), who blazed a trail with his unrelenting commitment to communicate the unsaid. What a gift to have worked with a man of such brilliance, humor, and courage, even unto death, and with this book, Bruce will continue to speak to each reader willing to take up the call to enter the conversation this book is but a fragment of. I also dedicate this book to my students, ever my co-experimenters in the inquiry of what it means to be a writer and a reader; and to my wife Cindy, and my children, Tristan and Cassidy: I dedicate the fruits of my labor to your future.

DREW

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

BRUCE HYDE (PhD, University of Southern California, 1990) was a Professor of Communication Studies at St. Cloud State University until his death on October 13th, 2015 (1941-2015). His primary interests as an educator were with the ontological dimensions of language and communication, and with dialogue as a non-polarized and non-polarizing form of public discourse.

DREW KOPP (PhD, University of Arizona, 2009) is an Associate Professor of Writing Arts at Rowan University. His research interests focus on the theory and history of rhetorical pedagogies, and he has published articles in journals in the field of rhetoric and writing studies, including *Rhetoric Review* (2013), and *JAC: Rhetoric, Writing, Culture, Politics* (2012). He has also contributed a chapter to the edited collection *Disrupting Pedagogies in the Knowledge Society* (2011).

PRAISE FOR *SPEAKING BEING: WERNER ERHARD, MARTIN HEIDEGGER, AND A NEW POSSIBILITY OF BEING HUMAN*

From the Afterword:

I regard *Speaking Being* as an enormously important contribution to understanding Heidegger and Erhard. The latter has received far too little serious academic attention, and this book begins to make up for that lack. Moreover, the book's analysis of Heidegger's thought is among the best that I have ever read. I commend this book to all readers without reservation.

MICHAEL E. ZIMMERMAN, *Professor Emeritus, University of Colorado, Boulder*

This book is powerful, imaginative, frustrating, amusing, threatening, and enlightening—all at the same time. It also has the power to transform your life.

JONATHAN D. MORENO, *University of Pennsylvania Professor of Ethics, author of Impromptu Man*

The profound impact of Werner Erhard's work on culture and society is a manifestation of an incredible insight, the experience of *being*, presented in this book through a comparative analysis of a transcript of a 1989 Forum led by Erhard alongside Heidegger's reflections on the meaning of "being there." The authors have drawn amazing parallels between these two extraordinary thinkers and have demonstrated the intersections of Heidegger's language with Erhard's ontological rhetoric of transformation. Erhard has at times described aspects of his method as *ruthless compassion*, and like all forms of compassion, evident here is a fundamental motivating desire to alleviate the suffering of others.

JAMES R. DOTY, MD, *Founder and Director, The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, Professor of Neurosurgery, Stanford University School of Medicine, and Senior Editor of The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*

Speaking Being is not a book. It is a multimodal *tour de force* of ontological rhetoric that hails its reader into an event and in so doing performs as an event, rather than what is commonly rendered as a book between two covers. Its status as an event is performed on every page wherein the "showing" of *Being* is enacted via

its remarkable design. Kaleidoscopically, Bruce Hyde and Drew Kopp have drawn their readers into a dazzling display, where the participants in dialogue with Werner Erhard in a specific Forum in 1989 are put into dialogue with Martin Heidegger. The result is arguably one of the most astounding academic interventions into both Erhard's methodology and Heideggerian thought. Citing David Farrell Krell, Hyde and Kopp remind us that "to be on a woodpath means to be in a *cul-de-sac*, a path that leads nowhere and has no exit." *Speaking Being* puts its readers in a dizzying *cul-de-sac* within which they may never leave, but rather transform into one of the glittering particles of this rhetorical kaleidoscope.

CYNTHIA HAYNES, *Professor of English, Clemson University, author of The Homesick Phone Book: Addressing Rhetoric in the Age of Perpetual Conflict*

Theory and Practice: Ways of seeing what one claims to be the truth of some intended object of consciousness and ways of applying this truth to one's everyday existence in order to cultivate wisdom, goodness, self-realization, and justice. The dialogical teachings of Werner Erhard speak to the importance of this relationship and its ontological significance. Professors Hyde and Kopp, scholars of rhetoric and communication who had observed and participated in programs designed by Erhard, provide comprehensive and detailed conversations—what they term "ontological rhetoric"—that took place in Erhard's 1989 Forum, and they demonstrate how Erhard and Heidegger can be read together for the benefit of both. This book is a major achievement in the scholarship of Erhard and Heidegger studies. A much-needed moment of enlightenment.

MICHAEL J. HYDE, *University Distinguished Professor of Communication Ethics, Wake Forest University, author of Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human*

In *Speaking Being* the reader discovers two original thinkers—Werner Erhard and Martin Heidegger—two intellects who independently reached linguistic, ontological, and phenomenological philosophies that illuminate each other.

Authors Hyde and Kopp accomplish the formidable task of masterfully presenting Erhard and Heidegger side by side in a readable, lively, and illuminating text. There is nothing quite like it!

JERONIMA (JERI) ECHEVERRIA, *Professor of History and Provost Emerita, California State University at Fresno, former Executive Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs of the California State University System*

Educational research confirms that without a significant intervention, students who become teachers are likely to replicate the pedagogical approaches their teachers used with them. Practicing Erhard's approach to ontological inquiry—presented in print for the first time in this book—provides such an intervention. It equips students, teachers, academics of any field to critically examine their dispositions and access more effective ways of being and acting. *Speaking Being* is a must read for scholars of social foundations of education, teacher education, and frankly, for members of any field of study.

CAROLYN J. WHITE, *Professor of Social Foundations, Department of Urban Education, Rutgers University Newark*

A different you and a different me must show up each day if we are going to tackle the world's most vexing problems. This book talks us through a process of transformation by showing us what it means to be an authentic human being in an inauthentic world, and what it means to take a stand for a world where everyone matters and where everyone can make a difference.

WILEY "CHIP" SOUBA, MD, SCD, MBA, *Professor of Surgery, Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, former Dean of Medicine and VP for Health Affairs, Dartmouth College*

This engaging study of Erhard's counter-discursive approach to transformational education—and how this approach aligns significantly with Heidegger's thinking—

might serve as a starting point for a deeper Indigenous philosophy. Rooted in a more non-hierarchical epistemology, such an Indigenous philosophy promises to move us away from a colonized and deeply problematized way of thinking, toward embracing the power and mysteriousness of presence, and making possible a place-based, non-anthropocentric interconnectedness. This is the next essential step we must take if we are to survive as a species.

FOUR ARROWS, AKA DON TRENT JACOBS, PHD, EdD, *editor of Unlearning the Language of Conquest, author of Point of Departure and Teaching Truly*

While some readers of *Speaking Being* may be familiar with The Landmark Forum, most don't know its connections to the philosophical tradition. Hyde and Kopp have woven together concise explanations of Heidegger's notoriously difficult thinking with an actual transcript of Erhard's Forum—by turns moving, funny, and shocking. This juxtaposition draws the reader into the experience and powerfully illuminates the teachings of these two thinkers.

DAVID STOREY, *Associate Professor, Boston College, author of Naturalizing Heidegger*

Speaking Being presents an ontological play between Erhard, Heidegger, the participants of a Forum delivered in 1989, and the reader, who is summoned to the scene to dwell in compelling questions and distinctions, the living of which make available the invention of a life that is experienced as authentic. The relentless commitment of authors Hyde and Kopp to communicate the unsayable, *Being*, opens up new directions for a rhetoric of emancipation that goes beyond traditional critical theories. *Speaking Being* speaks a new relation to language, one that honors the unexplored ontological power of language to create a new freedom to be, to live with existential courage.

MARGARIDA GARCIA, *Vice-Dean, Research and Communications, Faculty of Law (Civil Law) and Professor, Faculty of Law (Civil Law) and Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa*

Many academics in cultural studies accept postmodernity and content pedagogy as unquestionable facts of the world, but with a paltry understanding of how these ideas undermine our intention to produce morally conscious, action-oriented citizens. In their lucid exposition of Werner Erhard's methodology, Hyde and Kopp offer a cogent roadmap out of such a paralyzing paradigm of knowledge and subjectivity. Brilliantly, the authors use Martin Heidegger's writing to illuminate Erhard's work and The Forum's compelling impact on participants. Readers will discover for themselves, based on the contexts they bring, a powerful pedagogy of transformation grounded in an ontological inquiry into human being that leads students to discover their own paths of social agency and initiative. Highly recommended!

TRYSTAN T. COTTEN, *Associate Professor, Gender Studies, University of California, Stanislaus, founder and managing editor of Transgress Press*

Speaking Being presents, perhaps for the first time, a complete transcript of an actual Forum led by Werner Erhard, allowing the reader to directly observe and experience the unique power of dialogue as a tool for human transformation. Furthermore, authors Hyde and Kopp provide an intellectually satisfying correlation between the philosophical ideas of Martin Heidegger and the *out-here-in-the-world* work of Werner Erhard, revealing their surprising complementarity. I congratulate the authors on achieving this *tour de force*.

MICHAEL LESLIE, *Associate Professor, Journalism and Communications, University of Florida*

Introduction

In 1971, the television debut of *All in the Family* tickled an American public who was also celebrating the successful moon landing, and safe return home, of two Apollo space missions. In the same year, much smaller audiences took note of Igor Stravinsky's death and the birth of Calvin Broadus Jr. (aka Snoop Dogg/Lion); a marketing phenomenon was born in Seattle with the opening of the first Starbucks; Idi Amin ousted Milton Obote to become the dictator of Uganda; and in the new academic field of composition and rhetoric, a movement to elevate the status of process began to stir. Meanwhile, in October of that year in a meeting room of San Francisco's less-than-swank Jack Tar Hotel, Werner Erhard assembled some two hundred participants for the debut of the *est* Training. Given this timing for the emergence of the *est* Training, media at the time characterized it as a part of the human potential movement, but scholar Jonathan Moreno has more recently called *est* "the most important cultural event after the human potential movement itself seemed exhausted" (*Impromptu Man* 247).

Infamous for its rigorous ground rules and confrontational methods—elements Erhard says were necessary in the liberated, let-it-all-hang-out, "new age" ethos of the time—the *est* Training (Latin for *it is*, and an acronym for Erhard Seminars Training) grew in popularity throughout the 1970s because of the impressive benefits participants reported having received, including better relationships and a greater sense of "aliveness." Trainees experienced being "at cause" in the matter of their lives, and having a new sense that their lives could make a difference in the world. They felt "free to be." This new sense of responsibility and freedom allowed for breakthroughs in communicating with others, and enabled them to produce results, both personal and professional, that they would previously have seen as unlikely.

At the source of this educational enterprise was an experience Erhard had undergone earlier that year, although he later said it was "not in itself so much an *experience*, as a shift in the context in which he held all process, including experience" (Bartley 168). In some traditions, such an event might be referred to as an individual's having undergone *enlightenment*; Erhard has called it a *transformation*. He was, at this point in his life, a highly successful sales manager and trainer for a large publishing company. Further, he had devoted much of the previous decade to the rigorous exploration of various systems of enlightenment and personal development, from Zen (the essential one, he says) to the Dale Carnegie course and Mind Dynamics. But one morning in 1971, as he was driving across the Golden Gate Bridge

en route to his office, he suddenly realized that he knew nothing. As he related the incident to his biographer, William Bartley:

“All the things I had ever heard, and read, and all those hours of practice, suddenly fell into place. It was so stupidly, blindingly simple that I could not believe it. I saw that there were no hidden meanings, that everything was just the way that it is, and that I was already all right. . . . I realized that I was not my emotions or thoughts. I was not my ideas, my intellect, my perceptions, my beliefs. . . . I was simply the space, the creator, the source of all that stuff. I experienced Self as Self in a direct, unmediated way. I didn't just experience Self; I became Self. Suddenly I held all the information, the content, in my life in a new way, from a new mode, a new context. . . . I am I am. (Bartley 167–168)

In other words, an experience of being. The insight Erhard derived from that experience subsequently became what thousands of *est* trainees would spend two weekends and several hundred dollars to "get" for themselves.

Discussing his work later, Erhard addressed the challenge he had confronted in attempting to communicate what seemed essentially incommunicable: "You can't do this in the ordinary sense of communication: I can't have it and give it to you. But I can communicate in a way so that you get an opportunity to realize that you have it yourself already. Essentially, this is what the *est* Training was developed to do. It provides a setting in which this kind of sharing takes place" (Bartley 169).

From the outset, the language of *est* was central to both its pedagogical process and its public image. A fundamental tenet of the *est* Training, as well as its successor program, The Forum, has been that *transformation lives in language*, and that participants keep the program's results available in their lives by communicating those results with others. At the same time, Erhard's enterprise has consistently eschewed traditional advertising. The only way people have become aware of his work has been through hearing about it from their friends, family, or associates. The resulting symbiotic relationship—the program survives only when participants communicate about it with family and friends, and it is through communicating about it that participants keep the benefits alive in their experience—has served the work well through four decades. By 1985, when the *est* Training was discontinued and replaced by The Forum, word-of-mouth had brought a half-million people to see for themselves what this transformation was all about. As of 2019, another 2 million

people have graduated from The Forum, either the four-day Forum of Erhard's time through 1991, or the current iteration of the course, the three-day Landmark Forum (www.landmarkworldwide.com).¹

Erhard's influence on the culture has made itself felt in another way as well. During the 1970s, when it sometimes seemed that every fifth person in San Francisco was an *est* graduate, you could generally detect that element of the population by their use of the program's language, which in casual use began to be heard as jargon. Erhard's use of this terminology, however, was highly purposive, and many of those words and phrases made their way into the public sphere, some to lasting effect. An example has been the shift in the popular understanding of the term *sharing*. Before *est*, people shared a cookie or a bench in the park; what was shared was *divided*, and in the process one's own share was inevitably diminished. But in the *est* Training, participants *shared their experience*, and through sharing, that experience was augmented. To share, in the world of *est*, was to communicate in such a way that one's *self* and not merely one's story was made available, leaving the other touched rather than merely informed. This meaning of the word, we assert, is now common in our culture. Likewise, the term *coaching*, borrowed by Erhard from the sports arena in the early eighties to identify the style of his pedagogy, has since become ubiquitous in the field of management, human resources, and executive coaching. And the ubiquitous Mastercard catchphrase, "Master the possibilities," was born in the mind of an *est* graduate for whom the term *possibility* had acquired a new level of meaning; however, through overuse in the media, this new level of meaning has diminished.

The move to discontinue the Training in 1985 and replace it with The Forum arose from Erhard's perception of a shift in the culture's way of responding to the Training; he wanted to design a course that was responsive to that shift. At this point, while Erhard's success during those years had been greeted by considerable media curiosity, scholarly interest was moderate. Several studies of the *est* Training attempted to measure its effects using a psychological model; while he considered such efforts valuable, Erhard has asserted that this approach is inappropriate for

analysis of his work. His work, he says, is not psychological but *ontological*: his concern is the *being* of human beings ("Heart of the Matter" 1984). He has also consistently emphasized that the focus of his work is the development of the language in which it is articulated. Yet no significant scholarly work dealing either with Erhard's language use, or with the nature of an ontological methodology, has been published, even in the academic fields most likely to be deeply concerned with such matters—rhetoric and writing studies, business management, philosophy, and communication studies. This book aims to begin to correct that omission.

Before proceeding, we offer this statement of authorial stance: The authors have engaged extensively, both as participants and as scholars, in numerous programs designed by Werner Erhard. The senior author took the *est* Training for the first time in 1973, and we have each participated a number of times in The Forum, both during Erhard's tenure in the organization and following his departure. Our doctoral dissertations (University of Southern California, 1990; University of Arizona, 2008) consisted of rhetorical and philosophical analyses of The Forum. Based upon this considerable study and experience, our assessment of Erhard's work is unequivocal: we have found this work to be pedagogically effective and intellectually significant in all of its historical iterations. Our intention in this book is to stimulate its serious consideration by the academic community, as well as by others in the culture at large.

It is also important to note that our approach as participant observers has its limits. To carry out the design of the book, we have precluded a number of approaches that readers may wish to see addressed, and we beg those readers to indulge us. Before any significant and critical treatments could be viable, or even possible, from a number of disciplines—including philosophy, communication studies, rhetorical criticism, and so on—the phenomenon must be first made available. We present this book as a way into the phenomenon in question, and consequently, we invite members from a range of academic disciplines to enter the conversation we are seeking to initiate.

Evolution

This is an historical document. It presents an account of one moment—albeit a significant one—in an ongoing project for the development of human being. The first iteration of this project, the *est* Training, was designed to communicate to people living in the cultural environment of the 1970s. As Erhard saw it, considerable logistical rigor was required for the course to achieve its purpose, and thus the format included demands for which *est* soon became notorious, including lengthy sessions

¹ Landmark describes The Landmark Forum as a personal and professional development program, based on the discipline of applied ontology and phenomenology. Erhard created the work in the early 1970s and continued its development until in 1991 Landmark took over its ongoing development as expressed in The Landmark Forum and other Landmark programs. As of the writing of this book, the material and structure of The Forum have continued to be developed during three decades since the 1989 Forum presented in this book. The Landmark Forum of today (circa 2019) is less time (three days and an evening and each day ends by 10:00 pm), it incorporates the use of PowerPoint displays and videos that enhance the participants' experience of and access to what is being presented, and there is no use of profanity on the part of the program leaders.

with limited bathroom breaks, a highly confrontational interaction style—with the use of expletives—and the surrender of all wristwatches at the door. These demands were modified when The Forum replaced the Training; and in subsequent years, as the communication paradigm of the culture has continued to shift, the delivery of The Forum has altered accordingly.

On the one hand, of course, The Forum conversation inevitably challenges participants' familiar way of seeing things. Ontological inquiry—pedagogy such as The Forum, that aims to get beyond mere conceptual knowledge—is of necessity rigorous and sometimes uncomfortable. In Martin Heidegger's words, authentic inquiry into Being always “has the character of doing violence, whether to the claims of the everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and tranquilized obviousness” (BT 359). But while the conversation in the current Landmark Forum remains rigorous, participants will find a presentation that can for the most part be described as gentler, and more user-friendly, than the one presented in this book.

A further aspect of this difference, of course, has to do with Werner Erhard's personal style. In his delivery of both the Training and The Forum, Erhard's communication was edgily playful and relentlessly purposive. He called his approach *ruthless compassion*; and it included a profound sense of humor and Socratic irony implicit in the human condition. To communicate the humor as well as the compassion, he often provoked and insulted participants, using language generally considered inappropriate for such a setting (in a parody of one of his favorite epithets, graduates of the Training were sometimes referred to as “estholes”). Yet, as this book shows, those participants who initially resisted these intrusions inevitably got the message. Erhard has related this confrontive aspect of his communication to his 1971 experience of transformation: “On the bridge,” he said, “all of a sudden I could be 100% responsible for everything in my life, and at the same time none of it had any significance. At that point you are free and fearless” (Erhard, interview with authors). Erhard's communication style, and his humor, remain on full display in this book; the authors see them as important and entertaining aspects of the historical account we are presenting here.

Erhard Encounters Heidegger

Despite the shift we have cited here in The Forum's style and tone, a central thesis of this book is that from the first offering of the *est* Training in 1971, through its replacement by the Forum in 1985 and its current iteration as the Landmark Forum, the process at the heart of this pedagogy has retained its transformational dynamic. This dynamic, as we will show, arises in the *unspoken ontological realm*

of The Forum conversation as it proceeds, and has been the essential element of the course through all of its terminological variations.

During the transition to The Forum, Erhard excised many of the *est* Training's more meditative exercises and incorporated into the course a new vocabulary and redesigned procedures, with the stated intention that participants would have an enhanced experience of creating a new realm of *possibility* for themselves and their lives. At about this time, through colleagues, he was introduced to the work of the twentieth-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Erhard was taken with the way Heidegger's thinking reverberated with his own, and he consulted with several Heideggerian scholars on the subject. Two of them—Hubert Dreyfus of University of California, Berkeley and Michael E. Zimmerman of Tulane—provided formal assessments of the *est* Training's effectiveness, and noted its consistencies with elements of Heidegger's thought. When Erhard's revised technology emerged in The Forum and other redesigned courses, significant Heideggerian terminology was included in its rhetorical mix, and Erhard occasionally read passages from Heidegger in his presentations.

Most significantly, Erhard saw that Heidegger's ideas and his own were communicating from the same *unspoken* realm, and that the *specifications* of the two vocabularies could be merged to communicate that realm more powerfully: “I learned from Heidegger,” said Erhard, “*nuances* of what I had been saying that clarified and made more potent what was there” (Erhard, interview with authors).

What was there was Erhard's technology of language for the communication of being, and its ability, in both the Training and The Forum, to consistently and powerfully evoke an experience that participants found transformative. The evocation of that experience has remained The Forum's essential element; Erhard's encounter with Heidegger enriched the vocabulary in which he could see into it more profoundly and communicate it more effectively.

Technology

The form of this study will be *comparative analysis*: we will demonstrate that the work of Werner Erhard is aligned in significant ways with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, and that a comparison of their work illuminates the thinking of both men. We will show that The Forum's dialogic form introduces a performative dimension of Heidegger's ontological vocabulary in a way that Heidegger himself, working within a restrictive academic and political culture, was unable to do. We propose that The Forum conversation is *ontological rhetoric*: purposive speaking that communicates and makes present a context of meaning that, if left unexamined, shapes

and limits our way of being. However, this context of meaning cannot be spoken directly. It becomes present by virtue of what *is* said.

The dynamic of Erhard's technology of language responds directly to issues raised by Heidegger in his 1954 essay, "The Question Concerning Technology" (*Basic Writings*). Technology's essence, proposes Heidegger, is its relentless demand that all of nature, including human beings, be placed in *standing reserve*, on call for the uses of technology itself. The way of being evoked by this development (i.e., that we ourselves function as "calculable material" in a cybernetic system designed to serve ourselves) poses the danger that we may become lost in the profound reflexivity of that system, and, most fatally, may forget that anything has been lost. Surrender to technology "threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth" ("QCT" in *BW* 333). Such surrender, however, seems inevitable: the technological epoch is where we have landed, the only way of being we have been provided, and resistance is as futile as surrender is fatal.

But Heidegger suggests a middle path, a "comportment toward technology which expresses 'yes' and at the same time 'no'" (*DT* 54). Further, he proposes that "essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology, and, on the other, fundamentally different from it" ("QCT" in *BW* 340). We suggest that Werner Erhard's work provides such a realm. It is both a manifestation of the technological epoch and a subversive appropriation of its impulse, a thinking which reaches beyond the technological paradigm by reaching *through* that paradigm.

In Academia

For half a century, postmodern and poststructuralist theories across many disciplines have theorized a new freedom from the constraints of the Cartesian model of human being. Human subjectivity has been decentered; the self is no longer understood as the fixed and self-certain *cogito* but is open to creative reinvention; language does not merely re-present a preexisting world of objective meanings, but in fact generates the meanings that constitute that world.

These theoretical assertions concern *being*. But their effective communication in the universities has been hindered by our epistemologically-based academic tradition, which assumes that the central dynamic of education is *knowing*. This has given rise to a pedagogical model in which the ontological domain must always remain merely conceptual, because *being is not apprehended by knowing*. The book's

thesis is that the work of Werner Erhard makes available the ontological domain of language, so that the decentering of subjectivity and the reinvention of the self can be experienced as possibilities rather than merely considered as theory.

We recognize that this pedagogical model is in many ways a radical one, given the strength of the assumptions embedded in our tradition; but Heidegger says that an experience with language in the ontological domain always requires "*a leap*." As our educational institutions struggle increasingly to generate an opening for the human in the face of the advance of the technological, we argue that the situation is critical, and that a leap of this kind is in order.

The Plan of the Book

The central text for this book, located in the left and right columns on either page, is the combination of two sources: notes taken by the senior author while observing a Forum in San Francisco led by Werner Erhard in December 1989, and a transcription of the video of the same four-day event made available to the junior author on location at Landmark Worldwide's archives. While the transcript provides comprehensive and detailed conversations of the actual 1989 Forum, there are important alterations that must be accounted for. First and foremost, all names have been altered except for Werner Erhard, and actual names have been used only for those participants who speak more than once or twice with Erhard or the other two individuals leading the course ("Kipp" and "Wes"). In addition, some conversations have been edited out, or summarized, for the sake of space. For instance, all discussions dealing with the Six-Day Course, discontinued in 1990, have been removed. Also missing from the transcript is the Evening Session of the 1989 Forum: there was no extant video recording of that event. However, that omission can be rectified for interested readers if they were to attend an evening session of The Landmark Forum, where participants will share their experience of the course for guests they themselves have invited.

We call the text that accompanies the transcript either "sidebars" or "intervals." Sidebars occur in the central columns between the far left and right panes that house the transcript of The Forum, and the intervals occur between sessions of the course, and at the conclusion of each of the four days. In the sidebars and intervals are relevant ideas from the thinking of Martin Heidegger. Sometimes the connection between a sidebar and the transcript it accompanies may be apparent; sometimes it may be intended obliquely, as a hint at the background. Intervals are more often oblique in this way due to the focus on Heidegger's thinking in its wider arcs, for

instance, the central theme of “the forgetting of Being,” which has eight parts. Our purpose in this book is not to explain The Forum, or Heidegger’s philosophy—although there are moments where we do provide analysis—but rather, we primarily aim to engage the reader in thinking Erhard’s and Heidegger’s ideas for themselves.

For readers who have previously participated in The Forum, we believe the confluence here of Heidegger’s thinking with Erhard’s will enrich the way those readers hold their Forum experience. This has been true for the authors, and it is likewise consistent with the experience of Werner Erhard, for whom exposure to Heidegger’s thinking provided profound insights (Erhard, interview with authors). We intend that this book, in a dialogue with its readers, will evoke such insights.

Martin Heidegger once cautioned his students not to focus too closely on the concepts in his lectures, but rather to follow the “movement of showing” (*OTB* 2). The Forum conversation, we assert, is a carefully designed movement in language for the showing of being. In this book, we will show that showing. Our goal—Heidegger’s, Erhard’s, the authors’—is the unconcealment of a powerful aspect of human being with which we are, for the most part, unfamiliar.

While it may go without saying, reading this book will not provide an experience of The Forum. We intend to hint at that experience, and we encourage readers for whom our hints are provocative to seek out the experience for themselves. The Forum occurs essentially as a *dialogue*; ontological inquiry demands interactive play, and needs “the widest sphere in which to swing” (“DL” in *OWL* 27). In written form, Heidegger warned, “the movement of the questioning that is called for here might too easily congeal” (“DL” in *OWL* 50).

Nonetheless, as we undertake this project, the authors stand in the open question: *What is the possibility of communicating being?* This is not a questioning that seeks an answer; rather, the inquiry it generates persistently reflects the question itself back upon the questioner, undermining comforting and limiting assumptions. Thus we see it as a transformational question. We invite the reader to join us in this inquiry.

Acknowledgments

It is impossible to list all those who have contributed significantly to the composition of this book; to do so with full integrity would mean naming all who have risked what it means to hear the unsaid in what is said. In particular, our gratitude goes to several extraordinary individuals without whom our work would have failed to move beyond the planning stages, including first, Barbara Stevenson and Sheryl

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And a special thank you to the several reading groups that came together since the release of the book, one initiated by Paul Zohav, another by Ricki Rothenberg Moskow and Heather Schoen, another by Rebecca McKechnie, another by Peter McRae, another by Gordon Starr, and another by Miriam Carey for the Creating Course Leaders community. Each of these reading groups has provided profound opportunities to engage in ontological inquiry “on the court,” which opportunities have disclosed even wider horizons for a scholarly project to have ontological inquiry serve as the heart of the mission of the university.

Last, Bruce and I together stand in ovation to the man who has made, and will continue to make, the difference for both of us and countless others—the difference for all those who have had the opportunity, the gift, to be and speak with him—for in the very act of speaking being we create possibility for ourselves and our lives. Werner Erhard: Thank you for providing a way to say what otherwise remains forever unsayable.

SPEAKING BEING DAY ONE

FORUM DAY ONE: SESSION ONE

PRELUDE

More than 700 people were assembled in the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Francisco on the morning of December 27th, 1989. This was the first day of The Forum, and the occasion was unique in several ways. The first was that this Forum was to be led by Werner Erhard himself. Although he had created the technology of language that constituted The Forum, since 1973, to accommodate growing demand for the program across the United States and in Europe, the course had increasingly been led by members of a growing body of *est* Trainers, and later Forum leaders, a group of men and women trained by Erhard. As of 1989 there were forty-three Forum leaders, ten women and thirty-three men.

A second unique aspect of this four-day event was that it was an exceptionally large Forum composed of various groups in addition to the 502 regular participants (the usual number ranged from 100 to 250). Forty Forum leaders were also present as part of their training; during breaks in the procedure, they met with Erhard for debriefing sessions that the senior author attended as part of a special program for Forum graduates called Openings, a group of approximately 100 participants who were permitted to observe without actively participating. Also in the room were a number of invited observers who occupied a visitors' gallery and whose number varied during the course of The Forum. Last, a large contingent of staff and assistants (volunteers) performed logistical duties throughout the four days.

Due to the efforts of the assistants, the ballroom set-up remained consistent across all sessions of each of the four days. Regular participants and Forum leaders were seated in rows, theater-style, before a raised platform which stretched across most of the width of the room, and included a runway section extending well into the center of the audience area. Arranged on the platform were three chalkboards, two bar-height director's chairs, a music stand, and a large table which held a water pitcher and glasses, tissues, and writing materials. Openings participants and other observers were seated on risers at the rear of the room. Also at the rear of the room was an enclosed translators' booth: among the participants in Openings were twenty-five observers from Japan, seminar leaders and staff members in the Tokyo office of Werner Erhard and Associates. They listened to the proceedings in simultaneous translation through earphones connected to the translators' booth. Finally, three television cameras were placed strategically around the room to record the event, and several television monitors were placed so that most participants could watch the proceedings on video if they chose.

THE FORUM BEGINS

At 9:00 am, unannounced, Werner Erhard walked onto the platform. His manner was relaxed and casual. He wore dark tan slacks, a white shirt open at the collar, and an olive sweater vest. He greeted the participants in a friendly way, welcomed guests, and asked for questions while late arrivals were completing their paperwork. He asked if there was anything about the television cameras that needed clearing up, and he explained the presence of the Openings participants and the observers seated in the Gallery. Someone asked about the people wearing earphones, and he explained about the translators and participants from Japan. "That's a good question," he said. "Questions like that . . . what about, what if?"

Participants who raised their hands were asked to stand and wait until they were given a microphone; an assistant was stationed on each aisle to deliver one. After Erhard responded

to several questions about the various colors of name tags worn by people in the room, one participant raised her hand. Erhard called upon her to stand, and she asked about Erhard's use of language.

ERHARD

You need a language that gives you access to the kind of detail that you need to be a brain surgeon... The language you and I are going to use in here is also a specific language. It's designed to let you get at something you can't get at without that language. Surgeons generally confine that kind of speaking to the operating room, and so do I. I don't use that language when I'm out to dinner. For the most part it's unseemly to use special language when you're with people who don't share in that language.

Erhard asked for more questions. After he called on someone, he explained the reasons for standing up and for calling on multiple people ("to allow time to get microphones to them"). She asked about logistics. Erhard said it would happen later. She sat down.

BLAKE (after receiving a microphone from an assistant)

I don't know whether The Forum started yet, but I wanted to get through my apprehension of speaking before the group.

ERHARD

I suggest that those of you who have a fear of speaking take the same opportunity as Blake did. In The Forum no one is required to stand up and speak, though it is in your interest to do so, especially if you are reluctant to stand and speak.

Erhard also discussed the schedule of the course, pointing out that the daily ending time would be sometime between 11:00 pm and 1:00 am, adding that

ERHARD

Nobody guarantees you that schedule. You want to be clear about that. We're going to do this as long as it takes to get it done.

In addition, he said, The Forum would not be complete until the completion of the evening session, which would be held on the following Thursday evening—simultaneously in several cities, since many participants in this Forum had traveled to San Francisco for this event. Participants were encouraged to bring guests to their respective evening sessions.

As the conversation proceeded into the second hour, it gradually became clear, without transition, that the serious business of the course had begun. A participant named Ruth rose to say that she was pessimistic about getting the results of The Forum. Erhard began his response by acknowledging the validity of her doubt.

Talking about Being

One of the similarities between the work of Werner Erhard and Martin Heidegger is that both are *designing a language* for a specific purpose: the evocation of Being. Since the debut of The Forum in 1985, Erhard has regularly incorporated Heideggerian terminology into his vocabulary, and has quoted Heidegger extensively in his courses. It is the primary thesis of this book that Erhard's work is aligned in significant ways with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Even the *est* Training, the beginnings of which predate Erhard's encounter with Heidegger (circa 1980), already was aligned in significant ways with Heidegger's thinking. This alignment allowed Erhard to creatively incorporate Heideggerian language in the delivery of what would become The Forum.

Heidegger's language, on first encounter, is notoriously difficult; he regularly invented new German terms for his ideas, and translators have struggled to capture his meanings. Erhard likewise uses words in unconventional ways, and calls his work a "technology of language" in recognition of that fact. It is the experience of the authors that a comparative inquiry into the two bodies of work illuminates the thinking of both men, and helps to clarify the linguistic complexity of Heidegger's writing. In this book, we intend gradually to *unconceal* (a Heideggerian term Erhard has used) that clarity (*IM* 116).

This is not to say that either body of thought ever reaches the kind of logical understandability that we generally expect in what we read and hear. "If you walk out of here understanding," Erhard tells The Forum participants at one point, "that's the booby prize." Both Heidegger and Erhard are attempting to communicate something that, on that familiar level, cannot be communicated or grasped. This is new territory for communication, and requires both a new language (or, as Erhard says, new "linguaging") and a new way of listening.

We request, therefore, that the reader join us in embracing the atmosphere of questionability that must surround this entire

project. There is a sense in which *we don't know what we are talking about*, and the emphasis in that sentence should be placed on the word “know,” as implying a secure conceptual grasp. Talking about Being is challenging and sometimes feels, to use the vernacular, weird. Being is both pervasive and evanescent. It is elusive, vanishing even as it appears.

In his writing about Being (and all of his writing is about Being), Heidegger celebrates the ambiguity surrounding the topic. This is “something which every thinker has to see afresh each time, else he is not a thinker: that everything that lies before us is ambiguous” (WCT 201). However, this does not mean fuzziness at the expense of rigor:

“ This multiplicity of possible interpretations does not discredit the strictness of the thought content. For all true thought remains open to more than one interpretation—and this by reason of its nature. Nor is this multiplicity of possible interpretations merely the residue of a still unachieved formal-logical univocity which we properly ought to strive for but did not attain. Rather, multiplicity of meanings is the element in which all thought must move in order to be strict thought. (WCT 71)

► **NOTE:** Erhard believes that Heidegger's use of the word “thought” leaves people misled about what Heidegger means in the following way: Perhaps the word “thought” is valid for what is written down for people to consider, but it did not come from “thinking”—by which most people will understand “figuring it out”—it came from something like “looking,” or “just being with,” and is pointed to by the word “wonder” (Erhard, interview with the authors).

ERHARD

Very, very little in life turns out the way it was promised. So I remember my mother told me if I was a good boy everything would be great in life. I tried it for one day and it didn't work. People are told that when they graduate life will be wonderful, life will be easy, and it didn't turn out that way. When you get married it'll be great but it doesn't turn out that way. People say when you get divorced it'll be all right but it doesn't turn out that way. Most things don't live up to their promises.

RUTH

And what about the promises of The Forum?

ERHARD

Based on surveys, most people who've done this work say it turned out better than they expected. For you that'll be easy, because you have a pessimistic view about how things'll turn out. We've got your six hundred dollars. You're not going to get it back. Given that conversation's over, it'll turn out however it turns out. You know, I've never been wrong about that.

(To Ruth)

I could say a lot of things to reassure you, and that would be a mistake. Your pessimism is you.

(raising his voice, he turned to the group)

Listen up! If you haven't noticed, The Forum has begun. See, you and I think that our mood, our internal state, the way we are seeing things; we think *that* is a product of the circumstances. So I look at something and I like it, or I look at something and I don't like it. I think if I like it, it's the fault of the thing I'm looking at, and if I don't like it, I think it's the fault of the thing I'm looking at. That's the kind of thing that generates in me: “like”; and that's the kind of thing that generates in me: “don't like.” You and I think that our way of being is a product of what's over there. As you will see as we do The Forum together a lot of what is going on with you and me is something we already always are. It's something I am before anything happens. I'm kind of a pessimist waiting for life to happen, or I'm an optimist waiting for life to happen. About certain kinds of things I'm a pessimist before I even look at them, and then when I look at them, it's hard for me to recognize that the pessimism isn't generated out of the thing I'm looking at, but it's something I brought with me. Kind of like I was already always pessimistic and then this thing came along. So it's good that you're pessimistic, and if you're not pessimistic, that's good too.

(to Ruth)

If you find yourself being that way, don't try to change it. What's good is whatever you are, because that's what you want to bring into The Forum. If you deal with that pessimism which you are in a certain way, you'll have a choice about being pessimistic when it is appropriate. Pessimism is not a bad idea, and if you didn't have pessimism I would give it to you, because one of the things you're going to find in here is that we ask you not to believe anything that's said in here. We'll talk more about that later. At any rate, the point that

ERHARD (*continuing*)

I want to make now is that whatever it is that you're feeling, or whatever it is that you're thinking, or whatever your mental state is, or whatever your perception is, the way you are viewing things—that's exactly the way it ought to be. I'm going to probably have to say that to you ten times, because you won't remember that.

(*to the group*)

Another way you already always are is stupid about yourself. If that sounded a little bit like an insult, you got it right. You may not be able to see that about yourself, but you'll be able to see it about others. As I said: not you, but other people.

(*laughter*)

There are ways of being with yourself that are disempowering and disabling. You lose power and you lose ability. Whatever way you find yourself now, and whatever ways you find yourself variously throughout The Forum or in the evenings, or on the breaks: that's the way you're supposed to be—whatever way that is. One way to disempower or disable yourself is to question whether you are being the right way... You'll get a lot more out of The Forum a lot faster if you let yourself be the way you are.

(*pausing*)

There's a lot of this you're not going to get. Some of it won't make any sense. You're not going to get the whole Forum. The questions we're asking in here are too powerful to get it all. The Forum leaders are still getting it. So am I. But there are parts when you need to get it. In those parts, put up your hand if you don't. There will be a lot of repetition in here, too. For the fourth time: you should be the way you are! However you feel, that's the way it ought to be. The way I know that is, that's the way it is... The only right way to do The Forum is to be the way you're being. If you say you shouldn't be pessimistic, you're getting in your way.

A participant complained that she was distracted by and resentful about the physical set-up for this Forum—the cameras, the observers, etc.

ERHARD

What you want to get out of that is that life is upsetting because it isn't the way you expected it to be. The Forum will be that way also. What you want to get out of that is that you're already upset. You're already always upset at any change, at anything that violates your expectations. You think you're not upset until something violates your expectations. I said this strange thing: you are already always upset. You *live* upset. I know you don't believe that and I'm not asking you to. You're an upset waiting to happen. You'll see that more clearly as we proceed.

LYNETTE

I'm often upset.

ERHARD

You're always upset, and sometimes you notice it.

Nevertheless, despite its challenges, we assert that Being is also the most important thing that one could talk about, since talk that evokes Being has the ability to transform talk about everything else.

A fundamental difference in this arena is the distinction between *ontological* and *ontic* inquiry. Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily with Being. Therefore all of Heidegger's writing, and all of the dialogue of The Forum, is ontological in nature. Ontic inquiry is concerned with beings, and with facts about them. Therefore all of our everyday conversations—everything from political discourse to casual social chat—may be seen as ontic.

This is not to dismiss ontic inquiry as unimportant, or to equate a discussion of religion or physics with coffeeshop banter. We are not claiming that ontological inquiry is better, but that it is essentially different. And in the experience of the authors, it is profoundly interesting because of its transformational possibilities. In this book, we will illuminate the nature of ontological inquiry.

A prefatory note: people who write about Heidegger's work differ as to whether the term *Being* should be capitalized. This is, of course, a choice for translators and not one that confronted Heidegger, since in German all nouns are capitalized. It is a problematic choice because capitalization tends to reify or even deify, suggesting to some scholars that Being is "an eternal metaphysical foundation or eternal principle," while for Heidegger it was "the *event* in which an entity reveals or shows itself" (Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* xxii). Others feel that capitalization is important so that what it *means* to exist (Being) is not confused with the entities that exist (beings) (Richard Polt *Heidegger: An Introduction* 3).

In print, Erhard himself did not capitalize the term: a 1985 Forum brochure states that the purpose of The Forum is to provide participants with "direct access to the domain of being itself." In his more recent work, such as documents outlining

his development of an ontological/phenomenological model of leadership (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/cf_dev/AbsByAuth.cfm?per_id=433651), he continues to employ the lowercase.

In this book, we will employ capitalization in those instances where it clarifies the word's meaning in a specific sentence. We raise the point here to emphasize the unique nature of the issues that arise in any discussion, oral or written, of this subject. Being/being, as an ontological phenomenon, defies grammatical categorization. ■

► **NOTE:** As of 2019, Landmark Worldwide's Forum leader faculty included more than 60 people, representing a diversity in gender and race, and hailing from countries including the United States of America, India, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, Israel, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

LYNETTE

Do you have any more advice about how to get the most out of this?

ERHARD

I do and we'll go over that this morning.

TRENT

I hear there are Forum leaders here.

ERHARD

Forum leaders are here as part of their job.

TRENT

Four consecutive days instead of two weekends?

ERHARD

We've done this using odd schedules in different settings, for instance, in prisons.

BLAKE (*who expressed reservations about speaking*)

Continuing what you were saying as far as upset is concerned, and always being with you. My barrier is the fear of revealing who I am. I should accept that.

ERHARD

Whatever you think is in the way, especially those things you think are part of the circumstances—for instance, you don't get along with your boss and it's quite clear to you that's because you work for a jerk—bring that in here. Blake is clear that it's something he carries around with him; it doesn't come out of the circumstances. That's easy. It's the stuff you think is a product of the circumstances. So if there are circumstances in here, for instance, because there are people observing—that sounds like it is a product of the circumstances.

CHRISSY

You talked about being in The Forum whatever way you are being. What about outside The Forum?

ERHARD

Let yourself be like you are in those parts of The Forum that are outside The Forum, for homework assignments during the breaks, etc. If that's your mood at the moment, don't try to change it. You want it there because if it isn't there it's not going to get dealt with—particularly those things you think are part of the circumstances: bring that in here. Most of what you do outside The Forum in the next four days is going to be inside The Forum. If you do something to avoid that, then you've successfully avoided that once more. See, there's a lot of this you're

ERHARD (*continuing*)

not going to like. You're sitting there now with a whole bunch of assessments and conclusions. We've done this a lot. I can even tell you what your assessments and conclusions are.

A participant asked whether, based on all of this, he should keep his specific issues and concerns foremost in his mind.

ERHARD

You don't need to have something you're kind of holding in place. We will hook what's there in you that's appropriate to be hooked and pull it up to the surface. So you can kind of relax about that. A lot of stuff you won't even think about will get handled in here.

Another participant asked about the history of the organization.

ERHARD

We've been doing this work since 1971 and it was at the end of 1984 that we finished a four-year process of developing The Forum, and we've been offering The Forum since 1985 all over this country, and in lots of other countries around the world.

At this point, a man named Jake rose to complain about the purpose of the evening session, to which participants had been encouraged to invite guests.

JAKE

Isn't that more for Werner Erhard and Associates to hustle more members?

ERHARD

You know that you are a hustle waiting to happen, right?

JAKE

I said I feel like I'm being hustled.

ERHARD

I said you are a guy who is being hustled waiting to happen.

JAKE

I don't mind being hustled.

ERHARD

I said you are a guy who is being hustled waiting to happen.

JAKE

I don't see it that way.

Erhard came down from the stage and sat on the edge of the platform near him.

Dasein

At the outset, it is important to introduce a term that is central in Martin Heidegger's work, and will therefore begin to come up here almost immediately.

Dasein is Heidegger's word for *the Being of human beings*, and is one of the few terms in English editions of his writing that consistently remain untranslated from the German. In fact, the 2014 *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, published by Princeton University Press, calls the word "a paradigm of the untranslatable," and devotes six double-columned pages to a struggle to explain it (Adam Gopnik, "Word Magic," *New Yorker* May 26, 2014, 37).

A problem with translating this term, of course, is that term is central in Heidegger's most important work, *Being and Time*, in which he presents his ontological model of human beings. The specific elements of this model will be discussed in further detail as we proceed. For now, it is sufficient to note that *Dasein* will be spoken of as if the term indicates an individual; but since it indicates the Being of that individual, it refers at the same time more broadly to the collective Being of human beings. ■

ERHARD

You're oriented around being hustled. You would see hustle where other people wouldn't be smart enough to see it.

JAKE

I could go along with that.

ERHARD

You are a guy who is being hustled waiting to happen. Remember I said people are upset waiting to happen? You're hustle waiting to happen.

JAKE

I'm still not getting it.

ERHARD

Okay good, then we'll keep doing it until you do get it.

JAKE

In front of all these people?

ERHARD

Sure. You see hustle where others don't. You are already always being hustled. You are waiting for it to happen. You wake up that way in the morning, you just don't have the circumstances to express it yet.

JAKE

I think I see that... I am. I'm on the watch-out. I watch my bucks.

ERHARD

I've already got your bucks, don't I? Before this is over I'm going to get some more of your bucks.

JAKE

That's a challenge.

ERHARD

With you, I'd almost bet on it.

He remained seated on the edge of the platform as this interaction modulated from confrontational to friendly.

ERHARD (*continuing*)

That by the way was meant as a compliment. I'm going to offer you an opportunity to do this for the rest of your life, because I'm clear that you're going to get a lot of value out of this and I'm going to offer you the opportunity to get more value. You will always have the power to decline. I want you to know that's there in the relationship between me and you. I have no reluctance to hustling you, because you always have the power to decline. Is that clear?

JAKE

Yeah, I got it.

The first morning of The Forum continued as a dialogue with the group as Erhard responded to participants' questions. One woman expressed a concern that the content would go "over her head."

ERHARD

Most of what I say is not designed for your head. Understanding is not the problem in life. If you took a four-day course in how to be a tennis player and you left the course as a great tennis player without understanding a word of it, the difference would be your being a great tennis player. We don't promise you any understanding. You're welcome to understand. I like this stuff, so I enjoy understanding it. That's a quirk in me. We do this so that there's a freedom to be. If you walk out understanding, that's the booby prize. You walk out of here with the freedom to be that you didn't have when you walked in here, then you got something for your money. Speaking in here is designed to create the freedom to be... You don't understand what that means. What interests me is the freedom to be. You'll be interested in that too before this is over. I've done The Forum before so I know it works out.

A woman stated that she was already always nervous.

ERHARD (*to the group*)

How many people in here are already always nervous?

(*most raising their hands*)

You understand that the things that are going on with you are going on with everybody? You're like a rainstorm. You've got to get that there's nothing personal about a rainstorm—that is, that it waters the little flowers. You think that the rainstorm is worried about life on earth. You think that it rains *so that...* it rains *in-order-to*. It's true that life is sustained by the rain, but it's not true that it rains *in-order-to*.

SAL (*standing up, receiving a microphone*)

You're just arguing semantics.

ERHARD

No, it's not semantics. Or the other answer to that is, "yes it's semantics, but so is everything else in the universe."

Two Theses

The first thesis of this book, which will be addressed directly in the text, is that the work of Werner Erhard is aligned in important ways with the thinking of Martin Heidegger. Our purpose is to show this alignment through a comparative analysis of their work, an analysis that not only illuminates the thinking of both men, but sheds light as well on the nature of their shared central concern.

The second thesis, equal in importance to the first, cannot be addressed directly in the text. We have indicated it with the term *Being*, since unless we indicate it we cannot talk about it—as Heidegger puts it, "one cannot get by in public without rubrics" (OWL 29). But the term serves merely as a place-holder, since what it indicates cannot be thought, or even thought about, in our

usual way of conceptualizing. Think “freedom” and a conceptual barrage is evoked; think “Being” and the mind’s resources are few.

Our second thesis, since it eludes capture in concepts, can only be *hinted* at. It exists always as a background, in a domain of language that remains always unspoken. Unspoken, it is the unexamined context that shapes the way we understand everything else; unspoken, it is made present as the transformational background in the dialogue of The Forum; unspoken, it is hinted at persistently in Heidegger’s writing and in his lectures. Our second thesis, then, *is* this unspoken domain of language, formally referred to as the *ontological* realm.

In this book, to show what Werner Erhard and Martin Heidegger are doing in their work, the authors are called upon to say—to hint at—the unspoken shared dynamic at the center of that work. Inevitably, an element of mystery attends this topic; but nothing here is devious or arcane. While ontological communication makes rigorous demands on our everyday understanding, Erhard’s work is a practical pedagogical methodology, demonstrating that education beyond the merely epistemological is a real-world possibility.

The authors intend that our second thesis will be communicated in the background as we proceed through this book, leaving the reader with a hint of its nature as it emerges in The Forum.

One aspect of this background communication is that unfamiliar terms or concepts may not be fully defined at the point of their first appearance. Rather, they will be *distinguished* gradually as they appear and reappear in the text. A definition specifies conceptual limits; a distinction opens a space for thinking and acting, and the space is expanded each time the distinction is encountered. The goal of the inquiry, then, is never an answer, but the opening of a question from which to experience the world. We invite the reader to embrace the freedom that this background of questionability gives: at play in the question, you don’t need the right answer. ■

SAL

I believe that when it rains it rains in order to sustain life.

ERHARD

Okay, let’s stay there. Anybody else in that ballpark with Sal? Stand up if you are. Stand up if it rains in-order-to.

(a number of people rose)

If you’re not standing and you are an in-order-to, you’re interfering with your participation in The Forum. These people who are standing are not silly. They’ve got their foot nailed to the floor someplace. This will happen to all of you a lot of times during The Forum.

(to Sal, indicating the director’s chair on the platform)

Are the legs there to hold up the chair? We know that the legs do hold up the chair. For the legs, is there any in-order-to? Are the legs in-ordering-to?

(pausing)

It’s too hard that way... let me try something different. Is the wall standing in order to hold the ceiling up?

SAL

Yes, in my opinion.

ERHARD

Does the lightning lightning in order to start forest fires?

SAL

No.

ERHARD

Where is this organ of intentionality in the rainstorm?

SAL

The spirituality of the universe.

ERHARD *(to the group)*

He just told me where his foot’s nailed to the floor. He’s got something he believes so he can’t think about it.

(to Sal)

You think there’s an intentionality in the rainstorm. You said it’s your belief that matter was invaded by spirit in some way. Does it rain in order to produce floods?

SAL

No.

ERHARD

So the intentionality organ is not operating when it produces floods?

SAL

No, that just happens.

ERHARD

But it doesn't just happen that when it rains life is sustained? Remember, Sal, there's no question between you and me that water does sustain life. The question is: does it rain in-order-to? Or does it just happen, and by the way, it sustains life?

At this point Sal seemed to see Erhard's point, and sat down.

ERHARD *(to Sal)*

Okay. Now, just something personal between you and me. I've done this a lot. There's something I appreciated about you in this conversation. You were *open* in the conversation.

(to the group)

Nobody's ever going to win with me in here. Because this is my game, and only an asshole would try to win in another guy's game. You and I had a discussion where we *got* something together. Rain is impersonal. We weren't talking about a higher order of things. I don't want anybody to believe anything I say. And I'm not interested in sustaining anything you believe.

BLAKE *(recalling what had happened up to this moment in the conversation)*

I know that there was some sequence and I missed it. I mentioned that I was nervous, that I didn't like it, and then we were talking about the rain.

ERHARD *(to the group)*

He just demonstrated not knowing, being clear he didn't know. That's different from being confused. This is one of those things to get. There's a difference between knowing that you don't understand, knowing that you didn't follow something; knowing something didn't make sense and being confused are very different. You didn't invent being nervous. Even though the rain is impersonal, you do personally get wet. The same thing goes for being nervous. Being nervous is part of being human. Being human doesn't belong to you; you belong to it. You didn't invent being human. You were late for the party. Being human is an already always way of being that you walked into. It's like a rainstorm, and it's true you personally got wet. You are a human

Ontological Dialogue

A striking aspect of Erhard's method, one which appears again and again throughout The Forum, is his persistence in pressing any interaction or any topic of discussion through to completion. *Complete*, for Erhard, does not mean simply finished, but rather whole, and lacking none of its essential parts. Repeatedly, after he has been engaged on a particular point with an individual, he requests that others in the room who are not clear on that point stand, and works with each participant individually until all of them have "gotten" it for themselves. Erhard often uses the term "flatten" in the same sense, as in "Let's get that one flat before we move on." To get something flat, in an ontological dialogue, means that the item in question has been moved beyond a purely conceptual level of understanding, and has been distinguished as an ontological possibility, at least in a preliminary sense. The distinction will continue to be teased out as The Forum proceeds, ultimately becoming a clearing for Being; but the first step in that process is to flatten the concept, so that its ontological possibility can be heard.

Of course, "getting it" and "being complete" might be read as "having surrendered to Erhard's point of view." Erhard himself seemed to support this interpretation, telling one Forum participant Blake, "Nobody's ever going to win with me in here. Because this is my game, and only an asshole would try to win in another guy's game." During a debriefing session with The Forum leaders regarding their role in the dialogue, Erhard again referred to the process in agonistic terms: "You've got to have some appreciation for the advantage you've got there," he said. "And yeah, you're going to use the advantage, that's part of the game."